

Revelation 4 • Chapter Study

INTRO

We did an in-depth look at v1 last Sunday, so we'll just summarize tonight.

After parsing v1, we explained why we believe in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture.

↳ After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard *was* like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this."

The v begins & ends w/the same Greek phrase; "**meta tauta**" = "After this/these things."

& THAT sends us back to what J said in 1:19 where He gave Jhn an outline for Rev.

Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place meta-tauta = after this.

What John HAD seen was the vision of Jesus in glory in ch1.

The things which ARE, are Jesus' message to the churches in chs2&3.

V1/ch4 marks the 3rd & final part of the outline;

The things which will take place AFTER these things.

What Things? CHURCH things.

John is called up to heaven, and it's **from heaven** He sees the vents that occur during the Tribulation.

He's getting a fore-glimpse of the Rapture here.

Progression

Again, we covered this all in depth Sunday.

Before we press on here in ch4, I want to fill in something we looked at a few weeks ago.

I mentioned the interesting parallel many students of the Bible have noticed between what Jesus says to the 7 churches of chs2&3 and Church History.

The 7 churches Jesus sent these letters to weren't the only churches of the time; not by a long shot.

- They weren't even the most important.
- Ephesus was certainly key, but the rest were at best, minor players.
- Why didn't Jesus send a ltr to Corinth, or Antioch, or Alexandria, or even to Rome?
- Those churches had far greater influence than Smyrna or Sardis.

A clue as to WHY J addrsd these specific 7 churches lies in the 1 phrase He repeats to all –

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit **says** [is saying] to the churches."

- J wants us to understand that while these ltrs dealt w/specific issues in real churches in 1st C.,
- Their msg continues on in every generation.
- & collectively, these 7 churches chart for us the course of history frm 1st C, to Return of Christ.
- 7 =# of completion.

The 1st Church was Ephesus; the **Loveless** Church.

- 1) Jesus **commended** them for being busy, faithful, pure, & doctrinally sound.
- 2) But they'd left their first love; a passion for Jesus.
- 3) That well describes the Church after the Apostles from the late 1st to mid-2nd C.
- 4) Persecution hadn't set in yet as the official policy of the Roman Empire.
- 5) So the Church grew rapidly, but as it organized, it lost the fire that fueled its first days.

Next was **Smyrna**, the Persecuted church of the 2nd thru early 4th C.

3rd was Pergamos; the **Compromising** Church.

- 1) The Roman Emperor Constantine's lifted persecution in with the Edict of Toleration.
- 2) Christianity emerged from the catacombs where it had been hiding to become the favored religion of the Empire.
- 3) It began to adopt some of the forms of Greco-Roman paganism so as to appeal to a wider audience.

So the Compromising Church of Pergamos became the Compromised Church of Thyatira.

- 1) This is the merging of Church & State that took place during the Holy Roman Empire.
- 2) This period, from the 9th thru 15th Cs, saw some gross corruption in the Church.
- 3) That corruption moved many to demand reform.

Which brings us to the 5th Church—**Sardis**, the **Dead** Church.

- 1) It had a rep as alive, but Jesus said it was dead **because its works weren't complete**.
- 2) That's a poignant description of so much of the Reformation.
- 3) They got off to a good start, but didn't follow through.
- 4) They held on to too many of the man-made traditions & rituals of the medieval church.
- 5) And while most of the Reformation stalled, some heeded Jesus call & pressed on

Birthing the 6th Church – **Philadelphia**, the **Faithful** Church.

- 1) This is the Church that went back to the Bible.
- 2) It ended a formal priesthood & the distinction btwn clergy & laity.
- 3) The Gospel became central so missionaries went to the ends of the Earth to fulfill the Great Commission.

The 7th & last church we looked at 2 wks ago was **Laodicea**, the **Lukewarm** church.

- 1) This was the prosperous church that thought they had it all.
- 2) Jesus told them they were self-deceived & desperately needy.
- 3) He wasn't even IN their church. He was outside knocking 2C if any1 would invite Him in.
- 4) It's not diff 2C the modern church of the W'n world sounds eerily a lot like Laodicea.
- 5) And it's The **LAST** church.

After Jesus' msg to the last church of Laodicea, John is called up to heaven.

² Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and *One* sat on the throne.

This is precisely what Paul says in 1 Cor. 15 will happen to us.

At the voice of the Lord, we'll be **instantly** transformed from physical to spiritual.

In a twinkling of an eye, we'll be changed.

The first thing John is aware of when he realizes He's in heaven is a throne & its occupant.

Have you ever wondered what heaven will be like?

We get a picture of it here. We'd do well to study it.

Some years ago, Lynn & I went to Kauai.

Before the trip, Kauai was just a name of one of the Hawaiian Islands.

As the time grew closer, I started reading up on the history of Kauai & its features.

There were pictures & maps.

The more I read, the more excited I got.

When we got there & I saw the things I'd read about, the appreciation for them was greater.

Revelation is a bit like a Tour Guide for heaven.

The more we **read** it, the more familiar we become w/the glory that awaits us & the more it will prime our hearts to worship God.

After studying **John's** visions of heaven, we won't be walking around heaven like a bunch of goofy tourists saying, "Wow, what's that?"

As a man was driving thru a mining region he noticed a large number of mules in an open field.

When he stopped for gas at the next town he asked about the mules and was told the animals were brought up from the darkness of the mines to preserve their eyesight.

Unless they were regularly exposed to the sunlight they went blind.

We live in a spiritually dark world & need to have our vision of heaven regularly renewed so we don't go blind.

The first thing that grabs John's attention is a throne & the One sitting on it.

This **throne** is the main theme of ch4.

The word is used 12 Xs in these 11 vs; 46 Xs in Rev.

John's attention is arrested by this throne, & everything else is described **in relation to it**.

Take careful note of this: When John is caught up to heaven, the very first thing that occupies his attention is **God's Throne**.

In light of all turmoil & trouble Jhn going recount, this reminds us **above all is the throne of God**. God is **sovereign**.

No matter how bad things get, God is still on His throne & in control.

History is *His Story* from beginning to end.

³ And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and *there was* a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.

John **tries** to describe what he saw, but his words fall short; so he repeatedly says, “***It was like . . .***”

A key to our understanding of John’s description of all he sees in heaven is to remember he has to describe what is virtually indescribable.

That is, he’s now “in the Spirit” & seeing things *in the spiritual realm*.

Then he has to *translate* that into words derived *from our earthly experience*.

This is an imperfect analogy but might get us in touch w/John’s dilemma.

You’re touring Europe & decide to go check out the *Large Hadron Collider* in Switzerland.

This thing is the most expensive scientific instrument ever made; abt \$10 billion.

[Pics]

It’s used to accelerate atoms to huge speeds then smash them into each other & what they’re made of.

So, yeah; it’s a like a really big hammer.

So, you get there and see this [Pic] Now: Describe it.

We have trouble describing this, and this is man-made; earthly.

Imagine now John’s dilemma as he’s transported to heaven and has to use human language to describe a spiritual reality he’s never encountered before.

What he says is true & accurate and describes *something*.

But his words are approximations of what he saw & heard.

And most especially when he clues us in by saying, “It was LIKE ...”

John doesn’t describe a ***form*** for God here.

He instead speaks of the glory that emanated ***from*** the One who sat on the throne.

It’s like ***light*** reflected from precious gems.

The word “***jasper***” is the Greek word “***iaspis***,” a semi-precious stone of many colors.

The ***sardius*** came in 2 colors,

1) Flesh *carneian* & 2) Red *Sardine*

These 2 colors were often found in the same stone, mixed in bands.

Visualizing what John saw Picture light shimmering in a multitude of hues like a rainbow; w/rays of red & flesh-color lighting shooting thru it.

While these colors aren’t explained, they likely represent the fullness of God’s glory, coupled to Jesus who became a man & took on a body.

Around the throne John saw a ***green rainbow***.

You’ll remember frim Gen 9, that the rainbow was a sign of God’s covenant of mercy, that He would never destroy the earth by a flood again.

In the ancient world, ***green*** spoke of life, of flourishing.

John sees God’s throne as the ***source of abundant life***.

So John sees a throne surrounded by a rainbow.

The ***throne*** speaks of ***rule***; of ***sovereignty***.

The ***rainbow*** is a symbol of a ***covenant faithfulness***.

Our Sovereign God has given us precious promises.

Because His rule is absolute, He’ll make sure every promise is fulfilled.

The rainbow around God’s throne is green, not brown.

His promises are ***alive***, not old & stale.

As the Psalm says, His mercy is new every morning.

Now, John’s vision widens out -

⁴ Around the throne *were* 24 thrones, and on the thrones I saw 24 elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.

John sees ***more*** thrones circling God’s throne.

On each of these additional thrones is an elder.

He knows they’re elders just by looking at them. “How?” you ask.

Elders played a crucial role in the ancient world, especially in Israel.

In every city & settlement, elders were leaders; the city/town council.

Elders were almost always older men of proven success.

Befitting their station as elders, they wore clothing & groomed themselves in such a way you could pick them out of a crowd.

Elders not only provided the civil government for a town, they were its diplomats & **representatives** when negotiating with other towns.

John could tell **these were elders** sitting on these 24 thrones.

That they were arranged **around** God's throne means their authority is an **extension** of His.

He is THE sovereign; they **put** that sovereignty **into action**.

Why 24?

Let's look at 5:8 where we learn a bit more about them.

^{5:8} Now when He had taken the scroll, the 4 living creatures and the 24 elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, ¹⁰ And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth."

These 24 elders have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. So they are human beings.

They come from every ethnic group; so its both Jews & Gentiles.

They're a royal priesthood, as Peter describes believers in 1 Peter 2:9.

They're destined to reign on Earth as Jesus promised those who overcome in Rev 2:26.

In their hands are harps and golden bowls of incense, symbolic of the prayers of God's people.

These harps & bowls **speak of worship** – and that tips us off to link this to 1 Chr 24.

There we find a story about something King David did.

There were too many priests for all to serve at once.

So David divided them into 24 divisions; each w/its own leader & schedule for service.

We have a few worship teams here at CCO. In David's day, the Tabernacle had 24.

David not only **wrote** a lot of worship songs; called Psalms,

He was a master musician & conductor who organized worship.

So, from all this, it's best to understand the 24 elders as representatives of **all** God's people, from **all** history.

In Matt 19:28, Jesus told the **apostles** they would sit on 12 thrones in the Kingdom.

So that accounts for half of the 24.

The other half are probably representatives of the 12 Tribes of Israel.

Here in v4, John describes them as wearing white robes & golden crowns.

In 3:8, white robes are promised to those who overcome – so again, we're seeing believers.

And several times in the NT, crowns are promised as rewards for the faithful.

⁵ And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, & voices. 7 lamps of fire *were* burning before the throne, which are the 7 Spirits of God.

Lightning, thunder, voices & fire were all a part of God's presence at Mt Sinai in the Exodus.

1 of the weapons used by hostage rescue teams is called a *flash-bang grenade*.

It's not like a regular grenade which tears everything apart by flying shrapnel.

A flash-bang temporarily **stuns** people by exploding w/a super loud noise & bright flash of light.

The combination of sound & light overwhelm the senses & incapacitate a target for several seconds.

Reading John's description of heaven, we wonder if he wasn't overwhelmed by all he heard & saw.

Coming from God's throne is piercing light & bone-rattling noise.

If you've ever experienced a thunderstorm in the Midwest, you have an idea what John saw.

The storms we get here on the W Coast are nothing like the storms you get in the MW.

Lightning will strike again and again in rapid bursts and the thunder is so intense it shakes that ground and causes the very air to pulse.

There's something notable about these storms too – no matter where you are, the light from the flash pierces even to the darkest recesses & the thunder vibrates thru any wall.

That's the idea here; there's no place in all creation not effected by God's sovereign rule.

No darkness that won't be exposed; no place His voice won't reach.

John then sees 7 flames before the throne, described as the 7 Spirits of God.

We already encountered this in both 1:4 & 3:1

7 is the number of completion and this refers to the Holy Spirit in His fullness.

Isaiah 11:2 gives us the 7-fold fullness of the Holy Spirit -

The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him (1), the Spirit of wisdom and understanding (2&3), the Spirit of counsel and might (4&5), the Spirit of knowledge (6) and of the fear of the Lord (7).

It's interesting the HS is represented by lamps of fire.

In Acts 2:3 when Spirit came in power on the disciples on Pentecost, He appeared as *tongues/flames of fire*.

Fire is a symbol of *refining & purifying*.

That's why He's the **HOLY** Spirit; He indwells to make us more like Christ by making us holy.

[Artists attempts 3]

⁶ Before the throne *there was* a sea of glass, like crystal. [Stop]

Stretching out around God's throne is a vast flat surface that looks to John like the finest glass.

1st C glass was of poor quality; discolored, uneven & bubbly.

It wasn't clear like our glass, it was semi-transparent.

The only thing they knew of that was clear was a quartz crystal.

John sees the ground of heaven like that; a glass so fine it's like pure quartz.

When Moses came down from Mt Sinai w/the tablets / 10 Commandments, he also came w/plans for a special building called the **tabernacle**.

God told him to be careful to build it just as he'd seen a vision for it on the Mt.

In the book of Hebrews we learn the earthly tabernacle **was a copy of heaven**.

In the tabernacle there was a large bronze basin called the "laver," or "sea."

It was used for *washing* in preparation to enter the Holy of holies, a model of God's throne room.

Here in v6, John sees the *real sea* the laver symbolized.

This heavenly sea represents the forgiveness & cleansing God offers us.

But instead of a large basin, it's an *entire sea*, signaling the fact that His mercy, forgiveness, and cleansing are limitless & beyond exhausting.

1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from **ALL** unrighteousness."

But now think; what's the **medium** of our cleansing? The Word of God!

Psalms 119:9 says -

How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.

2 Tim 3:16-17 says -

¹⁶All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Eph 5:25-27 -

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

It's God's Word that **shows** us where we err, then corrects & establishes us in righteousness.

You could say the Word of God is our **foundation**, the spiritual ground we stand on; & that's precisely what we see in the crystal sea of heaven.

[6b] And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, *were* 4 living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. ⁷The first living creature *was* like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature *was* like a flying eagle. ⁸The 4 living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!"

We find these creatures at several places in the Bible.

They play an important part in Eze's visions in chs 1 & 10 where they're called **cherubim**. [10:20]
Isaiah saw them in his vision of the throne room of heaven in ch6.

Every time we encounter the cherubim, they're around God's throne (4:6 5:6 14:4)

They're so intimately tied to the presence of God, He's referred to as the "One who dwells between the cherubim." (2 Kings 19:15 Psalm 80:1 99:1 Isa.37:16)

Figures of the cherubim were woven into the design of the curtains in the tabernacle (Exo 26:31)

We find them on the top of the mercy seat over the Ark of the Covenant. (Exo 25:18-21)

They seem to function very much like **ceremonial heavenly bodyguards**.

As John sees them, they are **full of eyes**, speaking of their **eternal vigilance**.

The 1st of the 4 cherubim looks like a lion,

The 2nd like a young ox, in the peak of its strength.

The 3rd looks like a man,

While the 4th looks like an eagle.

In **Eze's** description of them, each has 4 faces, on each head.

John describes the side of each cherub as it faced him.

These creatures represent the noblest, strongest, wisest, & swiftest of natural creation.

When they, along with the 24 elders, worship God, which they constantly do **together**, it represents **all of creation**, both nature & man, worshipping God.

There's been no end to the conjecture as to what these 4 creatures represent.

In the book of Numbers we're told during the Exodus, the camp of Israel was arranged around the tabernacle when they camped.

There were 3 tribes on each side, N, S, E, & W.

In front of each grp of 3 tribes a standard or ensign was raised, & on these 4 ensigns **tradition says** were these 4 creatures.

To the **East**, the standard had a **lion** on it.

South was an **man**,

West had an **ox**,

North an **eagle**.

If the tabernacle was a model of heaven & the center of the camp of Israel was the Holy of holies, it's fitting around the tabernacle would be these standards, representing the cherubim.

Another view of why these 4 creatures are represented is found in early Christian tradition that the 4 gospels are **symbolized** by these 4 creatures.

Matthew presents Jesus as the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies and the **Lion** of Tribe of Judah.

Mark presents Jesus as the perfect servant, represented by the **young ox**.

Luke's gospel makes pains to present Jesus as the perfect **man**,

While **John** goes to equal pains to present Jesus as the one from Heaven – so the **eagle**.

Some of the earliest of Christian art depicts Jesus as these 4 creatures. [pics 2]

What's noteworthy is their song in v 8

"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!"

This is called the "**trishagion**"; the "**thrice-holy**"

If the Bible says something **once**, it's important.

If it's **repeated**, it's of special note & attention.

But when we find something spoken 3 times in succession – it's elevated to a place of primacy!

God is Holy!!! This is the **central declaration** of the cherubim, of those creatures which surround God's throne.

Day & night, without rest they cry out - "**Holy, holy, holy.**"

Some see in the **trishagion** a reference to the Trinity.

The cherubim call God the "**Lord Almighty.**"

He is "Lord;" the supreme authority.

And He is "Almighty;" it's that word "Pantokrator" that we looked at in Ch1.

The One in whose hand **everything** is.

"**Who was and is and is to come.**" He is eternal.

While John's description of the cherubim makes them sound **bizarre & freakish** – that's NOT the way we ought

to understand them.

These aren't animals. **Creatures** yes, but not umb, brute beasts.

They are creatures like the **angels** are creatures. **Created**.

But don't regard them as unintelligent beasts.

On the contrary, they are **super**-intelligent.

They are full of eyes; meaning they are mentally alert & aware.

They have 6-wings, meaning they're **highly mobile & purposeful** in movement.

Every time we encounter them, they're **worshipping** God.

Think of that!

These most intelligent, refined, & powerful creatures are pre-occupied w/what activity?

WORSHIP!!!

And WHY is it they're compelled to worship?

Well Where are they? Around God's throne – beholding Him.

The heart that knows God, worships Him.

A **lack** of worship is evidence of a heart **out of fellowship** with God.

⁹ Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰ the 24 elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: ¹¹ “You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created.”

When the cherubim worship, the 24 elders join them.

They vacate their thrones to prostrate themselves before God's.

They remove their crowns, the rewards handed them for their faithfulness, & cast them at God's feet as acts of adoration.

Have you ever gone to a party, only to discover you were supposed to bring a gift?

In heaven, the rewards we've received from the Lord for our faithfulness become the emblems of our love & devotion back to Him.

We'll take our best, & expend it on Him.

In the casting of their crowns at God's feet, there's an allusion to a practice known in the Roman Empire.

The Emperor ruled over many lesser kings.

These kings occasionally came before him to lay their crowns before him in homage.

He then gave them back, as a demonstration their right to rule came from him.

So here, the elders cast their crowns at God's feet.

He gives them back, & they once again heave them forth as signs of their dependence on Him.

Soon after Queen Victoria ascended her throne, she attended a concert in which Handel's *Messiah* was performed.

She was told, “Your Majesty, it's customary for royalty *not* to stand when the *Hallelujah Chorus* is rendered. Though everyone else stands, Your Majesty is to remain seated.”

When the orchestra & chorus came to the part where they proclaimed Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords, the queen, against custom & protocol, stood & bowed her head in worship.

She wasn't afraid to break the convention of the English court to honor the higher custom of the Court of Heaven.

The word “**worship**” in both Hebrew & Greek comes from the word meaning “to bow down.”

Worship involves the whole person: body, soul, spirit.

It's not just our voices raised in song.

Worship involves all we have & are.

V11 is our text for Sunday, so we'll leave further comment till then.