

The King on His Throne

Text: Revelation 4:1-11

Introduction:

1. The Section: Chapter 4 commences the third and major division of the Book (See Rev. 1:19)
2. The Subject: Chapter 4 & 5 contain a powerful, heavenly scene that forms a prelude to the commencement of the outpouring of God's judgments upon the earth in the Tribulation.
3. The key word in chapter four is 'throne', appearing 12 times. We get a glimpse of God Almighty ruling and reigning on His throne, surrounded by adoration and worship the likes of which we have never imagined. The theme of heaven's worship in chapter 4 is "God the Creator"; in chapter 5 it is "God the Redeemer."

We will divide our chapter under 5 headings for this study:

I. The Summons to the Throne (Vs. 1-2a)

A. The Time of the Summons (Vs. 1a)

1. "After this" = refers back to the church age described in chapters 2-3.
2. "a door was opened in heaven" = pictures the door of the rapture. This is the next event for the church at the end of the church age, **before** the commencement of the Great Tribulation.
3. 'heaven' = this is the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2), the abode of God (1 Kings 8:39), also called paradise (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 12:4; Rev. 2:7).

B. The Trumpet of the Summons (Vs. 1b)

1. The Person of the Voice – same voice John heard in chapter 1:10, the voice of Christ Himself. "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout..." (1 Thess. 4:16)
2. The Proclamation of the Voice
 - a. "come up hither" = He is called through the open door into heaven. The catching up of John to heaven is a preview of the rapture.
 - b. "things which must be hereafter" = the purpose to reveal future things to John that **must** take place. "The events are not just probably. They are fixed and certain because they are the outworking of God's will." (Thomas)

C. The Translation of the Summons (Vs. 2a)

1. 'immediately' = for John it was an instantaneous translation and so it will be for us at the rapture (1 Cor. 15:52).

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2. "in the spirit" = John was not physically translated and glorified. He was caught up "in the spirit". Church age saints will be caught up in resurrected, glorified bodies. But for John, this experience for him was as if he was actually in heaven.
3. The church is not mentioned from this point on in Revelation until the very end of the Book, and John as the representative of the church, is in heaven looking down upon the judgments that take place on earth. (Cloud)

II. The Sovereign upon the Throne (Vs. 2b-3)

A. The Permanence of the Sovereign – 'set' (Vs. 2b)

1. "a throne was set in heaven" = the throne of God is central in heaven and central to the Revelation. "This Divine seat of sovereignty is firmly set in place. Stable. Secure. Fixed. Established. Permanent. Immovable. Enduring. Eternal." (Lyle)
2. "Thy throne O God is forever and ever..." (Psalm 45:6)

B. The Posture of the Sovereign – 'sat' (Vs. 2b)

1. "one sat on the throne...he that sat" = speaks of a King who is actually reigning.
2. Illustration: If a politician is seated, he is said to be in office. If he is put out of office he is said to be unseated. Unlike the changeable governments of this world, "...our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased." (Psalm 115:3)

C. The Picture of the Sovereign – 'stones' (Vs. 3)

1. This is clearly God the Father seated on the throne (See Rev. 5:6-7). God the Father cannot be seen (John 4:24; 1 Tim. 6:16) but He is manifest here upon the throne. Moses only witnessed God's "back parts" (Ex. 33:23).
2. The Jasper Stone: A variety of quartz which is usually red or yellow (Cloud). However, this jasper is "clear as crystal" (Rev. 21:11). Probably the diamond (Ironsides). John's primary impression of the throne is that of color and light (Walvoord). Pictures the absolute purity and holiness of God. "...God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5)
3. The sardine stone: a fiery, deep red stone and pictures the wrath of God. Ezekiel 1:27 "And I saw as **the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about.**"
4. Cloud: "His presence is characterized by light and brilliant color and breath-taking beauty."

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5. Note: The Jasper & Sardius stones are the first and last of the stones in the High Priest's breastplate (Ex. 28:17-21)
6. The emerald rainbow: The figure of the rainbow reminds us of God's covenant made with Noah after the flood (Gen. 9:12-17) and speaks of the mercy, longsuffering and grace of God. This heavenly rainbow is unique in three aspects:
 - a. It encircles the throne making a complete circle, thus picturing the completeness and perfection of God's grace and mercy.
 - b. It is one color, emerald.
 - c. It appears before the storm. "Usually a rainbow appears after the storm; but here, we see it before the storm." (Wiersbe)

III. The Saints Around the Throne (Vs. 4)

A. Resting Saints – 'sitting' (Vs. 4a)

1. 'seats' = these are special seats as the word is *'thronos'* in Greek.
2. 'sitting' = the posture of the believer (Eph. 2:6)

B. Representative Saints – "four and twenty" (Vs. 4b)

There has been much discussion around who these 24 elders are. Some suggestions are that they are:

1. Representative of angels – this is impossible as angels are never called elders in Scripture nor are they numbered, nor can they sing the song of the redeemed (5:9).
2. Representative of **both** Israel and the Church – 12 Apostles and 12 Tribes. Interestingly the names of the 12 tribes are imprinted on the 12 gates of the New Jerusalem and the name of the 12 apostles on the 12 foundations.
3. Representative of the church – more likely as the following points will demonstrate.

C. Redeemed Saints – 'clothed' (Vs. 4c)

1. "white raiment" = pictures the imputed righteousness of Christ (Rev. 3:5, 18; 19:8)
2. In Rev. 5:8-10 these same elders sing the song of the redeemed. The language seems to fit the church age – "out of every kindred, and tongue and people, and nation."

D. Rewarded Saints – 'crowns' (Vs. 4d)

1. 'crowns' = these are the 'stephanos' or victors' crowns (See Rev. 2:10; 3:11).
2. Walvoord: Such a crown "was awarded in the Greek games when a person won a race or some contest. This crown "refers to a wreath consisting either of foliage or of precious metals formed to resemble foliage and worn as a symbol of honor, victory, or as a badge of high office."

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3. The picture is of the church that has been reviewed and rewarded at the Judgement Seat of Christ.
4. **Challenge:** How you live your Christian life now has eternal ramifications, not for your salvation as a Christian but for your eternal rewards.

IV. The Scene before the Throne (Vs. 5-8a)

A. The Sights from the Throne (Vs. 5a)

1. 'lightnings' = plural in number. Lightning flashes came forth out of this glorious throne.
2. Symbolic of God's righteous anger and wrath.

B. The Sounds from the Throne (Vs. 5b)

1. 'thunderings' = John heard the crash and rumble of thunder
2. 'voices' = intermingled with the lightning and thundering. Possibly the declarations and judgments of God (Cloud).
3. There were lightnings and thunderings on Mt. Sinai with the giving of the law of God (Ex. 19:16; 20:18).
4. Lightning and thunder signal the coming of a storm. They speak of the dreadful storm of God's wrath that is about to burst on the world below from God the Judge of the universe.
5. The same manifestations are connected with:
 - a. The 7th seal (Rev. 8:5)
 - b. The 7th trumpet (Rev. 11:19)
 - c. The 7th vial (Rev. 16:18)

C. The Spirits before the Throne (Vs. 5c)

1. Symbolic of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not usually visible unless embodied in some way (Matt. 3:16; Acts 2:3).
2. Not teaching that there are literally 7 Holy Spirits. Rather it pictures the manifold operations of the Spirit and His perfection.
3. "lamps of fire burning" = flaming torches. Distinct from the lampstands of Rev. 1:12. These were used outdoors rather than indoors. These torches "emitted a blazing and fierce light. Fire in Revelation symbolizes judgment." (Thomas)

D. The Sea before the Throne (Vs. 6a)

1. 'sea' = must be a large area as it is described as a sea.
2. "of glass" = unlike the oceans of water on the earth that are moveable, this is a fixed sea.
3. "like unto crystal" = crystal is transparent but at the same time it reflects light. Imagine how this sea of crystal-like glass reflects the glories emanating from the throne of God. "The transparent sea before the throne would doubtless gather and reflect the lightnings and rainbow and other aspects of God's glory." (Cloud)

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4. Moses and the 70 elders of Israel saw something similar. Ex. 24:10
“And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness.”
5. Walvoord: “There may be an analogy or comparison here to the sea of brass in the O.T. tabernacle or the sea in the temple. Both were washstands, designed for the cleansing of the priests. It may typically represent the sanctifying power of the Word of God.”
6. Later we find martyred Tribulation saints standing on it (Rev. 15:2).
“The Word abides, stable and sure forevermore – a glassy sea filled with crystal – firm and glorious, on which the people of God can stand eternally.” (Ironsides)

E. The Seraphs around the Throne (Vs. 6b-8a)

Particular emphasis is given to these four creatures. They closely resemble both the Cherubim of Ezekiel’s vision (Ez. 1:4-14; 10:14-15, 20-27) and the Seraphim of Isaiah’s vision (Is. 6:2-3) so are in the same class of special angels closely surrounding the throne. Note a couple of features revealed about them:

1. Their position (Vs. 6b) – they are in the middle of the throne and around the throne. This likely means they were in the “immediate vicinity of the throne and encircling it, one on either side, one behind and one in front.” (Thomas)
2. Their Vision (Vs. 6c) – they can see on every side. “The alertness and comprehensive knowledge of these beings is emphasized.” (Thomas)
3. Their Description (Vs. 7-8a)
 - a. Four Faces (Vs. 7) Their faces represent the greatness and the strength of all of nature (Dr. Robert Jeffress).
 - i. Lion: The lion is supreme among wild beasts and speaks of nobility.
 - ii. Calf (ox): Supreme among domestic animals and represents service or strength.
 - iii. Man: Supreme among all creation and represents intelligence or wisdom.
 - iv. Eagle: Supreme of all flying creatures and represents swiftness.
 - b. Six wings (Vs. 8a) – for flying and covering.

V. The Songs Directed to the Throne (Vs. 8b-11)

A. The Song of the Seraphs (Vs. 8b-9)

1. The Frequency of their praise (Vs. 8b)
 - a. It is clear from the rest of the Book that these beasts do engage in other acts of service for the Lord. For example, they

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participate with the opening of the seal judgments (Rev. 6) and one of the beasts hand the 7 vials of judgment to the seven angels (Rev. 15:7).

- b. That said, it is clear that the primary function of these heavenly creatures is to surround the throne of God with words of praise and adoration.
2. The Focus of their praise (Vs. 8c)
 - a. The Holiness of God – “Holy, holy, holy” The word is repeated for emphasis. God is exceedingly holy! His holiness surpasses anything we can begin to understand. “It is impossible to understand God apart from His holiness. It is His holiness that explains Christ’s cross and causes us to understand why it was necessary for the Son of God to die. It is also God’s holiness that explains the horrible reality of eternal hell.” (Cloud)
 - b. The Omnipotence of God – “Lord God Almighty”
 - c. The Eternality of God – “which was, and is, and is to come.”
 3. The Facets of their praise (Vs. 9)
 - a. They give God glory
 - b. They give God honour
 - c. They give God thanks

B. The Song of the Saints (Vs. 9-11)

1. The Prompting of their Worship – ‘when’ (Vs. 9)
2. The Posture of their Worship (Vs. 10)
 - a. “fall down before him” = this is the first of six times in the Revelation when the elders prostrate themselves (5:8, 14; 7:11, 11:16; 19:4).
 - b. ‘worship’ = means to ascribe worth to someone. “To adore; to pay divine honors to; to reverence with supreme respect and veneration.” (Webster)
 - c. “cast their crowns” = everything revolves around the throne and the One who sits upon it.
3. The Praise of their Worship (Vs. 11)
 - a. God is worthy
 - b. God is Creator
 - i. The fact of His Creative Work – “for thou hast created all things” The 24 elders have a more particular focus than the four beasts. “They recognize not only the attributes, but the works of God that reveal His attributes.” (Walvoord)
 - ii. The focus of His Creative Work – “and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”

Conclusion: Illustration: Man needed to kneel in art gallery. What is your view of God? What priority is given to worship in your life?