

Revelation 4 “Perspective from Heaven’s Throne”

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[0:00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

! Last week, we finished up the letters to the seven churches who needed some encouragement,! some challenge and correction, some inspiration, and all sorts of different situations that they were in.

But what do they all need? What does the church of Jesus Christ need in every generation, in every situation? Well, Revelation started with a glorious vision of Jesus, and now Jesus Himself says to John, let me show you ultimate reality. Come get the perspective that you need desperately.

Jesus is speaking to His churches, to us, what we need to know about reality now and in the future, what we need to know for today and forever. As I read through Revelation 4, let me encourage you right now just to soak it all up. We're going to come back through some more detail, but just see if your mind can even keep up with the picture being described.

It's okay if you can't. How wonderful it is that Jesus speaks to us this morning what He knows we most need. Revelation 4 at verse 1, God's holy Word.

[1:51] After this, I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.

At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven with one seated on the throne. And he who sat there had the appearance of Jasper and Carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. Around the throne were 24 thrones, and seated on the thrones were 24 elders clothed in white garments with golden crowns on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God. And before the throne, there was, as it were, a sea of glass like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. The first living creature like a lion. The second living creature like an ox.

The third living creature with the face of a man. And the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come. And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who's seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the 24 elders fall down before Him who is seated on the throne, and worship Him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, worthy are You, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power. For You created all things, and by Your will they existed and were created. Let's pray together.

God, what an amazing glimpse of Your glory. Would You give us eyes to see truly and to see things that are beyond us this morning?

Would You fill us with awe, with wonder, with hope at our great God? Spirit, do that work. Speak. Show us. Help us hear.

[4:32] We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Sometimes, we live in our own homes, and we drive our own cars, and we think our own thoughts, and we work in our own offices, and we consume our own customized algorithms of news, and we rarely see beyond ourselves. Everything, have you had this experience?

It's filtered through me. I'm at the center of it all. For example, even a huge hurricane comes sweeping through the country, and what I think is, will my vacation get shortened?

Will my soccer game get canceled? And at times, filtering everything that way can become chaotic, overwhelming, too much for us to manage.

Often, because we're central to all of it, I can't even keep up with it all. See, as delightful as it is, or sounds at least, to be central, it's actually quite overwhelming for everything all the time to be all about me.

But that is so natural for me. Maybe you know how that feels. To think that way is normal for me. Maybe you've been in a plane before, and you've looked down, and you've seen the cars driving on the highway, and they look like ants going along.

[6:17] And you see the homes all look like little monopoly houses. They're so far down there. Sometimes I need to get out of my own box and get that view of reality.

One of my favorite ways to do that is up on the top of a mountain. Can you picture that with me for a minute? Close your eyes if you need to. Looking out from the top of a mountain at mountains as far as you can see in every direction, and realizing you actually can't see past this one city and this one country.

You're feeling the wind on your face that seems to come from miles and miles away across the jet stream you don't understand. And the sunrise is beaming on you and lighting every direction with these glorious colors that you can't even name before they're changing by the minute.

You're smelling forests, and you're looking down to see the homes of Huntsville. And I can be there and I can picture my own home and others, people inside, racked with anxiety.

Not able to see outside those four walls that they're in. Caught up in arguments with spouses and siblings that seem inescapable and all-consuming.

[7:54] I look down and see Walmarts and malls full of people who are looking to get just the right outfit and just the right diet at just the right price or the world really might end.

And from the view on the mountaintop, it's almost laughable, isn't it? How stuck I get in my own world down there.

How from that view, everything couldn't possibly be all about me, seriously. How central I seem to think I am to everything when there is so much more out there.

Can you get that view? What Jesus wants to show us this morning is the central reality of the entire universe.

So not just mountaintop perspective, although that helps, but heavenly perspective. A throne. And you and I are not on it.

[9:08] Jesus is saying, what will help you right where you are in the four walls of your home or your office, in the midst of your daily struggles, in your overwhelming life, what's gonna help you is heavenly perspective.

That's what you need. Orienting yourself in the midst of this ultimate reality. God on his throne is the central reality of the universe.

Notice Jesus shows us a throne in heaven. That's this whole chapter centers around that. In this chapter, everything else is gonna be built around the central throne.

It's gonna be mentioned a dozen more times in just the verses that we read because everything exists in relationship to the throne. Here's an open door into heaven, into seeing true spiritual reality today and forever.

Here's how things are, Jesus says, and especially how they will be forever. Okay, so we'll look at some of the details. First thing you notice about the throne in heaven, it is gloriously occupied.

[10:36] Verse two, behold, a throne stood in heaven with one seated on the throne. Friends, the universe is not spinning out of control.

And we object, but hurricanes, but diseases, but wars. No, no. No, the throne is not empty and awaiting some victorious strong man to claim it.

No, there is one seated on the throne, ruling, reigning, all-powerful. The early church would have lived in a culture where they were inundated with throne images, right?

Constantly, everywhere they went around town so they couldn't forget the splendor and the power of the emperor. And Jesus is saying to those people who live there all the time, let's replace that throne imagery with the real throne.

Keep this at the front of your mind, he says, the throne of heaven. The emperor's not on it. You are not on it. But God himself is on the throne.

[11:55] Psalm 11, Yahweh is on his throne in heaven so he sees everyone, everywhere. Psalm 45, God's throne is forever and ever so there's no end to his powerful reign.

It's not gonna change. Psalm 47, God's throne is holy and over all the nations so he is absolutely without comparison.

He's without rival in the whole world. He is king. Not the emperor. Not the president. Not you. Not me.

Have we forgotten that? Is it possible that God has at times become an afterthought in our lives or a side dish to the real main attraction?

Have we as a church ever lost sight of his glory and his greatness? Theologian David Wells says we do that often in our culture.

[13:06] In his book, No Place for Truth, he writes pointedly, God now rests too inconsequentially upon the church. Not heavy enough.

His truth is too distant. His grace is too ordinary. His judgment is too benign. His gospel is too easy. And his Christ is too common.

His Christ, if he has seen at all, is impoverished, thin, pale, and scarcely capable of inspiring awe. And his riches are entirely searchable.

It is God that the church needs most. God in his grace and truth, God in his awesome and holy presence. And some churches, it seems, are almost scared to tell their people about God.

Why is that often true of us? Why would that be true when we get together? Is it possible that we actually sometimes start to think that what's most worthy of our attention, what's most relevant to our daily lives is my Wordle streak or my football team's winning streak?

[14:27] My influencer's latest hack deserves my attention? Or my church's latest trick to entertain people? That's what's really exciting.

We must regain a weighty, consequential, overwhelmingly relevant vision of God on his throne.

Gloriously occupied. Look at it. Verse 3. He who sat there had the appearance of Jasper and Carnelian and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.

You got that? Everybody understand what he looks like? Kids, I know that a lot of you like to draw and color pictures while I'm preaching.

That's okay. That's a good thing. I hope you do that this morning. Maybe some of you will come show me one afterwards. You ought to be drawing a picture of this throne room in heaven and there's some things you'll learn if you're trying to do that this morning.

[15:35] See, notice when God is described here. This was talking about God here, that verse I just read, verse 3. It doesn't say that God is six feet tall with dark hair and blue eyes or the things we would usually get to draw a picture of somebody.

The Bible's not most interested in our seeing what God physically looks like. Okay? What's being pictured here is he is sparkling with the splendor of these precious gems that are there on the throne.

They're jewels like you might know what a diamond looks like if you've seen a diamond ring and it's sparkling and shining. There's reds and greens and rainbows all around.

And John says that he has the words to tell you only the appearance of God, like what God is like, only enough to say what he's like on his throne.

So what you do when you're drawing a picture of the throne room, you don't draw like two stones on the throne and say that's God. That's not what he's saying.

[16:54] He's telling you that God is glorious beyond our full comprehension or description. Now that is not easy to draw, is it?

But you can give it a shot. You're going to need lots of colors, aren't you? Kids, you know how big God is? Can you think of how big God is?

God is so big that you can't fit him on your page. He doesn't fit there. He's not hoping you'll draw a picture of him on your page like you can fit him in.

You can't. God is so big that I can't tell you how big he is. That's how big God is. I don't have words for that. See, God defies description.

You heard us sing indescribable, uncontainable. So it's okay in your picture not to try to show this is exactly what God himself looks like.

[18:01] In fact, kids, that's one of the things you'll learn about God as you get older. The more you know God, the more you just, you can't fully describe God.

The more you know him, the more you wonder and you marvel and you say, God just defies description. I can't put it into words.

All my words seem to fall short. Kids, try preaching about him. When John sees this and writes it and he runs out of words, his words aren't enough much less mine.

I can't tell you how glorious God is. See, God is not irrelevant to the world. He's not optional to your life.

He is so central to everything that he can't be contained on one sheet of paper or in one area of life. He's not great at football only or math only or ballet only.

[19:07] He's gloriously great in every way. He's not central to the church building only but not your home.

To Sunday only but not to Tuesday. To your money only but not to your time. No, he is gloriously central in every way to everything.

So just briefly stop and think with me, what does that mean for us? if he's central and I'm not? Well, just a few things.

When we try to determine priorities for our lives, how to invest our time, where to focus our energy, God's glory must be central. Right?

When we struggle to understand suffering, we've been there, what has to be true? Well, we need to move off the throne and see God back on it.

[20:12] Otherwise, we're looking at the puzzle of suffering from the wrong viewpoint. When we feel our lives are out of control because we are not in control, we must remember that he is on the throne.

So while we may be out of control, that's true, so things feel out of control, they do, they are surely not out.

of control. You see how this reality changes things over and over in every part of your life? The throne of heaven is gloriously occupied by God.

Now, he is on the throne and everything else John sees here orients itself to the central throne. Just look at what all wonderfully surrounds this throne.

Every image here full of powerful meaning, for us. First, verse 4, around the throne were 24 thrones and seated on the thrones were 24 elders clothed in white garments with golden crowns on their heads.

[21:20] There is debate over whether these are human beings or angelic beings, but it seems clear that regardless of that, they represent God's people.

Twelve Old Testament tribes plus 12 New Testament apostles, the new Israel, 24 elders on 24 thrones.

They're the very first thing mentioned here near God's throne, aren't they? all of God's people are close to him, never to be distant, right?

What a great image. They're reigning, right? Not on his throne, but alongside him on thrones that get any of their power from being near the throne.

Next, we're told, from the throne came flashes of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder, clearly images of power.

[22:24] These are ones you can imagine. You've seen things like this. John's not only seeing more than he can take in, but he's also hearing overwhelming sounds, right? Thunder and lightning, always intimidating and powerful, fearful.

But here, unlike Mount Sinai, God's people are not kept away by the powerful display of God's holy greatness, are they?

No, they're right there nearby. Interesting. Hopeful. Then, before the throne, seven torches of fire representing the seven spirits of God, or as we saw earlier in Revelation, the fullness of God, God's spirit blazing forth before his throne actively at work, powerful.

And, a sea of glass like crystal. Don't get too caught up in the details. When that starts to happen, zoom back out and remember, this is part of an overwhelmingly glorious scene beyond what we can take in.

That's primary, but I love this image of a smooth sea, maybe especially this weekend. Normally, in the Bible, the sea represents chaos, turmoil.

[23:48] There's waves and storms and untamed beasts, and there is suffering like that in this world. But all that chaos is calm at God's feet.

Before God's throne, that sea is clear as crystal, still waters. I've pictured this week myself dragging the things that cause me anxiety, that swirl like waves in my mind, make me nauseated or overwhelmed, dragging all those things to the throne of God and watching the sea still, like it did at the voice of Jesus when He gave us a glimpse of heaven's glory walking on this earth. He said to those raging waters, peace, be still, calmer of my troubled heart. speak, and all my soul is peace.

So already around this sparkling throne with a rainbow of colors, God's people, lightning, thunder, fire, glassy seas, and now around the throne on each side four living creatures.

Recognizable creatures, but not. You ever seen something completely covered in eyes, outside and inside and all around? God sees and He knows everything.

[25 : 30] And they have six wings like the ones Isaiah saw worshipping in the throne room we read about earlier. They're ready for mission for this enthroned omniscient king.

They're worshipping Him and they're going and doing. Perhaps the lion, the ox, the man, and the eagle respectively, maybe they represent God's nobility and strength and wisdom and majesty. I think what's more certain is that these four represent all of God's creatures surrounding the throne of their creator and king.

Do you begin to glimpse now a little bit of what John saw? How everything, he's just able to give you a few examples, everything from the greatest to the strongest, the most radiant to the most impressive, everything surrounds the king's throne at the center of reality.

That's how it works. That's how the universe runs. That's how we're made to function, he says. And as you might expect from what it means that they surround his throne, we now hear explicitly that the one on heaven's throne is constantly worshipped.

[26 : 48] Worshipped. Declared worthy. Why? Verse 8. Day and night the four living creatures never cease to say, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty who was and is and is to come.

Y'all, the one on the throne in ways I fail to describe to you completely is utterly unique. Thrice holy. As holy as possible. Completely above all others. The only eternally self-existent one.

That's why he's worshipped. Again, verse 9. Glory and honor and thanks to the one who lives forever and ever. Who lives forever and ever.

In case you missed it the first time. Who lives forever and ever. Then verse 11. The chorus of worthy are you our Lord and God to receive glory and honor and power for you created all things and by your will they existed and were created.

[28 : 03] Do you see where the distinction is between God and everyone and everything else in heaven? What's the distinction? There is one creator and everything else is created.

He is creator and they are his creatures. That is a massive category distinction. Don't miss that. He has always been and they started sometime at his command.

His existence depends on no one else and their existence depends completely on him. So what do they do? They declare him worthy.

That's worship. We'll talk about it next week more but you worship something bigger, greater, more worthy than you are.

Like when you find the treasure in the field that's so valuable, you sell everything else that you have to buy that field, to have that treasure, that pearl of great price because it's worthy.

[29 : 15] That's worship. But for this week, chapter 4's glimpse of heaven, I want you to notice one thing in particular.

God on his throne is constantly worshipped. It's highlighted here. Day and night, they never cease to say, holy, holy, holy.

You never stop hearing it. It keeps happening. The living creatures doing that over and over and over and whenever they do. How often?

A lot. over and over. Whenever that happens, all God's people respond falling on their faces shouting, worthy. Imagine that scene now.

All of God's creation, all of God's people amidst sparkling brightness and thunder booming and lightning crashing. They're singing holy, holy, holy, answering worthy are you, our Lord and God.

[30 : 21] I want you to do something for me. It's a little bit like a football stadium but it's so far beyond this. Maybe you've been in a stadium where one side says Clemson and the other side says Tigers.

It goes back and forth because when one says it the other answers. You haven't been in that stadium? That's okay. It's really awesome. This is way beyond that anyway. Just give you a little taste of it, okay?

Y'all are holy. Y'all are worthy. Every time you say holy, you say worthy. Every time you say worthy, you say holy, okay?

Do you see what's going may may may may may may may calling back and forth to one another. And who were you calling to? Were you at each other?

You're calling about someone who's above all of you. You're yelling, and you hear them say, holy, and you say, yeah. Oh, he's worthy. You are, Lord and God. And you say, holy, holy, holy. And when do you stop? Somebody has to tell you that's enough for now. But in heaven, nobody does.

[31 : 35] They found the one who's worth worshiping all the time. They're not ever going to stop day and night, whenever. See, God is holy all the time. Listen, God is in control all the time. God is worthy all the time. The creator on the throne from which he never steps down is always central.

No matter what you're going through. So what does that mean for you? Just keep singing, get DJ and the crew back up here, and we just start singing and singing? That's not a bad idea.

Our awed hearts should overflow, as the hymn writer says, in 1,000 tongues to sing the glories of our God and King, right? No way could we do it too much. And God's people, the elders, y'all come back up in a minute. They also take action. What do they do? Falling down and casting their crowns before his awesome throne. What are they doing? Any power, any authority, any control that they had, as they stand before his, this great and mighty God, they relinquish it. They throw it at his feet. It's like a knight laying down his sword before his king. We lay down our control because we acknowledge his to be better. That's a lot harder than I just made it sound. We lay down our control. Are you kidding me?

Because we see his as better. That's not easy, but that's worship. A life where I am constantly acknowledging, not just in a room like this, but everywhere I am, I am weaker and God is stronger. I'm unclean, unworthy like Isaiah, right?

And he's holy, holy, holy, the king, worthy. Listen, friends, you can be weak if he is strong. You can be out of control if he's in control. That's a life of repentance and faith. That's what it's supposed to be like to live in relationship with him. When, by the way, can you live like that?

[34 : 24] When is that true? Every moment of every day, in every situation. Always my worship must repent and then trust, recognize his throne as central. God, I need you. I have you. I'm a sinner.

You're the savior. I'm unworthy. You're worthy. Repentance, faith. Repentance, faith. Repentance, faith. Do you hear the rhythm of worship? Do you see how it plays out here? That's what's constantly going on when you live in God's presence because the throne at the center is gloriously occupied. It is then wonderfully surrounded by all of creation so that the one true, awe-inspiring God is constantly worshiped.

Now, that's a lot of glorious realities about God's primacy, his centrality, his worthiness.

But if you're thinking, maybe you're thinking what I started to think this week because I'm pretty selfish. And I started wondering, am I okay if I'm not central? I'm so used to thinking I'm at the center. Am I merely one of those insignificant ants down there?

Am I going to get left out because after all, it's all about God? The answer to those questions all depends on how the one who is central relates to us.

[36 : 18] See if you can imagine with me, imagine that I'm up there on the mountainside overlooking Huntsville. I've got that perspective and I see a massive train speeding down the tracks, going through the city. And also from that mountaintop perspective, I look over and see my young child across town playing on the railroad tracks. And I can instantly tell what's coming in just a couple of minutes. They're on a collision course. There is certain disaster about to happen.

So what do I do? I jump down, as it were, from the mountain and throw myself in front of the train to rescue my beloved child at the cost of my own life, right? Certainly then, if that's how I would relate there, the otherwise tiny insignificant child would be valuable. Significant, worthwhile, even in the bigger picture perspective, even in the bigger story, even the one who sees from on top of the mountain says valuable. Next week, and you can read ahead if you want to chapter five, it is so good.

We're going to see that's exactly what Jesus does. When Jesus sees God's just wrath speeding toward sinners on a collision course, he sees it speeding towards those people he loves, and he

jumps down from the mountain, so to speak, to rescue us, his beloved children, his precious creatures whom he made and knit together, and he does it at the cost of his own life. Listen, if you're loved by the one who is central to the big story, then you become vital and valuable in it too, don't you?

The one who is worthy and glorious and central made us intentionally and loves us unendingly. And that is just one more reason to join the throng around his throne, marveling at his greatness, singing his praise, living for his glory.

[38:56] We're going to read that glorious vision of the lamb who was slain next Sunday. But God never wants us to wait to taste the wonders of his love.

Does the one on the center throne see you and love you?

Look at the one on the center cross. This is when he assures us of that. The night he was betrayed, he took bread and he broke it and gave it to his disciples.

As I'm ministering in his name, give this bread to you. He said, take and eat. This is my body given for you. The most valuable, precious thing ever.

Given to rescue you. Do this in remembrance of him. The same way after supper, he took the cup and said, This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for many for the forgiveness of sins.

[40:09] Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and you drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. You proclaim that you're worth enough to the God of the universe to come and give his life for you.

This is not the table of Southwood or the Presbyterian church. This is the Lord's table. So if you're a baptized member of a church that preaches Jesus as Savior, if you come this morning amazed that you could be part of God's people around his holy throne because of Christ alone, then come and eat with him and with us.

Maybe you're a child who hasn't yet professed faith publicly to join the church. Or maybe you're an adult who's been hearing about Jesus but hasn't yet trusted in Jesus and been baptized into him.

Then don't take these elements this morning. Come and observe if you like or stay seated if you prefer. But consider God's call to you to trust him, to join his people around his throne forever because of his son.

Let's pray and we'll celebrate together. Jesus, thank you that you found a way to make unholy people like us safe in the presence of a holy, holy, holy God.

[41:52] That you've brought us to sit at the same table. That you've ushered us into the throne room of heaven. Boldly, without fear.

Because of your body and blood given for us. Would gratitude fill our hearts all at your awesome grace.

We ask in your name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at [southwood.org](https://yetanother sermon.host). Thank you.