

Hurstbourne Baptist Church; November 15, 2020
Sermon Notes: Revelation 4:1-11
“The Throne in Heaven”

Introduction: A Glimpse into Heaven (4:1)

- The centerpiece of John’s heavenly vision in Revelation 4 is the **throne** of God.
- John refers to the throne of God **twelve** times in Revelation 4.

Sermon Outline

- Introduction: A Glimpse into Heaven (4:1)
- Who is Seated on the Throne of Heaven? (4:2-3)
- Who Surrounds the Throne of Heaven? (4:4-7)
- What are They All Doing? (4:8-11)
- Why is Revelation 4 so relevant for us today?

Who is Seated on the Throne of Heaven? (4:2-3)

- John is showing the churches that, **right now**, God is on His throne. He is being worshipped and praised as He rightly deserves.
- “John uses imagery and symbolism to convey his message, as no one can see or describe God as he actually is, for his glory is beyond human capacities. John describes him in terms of stones such as jasper and carnelian and a rainbow like an emerald. It is difficult to find one-to-one correspondence between the stones named and qualities or attributes of God, though they certainly convey his beauty, glory, and wealth.... The portrait here echoes Ezekiel 1:26-28.... The stones in Revelation and the vision in Ezekiel demonstrate that **the purpose of the description is to emphasize the unparalleled and indescribable beauty and glory of God. Seeing him, as Ezekiel records, casts us down on our faces**” (Schreiner, “Revelation” in *Expository Commentary*, 599-600).

Who Surrounds the Throne of Heaven? (4:4-7)

- The Twenty-Four Elders surround the Throne
- The Four Living Creatures surround the Throne
- The people of God are represented by the **elders**, and all creation is represented by the **creatures**.

What are the Elders and Creatures Doing? (4:8-11)

- They are **marveling** at God and giving glory and honor and thanks to Him.

Why is Revelation 4 so relevant for us today?

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Supplemental Commentary: Revelation 4:1-11
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- “Since then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:1-2).
- “Someday you will read in the papers that D. L. Moody, of East Northfield, is dead. Don’t you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now” (Moody, *Life of D. L. Moody*, ii).
- “If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’: aim at Earth and you will get neither” (Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 118).
- “I pity the man who never thinks about heaven [...] The man who is about to sail for Australia or New Zealand as a settler is naturally anxious to know something about his future home, its climate, its employments, its inhabitants, its ways, its customs. All these are subjects of deep interest to him. You are leaving the land of your nativity; you are going to spend the rest of your life in a new hemisphere. It would be strange indeed if you did not desire information about your new abode. Now surely, if we hope to dwell forever in that ‘better country, even a heavenly one,’ we ought to try to become acquainted with it” (J. C. Ryle, *Shall We Know One Another in Heaven*, 42).
- “The Bible refers to heaven more than five hundred times.... John’s description in chapters 4 and 5 [of Revelation] is the most complete and informative in all of Scripture. Escorted by the beloved apostle, readers are carried far beyond the mundane features of this temporal realm to behold the realities of eternal heaven” (Macarthur, *Revelation*, 144).
- “The opening of heaven means God is about to disclose a matter of great importance to all mankind (cf. Luke 3:21; John 1:51; Acts 7:56; 10:11; Rev. 19:11). The parallel in Ezekiel is particularly apt, for Ezekiel says the “heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God” (Ezek. 1:1). So too here, the voice John first heard booming like a trumpet (cf. Rev. 1:10) speaks to him again, summoning him to come to heaven. Clearly this is not the rapture of the church, for what happens here is confined to John alone. Indeed, the book of Revelation never mentions a ‘rapture.’ Presumably, John went to heaven in a visionary state, not literally. God reveals to John what will occur ‘after this.’ The temporal reference is quite general, for much in the subsequent chapters relays events that are already

happening or have already happened (e.g., the events in 12:1-6). For instance, God has always reigned on the thrones (4:1-11), and Christ's death (5:1-13) is a past event. Thus, the phrase 'after this' refers to the next vision, not to the sequence in which the events occurred or will occur in history" (Schreiner, "Revelation" in *Expository Commentary*, 599).

- "John sees a throne in heaven and God seated on the throne. Amid a world opposed to God, a world in which evil is horrific, John reminds his readers: God reigns! Psalm 103:19 captures this truth: 'The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all'" (Schreiner, "Revelation" in *Expository Commentary*, 599).
- Revelation 4 does not give us a "literal picture of God. John uses imagery and symbolism to convey his message, as no one can see or describe God as he actually is, for his glory is beyond human capacities. John describes him in terms of stones such as jasper and carnelian and a rainbow like an emerald. It is difficult to find one-to-one correspondence between the stones named and qualities or attributes of God, though they certainly convey his beauty, glory, and wealth.... The portrait here echoes Ezekiel 1:26-28.... The stones in Revelation and the vision in Ezekiel demonstrate that the purpose of the description is to emphasize the unparalleled and indescribable beauty and glory of God. Seeing him, as Ezekiel records, casts us down on our faces" (Schreiner, "Revelation" in *Expository Commentary*, 599-600).
- Who are the twenty-four elders in Revelation 4:4? Commentators have many different opinions. Some believe that the 24 elders are a "priestly entity." Some believe that the 24 elders represent the twelve tribes of Israel + the apostles (i.e., Israel + the NT church). Some believe that the 24 elders are angels who represent the people of God. Whatever their precise identity, we know from Revelation 4 that "the elders present the prayers of God's people before his throne and represent his people in the heavenly court" (Schreiner, "Revelation" in *Expository Commentary*, 599-600).