

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

AUGUST 24TH–25TH, 2024 // REVELATION

A DOOR (REVELATION 4:1–2)

The phrase, “after this” concludes the 1st vision of Revelation (Jesus among the 7 churches, Rev. 1–3), and begins the 2nd and longest vision of the book (Rev. 4:1–16:21).

- The emphasis of the 2nd vision is on Jesus and the events surrounding His return from the perspective of heaven.
- John sees an open door leading to heaven, like in the beginning of Ezekiel's visions (Ezek. 1:1).

As John sees a door to heaven, he hears the 1st voice that sounds like a trumpet blast commanding him to “come up here.”

- This voice (Jesus') was summoning and inviting him into God's presence to receive further revelation of future events.
- A simple principle presented is that God desires to reveal more of Himself to us, but we must be willing to draw near (James 4:8).

Some interpreters believe that the command for John to “come up here” is also referring to the “catching up” (the rapture) of Christians Paul mentions in 1 Thess. 4:17. However, the singular verb used excludes that possibility.

- Jesus says to John, “I will show you what must take place after this.” It is Jesus Who reveals what will happen in the future as the sovereign King.
- He also says it “must take place”: it will happen!

John then tells us he “was in the spirit.” This marks the official beginning of a fresh visionary experience.

- By the power of the Holy Spirit, John was transported spiritually to heaven.
- As John enters heaven through the open door and is caught up in the Spirit, the FIRST THING he notices is a “throne” and “one seated on it.”

In an absolute monarchy, the one seated on the throne was the highest authority in the land who could issue any judgment and to which the highest appeals could be made.

- As the most glorious and maybe the most important vision of Revelation begins, what God wants John to see is the reality that no matter what happens, God is always ruling and reigning over His universe on His throne!

A THRONE (REVELATION 4:3–4)

John never gives his readers any detail on the throne. He simply wants all the focus to be on the One seated on the throne.

- Human language has limitations in describing the reality of God.
- God's form simply has the appearance of things like precious stones and rainbows.
- Jasper (like a diamond) is clear and symbolizes God's clarity, brilliance, and purity.

Camelion (or red quartz) most likely symbolizes God's judgment, wrath, and anger against evil.

- John also records seeing a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald, most likely made up of various shades of green.
- Rainbows symbolize God's eternal promise with humanity; green is also a symbol of mercy.
- Above all things, mercy and grace surround God.
- This scene is eternal—it transcends all time.

John then describes 24 other thrones with 24 “elders” seated on them, dressed in white garments and golden crowns.

- The most frequent interpretation of the 24 elders is that they are the 12 sons of Jacob (the old covenant people of God) and the 12 apostles of Jesus (the new covenant people of God).
- Others believe they are an unknown class of heavenly beings created for worship.

Still others see the 24 elders as representing the “divine council.” Sometimes in the O.T. God is pictured surrounded by a council of heavenly beings who help execute divine rule (Ps. 89:7, Isa. 24:23, 1 Kings 22:19).

- So perhaps the 24 elders serve as a sort of heavenly counterpart to the elders of Israel, and “24” corresponds to the 24 priestly orders in the Old Testament.

Whoever they were, they appeared to John as old human males (“elders”) dressed in garments to represent purity and crowns to represent power, majesty, and reward.

- This vision of God that John receives gives us insight as to the nature of His being and character. He's holy, powerful, gracious and merciful, incomprehensible, and He's worshipped by angels and all creation.

LIGHTNING, THUNDER, & FIRE (REVELATION 4:5–6A)

From the throne of God itself came “flashes of lightning” and sounds of thunder.

- Surely for John, this must have brought to mind God's revelation of Himself to Israel at Mount Sinai where thunder, lightning, and smoke were present as the law was given.
- Before the throne, John records seeing seven torches of fire that he identifies as the, “seven spirits of God” (v. 5).

What seems to be symbolized about the work of the Holy Spirit through this manifestation of lamps/torches is that the Holy Spirit illuminates the minds and hearts of God's people (Acts 2).

- The Holy Spirit is the person of God responsible for leading us to God's truth and to greater holiness/purity in our lives.
- Before the throne appeared another amazing sight: “what looked like a sea of glass.”

Notice John doesn't say he saw a sea of glass, but only what looked like such a thing.

- This is reminiscent of the experience Moses and Aaron had when they “saw the God of Israel. Beneath His feet was something like a pavement made of lapis lazuli, as clear as the sky” (Ex. 24:9–10).
- Glass making in ancient times was unable to produce clear glass like today.

Glass would've been cloudy at best.

- Some believe what John is describing before God's throne is a picture of God's distinctness from everything else in our universe.
- He's so holy and unlike us in His perfection that there is represented before His throne a distance between Him and everything else.
- Others see the sea of glass as a picture of God's omniscience—He sees and knows everything.

The sea of glass also might just be a picture of the tranquility, peace, and calmness that are present in the majesty of God's throne room.

- Have you ever stood before an ocean or lake early in the morning and seen the water completely calm, like it's made of glass?

- God's glory, majesty, beauty, and splendor is always described as awe-inspiring and terrifying, yet there's a perfect peace in God's presence.

FOUR LIVING CREATURES (REVELATION 4:6B–8)

John didn't give a lot of detail about the appearance of the elders, but he does go into great detail about these creatures who are the closest of all created beings to God's throne.

- These creatures seem to be the beings that Isaiah and Ezekiel both saw in their visions of God (Isa. 6:2, Ezek. 1:10–11).
- Ezekiel identified these angelic beings as “cherubim.” They're mentioned often in the O.T.

These angelic beings are “covered with eyes in front and in back” (v. 6) as a symbol to mean that these creatures see unceasingly and are ever-watchful protectors.

- The creatures were like a lion, an ox, a flying eagle, and one had the face of a man.
- Again, we must pay attention to the use of the word “like” (they were like lions and other animals, but they weren't actually these things).

Why do they look like these animals in particular?

- One viewpoint is that the lion is the king of the untamed animals, the ox is the greatest of the domesticated animals, the eagle is the king of the birds, and the man is representative of humanity.
- The creatures symbolize that all nature is called on to declare the praises of God (Ps. 150), and these creatures serve as a reminder of this truth.

The function of these creatures is to constantly worship God in His throne room.

- The song that they sing was also heard in Isaiah 6:3 and emphasizes the worth and the glory of God.
- They repeat “Holy, holy, holy,” most likely to represent the triune nature of God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and begin the 3-part song that praises 3 attributes of God.

First, His holiness is praised (“Holy, holy, holy”) to show that He's set apart and “other”.

- Secondly, He's praised with a three-fold name—“Lord” (Yahweh), as the covenant-keeping God of Israel, “God” as the uncreated one, and “Almighty” as the all-powerful one.
- Thirdly, His eternity is praised as the One “who was, who is, and who is to come”—He's the God of the past, present, and future.

A SONG (REVELATION 4:9–11)

The words John uses to explain the meaning of the living creatures' praise are “glory, honor, and thanks.”

- “Glory” simply means praise and “honor” means high respect or value. Both are offered to God for Who He is.
- “Thanks” is simply an expression of gratitude because of what God has done as the One Who lives forever and ever.

True worship happens when we praise, highly esteem, and value God for Who He is to us and what He's worth to us.

- True worship is also when we express our gratitude to God and how much He's worth to us because of what He's done as the eternal, transcendent One.
- Your engagement at a worship service speaks volumes of how much God is worth to you.

John then sees the twenty-four elders falling down before the One Who sits on the throne.

- The language John uses (“whenever the living creatures give glory... the twenty-four elders fall”) is in the present tense—it means that this scene happens without ceasing.
- In worship, the elders present their crowns before the throne as a way of expressing that God's power and majesty are greater than theirs.

As they cast their crowns before Him, they sing a song of praise to “our Lord and God.”

- This title for God isn't found anywhere else in the Bible. However, the persecuted Church in that day probably knew the title very well.
- The Roman emperor Domitian blasphemously claimed this exact title for himself.
- God wanted the 1st Christians reading Revelation to see Who was really in charge.

While the praise of the living creatures centered around Who God is and His essential nature, the song of the elders centers around the glory of His creation.

- They worship God because He created all things out of nothing and simply because of His will.
- God's creative power includes both the act of creation AND His ongoing preservation of the created order.

Colossians 1:17 says that “...by Him (Christ) all things hold together.”

- Right now, God is upholding and sustaining everything in all of His creation.
- This completely dismantles the idea that God is so detached and separated from the material universe that even though He created it, He has no interest in it.
- God is upholding and sustaining you!

“IF I COULD JUST SEE GOD, THEN I'D _____ ...”

- Even after we have received a revelation of God and His character through creation (Rom. 1:20), His providence, the person of Jesus, God's Word, and the light of the Holy Spirit...
- ...when we don't see immediate results, instantaneous answers to our problems, or easy solutions to our hang-ups...
- We can be so quick to turn our hearts, affections, time, energy, and attention away from the God of infinite glory and towards other things that have absolutely no power.
- Our absence of worship sometimes is not an issue with us not seeing God or His hand at work in our lives, it's an issue with us not believing that He is as glorious as He actually is.

WHAT IS IT THAT KEEPS YOU FROM WALKING THROUGH THE OPEN DOOR TO GOD'S PRESENCE?

- What is it that keeps you from believing God is as worthy, powerful, sovereign, holy, just, gracious, good, and loving as He actually is?
- How would your life be different if you chose to believe that the One Who is ruling and reigning on a throne loves you perfectly and infinitely?