



REVELATION 4 & 5: ONE FOUND WORTHY

HOME GROUP NOTES

We're now going to travel to heaven!

Because whoever reads these chapters in Revelation 4 & 5 finds themselves, along with John, beckoned by Jesus to see the world from heaven's perspective.

This heavenly, symbolic experience we'll explore today comes off the back of John's initial encounter with Jesus in Revelation 1 to open the book and then Jesus' bracing messages to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3.

You may remember from last week that Jesus gave a motivating promise to each church to be faithful. The promise Jesus gave to Laodicea, the last church addressed, was that he would open the door for them to reign with Him on His Father's throne if they listened to Him.

Well, immediately after this promise, in the scenes of Revelation 4 & 5, John experiences this very thing as a door stands open leading to a heavenly throne room. John will taste here the destiny of creation and the purpose of our lives. And thus, it's been said that these chapters are the key to truly understanding the whole of Revelation itself.

Q: If Revelation 4 & 5 is the key to unlocking the purpose of the whole book, what question do you think Revelation is trying to get the seven churches, and all churches, to answer?

So, let's enter the open door with John as we hear, first, from Revelation 4.

READ REVELATION 4 (If in a home group, feel free to choose people to play each part conveyed by the different colours)

After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first 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 there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. ³ And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. ⁴ Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. ⁵ From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits^[a] of God. ⁶ Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. ⁷ The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. ⁸ Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

“Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God Almighty,^[b]
who was, and is, and is to come.”

⁹ Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

¹¹ “You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created
and have their being.”

As John passes through the open door into this heavenly sanctuary, he enters a beehive of activity. And whilst for us the images might appear strange and difficult to pinpoint their meaning, to John he has a heightened sense of *déjà vu*: he’s seen all this before, yet its all been re-arranged.

In his vision it looks like he’s walked into the Roman god’s supposed heavenly domain, as conveyed in Rome’s various temples and statues, as well as one of Caesar’s throne touring parties to his various colonies.

These civic settings and occasions served to remind people how reality is supposedly mapped out, showing who is in control and who is responsible for ruling on the god’s behalf as Lord.

In the case of Caesar’s touring parties, he would enter a city with his vast entourage and sit on a throne encircled by 24 dignitaries. They would offer him incense, hymns, cries of worthy along with other worshippers present, dressed in white and holding palm branches to show that he is deserving of praise and holds the mandate alone to establish the god’s reign of peace.

But in the ultimate throne room where John is now located, the gods and Caesar are nowhere to be seen.

Q: If we were to be taken in a similar vision to a setting in our society where do you think we might go?

Well, John’s memories of life in the Roman Empire are refurbished with a kaleidoscope of Old Testament imagery:

Q: What can allusions from the Old Testament can you spot?

- Here, worship is redirected to the One who sits on the throne, whose whole being erupts with gem-like colour of Jasper and Carnelian.

These gems recall the garment worn over the heart by the Old Testament High Priest, with 12 stones indicating his heartfelt love for the 12 tribes of Israel whom he serves (Ex 28:16-21).

In this vision, however, the first and last colour of those 12 gems, Jasper and Carnelian, pour forth from the One on the throne to vividly display that an encompassing love for all his people permeates his entire being. God is love!

- We see an emerald rainbow encircling the throne which recalls the splendour of God seen by Ezekiel (Ezek 1:28) and the rainbow from the time of Noah as a sign of God's unceasing faithfulness to restore His creation.
- The 24 elders are reimagined here it seems to incorporate together the 12 tribes of Israel and 12 apostles, mentioned elsewhere in Revelation (Rev 7 & 21:14), as a symbol of all God's people throughout time offering worship to the true Sovereign.
- There are flashes, rumblings, and peals of thunder and lightning recalling the dramatic scenes of Sinai as Moses received the Law (19:16).
- There are seven lamps, described as the sevenfold Spirit of God, which hark back to the same lamps in Zechariah 4, serving as a symbol of how people prosper – 'not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord.' These lamps before the One on the Throne represent the Holy Spirit.
- There's a sea of glass. The sea in Jewish thought commonly symbolised chaos, disorder and evil. But here in this heavenly sanctuary it's frozen solid – it holds no power in this place. (Rev 21:1 – 'there was no sea')
- There are also four hybrid creatures covered in eyes and wings who resemble the heavenly beings in Ezekiel 1 and Isaiah 6. This living creatures are angelic beings who have unhindered vision to the One on the throne and who offer constant praise on creation's behalf to its Creator.

This remarkable vision reveals the true ruler of the world is not Rome's gods or Caesar. It's the God of Israel, the Creator of the world - utterly unchallenged, abounding in love, supremely in control and worthy of praise. Our Father.

Q: Can you see therefore that, as John is caught up in a visionary experience, the prevailing images, ideas, words, and voices in John's world are witnessed but then refurbished by God's total rule in heaven?

Q: This scene is not just a familiar cultural setting but, with the link to the Roman gods and Caesar, also a disturbing memory and experience for John and the seven churches that holds power in the world. What memory or experience might we face in a similar vision that needs to be hi-jacked with the love and power of the King of heaven?

Revelation 4 depicts the Father's total will done in heaven, but it appears not to be equally the case on earth.

READ REVELATION 5

Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals.

² And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” ³ But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. ⁴ I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.

⁵ Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.”

⁶ Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits^[a] of God sent out into all the earth.

⁷ He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God’s people. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying:

“You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased for God
persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.
¹⁰ You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign^[b] on the earth.”

¹¹ Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. ¹² In a loud voice they were saying (along with those in this half of the room):

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!”

¹³ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying (with all of us in this room):

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power,
for ever and ever!”

¹⁴ The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

It seems that no one, not even Caesar, can truly bring God's will in heaven on earth – pictured by the inability of creation to open the scroll. And this leads John to weep.

John's weeping offers a discordant note to the joyful praise offered to God in this heavenly sanctuary. But John is redirected by one of the elders from his lament turning into despair because there is **ONE FOUND WORTHY.**

Q: Do we believe lament is improper before the throne or legitimate, even faithful? What might the difference be between lament and despair?

John hears that the Lion has triumphed, only to see a slain-yet-standing Lamb who shares the place of the One on the throne. Jesus is the Lion of Judah, the King of the world promised to emerge from the Israel's family line of kings.

But this surprising change from Lion to Lamb — in which the Lion image is never used again, whereas the Lamb image is used 28 times — shows that God's saves not through force and intimidation but through love: through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Q: What do you make of the idea that Jesus works in the world not by Lion power but by Lamb power? What might that mean for us today?

Now, it's not only the power of the Lamb's *work* that is shown here; the glory of his *being* is declared with his proximity to the throne – *standing* on the Throne.

His glory is shown also by his seven horns, a symbol of perfect strength, and seven eyes speckled round his body, a symbol of perfect insight and knowledge through the total power of the Spirit within him.

The perfect being and action of the Lamb thus provokes the adoration of the living creatures and 24 elders. They announce the power of his work: Christ's sacrifice purchases people from the unbelieving and hostile nations to God to reign with him.

This is startling because whereas Rome had an abundance of prisoners of war who were captured and then purchased by masters for further exploitation, Jesus' purchasing of those from the nations sets them free – free to be kings and priests, meaning that they have been freed to be fully human in the image of God who serve God and extend His blessing to all the families of the earth.

Q: How do you understand the idea that Jesus has purchased us to be a kingdom and priests?

**(If you want to explore this further, check out this excellent video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tw-bBfBDpE0>)**

This redemption by Jesus then ushers an explosion of delight throughout all of creation to show how worship to God and Christ is the heartbeat of the cosmos.

Every aspect of creation is touched by the effects of Jesus' work – as we see a bewildering number of angels in worship. That praise and acknowledgment of the true Lord then reverberates to every creature in the cosmos, to show the fulfillment of the Lord's prayer (Matt 6:9-10):

*'Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth, as in heaven.'*

These two chapters provide a picture of the future of creation set back in order, emanating around the throne of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit who blazes before them.

But this closing scene is not just a picture of the destiny of creation, it is also a call to join heaven now in the ever-expanding circle of worship, as the purpose of our lives.

When we worship God and Christ, in song and with our lives, we refuse as it were to sing from the hymn sheet of any other thought, memory, experience, identity, ideology, person or empire.

It meant particularly for the seven churches in a hostile environment, as it does for us, that our worship to Jesus as Lord becomes an act of resistance, 'songs of resistance', to anything that would divert us from experiencing the meaning of life. Worship is about where our allegiance ultimately lies.

Q: Where do we feel our society seeks to redirect our devotion?

As the curtain closes on these dramatic scenes revealing the Creator and Saviour of the World, we're left with the fundamental question of Revelation: **who is truly on the throne of our hearts?**

Prayer Time

Have we felt an urge to pray from any part of this session? A provocation to worship, or to cry out for help, or to repent?

As a group pray for one another in the areas that the Holy Spirit brought to light.

Extra Resources

If you would like to continue your own exploration of Revelation through these weeks or in the future, here are some helpful resources worth looking into.

For an overview of the whole of Revelation check out these fantastic videos from the Bible Project.

Part 1: <https://youtu.be/5nvVVcYD-0w?feature=shared>

Part 2: <https://youtu.be/QpnIrbq2bKo?feature=shared>

The Bible Project have also released a creative video on how to read Apocalyptic Literature:

<https://youtu.be/UNDX4tUdjIY?feature=shared>

If you want to go in a bit deeper, a good place to start is NT Wright's commentary, *Revelation for Everyone*, which explains the meaning of each chapter of Revelation in bitesize portions. A more devotional book, beautifully written, is from a hero of mine, Eugene Peterson, called *Reversed Thunder*.

A little more complex but great nonetheless are the books, *Reading Revelation Responsibly* by Michael J. Gorman which debunks a lot of unhelpful stuff we bring to this book and draws into sharper focus what the book is about. Then *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* by Richard Bauckham is possibly the best book on Revelation I have read. It's a small book covering the major themes of Revelation, it may keep you own your toes as it is quite academic, but it led me to worship more than any other book on the topic I have read! There is also a commentary called *Revelation and the End of All Things* by Craig Koester which is very helpful in exploring the meaning of each chapter in greater depth than say NT Wright's book.

Lastly, if you want to explore the book word-by-word check out *Revelation (Anchor Yale Bible)* by Craig Koester or Ian Paul's *Revelation (TNTC)*.

Revelation 1:3

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it...