

“What Will Heaven Be Like?”
 Casting Our Crowns Before Our Creator
 (Revelation 4:1-11)

Introduction

Few subjects are more intriguing and interesting than the subject of heaven. Questions explode from our minds as we think about it:

- 1) Where is heaven?
- 2) Does heaven really exist?
- 3) What does heaven look like?
- 4) Who will be in heaven?
- 5) Who won't be in heaven?
- 6) How can I be sure I will go there when I die?
- 7) What will we do in heaven?

All of these are excellent questions, but it is especially the last one, “What will we do in heaven?” that is the focus of Revelation 4:1-11. In this chapter we discover that heaven is not floating on a cotton candy cloud strumming a harp; it is not an eternal vacation that soon grows boring; nor is it an eternal sexual marathon as an exalted male procreates with his multitude of wives (Mormonism); neither is it an everlasting orgy of wine and women as taught in Islam. No, our activity in heaven can be described and summed up in one word: worship. Worship of our great God is what heaven is all about, and worship is what we will do. For eternity we will see and be with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and for eternity we will give our worship to our God for: 1) who He is and 2) what He has done.

Revelation 4 informs us of 5 reasons why worship will be our joyous job, our outstanding occupation, our heavenly honor. Actually chapters 4 and 5 are one heavenly vision consisting of two parts: 1) Chapter 4 focuses on God the Father and Creation, and 2) Chapter 5 focuses on God the Son and Redemption. The chapters reflect important aspects of Ezekiel 1 – 2 and especially Daniel 7. G. K. Beale points out that Revelation 4 – 5 repeat 14 elements of Daniel 7:9ff and in the same basic order. They are also reflective of Isaiah 6 as well. In both chapters, God's throne is central. In both, the worship of God is essential. Let's note the reasons why.

I. The plan of God demands our worship. 4:1

After these things – after the vision of chapter 1 and the letters to the 7 churches in chapters 2 and 3, the scene changes. John, who is on Patmos, a penal colony and rock quarry for Roman prisoners, is suddenly shown a new vision and in a new location:

4:1, “Come up here”

4:2, “Immediately I was in the Spirit”

The plan of God for the end of history is about to unfold and such a plan demands our worship for at least 2 reasons:

1. There is purity in His plan.

A door (lit.) having been opened (perf. tense) in heaven! (cf. 3:8, 20) This is not man's plan, it is God's plan. This is not a plan from earth but a plan from heaven.

Heaven – not the 1st where the birds fly and the clouds float, not the 2nd where the sun shines and the stars sing. No, it is the 3rd where God reigns and angels worship. It is the place to which Paul was raptured in 2 Cor. 12:2-4 where he writes, "I was caught up to the third heaven ... into Paradise."

John also heard a voice in heaven sounding forth the clarion call and authority of a trumpet. It was the voice he heard in 1:10, it is the voice of Jesus.

Transition

There is purity in God's plan. It comes from heaven and ... it comes from Jesus.

2. There is purpose in His plan.

"Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this."

This statement is crucial and looks back to the divine outline of the book in 1:19. John has recorded what he has seen, the vision of Christ in chapter 1. He wrote concerning the things which are, the 7 churches in his day of chapters 2 and 3. Now he writes about the things which will take place after these things, the events of chapters 4 – 22. These chapters constitute the 3rd and final section of the book and describe what will happen at the end of history leading into eternity. That these events were future to John there is no question. That they are future to our day is virtually certain given: 1) the catastrophic descriptions of the chapters; 2) the close parallels to Daniel 7 and 9, Matthew 24 and 2 Thessalonians 2, all of which address the end of history; and 3) it is virtually impossible to reasonably identify any of the events of chapters 6 – 22 with past history. The seals (chapter 6), trumpets (chapters 8 & 9) and bowls (chapter 16) have not come. The beast, Antichrist (chapter 13), has not appeared. No, the scene shifts both to heaven (mentioned 50 times in Revelation) and the future as God lays out for us His purpose, His plan, for the consummation of history. Things will not unfold willy-nilly. There is purpose in God's plan. History is not aimlessly moving forward out of control. There is purpose in God's plan.

Transition

The plan of God demands our worship.

II. The person of God demands our worship. 4:2-4

Immediately I (John) was in the spirit (cf. 1:10; 17:13; 21:10). 4 times the Spirit enraptures John and moves him to an ecstatic vision. Perhaps John had returned to a normal state of consciousness, but with heaven's door opening, the voice like a trumpet and the Spirit seizing him he now experiences a fresh, new wave of ecstasy that carries him into heaven itself. What he first sees teaches us 3 marvelous truths about the person of God.

1. His authority is sovereign. 4:2

A throne set in heaven. Revelation is a throne book and Revelation 4 is a throne chapter. The word throne occurs at least 45 times in Revelation as a whole and 14 times in chapter 4. It denotes monarchy, majesty, authority, royalty, and sovereignty. The one on the throne is king and he sits (pre. tense) continually as sovereign Lord. Earthly monarchs, rulers and presidents come and go, but this one remains forever. As Isaiah 6:1 says, “I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up.” Psalm 47:8 adds, “God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne.” In heaven, no one doubts who is in control. His authority is sovereign.

2. His appearance is spectacular. 4:3

He is “like” a jasper and sardius stone. Ezekiel 1:26-28 provides the Old Testament background to this glorious vision.

Jasper – probably refers to a translucent rock crystal (cf. 21:11), perhaps a diamond. It pictures God’s glory and purity.

Sardius stone – a blood red stone, pictures both the wrath of God poured out (14:20) and the blood of Christ that purchased our redemption (19:13).

Rainbow – pictures God’s covenant to Noah (Gen. 9:16-17) and his faithfulness to keep His word.

Emerald – green, pictures life, even mercy as our God is the God of new life and new beginnings.

Taken as a whole these precious stones portray God in all His majestic splendor and glory. He is beyond description in appearance and utterly dependable in activity. He is awesome, magnificent, transcendent and spectacular.

Application: Such a God is worthy of our worship.

3. His attendants are sanctified. 4:4

Encircling God’s throne are 24 thrones occupied by 24 elders (*presbuteros*).

Who are they? 1) angels; 2) 24 star-gods of Babylon; 3) 24 courses of the Aaronic priesthood (1 Chronicles 24:5); or 4) the redeemed of all the ages. I believe it is the redeemed. Why the redeemed? 3 reasons:

- 1) Their chair – they are on thrones (cf. Matt. 19:28; Rev. 3:21; 20:4).
- 2) Their clothes – white, symbolic in Revelation of the purity and righteous acts of the saints (3:4-5, 18; 6:11; 7:9, 13-14; 19:8).
- 3) Their crowns – (*stephanos*) are victors crowns (cf. 2:10) which are appropriate for the redeemed, not angels.

What an honor! To be saved would be enough, to serve a great privilege, but to share in His sovereignty, it is too much (cf. 4:9-10)!!!

*Immortal, invisible God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,*

Almighty (v. 8), victorious, Your great name we praise.

Transition

The person of God demands our worship.

III. The power of God demands our worship. 4:5

We have seen the one on the throne.

We have seen the ones around the throne.

Now we see what comes forth from the throne and who is before the throne.

1. God has awesome strength.

Lightnings, voices (“sounds”) and thunder speak of the awesome power and strength that emanates from God’s throne. It reminds us of God coming down at Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19:16. But these things also meant then what they mean now: a storm; and in Revelation, a storm of God’s judgment. In Revelation 8:5 they follow the breaking of the 7th seal; in 11:19 the blowing of the 7th trumpet and in 16:18 the pouring out of the 7th bowl. In 10:4, 7 thunders are about to come forth, but in mercy God seals them up. In awesome strength God will judge this rebellious and sinful world, and each time He does His glorious power and strength will be revealed.

2. God is perfect Spirit.

Seven lamps of fire were burning ... 7 spirits of God

seven – perfect

lamps – light, sight

burning – active in performing their function fully

7 spirits – perfect Holy Spirit

*The perfect light bearing Spirit who convicts us of our sin is the same Spirit who is forever blazing before the throne in heaven. He is perfect in His person, perfect in his position and perfect in His performance. Of this perfect Holy Spirit Charles Spurgeon wrote:

*Not far away is He, to be by prayer brought nigh,
But here in present majesty, as in His courts on high.*

IV. The portrait of God demands our worship. 4:6-7

Sea of glass like crystal – unclear as to its meaning other than it adds to the splendor and brilliance of the vision. Some believe it represents:

- 1) There is no more need for cleansing from sin in heaven.
- 2) God’s transcendence, holiness and his unapproachability.
- 3) In mirror-like reflection the fact that all is revealed to God.

Hence idea of cleansing and holiness, omniscience and majesty are presented.

Four living creatures (zoa) – angelic beings of worship.

Appearance of Ezekiel’s cheribum (Ezk. 1:5-25; 10:1-22).

Activity of Isaiah’s seraphim (Isa. 6:2-3).

Full of eyes – emphasizes full knowledge, alertness and wisdom. Adrian Rogers calls them “God’s cheerleaders!” 4 specific truths are taught by them.

1. God is perfect in His authority. 4:7

Lion – king of the animal world, strength, honor. That which is noble, respected. It was the mightiest among the wild animals.

2. God is perfect in His activity.

Calf – or ox – servant, strength, great power exercised for the benefit of others. It was the mightiest among the domesticated animals.

3. God is perfect in His majesty.

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

4. 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 are 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!

Transition

The portrait of God demands worship.

V. The praise of God demands worship. 4:8-11

Six wings – service

Eyes full – great knowledge with understanding (searching)

Mouth – sing

*More important than their appearance is their activity. What do we learn?

1. Praise God in continual confession.

Night and day – ceaselessly! They are sleepless angels!

Holy, Holy, Holy – superlative attribution, implicit of the Trinity (cf. Isa. 6:2-3), a slight modification of Isa. 6.

Lord God Almighty – used only of God by Jewish and Christian writers.

Sovereign Lord (cf. 1:8). Found 10 times in the New Testament, 9 in Revelation (except II Cor. 6:18, which quotes the Old Testament). He is of unlimited power and might. Nothing is beyond His control.

Who was and is and is to come – looks to the I AM of Ex. 3:14. The Lord of creation is the Lord of the ages.

Beasley-Murray, “The future is characterized by His coming” (p. 118). This is the theme of the remainder of Revelation.

2. Praise God by complete humiliation. 4:9-10

Whenever – and it is always!

Glory – (*doxa*), praise adoration

Honor – (*timen*)

Thanks – (*eucharistian*)

Sits on the throne – position

Lives forever and ever – permanence

The elders – 1) fall down, 2) worship, 3) cast their crowns before the throne.

*What He gives them they give back! They acknowledge that all they have is because of Him. Nothing they have would they withhold from Him. What about you? me? Our crowns, money, time, mind, service, clean heart?!

3. Praise God with conscious adoration. 4:11

You are worthy – “taken from the political language of the day ... greeted the entrance of the emperor in triumphal procession” (Mounce, 140). For the Christian, only one is worthy, and He does not live on earth right now!

(lit.) “the Lord and the God of us to receive ...” why?

a) You created all things

b) By your will they exist and were created

God willed it and it happened. God spoke it and it was so. Such a God is worthy of our praise. Such a God is worthy of our worship.

Conclusion

Holy, Holy, Holy

*Holy, holy, holy! all the saints adore Thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,
Who, wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.*

*Holy, holy, holy! tho' the darkness hide Thee,
Tho' 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.*

*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!*

In heaven we will cast our crowns and worship our God. It will be both an appropriate and happy assignment in light of who He is, and what He does. We will know He is worthy then. Shouldn't we know He is worthy now?