

Revelation 4  
The Rest of the Story

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever tried to put a large puzzle together without having the picture of what it is supposed to look like?

That is not easy. A jigsaw puzzle with no picture is about as helpful as a dictionary where the words are not in alphabetical order.

You can get the parameters or the frame by finding all the edge pieces, but after that, good luck. You don't even know what you are going for.

Chapter 4 of Revelation gives us a picture to guide us as we try to figure out the different pieces of this puzzle, we call life. Chapters 4-5 give the picture and create the frame that will contain all the other pieces.

We're stepping off the shelf into the deep water. Before we do that, just a word of review.

We've seen the first cycle of SEVEN – the letters to the SEVEN CHURCHES, i.e a message from Jesus to seven churches of that period. The messages to those churches are really for us as well, especially the words of warning along with the promises to those who overcome.

What this book is saying to all believers everywhere is this: **there is A HOPE UNVEILED, and that hope is that Jesus has won; He is winning, and He will win.**

He has conquered over sin and death. The final victory is assured for all who trust in Him and who hold fast to Him.

There will be trials and temptations, but Jesus is worthy of our trust and devotion. The values and influencers of this present age will be silenced and judged in the great day of the Lord.

Those values and influencers are portrayed as BABYLON – the ungodly people and systems that set themselves up against the values and people of the kingdom of God.

REVELATION 4

Scene in Heaven

**1** After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like *the sound* of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things." **2** Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. **3** And He who was sitting *was* like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and *there was* a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance. **4** Around the throne *were* twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones *I saw* twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.

**5** Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And *there were* seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; **6** and before the throne *there was something* like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. **7** The first creature *was* like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature *was* like a flying eagle. **8** And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY *is* THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME."

**9** And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, **10** the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the

throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying,  
11“Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.”

The God WHO REIGNS  
CREATION'S PRAISE  
HUMANITY THAT WORSHIPS

SIDE NOTE: Now, at this early point it is worth pointing out that the scenes of John's vision will change without notice throughout the book. He is in heaven from 4:1 through the end of chapter 9. But in chapter 10 he is on earth again and in the middle of chapter 11 we find him back in heaven, and so on. In this vision the prophet moves easily from heaven to earth and back again. (Rayburn)

The God WHO REIGNS

EX: Royal Weddings and funerals capture large viewing audiences.

Human beings seemed to be drawn for some reason to the idea of having a king. Throughout history that has been the norm. Sadly, for Israel it became the norm when the people rejected God as King and asked for a king like the nations around them. 1 Sam 8:4-22

The THRONE SCENES of Revelation are in contrast to the Roman worship of the emperors e.g. Apocalypse and Allegiance

It is hard for us to imagine how this passage landed with the original audience that was facing persecution from the empire. Christians everywhere at that time were in danger from the state. That has been the case for much of the world for the past 2000 years. From the time of Constantine in 323 AD the church in the West has had a dangerous entanglement with the “state.” At times the church was too cozy with the established rulers, and at other times the church and state were at odds. Obviously, we've not seen the sort of hostility toward the church that the early believers experienced.

John has a breath-taking VISION of the Throne of God –EX: IMAX on steroids.  
He gets a vision of what the churches need.  
This vision is to provide consolation and relief to the churches.

God REIGNS NOW. The God who is on the throne will reveal what is to come.

This throne is mentioned 17 times in chapters 4-5, over 40 references to some sort of throne in Revelation. That gives us a clue about the whole book – it unveils who is really in charge.  
In 3:20 Jesus is knocking at the door, but here the door is opened for John to enter.  
And God wants us to know what John is about to learn. That is why he says, “Come up here and I will show you what must take place after these things.”

That is what these Christians need to know – God has it all in control, and all human life is to be regulated by the precepts and values of THE God who reigns.  
Your attitude toward the reign and rule of God will orient your life.

Who is speaking? – Christ Himself – rf: 1:10 He has the voice like a trumpet

GET THE PICTURE – this vision is so resplendent that it is hard to imagine:

- A THRONE with one seated on it – an overpowering vision of dazzling color and beauty. It was majestic and glorious. The RAINBOW is a sign of God's mercy (Gen 9) toward his people even as the

plan of judgement unfolds. The lighting and thunder echo the scene of Mt. Sinai in Ex 19:6. A sea of glass, pure as crystal, forms the transparent pavement of this royal chamber, echoing earlier prophetic glimpses of God's palace (Exod. 24:10; Ezek. 1:22, 26).

- A THRONE represents RULING AND JUDGING. In the Roman Empire, the emperor had all power, but this vision shows John that all human power is limited, and God is the only ALMIGHTY ONE.
- Surrounding God's high throne are 24 thrones, on which sit 24 elders, his subordinate judges and advisors. This scene reflects Daniel's vision of the Ancient of Days, surrounded by his courtiers' thrones, a court sitting in judgment (Dan. 7:9-10). Why 24 thrones? Clearly, 24 is a multiple of 12, a number that symbolizes the whole people of God, both Israel's tribes (Rev. 7:4-8; 21:12) and the apostles who form the foundation of the New Jerusalem (21:14). These 24 elders represent all of the elect of God's special creation (Beale). ALSO, IT WAS THE PRACTICE for the emperor to be surrounded by 24 guards in his entourage

For believers in small churches, it would be an encouragement to get a glimpse of a 'higher throne' – one that was far greater than that of the emperors. This is a vision of the true living and almighty Lord and God.

We begin to learn what is behind the scenes – “The rest of the Story” – Paul Harvey

It is important to know the reality of the universe if we are to hold firm. **As Christians we are to have an eternal God-centered perspective of our lives and the world.** God rules from Heaven despite the pretensions and frailties of earthly leaders. The movement of faith for believers is to trust that God is still in charge.

The throne of God is a key symbol of Revelation. It is used to drive home the point that the Divine purpose will prevail on earth. **And what is happening on earth, even that which seems to be happening to the detriment of Christians and the kingdom of God, that too is the outworking of God's eternal and ultimate purpose for mankind, for the world, and for his church.** [Rayburn - Cf. R. Bauckham, *Theology of Revelation*, 31]

THIS IS WHERE THE LIFE OF FAITH KICKS IN-

When things seem like they are falling apart, the movement of faith is to lean into the heavenly reality that all is working according to God's eternal will. That is the movement of faith because it often appears that God is asleep at the switch, or He has taken his eyes off the control monitors.

**CREATION'S PRAISE** – The four living creatures represent all created beings (Beale) and give continuous praise

- V. 8-11 It's not just what he sees but also what he hears – the four living creatures do not cease to say,

**“HOLY, HOLY, HOLY IS THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME.”**

God exists outside the parameters of time – He was, He is, and He is to come. The same is said for all that He does. While there is a sequential order to all that He does, it is all present tense with God. Thus, while the final victory has not yet played out on earth, it is assured in eternity.

Ex: ALL illustrations dealing with God break down, but this might help.

The redemption accomplished by Christ is like a cosmic D-DAY (the Allied landing in Normandy). While it was not the end of the war or the end of the fighting, it pretty much sealed the victory to come. So too, the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ gained our victory, the devil is still seeking to cause destruction and disruption on earth. The final return of Christ is the ultimate V-DAY and this heavenly vision strengthens the hearts of God's people.

Note the three attributes given focus in the praise around the throne:

**Holiness, Almighty power, Eternal nature.**

While those may not be the warm fuzzy attributes of bumper stickers, they are attributes that distinguish the CREATOR from the creature. If God isn't Holy, Sovereign, and Eternal, then the attributes of love, compassion, and kindness, etc., won't have a transforming weight or impact in our lives.

The trajectory of your spiritual life will be determined by how you respond to the Holiness and Sovereignty of the Eternal God.

Rom 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

#### HUMANITY WORSHIPS

10 the twenty-four elders (representing ALL THE ELECT) will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

11 "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."

(Ps 29:1-2) give one example of this theme from the Psalms

1 Ascribe to the Lord, O sons of the mighty,

Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

2 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to His name;

Worship the Lord in holy array.

He is worthy because He is eternal – He lives forever. God has life within Himself. Nothing else can make that claim. If naturalists want to claim that matter of some sort spontaneously erupted in a BIG BANG to give rise to all that we see, then they sell it short by merely studying it. They should worship it because it is what has life in and of itself. Sadly, some do worship the creature or creation rather than the CREATOR, but in a sense, they are being consistent.

He is worthy because He created all things by His will. THIS SEPARATES the theist from the naturalist atheist. As theists, we understand that there is a method, design, and purpose for all that exists.

The secular naturalist simply lives in a meaningless world, though he /she is rarely willing to admit that. A typical response is like that of Carl Sagan who reaches for significance by looking to the human race for answers.

The hard truth seems to be this: We live in a vast and awesome universe in which, daily, suns are made and worlds destroyed, where humanity clings to an obscure clod of rock. The significance of our lives and our fragile realm derives from our own wisdom and courage. We are the custodians of life's meaning. We would prefer it to be otherwise, of course, but there is no compelling evidence for a cosmic Parent who will care for us and save us from ourselves. It is up to us. (Carl Sagan-The Meaning of Life)

That is a depressing conclusion – 'significance derives from our own wisdom and courage.' YIKES! How's that working out for us?

One of the reasons for the weekly gathering of the saints is to remind ourselves of this deeper heavenly reality. We need to remember that we are not merely earth-dwellers. We are not solely dependent on our own wisdom and courage. We are looking for a heavenly city whose builder and maker is God. As we keep our hearts and minds stayed on Him, we find grace and strength to hold fast to Christ. This scene in heaven also gives us a model of what our worship should involve.

God did not create the world and then leave it alone. NO, He is always maintaining and ruling over creation. The way in which He carries out His ultimate plan will be explained in greater detail in chapter 5 as the scrolls are opened.

Chapter 4 reminds us that our reward is NOT the applause and smile of this world. Our reward is the inheritance that is reserved in heaven for us according to the Divine will and plan of God.

The heavenly visions that we'll see in Revelation provide a fresh understanding on the verses of Col 3 – “Set your mind on things above, not on things of the earth, for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

This throne room vision is a reminder that our souls were never created to love the dust of the earth. As we meditate on this glorious vision, we are drawn into the place of praise and worship of the Holy, Almighty, and Eternal God.

COME TO THE TABLE

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