

Text: Rev. 4:1-11

Title: "God's heavenly throne room"

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Intro: I have seen some recent news reports about some amazing new technology that is helping legally blind people see. One lady in Tennessee a couple of weeks ago received a pair of specialized glasses that look like something out of a Star Trek episode, which enabled this young mother to see her young family for the very first time. It was a moving thing to watch.

You and I are hopelessly blind when it comes to our ability to see God's heavenly throne. We prayed this morning, and our Bible tells us that we did so before God's heavenly throne of grace, but that throne is something that we know is there by faith and not by sight.

But like a special pair of glasses that helps the blind, there was a man who actually got help to see God's heavenly throne. He was the Apostle John, and we read about what he saw there in this chapter. The chapter begins by reminding us that we who believe the gospel that John believed are going to see that heavenly throne someday too. It does so at the very beginning of verse 1, "Come up here!"

The phrase also occurs in 11:12, where two witnesses go up to heaven. The Bible teaches that "after these things", i.e., after the events of the church age (chapters 2-3), we are going to hear a trumpet-like voice invite us to God's heavenly throne. Each of us could hear that invitation someday during an event we call the Rapture (John 14:1-3, 1 Thess. 4:13-18, 2 Thess. 2:1-8, 1 Cor. 15:51-58). This passage tells us about a place we cannot see right now, but one that we will see then. Notice with me this morning four things about God's heavenly throne room.

I. God's heavenly throne room is the place where what must happen is decided (v. 1).

Ill: The Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar and the Apostle John were two very different men who lived in two very different times, but they did share something in common. Both of them experienced the wondrous miracle of God in their lives that is summed up by that last phrase in verse 1, *I will show thee things which must be hereafter*. Nebuchadnezzar had a dream, and when Daniel interpreted that dream for the king, Daniel said, "But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days" (2:28). Daniel went on to explain that the king's dream meant that this God in heaven had planned for Babylon to give way to Medo-Persia, and Medo-Persia to give way to Greece, and Greece to give way to Rome, and Rome to give way to the kingdom of the antichrist in the last days. John had seen the rise of Rome, and now he was going to be shown in great detail what the nature of the rise and fall of that last kingdom would be like.

Appl: But the night that Daniel interpreted that dream for Nebuchadnezzar was the first night that this king came to understand that he was not the sovereign of his own life, still much less of the kingdoms of this world. If you want to know who is in control of what is going to happen next, do not look anywhere else but in this place - the throne room of the God of heaven. John would be shown what must take place there, because the God of heaven would show him. When it comes to the kingdoms of this world, it is not the White House, or Moscow, or the "deep state," or Wall Street that will determine what is going to happen next. They are only pieces on the board in the chess game of the God of heaven.

Appl2: And when it comes to what happens next in our own lives, it will be the God of heaven who again shall determine what must be after these things. We can trust His promise in

this regard: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). What we must focus on is hearing, trusting, and obeying His plan and purpose for us, on loving Him. That is the variable affecting our future that we can control. God's throne room is the place where what happens next is decided. The throne room of our hearts is the place where we decide whether or not that will be a blessing for us as God intends, or a curse for us because we failed to follow His purposes and love Him as we should.

II. God's heavenly throne room is the place where His majestic grace is displayed (vv. 2-5a).

III: NASA's Cassini spacecraft has been orbiting Saturn for the last 13 years or so, and it has given scientists their closest views of that glorious planet in our solar system. Saturn is known especially for its rings, and the spacecraft has taken some natural color pictures of those rings. They are thought to be formed by ice crystals, so many are white giving off many different shades of gray against the darkness of space, while others are sandy in color, evidently due to some earthy particles included in the ice.

Appl: John witnessed some majestic color when he saw the throne of God. The God who created the rings of Saturn dwells in a throne room full of glorious sound and light. The sound and light are both beautiful and powerful. The God of heaven is a God of majesty. He is the ultimate combination of beauty and power. We ought to let this truth affect our understanding of the nature of aesthetics. Artistic beauty is not a mere matter of personal opinion. No one in God's throne room will think that the gemstone light coming from God's throne is ugly. It is beautiful because it is reflective of His tastes. We should seek to find beauty where God finds it.

Appl2: But perhaps the greatest display of the majesty of God in His throne room is actually the display of His majestic grace in the symbol of the 24 elders who are there. They are 24 in number, much like the gates and foundation stones of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:12-14), because they signify the elders of Israel and the elders of the church – 12 tribes and 12 apostles. The point here is that both Old and New Testament saints are there in the throne room as a majestic display of God's grace (as a result, I believe, of the Rapture). See this grace:

1. By grace they reign on thrones (v. 4a). Though formerly those who suffered on earth, now in heaven they rule and reign with their God (2 Tim. 2:12, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him").
2. By grace they are clothed in white garments (v. 4b). Though formerly stained by their own sin, now they have been washed white as snow (Rev. 3:5, "He that overcometh [by faith, 1 John 5:4-5], the same shall be clothed in white garments").
3. By grace they are crowned with golden wreaths (v. 4c). Though formerly living for things that pass away, now they are rewarded with eternal commendations that last forever (2 Tim. 4:7-8, "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.").

One of the most beautiful displays in heaven for all eternity will be the display of the sinner who was saved by the majesty of God's wondrous grace to us in Christ (Eph. 2:8-9, "And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast."). God's heavenly throne

room is the place where His majestic grace is displayed. Have you received that saving grace by faith?

III. God's heavenly throne room is the place where the Trinity is discerned (vv. 5b-7).

Appl: The throne of God itself is a fearsome and unapproachable sight in this vision. With its lightning and thunder, it reminds us of Mount Sinai, where God appeared to man to give him His law, which condemned him as a sinner. This is God the Father, unapproachable in His holy perfections. But two other realities of that throne are mentioned in this passage – equally perfect, but not equally unapproachable – the Holy Spirit and the Son of God.

1. The Holy Spirit is represented by seven burning lamps before the throne and a sea of glass as clear as crystal. That the lamps burn continually speaks to the Spirit's ministry of revelation and illumination so that we can know who God is through His Word. That they are seven in number corresponds to the seven stars and churches of earlier chapters (3:1), showing that this activity of illumination is intimately involved in each local church family. The sea of glass as clear as crystal is perhaps symbolical of the living-water ministry of the Holy Spirit, whose indwelling presence quenches the sinner's thirst for God. See the hymn, "Satisfied."

2. The Son of God is represented by the four seraphim who are here. Isaiah saw these creatures (Isaiah 6), but here John gives us more detail, which helps us see some ways in which they depict the glory of Jesus Christ as they worship God with their call, "Holy, Holy, Holy!" [Note that the seraphim of Ezekiel 1 are similar with some significant differences (4 vs. 6 wings; 4 faces); Ezekiel's vision may have consisted of a seraphim-like chariot throne rather than the seraphim themselves.] They are full of eyes, and so they depict the omniscience of our Savior who over and over in the letters to the

churches said, "I know thy works." One is like a lion, and Jesus is the Lion of Judah. One is like a calf, and Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. One is like a man, and Jesus is God the Son incarnate. And One is like an eagle, a symbol of the judgment of God's enemies (8:13; note that modern translations have *eagle* rather than *angel*) and the deliverance of His people (12:14) in Revelation, and Jesus like an eagle leads His people to the supper of the judgment of Armageddon on His return to earth (Matt. 24:28).

Appl: And so to see God in His throne room is to recognize that He is a Trinity. As we get to know God personally, we should ever grow in our appreciation of Him as three persons, each unique in their loving work for our redemption and well-being. Know, love, and worship Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

IV. God's heavenly throne room is the place where God's holiness is declared (vv. 8-11).

Appl: As we come to the close of our service this morning, we do so having come to worship the God of heaven. Have we worshipped Him well? Certainly, this worship in the throne room of God is the gold-standard when it comes to worship, and I want us to reflect on two things that are emphasized here that should be an emphasis for us when we come to worship the God of heaven.

1. The 24 elders fell on their faces to worship. Worship is falling on your face before a holy God. Failing to do that is failing to worship. On our faces we recognize that He is the One who lives forever and ever (v. 10), and we live only because He gave us life. We cast our crowns and achievements before Him, recognizing that He deserves all the power, glory, and honor that any of those things might bring about. We recognize that He is the Creator, and we the creature, and that we exist for His pleasure, not for our own. We must get off our thrones and fall on our faces to worship.

2. The seraphim cry out "Holy, holy, holy." He is our Lord and our God. He is Almighty. He is eternal. He is holy. We worship only when we recognize the holiness of our God.

Conclusion: Stephen Charnock on God's holiness: "No attribute is sounded out so loftily, with such solemnity, and so frequently by angels that stand before his throne, as this. Where do you find any other attribute trebled in the praises of it as this? Isaiah vi: 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory;' and Rev. iv. 9: 'The four living creatures rest not day and night saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty,' &c. His power of sovereignty as Lord of hosts is but once mentioned, but with a ternal [in threes] repetition of his holiness. Do you hear in any evangelical song any other perfection of the divine nature thrice repeated? Where do we read of the crying out, Eternal, eternal, eternal; or Faithful, faithful, faithful, Lord God of hosts! Whatsoever other attribute is left out, this God would have to fill the mouths of angels and blessed spirits forever in heaven. . . . As it seems to challenge an excellency above all his other perfections, so it is the glory of all the rest; as it is the glory of the Godhead, so it is the glory of every perfection in the Godhead; as his power is the strength of them, so his holiness is the beauty of them; as all would be weak without almightiness to back them, so all would be uncomely without holiness to adorn them: should this be sullied all the rest would lose their honour and their comfortable efficacy; as at the same instant that the sun should lose its light, it would lose its heat, its strength, its generative and quickening virtue. As sincerity is the lustre of every grace in a Christian, so is purity the splendor of every attribute in the Godhead. His justice is a holy justice, his wisdom a holy wisdom, his arm of power a 'holy arm.' Psalm xcvi. 1; his truth or promise a 'holy promise,' Psalm cv. 42. Holy and true go hand and hand, Rev. vi. 10. 'His name,' which signifies all his attributes in conjunction, 'is holy.'"

To say that God is holy is to confess that He is distinct from us in every respect. The essence of idolatry is the opposite of holiness. We are idol worshippers when we make God out to be what our imagination says He should be. That is the failure to worship Him as holy, as completely distinct and above all that we are or could imagine. Have you declared the holiness of God in your worship this morning? If we have not, we have failed to worship.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching