

The Throne of Heaven

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this evening, for a short while, under the Lord's help, and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to Revelation chapter 4.

Revelation chapter 4, and we're going to look at the whole chapter, but if we just read again at verse 1. Revelation chapter 4 at verse 1, where John writes, And so on.

You know, when it comes to the shorter catechism, for many of us, it may not have been our favourite book because we were made to memorise it as a child.

And yet it's a familiar book because we were made to memorise it as a child. But now as a Christian, someone who loves the Lord and follows the Lord, the familiar catechism, it asks our probably, well, it's my favourite question anyway.

What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death? And we're taught, many of you have probably memorised it, the souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness.

[1 : 35] And they do immediately pass into glory, and their bodies still being united to Christ, to rest in their graves until the resurrection.

It's a beautiful reminder and reassurance that when we close our eyes in this world, this familiar world for the final time, we will open them in what will be our favourite place.

We will be face to face with Jesus, the one who loved us and gave himself for us. Now I know that us here this evening, we find that very hard to get our head around.

We find it a very hard concept to grasp. And yet that's what Paul said. Paul said that we see through a glass darkly right now, but soon we shall see face to face.

And even John the Apostle, he said, Beloved, we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him even as he is.

[2 : 39] But the thing is, John said that not out of an expression of hope. He said that out of an experience of heaven. Because in the book of Revelation, John gives to us his experience of heaven and what he saw in heaven.

He saw us, we read in this chapter, he saw the throne of heaven. John saw the throne of heaven. And in chapter 4, John, in this chapter, Revelation chapter 4, John describes what he saw upon the throne and around the throne in heaven.

John describes what he saw upon the throne and around the throne in heaven. And there are two headings this evening. Upon the throne and around the throne.

You'll be shocked, there's no alliteration. Upon the throne and around the throne. I wanted to take what was actually in the verses. And John emphasizes what's upon the throne and around the throne.

So first of all, upon the throne. Upon the throne. John says in verse 1, If you notice, the opening verse there in chapter 4 begins and ends with the same phrase.

[4 : 08] It begins and ends with the phrase, After this. Where John writes, After this, I looked and behold a door standing open in heaven. And then Jesus, he ends the verse saying, Come up here and I will show you what must take place after this.

John's after this refers to what was written in the previous chapters. Chapters 1 to 3. But Jesus is, after this, refers to what is yet to be revealed to him.

And yet both phrases, they refer to the same revelation. Because as we said before, this is not the book of revelations. I get really annoyed when people call it the book of revelations.

Because it's not revelations plural. It's one long revelation. It's the book of revelation. It's the revelation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

And as a revelation, its purpose is not to conceal. Its purpose is to reveal. Because this, as we said before, it's an apocalypsis. It's an apocalypse.

[5 : 13] It's a revelation. Where God, he's lifting the lid for us. He's removing the veil. He's pulling back the curtain in order to reveal to us Jesus Christ.

Who is the risen, ruling, and reigning king. Who is going to return. And that's what we see again in this chapter. Jesus Christ, he's been revealed to us. As this risen, ruling, and reigning king.

Who is going to return. But as we said, this opening verse, it begins and ends with the same phrase. After this. But John's after this. Just as he begins the chapter.

He says, after this I looked. And what he's referring to is what was written in the previous chapter. He's referring, first of all, to the seven letters to the seven churches.

Whereas we saw them before. We've gone through them all. They were this symbolic. All these churches, they were symbolic of the universal church of Jesus Christ in every century.

[6 : 15] And as we discovered, Ephesus, it was the loveless church. Smyrna was the persecuted church. Pergamum was the compromising church. Thyatira was the corrupt church.

Sardis, the dead church. Philadelphia, they were the faithful ones. They were the beloved brethren that loved one another. And Laodicea, they were the lukewarm church.

But John's after this, it goes further back. It goes back further than chapters 2 and 3, right back to the opening chapter. Where we're told that while John was in exile on Patmos, and while he was engaging in prayer on the Lord's Day, Jesus spoke to John with the voice of a trumpet.

And we're told there in chapter 1 and verse 10, John says, if you want to turn to it, you can. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day. And I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, and to Thyatira, and to Sardis, and to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me. And on turning, I saw seven golden lampstands. And in the midst of the lampstands, one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe, and with a golden sash round his chest.

[7 : 41] The hairs of his head were white like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace. And his voice was like the roar of many waters.

In his right hand he held seven stars from his mouth, and from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. And his face was like the sun, shining in full strength. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

But he laid his right hand on me, saying, Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold, I am alive forevermore. I have the keys of death and hell.

Write, therefore, the things that you have seen, those that are, and those that are to take place. Notice the words after this. There's the phrase again, which links us right into chapter 4.

It's the same vision. It's the same vision that John is seeing. And, you know, I love how John describes everything he sees so vividly and so visually. Because the first thing John says as he continues his vision into chapter 4, the first thing he says is, After this, I looked and behold a door standing open in heaven.

[9 : 04] Heaven was an open door to John. It was an open door that was willing and welcoming John to come in. And, you know, it's that great and glorious gospel truth, isn't it?

A truth that Jesus shared with the church. He said to the church in Philadelphia, Behold, I have set before you an open door that no man can shut.

And John is saying here, I looked and behold a door standing open in heaven. It's willing and welcoming John in.

And then John writes in verse 2, At once I was in the Spirit, just like he was in the Spirit in chapter 1. It's a continuation of the Revelation. And behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.

And he who sat on the throne had the appearance of Jasper and Carnelian. And round the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.

[10 : 09] Now, we have to remember that this is a revelation. It's not yet a reality for John. Well, it is a reality for John. Now he's passed away. But then, when he received it, it was a revelation.

It wasn't a reality. And that's why John, John is repeating the word all the way through. You'll see it all the way through the book. He repeats the word, Behold. Behold. Behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.

He says, Behold. And this throne, for John, it's the primary picture throughout the entire Revelation. This is what John is seeing from beginning to end.

And we know that this is what John sees from beginning to end, because the word throne, the word throne, it appears 62 times in the New Testament. And 47 of those words, they appear here in the book of Revelation.

So, which means that this revelation, John's revelation of Jesus Christ, it is focused, and it's fixated on this throne, the throne in heaven.

[11 : 14] But it's particularly focused and fixated with the one who's sitting upon the throne in heaven. And John has already, he's already told us who is on this throne.

He's already described the one who's sitting on the throne. He says he is the Alpha and the Omega. He's the first and the last. He's the beginning and the end. He's the one who is the keys of the kingdom, of death and hell.

And as we read there in Revelation chapter 1, John gave us this image that he could see. He says that he's clothed with a long robe.

He has a golden sash around his chest. His hair is as white as snow. His eyes are a flame of fire.

His feet are burnished bronze. His voice is like the roar of many waters.

His mouth is a two-edged sword. His face is shining like the sun. And they're all images and illustrations to us of his holiness.

[12 : 14] The holiness of the one who is seated upon the throne in heaven. He is one who is holy. And we'll see that as we go on. There's beings that are gathered around the throne and all they're crying is holy, holy, holy.

But then we're told in verse 3 that the one who sat upon the throne also had an appearance of jasper and carnelian, which are two precious stones.

And if you look up what jasper and carnelian look like, they're dark red in colour. Or you could say they're blood red in colour. In fact, carnelian, the word carnelian, it comes from the Latin carnis.

Carnal, meaning flesh. That's why it gets its name, the blood red colour. It's a fleshy colour, which immediately is preparing us for what we're going to see in chapter 5.

It's one long vision. Because in chapter 5, in the following chapter, when John talks about his revelation, what he sees next, what he sees upon the throne is a lamb there.

[13 : 29] And he appears as though he has been slain. He's a bloodshed lamb. He's a blood-slain lamb. And that's what John is seeing.

He's seeing this lamb in the midst of the throne who is a blood red colour. But, you know, as you go through this revelation and you see that it's all one long revelation, you know, I keep going back to what John said in chapter 1.

What John said in chapter 1, when he first saw the throne and the one seated upon the throne, this one who is holy, who is the Alpha and the Omega, John says, when I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

And, you know, that's the approach we should have as we come to this. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. John was in awe.

John was in absolute amazement of who he was seeing. And he fell at his feet as though dead. He fell at the feet of Jesus. And, you know, you go through the Gospels as well and you see that throughout the Gospels account, you see people, they're falling at the feet of Jesus.

[14 : 44] And they're falling at the feet of Jesus because they're in awe of him. They're in amazement of who he is and what he does. And that's how John is here. He's in awe.

He's in amazement of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done as the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne. And, you know, that's how we will be. You know, I think sometimes we should think of this more.

That's how we will be when we see Jesus face to face, when we see the one seated upon the throne, when we see him who is holy and righteous and glorious.

When we see him, we will fall at his feet. As John says, as though dead. We will fall at his feet.

As though dead. And so John here, he's describing the one who is seated upon the throne. He's describing what he sees in heaven. He sees the one who's upon the throne.

[15 : 45] But then he sees, secondly, those who are around the throne. So the one upon the throne and then those around the throne in heaven. Around the throne.

Read again in verse 3. He who sat there had the appearance of Jasper and Carnelian. And round the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.

Round the throne were twenty-four thrones. And seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder.

And before the throne were burning seven torches of fire. Which are the seven spirits of God. And before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass, like crystal.

And round the throne and each side of the throne are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind. You know, before John describes in detail all these elders and all the living creatures who were gathered around the throne of heaven, I don't know if you noticed there that the first thing that catches John's eye after he sees Jesus, the first thing he sees is a rainbow around the throne.

[17:07] That's the first thing John says that he sees. He says in verse three, around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. Now we're all familiar with the symbol of the rainbow because we're all familiar with the story of Noah and how Noah was chosen and called and commissioned to build an ark as the means of salvation for him and for his family.

But following the flood, the Lord, you remember, he promised Noah, he covenanted with Noah that he would never flood the world again. And the symbol of God's covenant faithfulness to Noah and to his descendants, the symbol was the rainbow.

The Lord said, I will look on the rainbow to remember my everlasting covenant with you. And you know, that's why our toddler group is called Little Rainbows because we want to teach our children that the rainbow is the symbol of God's covenant promise.

And that as the children's hymn says, whenever you see a rainbow, remember God is love. And that's what we want to teach our children. That's what Ina and Karine do every Thursday and Etta. They do it every Thursday. They teach our children, whenever you see a rainbow, remember God is love. And you know, I always found it amazing. I don't know if you found it amazing that during the COVID pandemic, the rainbow re-emerged as the symbol of promise, the symbol of promise to get us through the pandemic.

[18:40] Where almost every home had a rainbow on display in their window. But of course, as you know, the rainbow, which God ordered and God ordained as the symbol, as a symbol of promise, it is now in the 21st century.

It's been altered and you could also say abused to become a symbol of pride. It's a symbol of pride. In fact, I was watching an interview the other day from the Christian Institute and I was thinking, I'll put it on the intimation so you can watch it yourself if you haven't seen it.

It was an interview with Reverend Matthew Roberts. He's an IPC minister in York. He belongs to the International Presbyterian Church. And he's recently written a book that I'd like to read.

I haven't read it yet. It's called *Pride, Identity and the Worship of Self*. Pride, the Identity and Worship of Self. The book is based upon the phenomenon that is the LGBT Pride movement.

But the interview is based upon the question, is pride the new religion? Is pride the new religion? And the question was asked because the symbol of promise with the rainbow, it has been altered, as you know, it's been abused to become a symbol of pride.

[20:01] And this symbol has not only been imposed upon us, it has also influenced our nation and it's infiltrated every area and every avenue of society, whether it's shops, whether it's sport, whether it's schools.

We see that a lot at the moment with the RSHP resources for schools. Pride is present. Pride is being pushed and pride is being promoted and we see it everywhere, whether on flags or on Facebook or on football.

Many of the major companies and cooperations like Argos and Google and M&S; and the NHS, they've all altered, they've all adapted their logos, they've all lit up their buildings in all the rainbow colours in this attempt to accommodate gay pride.

Pride. And the thing is, we're going to hear a lot more about pride this month if we haven't heard more about it already than we usually do. Because as you know, the month of June, it's set aside, it's sponsored as Pride Month.

So the month of June is Pride Month. What's more is that the month of February is LGBT History Month, which means that two out of twelve months of the year are dedicated and devoted to gay pride.

[21 : 22] And yet, as it's mentioned in the interview with Matthew Roberts, our fallen servicemen and women, they only get one day in November.

Two months are dedicated and devoted to gay pride and yet servicemen and women get one day in November. And as Matthew Roberts emphasises and explains, it shows us and it stresses to us that pride is the new religion.

Pride is the new religion because it's been presented and pushed and praised as the absolute truth of our day and generation.

It is the absolute truth, that's what they say, the absolute truth of our day and generation. And yet you look at, I was listening to the thing, the interview, and you think, I think to myself, well, we shouldn't worry.

It should cause us concern, absolutely, but we shouldn't worry. Why? Because the sign of the rainbow is around the throne of heaven and it's not a sign of pride, it's a sign of promise.

[22 : 30] It's a sign of promise. More than that, it's a sign of power because Jesus Christ, he's sitting upon his throne and he is there in a position of authority.

He is king of kings, he's lord of lords, he has put all his enemies under his feet, he has all power and authority in heaven and on earth.

He is the risen, ruling, and reigning king who is going to return. And so we're not to worry, we're not to worry. As the Bible assures us, all things are going to work together for good to those who love God, those who are called according to his purpose.

And we're not to worry because around the throne of heaven is a rainbow of promise, power, and praise. And there's praise around the throne of heaven because gathered around the throne of heaven, as we read there, are 24 elders and four living creatures.

There's 24 elders and four living creatures. And what's interesting about these 24 elders and four living creatures is that they feature repeatedly throughout this revelation. They're there all the time.

[23 : 39] They are part of this revelation. But as we're introduced to them here in chapter 4, we're told that the 24 elders are seated on 24 lesser thrones.

Their throne isn't as high and as holy as the one in the centre, on the centre throne. Nevertheless, there were 24 thrones around the throne of heaven.

And there were 24 thrones because these 24 elders, they symbolise the church of Jesus Christ under both the Old and the New Covenant, the Old Testament and the New Testament.

You could say that the 12 sons of Israel, they symbolise the church of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament, under the Old Covenant. And the 12 apostles who were chosen, called and commissioned, they were the ones who symbolised the church of Jesus Christ in the New Testament under the New Covenant.

And that's why there's 24 of them. 12 and 12 are 24. There are 24 elders seated on 24 thrones. And there's 24 of them because the church of Jesus Christ is one church.

[24 : 53] It's one united church. Whether it's part of the Old Dispensation or part of the New Dispensation, whether it's part of under the Old Covenant or under the New Covenant, whether it's in the Old Testament or in the New Testament, they're all saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Those under the Old Covenant are looking forward to Christ. Those in the New Covenant, we who are in the New Covenant, we are looking back to Christ. They're all united in Christ.

We're all united in Christ. So Abraham is saved the same way as Myrtle Burns. By faith, by grace through faith.

All one in Christ. And that's what Paul reminds us when he says that the church of Jesus Christ has one body, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

He says we are all one. Whether Old Testament or New Testament, whether Old Dispensation or New Dispensation, we are all one in Christ Jesus.

[26 : 13] And that's what these 24 elders seated around the throne of heaven symbolise to us we are all one in Christ Jesus. And we'll see more of that as we come to chapter 7.

We'll see this innumerable number from all these different tribes and nations and peoples and languages. And they're all gathered there as well. Because we're all one in Christ Jesus.

But more than that, we're told about these 24 elders. They're all clothed in white garments. They all have golden crowns on their heads. That's verse 4. Which means that they're sinless.

They're spotless. They were pure and perfect in holiness. Which is what the church of Jesus Christ will be when she appears before the throne in heaven.

She will be sinless and spotless. She will be pure and perfect in holiness. The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness.

[27 : 13] They do immediately pass into glory. And that's what Jude tells us in his letter. He tells us at the end of his letter that the church of Jesus Christ will be presented to him faultless.

Presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. But what about these four living creatures?

What about these four living creatures who are gathered around the throne of heaven? We read in verse 7 that each creature what each creature looks like.

We're told there that the first living creature is like a lion. The second living creature like an ox. The third living creature by the face of a man. The fourth living creature like an eagle in flight.

And the four living creatures each of them with six wings are full of eyes all round and within and day and night they never cease to say holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come.

[28 : 17] Now it's difficult to understand what is meant by the four living creatures. They're similar to the creatures mentioned in Ezekiel's prophetic vision in chapter 1.

They're similar but they're not the same. And yet some believe that the first living creature which is like a lion that symbolizes God's power. The second living creature like the ox symbolizes God's faithfulness.

The third living creature with the face of a man symbolizes God's intelligence. And the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight symbolizes God's sovereignty.

But you know it's not so much about what these living creatures symbolize that's important. it's more about what they say that's important. Because we're told there in verse 8 that day and night they never cease to say holy holy holy is the Lord God almighty who was and is and is to come.

now you should know where that is from in the Bible. As you know it's an echo of Isaiah's prophetic vision in Isaiah chapter 6 where Isaiah said he wrote in Isaiah chapter 6 in the year in the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up and the train of his robe filled the temple above him stood the seraphim and like these four living creatures each of the seraphim had six wings with two were told he covered his face with two he covered his feet and with two he flew and one called to another saying just what's written here holy holy holy is the Lord is the Lord of hosts the Lord God almighty the whole earth is full of his glory and you know I love this because I was thinking well Isaiah tells us the year that he received his revelation he tells us when it happened because he says in Isaiah chapter 6 it was in the year that King Uzziah died it was the year around 740 BC and then we have

[30 : 36] John's revelation and we know that John received his revelation around the year AD 90 and so when you do the maths there's about over 800 years between Isaiah's revelation of heaven and John's revelation of heaven and yet for over 800 years we're told that day and night those around the throne they have not ceased to say day and night they've been saying it day and night they have not ceased to say holy holy holy is the Lord God of hosts the whole earth is full of his glory and the amazing thing is Isaiah heard it in 740 BC John heard it in 90 AD and tonight they're still saying it 2023 they're still saying holy holy holy holy is the Lord of hosts the whole earth is full of his glory they've been saying it ever since and they'll never tire of worshipping the Lord you know we get tired of worshipping the Lord but you know in heaven they never tire of worshipping the Lord and that's what brings us towards the end of the chapter we're told there in verse 9 and whenever the living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to him who is seated on the throne who lives forever and ever the 24 elders they fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever they cast their crowns before the throne saying worthy are you our Lord and God to receive glory and honour and power for you created all things and by your will they existed and were created you know what a worship service to be part of that is a service you want to be at for these worshippers around the throne of heaven they're seeing the one who's on the throne he is holy holy holy his glory is there and as they are gathered around the throne they experience and they enjoy praise they praise him because their eyes are fixed on him they're focused on him they're fixated with him the one who is seated upon the throne and you know that's where our eyes need to be that's where our eyes need to be in this wilderness journey that's why John is writing this letter

John is writing to encourage the church to keep their eyes focused upon the one who is the risen ruling and reigning king who is going to return and John is saying to us with this revelation he's saying that's where your eyes need to be set your affection he's saying just like Paul said it set your affection and your attention on things above because that's where Christ is and my Christian friend that's where you're going so set your affection and your attention on things above to the one who is seated upon the throne in heaven because he is as he has always been and always will continue to be the risen ruling and reigning king who is going to return he's the risen ruling and reigning king who is going to return and it's no wonder they're singing worthy are you our Lord and God to receive glory and honour and power for you created all things and by your will they existed and were created and you know

I love what Charles Wesley wrote he wrote this wonderful hymn describing the one seated on the throne and he describes particularly what the elders did these 24 elders who gathered around the throne were told that they cast their crowns before the throne and Charles Wesley he describes in his hymn love divine all loves excelling he brings the hymn right to an end and this is what he says finish then thy new creation through and spotless let us be let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee changed from glory into glory till in heaven we take our place till we cast our crowns before thee lost in wonder love and praise lost in wonder love and praise my friend we are to set our affection on things above where Christ is seated so keep your eyes there keep your eyes upon Jesus well may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray oh Lord our gracious

God may give thanks to thee this evening for reminding us that the best is yet to come and Lord how often we get so bogged down in this world how often the burdens and the baggage that we bear day by day they weigh us down but help us we pray to see in a measure of what John saw to see the one seated upon the throne and to see that he is and he remains the lover of our soul the one who loved us and gave himself for us and we thank thee and we praise thee that our hope our hope is sure and steadfast it is the anchor of our soul and it has gone within the veil that our hope tonight is in heaven and that one day when we see him we shall be like him and see him even as he is and Lord we bless and praise thee for the hope of the gospel that we have that great assurance that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor even things to come neither height nor depth nor any other creature is able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ

Jesus our Lord and Lord remind us anew this evening of that timelessness of eternity to realise as Newton said that when we've been there ten thousand years bright shining as the sun we'll have no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun oh Lord enable us we pray as thy people to live lives that bring praise to thy name but also Lord to see that we have been saved to bring glory and honour to thy name for time and for eternity bless us then we pray go before us lead us into the rest of this week that until we meet again Lord that thou wouldst keep us ever looking to Jesus and setting our affection on things above where he is tonight making intercession for us cleanse us we pray and go before us for Jesus sake Amen we're going to bring our service to our conclusion this evening we're going to sing in Psalm 67 in the Sing Psalms version

[38 : 06] Psalm 67 Sing Psalms version page 84 Psalm 67 and we're singing the whole Psalm God be merciful and bless us shine upon us with your face that the earth may know your actions and all lands your saving grace O God may the peoples praise you may all people sing your praise for you judge the nations justly ruling over every race we'll sing on to the end of the Psalm of Psalm 67 to God's praise Lord be merciful and blessed shine upon us with your face that the earth may know your actions and all lives your saving grace.

O God, may the peoples praise you. May all peoples sing your praise.

For you judge the nations justly, ruling over every race.

May they sing with joy and gladness. May they all rejoice as one.

O God, may the peoples praise you. As they all unite in song.

[40 : 27] Then the land will yield its harvest. God will pour his gifts abroad.

God, our God, will surely bless us.

All the earth will fear our cause. Amen. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore.

Amen.