

Revelation 4 (ESV)

4 After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, **"Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."** ² At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. ³ And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.

⁴ Around 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. ⁵ 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, ⁶ and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.

And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: ⁷ the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight.

⁸ And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around 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!”

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, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders 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,

¹¹ “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.”

The very first word in the book of Revelation, in the original Greek, is: Ἀποκάλυψις (apokalypsis) which means “unveiling” “revelation”. It means that something **was** hidden, but **now**, it’s been revealed.

And at several points in the Revelation, there is a distinct change of Scene, where something **new** is revealed. And today we’ve come to one of these ‘changes of scene’.

Let’s have a bit of a recap:

In Chapter 1, we began with John having a vision. And he saw Jesus walking among the 7 golden lampstands (which represent the churches)... In chapters 2 & 3, Jesus dictated 7 letters to John – One for each of the churches... And over 7 weeks, we studied each of these 7 letters.

And some of us, might've been a bit surprised by what Jesus sees, when He looks at a church.

- The churches that (humanly speaking) looked to be doing the best, weren't doing so good. They were either dying or they made Jesus sick to the pit of His stomach...
 - Those who thought they were rich, were actually spiritually poor;
 - Those who had the reputation of being alive, were spiritually dead;
 - They were half-hearted about their faith;
 - they weren't witnessing;
 - And they were trusting in their own resources, instead of depending on Jesus.

- Some of the churches, were folding to the pressures of the world. The values of the world, were being taken on by those within the church. Immorality; Idolatry; compromise...

- There **was** a church there, that **did** stand strong in what they believed, and they were all very theologically correct,,, but they didn't love. And Jesus said to them, "A church that doesn't love, is not my church" – No matter how right your theology is...

- Some churches were being infiltrated by false teachers, who were turning people's hearts away from truth, and bringing in false teaching, and the worship of other Gods, and once again, immorality.
- And all but 2 of the churches were being persecuted.
- In fact, those going through the most severe persecution – those who were **dying** for their faith – were the churches who were faithful...

What's going on??? The churches, who in Jesus' eyes, were alive – that is, the churches who were witnessing for Him; who were faithful in belief; and were faithful in their actions,,,, - they were really copping it. They were being starved, imprisoned, and executed....

What's going on???? ... Where is God in all of this????

....

You know, many people are of the opinion “If you're being obedient to God, it's going to go well.” ... Well, this Revelation of Jesus Christ, makes it very clear, “That's a **human** perspective – not a Godly perspective”... , Because those who were being obedient to God, were really copping it.

And so I ask that question again: “Where is God in all of this???”

And we get the answer to that question, in Chapter 4. God, is on His throne.

It can be very tempting (looking with human eyes), to come to the conclusion that at this stage of history (and in our stage of history), God's taking a back seat. One could come to the conclusion that the world is either running itself, or Satan's in control.... But in Chapter 4, we're invited into the throne-room of Heaven, and it's revealed – God is on His throne...

Yes, His faithful **are** being persecuted. Yes, physically speaking, the **un**faithful do seem to be gaining the upper hand... But the history of the world, is not out of control – History, continues to be: “His Story”...

And so the scene of the revelation changes, and the throne room of Heaven is revealed.

And if I were to sum up the whole of Chapter 4 in one word, I would use the word “Worship”....

How does one describe the indescribable? What words could one use to describe a scene that makes one stand in silent awe????

In the introduction to Revelation, I said that the book of Revelation is what's known as “apocalyptic literature”. It gives a message with pictures and images; and symbolism. And so what we read here in chapter 4, is telling us about the worship of God, and His awe and majesty... It's most probably **not**, a literal description, of what heaven really looks like... It's telling us about the worship of God, and His awe and majesty..

So, let's begin.

Right at the beginning of the Revelation, John heard a loud voice – he describes it as “a loud voice like a trumpet”. And it ended up being Jesus' voice.

And **now**, John looks, and he sees a door standing open in heaven! And this voice (the voice of Jesus) says “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”

Alright, there's nothing random about history. God hasn't lost control of the situation. These things **must** happen.

And at once (not physically, but in the Spirit), John is standing in Heaven.

And God is seated on His throne. John describes Him as having the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.

Do you see what I mean? How does one describe the indescribable?

When Ezekiel had a similar vision, he too used gem stones and a rainbow, to try to describe the glory of YHWH...

V⁴ Around 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.

Now, we don't know exactly what this means, but we **do** know this:

- In this Revelation, those who wear “white clothes” = those who have been made Holy through Jesus Christ.
- The ones who wear crowns, are those who have conquered – those who have run the race, and their faith has endured to the end.

So, we know **that**.

What about the number 24 – well, we're not sure what that means – it **could** represent the 12 tribes of Israel, and the 12 apostles. So, the number 24 **could** represent, the whole people of God – those from Old Testament times (who were faithful to God under the Old Covenant), and those who have come to faith in Jesus, under the New Covenant....

Alright, so these 24 “Elders”, which are probably “high ranking angels” **may** represent God's faithful, from every generation (in the Old Covenant, and the New).

But we can't be certain about that.

V⁵ From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder,

Once again, we're describing the indescribable. – The awesome power and might, of the Lord God almighty.... But it's telling us something more than this: When we get further into the Revelation, and God is pouring out His judgment on the world, that phrase “**flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder**” gets repeatedⁱ several times, as God judges the wicked. Alright, so this is an image, depicting the power of God, and tying to it, the willingness of God, to use His power, in the righteous judgment of the wicked, that is yet to come...

And so, this is a reminder, for all those Christians, throughout all of the centuries, who are being persecuted for their faith, “God has not forgotten you”... At the moment, it **may** seem that Satan has gotten the upper hand, But God will punish the wicked for what they have done...

and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God,

In Chapter 5ⁱⁱ, the 7 spirits of God are explained more fully. What it means is “God isn't restricted to His throne.” He is all seeing, and all knowing. Nothing escapes God's attention... And so those who are suffering in this life, shouldn't even be questioning if God knows about it or not... He does... And in the fullness of time, He will act.

How we going so far? Deep???

Righto, if it hasn't already, at this point, it all starts to get a little bit more weird...

V⁶ and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind:

Now, for those who love going to the beach, and really enjoy having a bit of a splash in the surf, you might have a bit of trouble grasping what this is about... Biblically, the sea has been used to represent chaos and evil... And it's not hard to understand why. *Many a ship has been lost; Many a soul, has cried out to be saved,,,* but the storm and the tempest of a raging ocean, has always been an image of chaos, beyond our ability to overcome...

But here we have a sea of glass... My boys would go "Woo Hood!!! Barefoot water!!!"...

And so it's an image of the physical world, yielded to God – chaos overcome.

The 4 living creatures are a bit more difficult to understand... Do you remember in the very beginning of our series, I hinted that there was a phrase that I was going to use pretty often during this series??? "I don't know what this means."; or "We can't be **sure** what this means."... And this is one of these times. We can't be **sure** what this means, but this is the most likely explanation:

The 1st living creature is not a lion, but it's **like** a lion.

The 2nd living creature is not an ox, but it's **like** an ox.

The 3rd living creature is not a man, but it has a **face** of a man.

The 4th living creature is not an eagle, but it's **like** an eagle in flight.

The Jewish Rabi's used to say “*The mightiest among the birds is the eagle, the mightiest among the domestic animals is the bull, the mightiest among the wild beasts is the lion, and the mightiest among all is man.*”ⁱⁱⁱ”

Most commentators agree (as do I), that the 4 living creatures represent the mightiest of every living creature on earth... And these never cease to worship God. **day and night they never cease to say,**

“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!”

And this is the purpose of every living creature. This is the purpose of all of creation – to worship their Creator. And when Jesus returns, and the world is fully and completely renewed, all of creation will bow down before God and before the Lord Jesus Christ, and praise and worship Him.

If these are the **mightiest** of all living creatures worshipping God, every mouse; every fly; every flea; every bacteria, will worship the Lord God Almighty.

But this image is also showing us something else (a bit more cryptic). They don't just represent the creatures of earth – in some way these are also heavenly beings. They're described as having 6 wings. In Isaiah 6, Isaiah also had a vision of God on His throne. And these creatures with 6 wings, he describes as Seraphim (one of the orders of angels).

Isaiah 6 says this:

6 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. ² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is YHWH of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!”

These creatures are also described as being “full of eyes”... They see everything – and they witness to God, everything that they see...

We’re in the realm of guessing now, and I don’t like to guess... So let’s stick with what we do know...

Everything about chapter 4, paints the picture of worship. The Lord our God is worthy to be worshipped, because of who He is. He is the creator. He created everything.

And so the four living creatures, **never cease to say,**

“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come!”

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, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders 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,

¹¹ "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:

- the idolatrous worship created things.
- They bow down to the sun god;
- to the moon god;
- they bow down to the stars;
- Hindus worship the cow
- humanists worship themselves – they worship man;
- some worship the environment
- And ultimately, anyone who doesn't worship the one true God, worships the devil

.....

We all have a need to worship, but it is **only** right to direct that worship in one direction... All of creation; All of the redeemed, worship the Lord God almighty.

We preachers always like to preach on something practical – something that we can take home and apply to our lives. Well, for a disciple of Jesus Christ, there is nothing more practical than worship.

Worship is never time poorly spent.

You may have come to church today, looking for answers – looking for something to fix some problems in your life; or looking for something to give you direction in life... Well, the only answer I have for you today, is to know that God is on His throne, and to worship.

- Worship is something that we do in prayer.
- It's something we do in song
- We worship in church
- We worship at home.
- And we worship in life:

Romans 12:1, tells us what **spiritual** worship is – it's not just going through religious motions – it's not just singing a song (or even putting your hands up as you sing) – Spiritual worship, is a life submitted to Christ:

Romans 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

True worship / spiritual worship, isn't just singing a song – it's a life transformed by God – it's a renewed mind – it's the sacrifice of total submission to the Lord...

Let's worship. And we **are** going to worship in song now, but let it not just be words. Let it be the worship of your life submitted to God.

ⁱ The first phrase, "lightnings and sounds and thunders," is repeated virtually verbatim in 8:5; 11:19; and 16:18, which all appear at the conclusion of each series of seven judgments. (in Beale, G.K., 1999. *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text*, Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.)

ⁱⁱ Revelation 5:6 (ESV)

⁶ And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

ⁱⁱⁱ Morris, L., 1987. *Revelation: an introduction and commentary*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.