

Revelation 4 ... There is a higher throne!

A new vision of Jesus. That's the heartbeat of Revelation, that's what makes it tick; from start to finish, it's all about Jesus! A vision like that breathes fresh hope into our hearts; it gives us hope when we're depressed, discouraged, and defeated; it gives us hope that ignites our hearts and sets our faith on fire!

You'll find in chapters 2 and 3 that Christ is one who is walking among his seven churches - here is One who speaks to his church—he says: 'Fear not'; here is One who is staying with his church—we have the promise of his living presence; here is One who is searching through his church for he wants us to maintain a clear, sharp cutting edge; and here is One who is strengthening his church for the unfinished task in hand.

This is one of the most exciting portions you'll come across anywhere in the word of God. There are many high points in Scripture but, at the end of the day, I think none surpass what we have in this duo of chapters, here we're touching the throne! You can't get much closer to the Lord than that! The tremendous theme woven into chapter 4 is: let's worship the Creator. There's a hymn dating back to the 1700s which says, *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the king of creation*. The keynote in chapter 5 is: let's worship the Redeemer. The old gospel song is right when it joins both together to tell us that *the great Creator became my Saviour*. It was the incredible experience of John on Patmos, he was given a triple vision of the grace of God, the government of God, and the glory of

God; it was the thrilling experience given to the young prophet Isaiah when he saw an earthly throne that was vacant, but the throne he saw in heaven was occupied;

it was the unbelievable experience of Daniel when he quickly realised that the God of heaven is in total control of events on planet Earth, that's when it dawned on him that the Lord rules and reigns! This illustrious trio had one thing in common; all of them touched the timeless throne of God!

And it reminds us of the words of the irrepressible Corrie ten Boom when she wrote: 'There is no panic in heaven! God has no problems, only plans!' And she's right, for that's what happened to John ...

The message from the throne is: God is not idle for he is active; God is not unseated, he is not up for re-election; God is not absent or distant or forgetful or uncaring for he is orchestrating the events of human history. The plot is not lost!

A door is open in verse 1 where we see the regal splendour of our God – the open door leads us through into a throne room where the king is sitting! I like to think of it like this, here is John being ushered into the oval office of heaven; it's the place where decisions are made. Jeremiah was on the ball when he described it in 17:12 as a *glorious throne, exalted from the beginning*.

For John to get from earth to heaven, something had to happen, he couldn't get there under his own steam; he had to be transported there, courtesy of another. That explains the phrase in

verse 2 where it informs us that he was *in the Spirit*. In other words, God would take him there. When the old preacher man arrived, he couldn't believe his eyes. It was sensational, spectacular, utterly amazing. It can't really be described for human language fails to convey what is seen, it's awesome, strange, unexpected. Like John, we feel out of our depth. Such an encounter, it has to be said, doesn't happen every day of the week!

The Bible records: *and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it*. It's interesting to note that in verses 5, 6 and 9, there are four prepositions which all relate to the throne: *on* the throne, *around* the throne, *from* the throne, and *before* the throne.

A throne ... and someone sitting on it! That says all that has to be said. He is exalted. He has taken the highest honour, he has sat down, he's on the throne! Jesus is king!

If we're honest, there are times when we seriously question that fact! When bad things happen, we wonder, is he really on the throne? When heaven is silent, we tend to think he isn't there, that he's forgotten all about us. When the bottom falls out of our life, when our castles have tumbled, when all we have left are broken pieces and shattered dreams, we're inclined to feel as if we're on our own. Be assured, you're not! He hasn't moved, he's still on the throne, and *he will remember his own, though trials may press us and burdens distress us, he never will leave us alone, for God is still on the throne!*

John sees someone sitting on the throne, did you see how he described him in verse 3? As a stone!

It's hard to imagine, isn't it. How can any man even begin to describe our God? We need to remember that, like Moses before him, John didn't see the actual face of God. No man can do that and live to tell the tale. John records that God revealed himself in a dazzling nimbus of coloured lights. A scintillating display of colour. It tells me that there is no God like our God!

A jasper is a clear gem, as clear as crystal, a bit like our diamond. It's true to say that the glory of God is more perfect than any gem displayed in an up-market jewellers on the high street; and the carnelian is a stone comparable to the ruby.

The jasper speaks of the hardness connected with the government of God. His laws are fixed and firm; they're unyielding, unbending, and unrelenting. That's what today's world badly needs, it needs a firm hand. So the jasper is symbolic of his government and the way he runs it.

The carnelian is suggestive of the holiness connected with the government of God. It's a deep, fiery, flashing red stone and it powerfully reminds us that our God is a consuming fire. You will remember that the fire on Israel's altars was to burn on and on, it was never to go out. You see, so long as sin exists, God's attitude towards it is one of burning holiness.

Here's an interesting thought: when you put the jasper and carnelian together, they underline the humanity connected with the government of God.

The high priest in Israel wore on his multicoloured outer garment - the ephod - a breastplate of twelve precious stones - on each stone was engraved a name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. That is,

they were always on his heart, when he went into the presence of God on their behalf. And, as we all know, the heart is the place of affection and love.

The first stone, representing Reuben, was a jasper stone - and the last stone, representing Benjamin, was a carnelian.

When we look at the second part of verse 3 we discover there was *a rainbow, resembling an emerald which encircled the throne ...* it reminds us that the judgment of God is flawless. It has integrity, it is independent.

The rainbow went around the throne like a circle ... that speaks of perfection. It also represents eternity, a circle has no beginning and no end. Because it wasn't merely an arc, but a circle, it indicates that in heaven all things are completed.

The fact that it was emerald in colour intimates that the judgment has to do with planet Earth.

The whole scenario is a reminder that, in the final analysis, judgment is in keeping with the covenant of God. It speaks of a great and glorious God who keeps every one of his promises; here is one who honours every commitment he has made.

The next item of major interest is in verse 4 ...

This is the first time we come across these noble individuals where their relationship to the throne is of supreme importance. They are around the throne of God in heaven and that's what needs to be emphasised. They are the king's court, they are the royal courtiers.

One of the questions probably going through your mind is: can we identify these twenty-four elders? Who are they? They represent the people of God in heaven, a people enthroned and a people

rewarded. They are clothed in white robes and have a crown of gold on their heads.

I was captivated when I read the words of Psalm 89:7 to find that – no matter how wonderful and glorious it is for these dear ones to be in the immediate presence of the Lord, to be so near him, to be within a hair's breadth of him – their elevation to such unthinkable heights fades into oblivion when we realise that *the [Lord] is more awesome than all who surround him.*

In other words, it doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't even matter how close you are, the eternal God is still centre stage, transcendent, unequalled, unrivalled, our God is truly magnificent! We may worship him and, at the same time, be lost in wonder, love, and praise! *Worthy, O worthy are you Lord, worthy to be thanked and praised and worshipped and adored!*

Let's move on to verse 5 ... It wasn't only what John saw with his eyes that mattered, it was also what he heard with his ears. John was treated to **a sound and light show** which was, quite literally, out of this world. The fast-moving proceedings going on before him are accompanied by terrifying sights and sounds, its thunder and lightning! It's something you might expect to see in a Steven Spielberg movie! It's enough to make any man quake in his boots, it's a vivid reminder to all of us that it's *a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

This sensational display announces a coming storm which will manifest God's presence, God's power, and God's wrath in a mighty way. The combined forces of nature are harnessed and

used by him to illustrate the power which he has at his disposal. Read the rest of the book!

The same verse also informs us that *before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God.* The reference here is to the presence of the Holy Spirit on the morning of judgment. He is there in all his fulness; he's seen acting in the role of prosecutor of the human race.

In that final day, when the age of grace comes to an end, as the omniscient one he has all the facts at his disposal, no stone is left unturned, all is laid bare, he'll be seen to do what is right before God as the judge of all the earth.

He is perfect in his person, perfect in his position, perfect in his purity, and perfect in his power.

Verse 6 provides us with a fascinating piece of data ... Perhaps the primary point of the sea of glass before the throne of God is to picture the holiness, the majesty, and the white purity of God himself; if anything were needed, this underscores the fact that he is separate from his creation; it underlines the fact that he is God.

The transparency of that sea of glass draws attention to God's penetrating gaze into all things that take place on earth. He misses absolutely nothing! He sees all things!

The next thing we read about in verse 6 is that *in the centre, around the throne, were four living creatures.* They resemble the cherubim that the prophet Ezekiel saw in his visions. And when we listen to their praise in verse 8, they remind us of the seraphim of Isaiah 6.

It seems, from reading between the lines, that this group of four angels has a distinctive role to play

in the unfolding drama of God's plan. They are closer to God than the other angels, they have a unique position in relation to the throne.

It's well within the bounds of possibility to describe this quartet of angels as the worship leaders of heaven. When you see the response to their actions, they certainly inspire everyone else in heaven to pour out their worship toward the One who sits upon the throne.

They celebrate the government of God in their capacity as cheer leaders; in one sense, they're on the fringe, but, on the other hand, they're intimately involved for they're at the heart of divine government. They can't get much nearer the throne than where they are at present!

These living creatures are saturated with a sense of the felt reality of the presence of God all around them; they are strangely aware of the closeness of God to them. The whole atmosphere is permeated with the undiluted wonder of their worship and praise; they're thrilled and they just can't contain themselves; they're bursting at the seams, for we read in verse 8 ...

They see him as a God who is holy. Three times they say it! Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are holy. When they address him as *Lord God Almighty* they appreciate something of his power, they recognise his omnipotence. Here is a God who can do anything, but fail!

The picture emerging is fairly clear, here is a God who acts, a God who moves, a God who performs; every time he does something at a personal level, on a national scale, or even on a global front, it never contradicts his holiness. His attributes and

his actions work in perfect harmony. You see, he does what he does because he is who he is!

The final phrase in the verse is similar to one we came across in chapter 1. It speaks of a God who is everlasting in his nature, he's above time, beyond time, outside of time; by the same token, he is ever present in current affairs, he's the God of today, the God of the now! It tells us that God is just as much in control of our unknown future and our unnerving present as he is of our unpleasant past.

Did you see what happens when they ascribe praise unto the Lord? You find the answer in verses 9 and 10 ... Their praise triggers off an immediate, impromptu response from the elders. The net result is that heaven reverberates with praise unto the Lord, the whole place resonates with an unfinished symphony of joyful worship. When they fall down before him they give him his proper place, they recognise his sole authority and peerless position, they take the place of humility before the throne of God. When they cast their crowns at the feet of the sovereign Lord they realise that before him no one else is worthy to wear a crown. His is the singular right to rule and reign. He alone deserves the adoration, the adulation, and the acclaim of his people.

The stanza which the elders sing unto him is found in the last verse ... It tells me what he deserves: *glory, honour and power*. And it tells me why he deserves it, for he is the great Creator, the Sustainer of all things. He's the one who brought something out of nothing on the morn of creation, he's the one who started the ball rolling, the one

who keeps it all together, the one who holds it all in sync. It was the reformer, John Calvin, who said that 'creation is the theatre of his glory.'

The best response is to borrow the words that we have here in verse 11 and make them a personal tribute to the one who is our God of grace, and God of glory. When we sing a song like that down here, and when we hear a song like this coming from over there, we quickly realise there's nothing boring about heaven. It's a land of eternal song, a place where praise is the norm. These few words are a stirring melody of pure theology, it's doctrine set to music.

God is seen as the centre of everything, he's in the driving seat, he's on the throne. I think you'll agree with me when I say there's more to Revelation 4 than meets the eye, it's far more than just a casual glimpse into the world of heaven and the world of tomorrow. It's a vivid collage of images, they focus our eyes on what real worship should be – at all times and in all places.

It's a powerful reminder that God's throne speaks to us of *eternity* in an hour when men live only for today; it speaks of *personality* for someone is sitting on it; it speaks of *majesty* for he is worshipped to the ends of the earth; it speaks of *authority* for he has the ultimate rule; it speaks of *purity* for *who may ascend the hill of the Lord but he who has clean hands and a pure heart!*

Ever asked yourself: Why am I here on Earth?

What is the real meaning of life? Are there times when you feel frustrated trying to put the pieces of the jigsaw together? Do you wonder why things happen as they do?

Well, you've just had an insider's view of heaven, you've seen what it's like on the other side of death, you've seen the throne, a higher throne, you've seen the one who has the whole world in his hands, you've had a new vision of Jesus.

The message is unmistakably clear: when it comes to this world and when it comes to his church, and when it comes to your life and mine, our God reigns. That's why we worship him! That's why we sing unto him: *holy, holy, holy!* And that's why we thank our sovereign Lord that there is a higher throne, and the one who is seated thereon is none other than the High King of Heaven!