

REVELATION

4:1-11

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Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday morning, 1st February 2026 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Introduction

This morning we are going to resume our study of the book of Revelation. And I want to note again that this book is more fully called *the Revelation of Jesus Christ*. Both in that *He* has given it to us, but also that this book *reveals* so much of who *He* is. And we've seen that already, as we've looked at the opening chapters, seeing in chapters 2 & 3 how *He* loves His church, His *bride*, but how naturally *He* wants His *bride* to be healthy and beautiful, and what *He* specifically desires in her.

And as we now look at chapters 4 & 5 (this week and next), we are going to see some *remarkable* things, but also be *reminded* of how *wonderful* *He* is, and *what* *He* has done in saving us, by paying for our sin with His own blood shed upon the cross. And so my hope is that we'll not get caught up in endless discussion about the things we *don't* understand, but that we'll be amazed once again by the things we do — and have joy at the things that await us. Indeed, I pray that a result we may want to worship our God and Saviour more — not only with our lips, but with our lives.

So let's first break down what we're going to read in this chapter this morning:

Overview of chapter four

- v1-5 —The throne room of Heaven

- **v6-8** — The four creatures worship God
- **v9-11** — The twenty-four elders worship God

We will find in the opening five verses that there is a change of scene here from chapter three that preceded it — indeed there will be a jump in time from the things John has previously been writing about taking place in the churches here on earth, to what he is now writing about as he gazes at the throne room of Heaven itself and what is taking place there. And first and foremost we'll get a glimpse of God's beauty, majesty and power.

Then in verses 6-8 we'll read of four creatures that praise God without rest day and night, and in verses 9-11 we'll see that as they do so, twenty-four elders (who we'll also read more about) join in, falling down to worship God themselves, declaring how worthy He is. So then, there will be questions we have, and I hope to answer, as to who these creatures and elders are. But again, we should pay particular attention to what they are *saying*.

Now, there are probably more questions than answers I have about this scene. Indeed, the answers we're given in scripture lead to more questions. But surely that's the point, that we would *think* on these things. For this isn't merely getting a glimpse into Buckingham Palace. For even the most elaborate of earthly throne rooms are so finite in nature, so constrained by resources and space, that they pale into insignificance compared to what we see here.

And as John writes this, he is trying to describe the indescribable. Of course, he is being inspired to do so by the Holy Spirit, so it's not like he's taking a best guess at this. But rather he's conveying to our limited human understanding, what it is like to look into the throne room of the supernatural God. Why? Because there *are* things for us to learn here. There *are* things for us to be reminded of. And as we *read* at the start of this book, there is a blessing for those who even read the prophecy of this book. So let us read this with open hearts, without preconceived ideas. For anything that is contrary to what we read here is of course contrary to the Bible.

Chapter four

So, let us read what it says. We read in verse 1:

Revelation 4:1

After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this."

So then, John receives a call up to heaven from a voice like a trumpet. The same description he gave to the voice he heard in chapter one, which of course we know to be Jesus Himself. And here he both writes "after these things", indicating after he had written the seven letters to the seven letters at Jesus' request, but also that Jesus now says "*I will show you things which must take place after this.*" That is, John was about to see things that would take place yet future.

So what things was he about to see? Well this third division of this book, after John's first vision, then the letters he was instructed to write, deals with the things that will take place after those events. And if we consider the letters of chapters 2 and 3 as both instructive *and* prophetic, then this is very clearly indicating that these things will happen after the church age. And namely that will point to God pouring out his wrath on a wicked and unbelieving world. Which chapter 6 onwards will deal with in some detail.

So let us remember what Jesus wrote to the church in Philadelphia, saying:

Revelation 3:10

Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

How will He keep anyone from that hour? By taking them out of the way. That is, by taking them out of this world. We read in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18, which was part of our reading earlier:

1 Thessalonians 4:15-18

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

That is, there is comfort in being with the Lord, but also that we will not have to endure the terrors that will come upon the earth. And this helps us make sense of Revelation chapter four. For all of a sudden the church is present in heaven. No longer referred to as the church, but the redeemed. Those whom Jesus' blood paid for. That's not angels. It's the church. But how did the church get there? Well, simply put, this is what we refer to as the rapture, where the church will be taken up into heaven as we just read in 1 Thessalonians.

This is not a scary thing. Again, this is something that brings comfort that God will not only take us to be with Him in Heaven, but we will not endure the Great Tribulation that is to follow on this earth, as God pours out His wrath on this ungodly and unholy world.

Now, you may be aware, some have differing views. What we teach and believe here is known as the pre-tribulation view — that the church will be taken out of the way before these things. Some believe the church will be taken up half-way through. And I while I disagree, I can have fellowship with most if not all of those folks. But there are those that believe the rapture and second coming are the same event, or that there will be no rapture at all — and such views I find impossible to accommodate. Not that I would be unwilling to spend time with someone who holds them, but they are clearly contrary to what the Bible says about these matters *and* God's character.

What is important, is we look at what the Bible says, which of course is also reinforced by the patterns or examples we have in the Bible.

You see, **first**, the word *church* is found 19 times in Revelation chapters 1 to 3, but not once after until chapter 22, after "the things which must be" are fully revealed.

Second, the elders we will read of in this chapter and the next are described as those who God has redeemed out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation. That's not angels. This is the church.

Third, Jesus spoke of His own being able to escape the things that were to come, saying in Matthew 21 "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Fourth, in 1 Thessalonians chapter five, after Paul had warned of how sudden destruction would come on those in the last days, he goes on to say:

1 Thessalonians 5:8-10

But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.

That is, we will not endure the wrath that comes upon this world. For Jesus will not pour out His wrath on His bride. He's a good husband! And there are other passages we could look at too.

Indeed, we have examples in the Old Testament that point to this. For Noah wasn't saved after the flood, or in the middle of the flood. But rather He went into the ark, God closed the door, then judgement came on the unbelieving world that was. And after that judgement, the ark descended, landed on the earth, and in effect Noah saw a new earth. Not in the same sense that there will be a new heavens and new earth after the judgement we read of in Revelation. But it paints a picture.

Likewise, we have an example of God's perfect character as Abraham sought to save his nephew, Lot, from the destruction that was coming on Sodom and Gomorrah. Asking God if He would still judge it if there were 50 righteous still in the city, to which God said He would not. Then asking Him if we would judge it with 45, 45, 30, 20, or 10 — each time God confirming that He would not. For God cannot judge the righteous with the wicked.

And so, neither will God judge His church, whom Jesus died for, with this unbelieving world. That would be against His character, and it would be contrary to all we read in scripture. For Jesus will first take His bride to be with Him forevermore. And that is what we see now with this scene change in Revelation chapter 4, that the church is now with Him.

So then, with the church now in Heaven, John has been invited to go up there to observe the things that must come to pass. And we read:

Revelation 4:2

Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.

So then, John was in the Spirit — the Holy Spirit revealing these things to Him, as He had done back in chapter one as John had that vision of Jesus in all His glory. And we read that the first thing that grabbed his attention was a throne, and One sat on it. It's not that there weren't other thrones, for as we'll read in a moment there were also twenty four lesser thrones in this scene...

But it's this particular throne, *THE* throne, that draws his full attention to start with. And that is because this is the throne of God. A throne that the book of Revelation talks about more times than the rest of the New Testament put together. In fact, 37 of the 45 times the word *throne* is mentioned in this book, it is talking about the throne of God. Compared to just 15 times from Matthew to Jude.

And when we remember the context of the times John was writing this in, that there was hideous persecution of Christians taking place, they would not doubt have been comforted by the knowledge that God was and would be still very much on His throne. That though they didn't understand all that was going on around them, they knew that God would not abdicate his throne.

Yet isn't that the comfort we need in our day too? I mean, in the last 5 or 6 years we've had the Covid pandemic, we've had inflation spike, and chaos in politics. We've seen wars in Ukraine, Israel & Gaza, Lebanon, Iran, Syria, and now matters heating up in Venezuela and Iran again. We're reaping problem after problem we've sown through social media, and it seems everyone hates each other — at least that's what the media would have us believe. We *also* need to know that God is on His throne. And friends, He is. And He's going no-where, as we shall see. For His throne is immovable. It is set in Heaven. And He is sat upon it. We read:

Revelation 4:3

And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.

And so our attention is directed to the One sat upon the throne of Heaven. The throne of the entire *universe*, no less. And we are given this description of His beauty — the jasper being a precious stone of various colours, and the sardius being a precious stone that is red in colour. Yet is that all there is for us to consider here? No, I believe there is more. For back in Exodus 28, as God gave Moses instruction on how to make the garments for the priests of Israel, we read specific instructions regarding the *breastplate* that they were to wear — which, as you may know, featured 12 precious stones.

Now those stones, which included those that we see mentioned here, were also to have the names of the tribes of Israel engraved into them, and as such there is meaning associated with them. So what does this draw our attention to? Well, on the breastplate the sardius stone was the first to be placed — and as such it was associated with the eldest of Jacob's children, Reuben, whose name meant "See, a son" or "Behold, a son". Whereas the the jasper stone was the final one added, which meant it was engraved with Benjamin's name, the youngest of Jacob's sons. And his name meant "Son of my right hand".

What do we conclude? Here we are told "Behold the Son of my right hand". So, we not only have a picture of God the Father on the throne, but right here we have a picture of Jesus on the throne! And, as we'll read, we'll see the Holy Spirit mentioned in a moment too. So here the Trinity is seen. Yet there's more, for these were the first and last stones on the breastplate — and what do we read of Jesus? That He is the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last. This has me bubbling with excitement as we realise that this description by John isn't merely his best attempt to describe what is going on, but that God, I'm sure, wants us to see this too.

And furthermore, we read of the rainbow around the throne — whether arrayed vertically above and beneath, or horizontally more like a halo we don't know — but nonetheless the rainbow is symbolic of grace, which of course we read about the throne of grace that we can approach.

And so you can see there is a lot of symbolism here. Now, we next read:

Revelation 4:4

Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.

So then, around God's throne there are 24 lesser thrones, sat upon by these 24 elders. So who are they? Well, there are a few different views. That they are men representing the church, or that they are the 12 patriarchs plus 12 apostles, or that they are angels. And to put it plainly, we can safely conclude they are 24 men, not angels, and I believe are men that are representing the church.

Why? Because the Greek word used for elders here is never used of angels, they have crowns and sit on thrones which are only ever promised to those who have been redeemed by Christ, and they are wearing white robes — only used in Revelation of Jesus and saints (that is, Christians). Furthermore, we find in chapters 19 and 22 that the one talking with John identifies himself as one of his brethren, his fellow servant, and specifically in chapter 19 as one who has the testimony of Jesus, and in 22 as one of those that keep the words of this book.

Now there are those, including people I respect, who maintain that this must be the 12 patriarchs — Jacob's sons — and the 12 apostles, largely because we find that their names are collectively written on the gates and foundation stones of the New Jerusalem in chapter 21. But I don't believe the patriarchs match the other descriptions so clearly here, and it would also be surprising if the apostle John, as he writes this, doesn't say "Oh, that's me!". Furthermore, Israel doesn't receive her rewards until the end of the book before the millennium. So rather I believe this group is representative of the church, just as there were 24 courses of priests that represented Israel.

What we can be sure of, is that these are not angels. Not only because of what I've already said, but because we read in chapter 7 that "All the angels stood around the throne" — which is how many of them? All of them. And that verse goes on to say "*and the elders and the four living creatures*". So these are distinct from one another. And as we will see, they have a specific ministry before God.

Now, building on this description of God on His throne, and the 24 elders on thrones before Him, we read in verse five:

Revelation 4:5

And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

And so, let me jump straight to it, that the seven Spirits of God are referring to the Holy Spirit and His attributes as seen in Isaiah 11:2, as already mentioned in chapters 1 and 3. Which means we have the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit seen here.

But also, we read that "*from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices*".

A reminder, should we need one, of the power of God. This is not some fluffy dreamy scene, but one that depicts the God of the whole universe sat upon His throne, unlimited in power, unwavering in righteousness, and as we will soon see in the coming chapters of this book, about to pour out His judgement on the earth.

Yet here, before His throne of grace, there is peace. We read:

Revelation 4:6

Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back.

And in case you're reading from the KJV this morning, you'll notice the word here for these creatures is *beasts*, but note it comes from a different word to that which is translated *beast* elsewhere in Revelation. Indeed, here it comes from the Greek word *zōa*, from which we get our English word *zoo*. And so the emphasis is that these creatures are living. And we read on:

Revelation 4:7

The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle.

And we'll get more description in a moment, but *why* these different faces? Well, I'm sure there is more here than we understand. But there are at least two possible things that the faces of these creatures point back to:

The first, which has long been noted, is how these correspond with the four Gospels accounts. Which one commentator concisely states: *Matthew presents Jesus as King, typified by a lion. Mark presents Him as a Servant, the ox representing servitude. Luke presents Jesus in His Humanity, seen in the face of a man. And John presents Jesus as the Son of God, pictured by the eagle who not only soars higher than any other creature, but is the only animal able to look directly into the sun, even as only the Son of God beholds the glory of the Father.*

But second, we also find back in the Old Testament that the Lion, Ox, Man, and Eagle were used as symbols of four of the tribes of Israel. And specifically, we find they were used as the symbols of the lead tribe that camped on each side of the Tabernacle in the wilderness. And you may recall from when Bob took us through our study of Numbers, that the Bible is very precise as to how many camped in each of these groups. With 108,100 to the west, 151,400 to the south, 157,600 to the north, and 186,400 to the east. Which would have meant that as the camp was viewed from above, they would have been arranged in the shape of a cross!

So in two ways, the faces of these creatures seem to point to the gospel itself. But their purpose? Well, we read in verse 8:

Revelation 4:8

The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!"

And so these are unlike anything we have ever seen with our eyes, right? But they are not unlike anything described in the Bible, for back in Ezekiel chapter 10 we read that he describes the cherubim he saw as having 4 faces each, though there he describes them as having four wings, not six. And in Isaiah chapter 6 we read of the seraphim standing above the throne of God, who each have six wings, but with two that cover their face. Now there in Isaiah, the word for face is plural — so though we don't get a description, there's perhaps the suggestion that they had more than one face. And indeed, there we read some of the same words uttered by them, saying "Holy, holy, holy".

So what are *these* creatures here in Revelation 4? The cherubim or seraphim. Honestly, I don't know for sure. But I would lean toward it being the seraphim. Even though one of the Bible teachers I trust the most leans toward it being the cherubim.

The most important thing here, though, is not the identity of these creatures, but what they are saying and doing. For we read they *they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!"*

That is, these beings are fully preoccupied with worshipping God. Declaring how He is Holy — without blemish, without sin, without any shortcoming — and doing so three times. Perhaps speaking to His triune nature. Declaring how He is ALL mighty. Without limit. And declaring how He is the One who *was and is and is to come*, pointing back to chapter 1 verse 8 where Jesus described Himself with these words, noting that He is still to return to the earth at His second coming.

These beings can't take their eyes off God, such is His beauty and majesty. So how very sad it is that we are so distracted by so many lesser things in this world around us. Yet one day, I don't think we'll have that problem, for as we'll see, these creatures only point *towards* God, with the 24 elders worshipping Him too. We read in verses 9-11:

Revelation 4:9-11

Whenever the living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: "You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honour and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created."

So then, these four creatures worship God, and in response so do the elders. And I think we should note that our own worship of God should only ever encourage others to do the same. Not draw attention to ourselves through performance or making anyone think "what on earth is going on there?!!". Indeed, true worship of God *does* encourage us to do the same.

And note the subject of this worship in Heaven. That the One sat on the throne is the eternal One. He didn't get voted in. And He is not going to get voted out. And we see that that our God is so worthy of praise that we read the elders, representing the church, cast down their crowns before His throne in an acknowledgement of His supremacy. Where did they get these crowns? Also from Him! There is nothing we can give to God that He has not given to us.

And in the case of crowns that God gives, we read of five distinct ones in the Bible:

- The crown of righteousness in 2 Timothy 4:8, given to those who have loved His appearing
- The crown of life in James 1:12, given to those who love Him, who have endured temptation
- The crown of glory in 1 Peter 5:4, given for servanthood
- The crown of rejoicing in 1 Thessalonians 2:19, for those who share their faith
- The martyr's crown in Revelation 2:10, given to those who lay down their lives

And one day you and I will have opportunity to lay *our* crowns at Jesus feet. So *will* you have something to give? Will I? You know, it's pretty awkward turning up to a birthday party with nothing to give, right? So how much more would we regret standing in front of Jesus having nothing to offer Him? What a tragedy it would be if our lives were lived so indifferent to the things of God, so indistinct from this world and its ways, that we would receive no crown that we could offer Him.

Yet the crowns are not the only worship offered, for we read how the elders will declare: "You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honour and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created."

He is Worthy. He is worth worshipping. Why? Because without Him, we wouldn't even exist. Without Him, we would not have a Saviour. Without Him, we would not have the joys of eternity to look forward to. He truly is worthy. But note, that is rooted in Him being our creator. And the elders here in heaven are not questioning whether God created the world. They are stating it as fact, because it is. They did not create themselves. They were not the result of a big bang. They were not the result of a process of chance and time. For He created them.

Friends, we read in Genesis that God created. We read in John 1 that Jesus created (that *without Him nothing was made that was made*). We read Jesus' own words of "*He who made them at the beginning made them male and female*". We read of creation in the epistles. And we read of it here. There is no room for ambiguity in the Bible as to what happened, for we read that God created the Heavens and the earth. There should be no debate in the church about this. Of course, outside, the world is grasping at straws. But for the Christian, the matter is settled, for the Bible tells us so.

But let us not forget what is happening in this scene, for these elders are worshipping the God who saved them. But what of you? How you will stand before Him will be determined now, and not then. Whether you stand before His throne of grace, or throne of judgement will depend on whether you have accepted Him as your Saviour. So if you don't know Jesus as your Saviour, I beg you, get right before Him today. Repent of your sin, and put your faith in Him to save you.

Application questions

Oh what a grand picture we have of the throne room in Heaven. And there's more to come. But for now, let me ask you three questions to ponder in the days ahead:

- The church is going to be in Heaven for these things — but will you?
- Are you in awe of God as those before His throne?
- Will you have crowns to lay at His feet? or will you be empty-handed?

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