

The Heavenly Throne Room

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- [0 : 0 0] Morning everyone. Lovely to be here and lovely to see everyone. And to have us all back together again, or most of us. And so if you're listening online, welcome to you.
- So, wouldn't it be interesting to speak to someone who's actually gone to heaven? Has anyone here been to heaven? You never know. Some churches, that happens a lot.
- They go up to heaven a lot in some churches. But you'd have so many questions. What did you see? What is it about? And in recent years, there have been accounts from young boys.
- I don't know if you've read these accounts or maybe seen the movie. One of them went up to heaven. He was only three years old. And he was on the operating table and had one of those near-death experiences. Anyway, he came back and it had a huge impact.
- He wrote a book. Not the three-year-old kid, but a book was written. And they made a movie. And they made millions. This little kid and his family made millions out of his trip to heaven. But, you know, like, how do we know that it's real?
- [1 : 0 0] Another recent account of this boy kicked it off about ten years ago. Then suddenly another little boy went to heaven. They wrote a book. But before they could turn it into a movie, he got a conscience and said, no, he lied.
- He was just trying to get attention. So what we need when we think about heaven, we need an authoritative account. We need to know of someone who's actually been there and actually seen the things he's seen.
- And that's why we've got the Bible and why the Bible is so important. John's account is authoritative because he's the disciple of Christ. He gets appointed as an apostle by Jesus to tell the world what he sees.
- And instead of making millions of his preaching and what he knows, he gets exiled to this island and is exiled from his family and friends. He gets to pay the price for seeing what he sees and sticking to his story.
- And so what we've got in Revelation, Revelation 4 and 5, which is really the passage we're looking at today. It's a major unit in the book of Revelation 4 and 5 go together.
- [2 : 0 4] And we see a vision that transports John and therefore us, his readers, into heaven itself. At the center of this vision is this magnificent throne.
- We picked it up in chapter 4. Just have a look at chapter 4 from verse 4. In fact, from chapter 4 verse 1, you know, John is standing there and then he sees a door and then a voice calls him and says, Hey, come up to heaven. I want to show you some stuff.
- That's the same one that he saw in chapter 1. It's Jesus. So he goes up and he starts to see things. And he sees a throne from verse 2 and someone's sitting on it.
- Interestingly enough, this word throne occurs so many times in this chapter, about 14 or 15 different times it occurs in this chapter. And everything gets described except the one that sits on the throne.

The one who sat there, well, he does get described, but we're not in detail. He had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. These are precious stones. A rainbow resembling an emerald encircled this throne.

[3 : 11] Surrounding the throne were 24 other thrones. And seated on them were 24 elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.

From the throne came, and this is now from the throne again, came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne were seven lamps blazing.

These are the lamps of the Spirit of God. And before the throne was what looked like a sea of glass, like a crystal. So at the center of John's vision is this magnificent throne.

But John's vision continually expands outward more and more. It focuses on the throne as the center of heaven. And it keeps sort of expanding as we go along in chapter 4. He sees these living creatures, these interesting creatures that we've seen videos about, known as cherubim.

We'll have a description of them later. And then the 24 elders, and they're all worshiping God on the throne. And then later on in chapter 5, that worship gets extended sort of down to earth.

[4 : 14] And includes the whole world. And so we end up in Genesis chapter 5. With a vision where the worship of heaven and earth are united.

A little bit like we saw in that video. And this uniting of the worship of heaven and earth together is one of the key teachings in Revelation.

And not just Revelation, but of the whole storyline of the Bible. Which makes it the main storyline of the history of the world. And so as we look at, we'll spend most of our time in chapter 5.

But we'll start off in chapter 4. There's a number of really important realities we need to get, to grab hold of. In order to fully understand and appreciate what John is wanting us to see.

And what action he wants us to take. So we really need to look at chapter 4 and 5 together. So the first thing that we need to grab hold of is that God is the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth.

[5 : 15] God is the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth. So in chapter 4, look at verse 8. We see these living creatures that had six wings and covered with eyes all around them.

We'll try and explain that in a short while. Under their wings, day and night, they never stopped saying, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.

John's vision of God's throne room is at the theological heart of revelation. It's the kind of heartbeat of revelation. In fact, it's the center of the entire cosmos.

As we see God being worshipped as the creator. At the center of John's vision is this mighty, powerful throne. And at the center of the throne is this thrice holy God.

In Greek, where it says God Almighty, the Greek word there is pantokrato, which means the all ruler.

[6 : 21] Literally just means all ruler. It means the all powerful one. The Greek word krato means might and power and strength. If someone who is a krato, is a ruler, decides to do something, it gets done.

It's got connotations of taking and seizing, of giving orders and getting things done. It's a Greek translation of Yahweh sabayot, the Lord Almighty, the Lord of hosts, the Lord of the armies of heaven.

So it's a martial term. It's a kingly term. It's almost a warlord language. It means that this person sitting on the throne is the commander-in-chief, and it's not just of heaven, but of heaven and earth.

And that term, pantokrato, is used ten times in the New Testament and nine times in the book of Revelation. So if you want to know who God is, you need to know him as the almighty, the all ruler, the one who controls heaven and earth.

Second point, God is the eternal one. And we see that in verse 8, who was and is and is to come. In verse 10 again, still in chapter 4, the 24 elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever.

[7 : 46] And that Greek phrase, forever and ever, there is an interesting phrase. It means from the ages to the ages. He's been around for ages and ages, and he's going to be around for ages and ages.

God is the alone one who has existed, does exist, and will exist into eternity. He is the one who is alive from all the ages. He's got no beginning, he will have no end.

He's a being with supreme power and authority. The one who created time, but is not bound by it. His power extends from before the world began, is manifest in the presence, and will go on being unhindered into the future.

After every rival power has been destroyed or bows in submission to him. Such a being can't but help have power and authority, and not small amounts of it, really, really big amounts of it.

And then, the third thing we need to know about God is that he is the creator. He is the creator. He is the one who calls everything into existence.

[8 : 55] So, verse 11, You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power for, because, you created all things, and by your will, they were created and have their being.

Things in heaven, like those scary, powerful things, those creatures that we see in chapter 4, are created by God, but also things on earth.

Yahweh is the creator God of all that is. As that video showed us, although heaven and earth are now sort of separate, when God first made it, they were much closer together.

Because God is the creator of the physical world, we must not divorce what we do in the world from His rule or authority, and yet that's the one thing that we as humans love to do most.

We want to live life on our own terms, and not in reference to the God who made it. But what we've got here in the vision of John, is when John is saying that God is the creator of everything, He wants every sphere of human activity brought under the controlling authority of God, precisely because He is our creator.

[10 : 12] And that goes for all humans, not just for Christians. We all owe Him our honor and allegiance, because He made us all. In fact, John is firing a few shots at the pagan world in particular, and in particular the cult of imperial worship, when he talks about God in these terms.

Roman emperors styled themselves as Lord and God, which says in verse 11, you are worthy, our Lord and God. That term worthy is not used often in the New Testament.

In fact, it's only used by John, and I think only in Revelation. It's a very particular word that he's using there. And that word in the Greek is also attributed to the emperors of Rome.

When they did something magnificent, they were hailed as the worthy one. And then he calls him, verse 11, you are worthy, our Lord and God. And the Roman emperors would style themselves in exactly those terms.

Kyrios, Ky Deus, Lord and God. They would be like, he'd be Lord and God Nero, Lord and God Julius.

[11 : 19] That's the titles that they gave themselves. Although technically, the Roman Senate only granted them the title of God once they were dead, because they didn't quite trust these leaders, you know. But what John is saying is that there's only one true power in the world, and it's not the Roman emperor.

And that gets you into serious trouble in the Roman world. Although that's a very important point for us to remember today. Because the Western world is becoming increasingly less and less Christian, and its rulers ever more intolerant of their Christian past, and of Christians that keep on standing up and saying, hey, you're not allowed to do that.

So this lovely vision of God, who's ruling in heaven, and the creator of the world. And yet, no matter how glorious this vision of God is, there's a problem, and that's where we get into chapter 5.

It seems somehow incomplete. It doesn't feel like it's incomplete in chapter 4, except to say this, the vision is almost stuck up there in heaven.

It doesn't seem to have anything to do with what's happening here on earth. And then John gets perplexed, as you see, and there's this issue of a scroll that comes up, and what's going on there?

[12 : 42] So just to read through a few verses in chapter 5, John says, then I saw the right hand of him who sat on the throne, a scroll with writing on it, and sealed up with seven seals.

We'll get into that in a minute. But just to point out that there's no one, verse 3, in heaven, or on earth, or under the earth, that could open the scroll, or look inside.

So there's something that needs to be opened, and explained, and taught, but there's no one who could do that. And then John just gets so distraught. Verse 4, I wept, and wept, because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll.

Now what's going on over there? Well, scrolls are an Old Testament way of describing something that God is going to do on planet earth. We come across that word in Daniel chapter 7, but there it's the books that are opened.

It's the same word. And scrolls are given every now and then to the people in the Old Testament who have the same vision that John did. And there's not many of them, by the way. We think that so many people just, you know, sort of bounced up into heaven every now and then.

[13 : 51] But it doesn't happen like that in the Bible. It's only about four or five people that get to see these amazing visions. Moses, Ezekiel, Daniel, Isaiah did, and Zechariah, and maybe one or two others.

And then John. And often in the Old Testament, when you get these people seeing this amazing vision of God, they get a scroll. They receive a scroll. And that means that something is going to happen down on earth.

God gives them a message. They're the agent, and they've got to take the scroll. It's a message. It's something that's going to happen on earth. It's an Old Testament imagery for an edict of God for something about to happen on earth.

But someone must deliver it, and no one can be found. until John hears about the Lion of Judah, he hears about it, interestingly enough. But when he turns and sees, he doesn't see a lion.

He sees a lamb. So the next part of the vision is all about Jesus. And Jesus is the king appointed by God to bring his reign to earth.

[14 : 55] The first thing we see is that Jesus is a conquering king. Jesus is a conquering king. Verse 5. Then one of the elders said to me, this is John. He hasn't seen him yet, but he's hearing about Jesus.

Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. In other translations, has conquered. It's the same thing. He is able to open the scroll, and it's seven seals.

Jesus is the Lion of Judah and the branch of David. And you know, you simply cannot get any more political than that than when describing the king of God's kingdom. Do you know where the phrase, the Lion of Judah, comes from?

Genesis chapter 49. Do you remember we did this in Genesis? Let's see if we can... We just need to turn there quickly so you can understand that imagery. So if you've got your Bibles, just hang over to Genesis 49.

I've got it marked out so it's easy to see, but it's obviously at the start of the Bible. But just see how prophecy is made about Judah. And of course, Jesus is from the tribe of Judah.

[16 : 01] He says this, Judah, this is Jacob speaking, Judah, your brothers will praise you. Your hands will be on the neck of your enemies. Someone who's going to come from you that will rule.

Your father's sons will bow down to you. You are a lion's cub, O Judah. You return from the prey, my son. Like a lion, he crouches and lies down. Like a lion is. Who dares to rouse him?

The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations will be his. So we've got a vision of this mighty, strong, and powerful king.

He's a lion from the tribe of Judah. We all know what lions do. They symbolize strength and power and aggression. When a lion looks at something and sets his eye on its prey, that prey is dead meat. And this title is given to Jesus.

Jesus is also the root of David. That comes from Isaiah, particularly Isaiah chapter 11, of the coming king who will be covered by the sevenfold spirit of God. You remember in Isaiah chapter 11, you see one who's got the spirit with wisdom and understanding and counsel and might and knowledge and the fear of God.

[17 : 12] Isaiah 11 goes on to say, he will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. But one who will also in the day, the root of Jesse will stand as a banner for all people.

The nations will rally to him and his resting place will be glorious. John is saying that the promises of Genesis 39 and Isaiah 11 are now fulfilled in Christ.

As John is standing there, those things have already been fulfilled. He has already conquered. Because he is the conquering king, he is worthy to take the scroll and to fulfill it on earth.

Scrolls, as I said, are royal edicts signed by God and they're handed to Jesus as his king to carry out on earth. That's how kings give orders in the olden days. They would have a scroll where their orders were written on.

It would be sealed with wax seals and they would be given to his agents and carried out. It's only Jesus who is now able and worthy to open the scroll.

[18 : 16] He alone is the unique and exclusive one given authority by God to carry his will out on earth. That's what receiving the scroll means. This immediately makes Jesus someone to be obeyed.

But it's because of what he has already done for his people that he is to be worshipped and adored. because this king is different from any other king in the world.

This king conquers not just through death but through his death which makes him different from every other ruler in world history. Every other ruler in world history conquers by killing or by the threat of killing.

Jesus conquers by being killed himself. So that's the whole point of the images in chapter 5 now and verse 9 and 10.

You are worthy to take the scroll to open his heels because you were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe nation and town. And the tension in the text builds as John hears about this lion of the tribe of Judah and turns and sees this incredible image.

[19 : 31] It's probably the center of the image of Revelation. The throne and the lamb. In fact at the end of our time together at the end of our chapter the throne and the lamb the lamb is on the throne.

They become united. A lamb that's slain. The lamb is standing at the very center of heavenly worship and therefore at the very center of God's purposes for the world.

The lamb imagery comes from three places in the Old Testament from the Passover lamb that is slain to purchase freedom for God's people. From the sacrificial lamb in the temple worship as we saw in the video that sort of absorbs the sins of the world the sins of God's people.

And then from Isaiah 53 a famous passage of a lamb who's slain and by whose wounds the world finds its healing. It's a famous passage.

It talks about God's servant who was pierced for our transgressions crushed for our iniquities. It talks about God's people who are like sheep have gone astray each one turning his own way but that on the servant that is going to come the Lord has laid on him our iniquity the iniquity of us all our sins our troubles our problems.

[20 : 52] We know that in order to do this to get this iniquity he had to die. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and there's a sheep before its shearer is silent so he didn't open his mouth.

He was cut off from the land of the living for the transgression of my people he was punished and that because of that because he paid the ultimate price God was willing to raise him up and give him a portion among the great and divide the spoils with the strong.

Jesus accomplishes the most powerful single act in human history and he does it not by conquering but by being conquered or rather by allowing himself to be conquered.

It is his defeat that is his victory. Yes he was killed and was overcome by death but because of who he is he's also the lion of the tribe of Judah the strong and mighty and he was also a lamb with seven horns he picked up all that language of seven horns which indicates amazing strength horns is a picture of image of strength in the Bible.

He is a mighty lord and king evil and death is too weak to keep its hold on him. He is stronger and conquers them and he raises from the dead and tramples death and sin underfoot so that world history is no longer determined by those two evils in particular by sin and by death but among these other evils as well that Jesus conquers.

[22 : 19] World history is not determined by those two evils nor by the people who would wield them to hurt or threaten others. And then lastly Jesus death purchases a holy international nation of priests and kings.

Jesus death conquers sin but it also buys for himself a nation. This is the meaning of ransom. If you see in your Bible verse five you are worthy to take the scroll and to open seals because you were slain and with your blood you purchased or ransomed men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

That word ransom is a payment made to free slaves. It's a technical term and when he does this this mighty king doesn't purchase himself one or two little small little tribe of slaves.

He's got a kingdom of people following him made up of all the tribes of the whole world. It's a massive fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that through him all the nations of the world will be blessed.

But it kind of reaches further than that actually. It's the undoing of the curse of Genesis chapter three and chapter six where the world is divided and people hurt and kill each other. By creating this new international kingdom Jesus is undoing the problem that sin introduced into the world and bringing back God's original plan for creation and for humanity that we can be in community and love each other and not hurt each other.

[23 : 51] it's a huge international community that has been set free by Christ. We are free because of the ransom that was paid by him. We owe him our freedom.

We owe him everything. So our first allegiance then is to Christ, our new king, and then to each other as people of that kingdom. And then we are to be a nation of priests so we represent God and Jesus to the world.

Now this puts the church, us, here at St. Mark's, remember in chapter 2 and 3 it's the local churches that Jesus is speaking to, it puts us in the most awesome privileged position.

We can change world history because our king is at the center of God's plans for the world. Our king sits on the throne of heaven. Our king is the one who can undo the scrolls and bring about God's rule on earth.

Our king has the whole of heaven and earth united in praise to him. Our king has countless thousands throughout the world united in worship but also united under his rule and in obedience to him.

[24 : 56] And so you've got this amazing vision of God, this glorious vision of Christ and just three things that I want us to pick up from that. So three truths for the church to live by.

Three truths. There's more but I'm just highlighting a few of us today. They give us some very important truths to hang our lives on. Like the seven churches in chapter two and three, we need to fight compromise with the world, compromise with our allegiance to our king, but also be encouraged that we can overcome.

So first point, heaven controls what happens on earth. Heaven controls what happens on earth. Heaven is the executive throne room where geopolitical decisions about earth are made. Those little boys that went up to heaven, they got fluffy pink clouds.

They got to sit on Jesus' lap and they got a lovely spiritual hug. That's not what happens in heaven. You don't walk up there and just go and hug Jesus. There's a throne with fire and lightning and holy creatures that will keep you far away from even going close to that.

In the Old Testament when God appears, especially in Mount Sinai, the same kind of vision is given to Moses and God says, okay Moses, call the people up here. And to a man, the Israelites said, no, no.

[26 : 13] They just see this whole mountain burning with fire and lightning coming down. And they're like, no, we're not going up there, Moses, you go. Because they knew they were going to die if they go up there. You don't just go to heaven and get a spiritual hug.

God is the cosmic creator, the all ruler. And so he takes executive decisions about what happens on earth. This section of Revelation is telling us that God and Jesus are the ones who have ultimate authority in the affairs of man, and that that authority extends to all areas of life.

not just what we would consider the spiritual side of things. In Revelation, the natural world responds to orders coming from heaven as do the political powers.

So apocalyptic literature is about the political powers in the world. You saw that in Daniel 7. Those beasts are kings and rulers and they happen in time and space. So heaven controls what happens on earth.

Secondly, Christ is already king. This is such an important thing for us to grasp, especially for our church today. John's vision is not a vision of the future here, but of how things are as he sees them already.

[27 : 20] Heaven realities need to supersede what it seems like is happening in the world around us. The Lamb has already conquered. Our enemies are already under his control. He is busy calling thousands upon thousands all over the globe to his cause.

Christ is freeing people all over the world from slavery to sin, from broken ways of living, from bad choices, from their guilty pasts. With Jesus as king, there is nothing that the powers of earth can do to stop him from saving for himself the people that he wants.

So this should motivate us to stay faithful in teaching the word and in preaching the gospel. And then lastly, we are not alone in our struggles.

The church will always face the dual challenge of persecution and compromise. You know how they go together, of course. You just get pressure slowly but surely. No, no, no, you need to believe this, you need to believe this.

And then we compromise our allegiance to Christ. Like the seven churches in chapter two and three, we will face our own particular struggles and trials and temptations. And we're particularly prone to temptation to give up the struggle when it doesn't look like anything is happening.

[28 : 31] John's vision helped us to see that there's a much larger reality taking place around us. And we need to know that as we worship today at little old St.

Mark's, we are participating with the elders and the cherubim, and we didn't get to explain that too much, but maybe we'll show some more Bible videos and you'll get to understand it a bit better.

The cherubim and countless thousands of angels and people from all over the world in worship to God. In our struggle to swim against the cultural tide of the world at odds with its creator and to present Christ to them, we can know that we're not alone in the fight, we are not in the minority, we are not powerless.

Which is why the whole thing ends with a final amen from the cherubim. Let's have a look at the end of chapter 5. The four living creatures said, Amen, and the elders fell down and worshipped.

It's kind of a strange way to end the chapter. Why the cherubim, those living creatures of the Old Testament cherubim? Well, we first meet them as guardians at the gate of Eden, with those flaming swords where they keep sinful men from getting back to the meeting place with God.

[29 : 45] By having the cherubim saying amen, they're joining us, humans, the ones that they used to keep out of the garden, in worship. And this is John's way of saying that the separation between heaven and earth has ended, that we can be friends again.

There's now fellowship between God and man, and that because of Christ's sacrifice, we can worship God and enjoy Him forever. And isn't that worth singing about? God. Well, let's pray now and ask God to help us to remember these things and to stay true to Him.

Heavenly Father, what a glorious vision of who you are, the ruler of heaven and earth, and of who Jesus is, Christ our Lord, the conquering Lamb.

And of who we are, Lord, the goal of history, of people created by His sacrifice, to live in obedience and worship. Lord, the world around us doesn't know you as we do, and we pray, Lord, that we will be good witnesses, and that we will never compromise the truth of who you are in what we say about you.

Help us to be strong and true all the days of our lives, so that we can get this huge inheritance that is promised for your people. In Jesus' name, Amen.