

## Praise To the Almighty the King of Creation

### Revelation 4: 1-11

**Introduction:** 1) The great preacher of London, England, Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892), simply but profoundly said, “Beloved Friends, we may well continue to praise God, for our God continues to give us causes for praise” (1893, Sermon 2296). Such a simple theology is profoundly missing in our culture, and even in our churches, today. Few talk of a God who is “too big” as if that were even possible. Timothy George is certainly correct, “in much contemporary theology today, the note of God’s grandeur, greatness, and glory that so fills the Bible is noticeably missing. Such theology suffers from a doxological deficit” (emp. mine, *A Theology for the Church*, 158). Such doxological deficiency can be corrected, however, when we realize the God of the Bible is “a consuming fire” (Deut. 4:24), the living God into whose hand to fall is “a dreadful thing” (Heb. 10:31). This God cannot be relegated to the safety of the seminar room or scrutinized like a butterfly under a microscope. The God of the Bible is the God with whom we have to do in life and death, in time and eternity, the God to whom we must all give an account and whom no one can escape. Every human being, Calvin says, has *negotium cum deo*, “business with God.” (*TFC*, 160).

2) The God with whom we have business is majestically addressed in Revelation 4. He is praised as the King of Creation who is eternal, holy, and glorious, a God who alone is worthy of praise and worship. Actually chapters 4-5 constitute one vision of 2 parts:

Chapter 4 → God the Father and Creation

Chapter 5 → God the Son and Redemption

The two chapters are immersed in Old Testament text like Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1-2, and especially Daniel 7. Greg Beale notes that Revelation 4-5 parallel Daniel 7:9ff at 14 specific points (314-15). The thrust of the two chapters is that both by creation and redemption God is sovereign over His world. He created it and He redeemed it. He may do business with it as He wills.

3) Chapter 4 then focuses on God the Father and the throne room in heaven. He is the King. He is holy. He is the Creator. These three truths provide the expositional outline of our study.

### **I. Praise God because He is the King over all things 4:1-5**

The Lord Jesus has been walking among His seven churches in chapters 2-3 giving us a view from below, from earth. Now the scene shifts to heaven, giving us the view from above. All that is taking place on earth is under the sovereign control of the one who sits on the throne in heaven. Corrie ten Boom, who hid Jews from the

Nazis and went to prison for her efforts, says it well, “There is no panic in Heaven! God has no problems, only plans.” She is right. This is the first thing John draws our attention to.

1) The plans of God demands our praise 4:1

- “After this” refers to the vision of the exalted and glorified Christ in 1:9-20 and the 7 letters to the 7 churches in chapters 2-3. John is suddenly given a vision in “heaven” (mentioned 50 times in Revelation) and “an open door.” He then hears “the first voice he had heard speaking to him like a trumpet” in 1:10. It is the voice of Jesus. Our Lord tells him, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” This statement looks back to 1:19 which provides an outline for the book both in terms of structure and chronology. Write:

- What you have seen (Ch. 1)
- What is (*ESV*, “those that are”, Chs. 2-3)
- What will take place after this (Chs. 4-22)

Robert Mounce captures well the plan of God that is about to unfold:

“John is about to see “what must take place after this.” This definitely assigns the content of the following chapters to a period of time yet future, (although embedded in the material are sections that refer to times already past, e.g., 12:1-6). In 1:19 Christ had commanded John to write

“what will take place later”; now he will show him those things. Since events on earth have their origin in heaven, the heavenly ascent is not unexpected. A true insight in to history is gained only when we view all things from the vantage point of the heavenly throne” (118-119).

- When my 4 sons were small there was an occasion when they saw something on T.V. that discussed the potential of nuclear holocaust and the annihilation of the earth by the push of a button. That night Paul asked me if I was afraid someone might push that button and we would be wiped out. I confidently told him no, that I had no worries. Jesus has the whole world in His hands! God is in control and he has a plan to make a perfect New Heaven and New Earth (chs. 21-22) and no one can stop God’s plan from happening. “God has no problems, only plans.”

2) The person of God demands our praise 4:2-3

- “Immediately,” John tells us, “I was in the Spirit” (cf. 1:10; 17:13; 21:10). Four times this phrase appears in Revelation, each time taking John into an ecstatic, revelatory experience. In the tradition of the prophets, he is seized by the Spirit! What a gift for this lonely old man exiled as a prisoner to the island of Patmos (Mounce, 118).
- Like Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, he was taken into “the third heaven,” what the Bible also calls “Paradise.” This is the very presence of God.

And like Paul, whether this was “in the body” or an “out of body” experience we do not know. And further still, “John does not attempt to describe the “someone sitting on” the throne (cf. 1 Ki 22:19; 2 Ch 18:18; Ps 47:8; Isa 6:1-5; Eze 1:26-28; Sir 1:8)” [Johnson, EBC, 641]. He can only tell us what He is like! After all 1 Timothy 1:17 tells us our King is “eternal, immortal, invisible...” And 1 Timothy 6:16 tells us He dwells, “In unapproachable light; no one has seen or can see Him...” In our sinful, fallen state, no human can gaze upon this God in His undiminishable glory and majesty and live. No one!

- Still, John does his best. He says, I saw “a throne (40 plus times in Revelation; ¾ of all New Testament occurrences) set there is heaven.” Isaiah 6:1 says, “I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne.” Psalm 47:8 adds, “God reigns over the nations; God is seated on His holy throne.”
- Drawing from Ezekiel’s vision (1:26-28), John says the “One seated on the throne looked like jasper and carnelian stone.” Gordon Fee notes that in Exodus 28:17-20, “these are the first and last of the twelve stones mentioned in the description of the breastplate of the high priest” and that “both of them are red” (69). The jasper stone may represent majesty, holiness or purity, the carnelian wrath or judgment (Mounce, 120). John

also says “a rainbow that looked like an emerald surrounded the throne,” a reminder of God’s covenant to Noah and His faithfulness (Gen. 9:16-17). Put them all together and you have a vision of God’s majesty, splendor, glory and faithfulness. He is beyond description in appearance and utterly reliable in His promises. He is awesome, magnificent, transcendent and spectacular. There is no God like our God!

3) The privileges of God demands our praise 4:4

- John sees 24 thrones with 24 elders (Gr. *presbuterous*) sitting on them dressed in white with 24 crowns (Gr. *stephanous*) on their heads. The identity of these 24 elders has been much debated. Beale informs us of the various options, and then strike something of a compromise understanding between the two most popular views:

“Now a heavenly entourage around the throne is pictured. The elders have been variously identified as (1) stars (from an astrological background), (2) angels, (3) OT saints, (4) angelic, heavenly representatives of all saints, (5) patriarchs and apostles representing the OT and NT saints together, and (6) representatives of the prophetic revelation of the twenty-four books of the Old Testament.

The elders certainly include reference to OT and NT saints. They are either angels representing all saints or the heads of the twelve

tribes together with the twelve apostles, representing thus all the people of God. Identification of them as angels is consonant with some of our earlier observations that many of the traits and functions characteristic of angels are likewise applicable to humans (see on 1:20b). Probably the elders are angels who are identified with the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles, thus representing the entire community of the redeemed of both testaments (the songs in 15:3-4 may also point to the inclusion of OT and NT saints).” (322).

- I am of the judgment the redeemed are in view. Why? 1) Angels are never called elders. 2) Believers are granted to sit on thrones as co-heirs with Christ (Matt. 19:28; Rev. 3:21; 20:4). 3) White clothes, though applied to both angels and humans in Scripture, are particularly the apparel of the redeemed in Revelation (3:4-5, 18; 6:11; 7:9, 13-14; 19:8) 4) The “*stephanos* crown,” the victors crown (2:10), is appropriate more for the redeemed than it is for angels.
- What an honor this is for followers of this great God and the crucified Galilean. He created us and He has redeemed us in order that we might reign with Him! It is too much!! No wonder in verse 10 the elders surrender their crowns as they worship the One seated on the throne. We

gladly return in worship what our God has given us for we readily acknowledge all that we have was first given to us by Him.

4) The power of God demands our praise 4:5

- John now sees “flashes of lightning and rumblings of thunder from the throne.” This reminds the people of God’s descent at Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19:16-20. Symbolic of awesome power and strength, lightning and thunder appear 4 times in Revelation (4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18). It is likely that John is drawing again from Ezekiel 1. Mounce notes, “In Revelation the symbols of thunder and lightning are always connected with a temple scene and mark an event of unusual import” (122). Interestingly, in Revelation 10, “thunder judgments” are about to be unleashed on the earth, but God in mercy seals them up (10:4).
- John also sees “seven fiery torches burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God” (cf. 1:4; 5:6). Here again we see the perfect light bearing Spirit. The Spirit who convicts us of sin and changes our heart in regeneration (Titus 3:5) is the same Holy Spirit who is forever ablaze before the throne of God in heaven. Perfect in His person, perfect in His position, perfect in His purity, perfect in His power; “this is the Spirit’s only appearance in heaven in this book...this is rightly



understood as ‘the sevenfold Spirit,’ imagery taken from Isaiah 11:2...”  
(Fee, 70).

- What a vision! What a King! “Our affairs rest in the hands not of men but of *God!* Hence, when the world is enkindling the flames of hatred and slaughter and when the earth is drenched with blood, may our tear-dimmed eye catch a vision of *The Throne* which rules the universe. In the midst of trial and tribulation may our gaze be riveted upon the One who is King of kings and Lord of lords.” (Hendriksen, 99-100).

## **II. Praise God because He is holy in His nature 4:6-8**

- “Holiness so defines the character of God that it can be said to include all of the other divine moral perfections as well...Holiness in [the] absolute sense belongs only to God, since only God is untouched by evil” (George, *TFC*, 191-92). John continues to unfold the throne room vision given to him by Jesus. What we now see is both magnificent and strange. However, the point made is crystal clear as the sea of glass John now beholds.

### 1) His creatures show His holiness 4:6-8

- John sees something “like a sea of glass, similar to crystal...before the throne.” This adds to the splendor and brilliance of the vision. Maybe this represents purity and no need for cleansing in heaven. Maybe it stands for God’s transcendence and holiness. That it is a sea of glass

may pick up on the fact that “the sea is usually negative imagery in scripture, as a place that is wild and untamed. But here it has clearly been tamed, appearing like “glass, clear as crystal.”” (Fee, 71).

John then sees “four living creatures (Gr. *zoa*) covered with eyes” everywhere. And, one was like a lion, another a calf, a third had the face of a man and the fourth was like an eagle. In addition to being covered with eyes, they each had six wings. These are angelic beings of worship, who have the characteristics both of Isaiah’s seraphim (Isa. 6:2-3) and Ezekiel’s cherubim (Ezk. 1:5-25; 10:1-22). That they are full of eyes emphasizes God’s omniscience, His exhaustive knowledge of all that is or ever could be. The wings “suggest swiftness to carry out the will of God” (Mounce, 125). Dogmatism on their 4-fold appearance is unwarranted. However, perhaps this is what our God is communicating to us:

a) God is perfect in His authority. 4:7

The lion is king of the animal world. It emphasizes strength, and honor; that which is noble, respected.

b) God is perfect in His activity.

The calf or ox is a servant. It exercises great power for the benefit of others. It was the mightiest among the domesticated animals.

c) God is perfect in His majesty.

Man is the pinnacle of creation, and only man has a “face” in this vision. He is intelligent, rational and spiritual. He is the apex of all that God made. He is God’s vice – regent on earth.

d) God is perfect in His deity.

The eagle soars in the heavens and often represented deity. It is the mightiest among the birds and the swiftest of God’s creatures. These creatures are strong like a lion, serve like an ox, see like a man and swift like an eagle. Each in its particular appearance gives witness to the greatness and glory of our God. No creature is as strong as He. No creature serves as does He. No creature sees as does He. No creature is as swift as is He! (Mounce, 124-25; Osborne, 233-34).

2) His creatures tell of his holiness 4:8

Adrian Rogers calls the four living creatures “God’s cheerleaders!” While the meaning of their appearance may be unclear, their activity is not. “Day and night they never stop.” These angels never sleep. And, what is their message, their chant, their song? Echoing the words of Isaiah 6, they say:

“Holy, holy, holy,  
Lord God, the Almighty,

Who was, who is, and who is coming.”

I appreciate the insights of Alan Johnson on this verse:

“The four living creatures ceaselessly proclaim the holiness of God: “Holy, holy, holy” (cf. Isa. 6:3). In Hebrew, the double repetition of a word adds emphasis, while the rare threefold repetition designates the superlative and calls attention to the infinite holiness of God—the quality of God felt by creatures in his presence as awesomeness or fearfulness (cf. Ps. 111:9: “Holy and awesome is his name”). The living creatures celebrate God’s holiness and power as manifested in his past, present, and future activity. Such holiness cannot tolerate the presence of evil (21:27)....This hymn is the first not only of the five sung by the heavenly choirs in chs. 4-5 but also of a number of others in Revelation (4:8, 11; 5:9-10, 12, 13; 7:12, 15-17; 11:15, 17-18; 12:10-12; 15:3-4; 16:5-7; 18:2-8; 19:2-6). These hymns relate to the interpretation of the visions and provide a clue to the literary structure of Revelation. In these two chapters, the sequence of hymns shows that the first two are addressed to God, the next two to the Lamb, and the last one to both.” (*EBC*, 642). Yes, His creature continually and forever tells of His holiness.

### **III. Praise God because He created everything that exists 4:9-11**

Our King is the “Lord God, the Almighty” a title found 10 times in our New Testament, 9 in Revelation (cf. 2 Cor. 6:18). He is possessed of unlimited power and might. He is the great “I AM” of Exodus 3:14, the One “who was, who is, and who is coming.” Indeed “The future is characterized by His coming” (Beasley – Murray, 118). Because our God is eternal, infinite, and omnipotent, the worshipping creatures in heaven acknowledge that their very existence and being is completely dependent on the One who sits on the throne in heaven. In witness and word they testify to His greatness, to His worthiness. Wonderfully, we can join them in their worship.

#### **1) Show Him you believe He is worthy of your worship 4:9-10**

- Whenever the living creatures “give glory, honor and thanks to the one seated on the throne,” which is always and forever (!), the redeemed (the 24 elders), worship! And how do they worship? They 1) fall down and 2) cast their crowns before the throne. What He gave they joyfully give back. They acknowledge that all they have is His gift to them. They did not earn it. They did not merit it. Nothing they have would they withhold from the One on the throne who is majestic, awesome and holy.

- This brings deep conviction and raises a question: Am I withholding anything from my God? Even good things? Money? Time? Mind? Service? Heart? Chuck Swindoll is right, “We miss it when our focus becomes horizontal—riveted on people and things—rather than vertical—centered on God and God alone” (98).

2) Tell Him you believe He is worthy of your worship 4:10-11

- Our passage ends with a glorious and majestic hymn praising God as the Creator. Falling down and casting their crowns before the throne in worship, the 24 elders now sing to our Almighty Creator. “Our Lord and God, you are worthy...” Mounce notes that “the first words of the hymn are taken from the political language of the day: “You are worthy” greeted the entrance of the emperor in triumphal procession, and “our Lord and God” was introduced into the cult of emperor worship by Domitian. For the Christian only the One who sits on the heavenly throne is worthy: the claims of all others are blasphemous” (127).
- This singularly worthy One is worthy to receive glory (Gr. *doxa*), honor (Gr. *timen*) and power (Gr. *dunamin*). Why? First, “because You have created all things.” Theologians often refer to this as *ex nihilo* creation, creation out of nothing. Only God is eternal. The universe is not. Only God is eternal. Matter is not. This God spoke into existence all that exist

(Gen. 1). Second, “because of your will they exist and were created.”

God willed it and creation happened. God wills it and creation continues.

Had he not willed it there would be nothing. If He does not continue to will it, there will be nothing. You are still here because he willed it.

Adrian Rogers is right, “If you woke up this morning and you are still here, then God still has a plan for your life. That is worth praising Him isn’t it?!”

**Conclusion:** 1) Written in 1826 for “Trinity Sunday” by Reginald Heber (1783-1826), a bishop in the Church of England, the hymn finds its inspiration in Revelation 4:1-11. It’s title: “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty.”

1. Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!  
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.  
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,  
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!
2. Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,  
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;  
cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,  
which wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.
3. Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,  
though the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see,  
only thou art holy; there is none beside thee,  
perfect in power, in love and purity.
4. Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

All thy works shall praise thy name, in earth and sky and sea.  
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,  
God in three persons, blessed Trinity.

2) A. W. Tozer said worship is “the missing jewel in modern evangelicalism.”

Might a glimpse of the God of Revelation 4 help us rediscover that jewel?!