**The Throne Room**

Revelation 4

In chapter one we saw the glory of King Jesus revealed; his eyes blazing with fire, his feet like burnished bronze, his hair white like wool and his robe white with a golden, priestly sash. Here was John’s response:

“When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, ‘Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.’” Revelation 1:17-18

***What a combination of GLORY AND GRACE!*** To see Jesus in all of His splendor is to be undone before the matchless splendor of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Yet, this Almighty Creator touches us with His hand of mercy and lifts us back to our feet with the words, “Fear not.”

Chapter two and three recapped the chapter one descriptions of Jesus in the introductions to each of the seven letters.

**The Glory of King Jesus:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * 7 stars, 7 lampstands * First and last; died and rose * Sharp 2 edged sword * Son of God, flaming eyes, shiny feet | * 7 spirits, 7 stars * Holy and true, key of David * Amen, faithful and true, beginning |

***Jesus holds the seven stars***, which are the angels of the seven churches. He walks among the lampstands, which are the churches. He is the first and the last, the alpha and the omega, who died and rose again. From his mouth comes the sharp two edged sword, the word of His authoritative declaration; His final judgment. Jesus is the Son of God whose eyes blaze with all-seeing fire and whose feet stand firm with unshakable stability and power.

Jesus is one with the seven-fold Spirit of God, ***eternally existing as the loving union*** of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is holy and true and holds the key of David so what he opens no one can shut and what he shuts no one can open. He is the amen, the honest one, the faithful and true witness upon whose word we can totally rely. He is the beginning, the eternal one; the God of all being.

So the first three chapters of Revelation have already shown us ***this is the revelation OF the glory of Jesus***. Yes, it is FROM HIM, but primarily it is the unveiling of HIM in all of His glory.

And even here in chapter four where the angel says:

“Come up here, and I will show you what must soon take place.” Revelation 4:1

We don’t hear anything about events or judgments to take place, instead we are transported with John:

“At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.” Revelation 4:2

There is something really important in the message and sequencing of this incredible book. **Before we get to chapter six** and the first seal is opened with various dramatic judgments unleashed, ***we get five chapters of revelation of JESUS HIMSELF***. Visions of His glory. Word of encouragement and rebuke from Him.

Surely this is significant. If we want to understand the great tribulation and the coming Day of the Lord, the main thing we need to understand is **the LORD whose Day it will be**. The ***main thing we need to see*** is not the first EVENT or sign of the end times but the face of God and the fullness of His glorious supremacy.

Then whatever else we see really fades by comparison.

It’s like a pastor once said, “The key to moving mountains is to look at God, not the mountain.” Or as it relates to Revelation and the end times: ***“The key to facing the end times and the tribulation is looking at God and not the tribulation.”***

Remember **when Stephen was being stoned to death** outside of Jerusalem, with Saul the Pharisee approving of his execution. Even as the stones pummeled his body and struck his head, he wasn’t looking at the stones or the people throwing them, his eyes were fixed on Jesus up in the clouds.

“Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’” Acts 7:54-56

***Whatever you are going through right now***, whatever pain or suffering, sadness or loss; whatever worry or concern, lift your eyes above all that and look to Jesus. The Lord Jesus is SEATED at the right hand of God the Father, in a position of eternal glory and dominion. But when Stephen was being stoned, Jesus stood up.

Whenever you need the Lord Jesus, **picture Him that way**. He stands up from His throne and looks down at you; seeing everything; smiling at you; waiting to welcome you home.

Now, **turn to Revelation 4** and let’s try to experience this moment along with John.

“After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven.” Revelation 4:1

We’ve already seen that **Jesus is the one with the key of David**; who opens doors no one can shut and shuts doors no one else can open. To the church in Philadelphia Jesus said that he had placed before them an open door. Then to Laodicea Jesus said, “I stand at the door and knock.”

Now, just a couple of verses later, John sees a door OPEN In heaven. ***Clearly JESUS is the one who has opened this door***, but interestingly we don’t see Jesus (as the Lamb) until chapter five. Still, he has opened the door for us into the very throne room of God, into the most holy place of God’s heavenly temple.

***No human would dare cross that threshold*** or even look into it without the Lord Jesus opening the door. To see the face of God in a sinful condition is to die. But Jesus has opened the way for us through the curtain into the holy of holies by means of his blood. The key of David is the key of the KINGDOM, and it is held by the KING.

So welcome, brother, sister! Come through this open door in heaven. Come up and see what the Lord wants to show us today. And what He wants to show us is nothing less than the glory of God! In this inspiring chapter of the Revelation we will see three ways to respond to an encounter with God. First:

**How to Respond to an Encounter with God:**

1. **Surrender** to the One True King

“At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.” Revelation 4:2

***When you come before a mighty king, you bow.*** First we see a throne, then we see there is a glorious figure on that throne. The Spirit of God has taken over. Jesus opened the door, now the Spirit has carried John into this vision of God’s heavenly throne.

**How to Respond to an Encounter with God:**

1. **Surrender** to the One True King

“And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.” Revelation 4:3

It’s interesting when John uses terms like ***“the appearance of” and “like.”*** Sometimes he struggles to articulate what he is seeing. But the THRONE was not “like a throne” or with “the appearance of a throne.” That was straight up, no doubt - a throne. And the One on this throne is not “like a son of man.” This is clearly The Divine Being. God the Father Himself on His throne in heaven.

***Three jewels are mentioned:*** jasper, carnelian and emerald. Jasper is a reddish rock. Carnelian is reddish orange. So the figure on the throne is described in FIRE-like terms of reddish-orange radiance.

***AROUND the throne is a rainbow like an emerald, which is green***. So a rainbow type green here.

The imagery here in Revelation 4 is largely drawn from **Ezekiel chapter 1**. There are allusions to Isaiah 6 and we will come back to that at the end. But the prominent references here are to Ezekiel 1, especially with the four living creatures with all the eyes on them.

In Ezekiel 1, the prophet sees ***a vision in the skies above him***. From a hurricane emerge four living creatures in freaky chariots, wheels within wheels moving in all directions with eyes covering them on all sides.

Then above these four chariot-riding creatures Ezekiel sees a shiny expanse, ***an enormous CANOPY like radiant CRYSTAL***. And a voice spoke from the expanse.

“And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance.” Ezekiel 1:26

In Revelation 4 (and Isaiah 6) the vision is of the throne room of God in heaven. In Ezekiel 1 that throne room is the whole world. ***God’s throne appeared in the skies above the prophet***, under a canopy or expanse that IS the heavens.

The glorious human-type figure on the throne looked like gleaming metal above the waist and blazing fire below the waist.

“And there was brightness around him. Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around.” Ezekiel 1:28

In other words: a rainbow around the throne. Brightness, clouds, thunder, lightning. Four living creatures covered in eyes, flying around. Unmistakable connections between Revelation 4 and Ezekiel 1. So let’s see how Ezekiel 1 ends.

**How to Respond to an Encounter with God:**

1. **Surrender** to the One True King

“Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.” Ezekiel 1:28

***Ezekiel the priest, living in Babylon***, had an encounter with the God of Israel, a vision of the glory of God, and he did what everyone does in those cases: **he fell on his face**. And don’t miss the last line. He fell on his face and LISTENED.

***What do you do when you encounter God?*** There are several examples of this in the Bible. But Revelation 4 and Ezekiel 1 are two of the most vivid and dramatic ones. Let’s see: step one: fall on your face. Got it. Check.

In other words. **You bow. You surrender**. You don’t stand up straight and casually stroll up to the throne, like “Yo.” Sup? The 24 elders show us what to do in v. 10.

**How to Respond to an Encounter with God:**

1. **Surrender** to the One True King
   * The God of infinite glory, matchless **Power** and everlasting peace

“The twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever.” Revelation 4:10

All of these visions **reveal truth about God**.

* The precious, rare, radiant jewels convey His glory and infinite splendor.
* The throne, the thunder, lightning and fire communicate matchless, limitless power.
* And the sea of glass, like crystal, around the throne stands for PEACE. Not a turbulent ocean but a perfectly calm sea, simply there to reflect the glory of the One seated on the throne.

**What else can you do** when you find yourself face to face with such a one?

Remember the disciples ***when Jesus calmed the storm*** with just a word. They were scared in the storm and afraid they would die. But when Jesus spoke and the storm stopped, then they were TERRIFIED. In that moment they realized they were not in a little sailboat with any everyday guy. It was the God of heaven there with them.

So, step one when you meet God: surrender. Bow. Fall on your face. Step two.

**How to Respond to an Encounter with God:**

1. **Celebrate** the grace of the King

“Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.” Rev. 4:4

When you find yourself suddenly in the presence of God, in His very throne room, ***what do you expect?*** The universal response of those in the Bible who encounter God is an overwhelming feeling of being UNDONE. Being exposed. Being obliterated by the holiness and justice of an all-seeing, all-glorious God.

What you do NOT expect is to be **placed on a throne**, given a white robe and a golden crown on your head.

Now, I realize that isn’t what happened to John or Ezekiel, but ***what do these 24 elders represent?*** I’m no math major. But 12 times 2 is 24. 12 patriarchs, the forefathers of Israel. 12 apostles. Seems this is either Israel times 2 or Israel plus the apostles. Based on the vision of the CITY OF GOD in Revelation 21, the bride of Christ coming down out of heaven, I expect the 24 elders represent 12 for Israel and 12 for the church. The bride of Christ has 12 gates, each a single enormous pearl, each with the name of one of the 12 tribes of Israel. And the holy city of God also has 12 foundations, ginormous stones, each inscribed with the name of one of the 12 apostles (Rev. 21:12-14).

So the 24 elders represent the leadership of ***ALL OF GOD’S PEOPLE*** throughout all of history. In other words, they stand for US. And look at what God has given us!

1. **Celebrate** the grace of the King
   * The robe of salvation, crown of **Glory**, and throne of authority

“Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.” Rev. 4:4

Imagine you’re walking into a wedding celebration and look down to see ***you’re in a swimsuit and flipflops.*** Completely unprepared for this event. All wrong. Super exposed. Embarrassing. Not even a T-shirt to put over the swimsuit.

That’s the feeling all people have before the holy God of heaven. ***You are simply NOT DRESSED for the occasion.*** The clothing of your life is covered in the stains of your selfish, rebellious choices, and God sees them all.

But at the moment you called on Jesus to save you, he took all of your filthy, stinky clothes and wore them on the cross for you. In exchange, ***He gave you His robe of perfect righteousness to wear forever.*** You will never see those dirty old clothes again. Forever you will stand before God in radiant, unstained and unstainable garments of salvation.

And that’s not all. Jesus, the true conqueror, places on your head ***the crown of a victorious warrior and king***. All of the seven letters had promises for those who conquer. That is the church victorious of our Lord Jesus Christ. The crown is a visible sign of GLORY, honor and recognition. It is a sign that God is pleased with your life and work. Like a **congressional MEDAL OF HONOR** pinned on the chest of a brave soldier.

Granted, we won’t strut around heaven showing off our fancy crowns with their various jewels. The elders continually fall down before the throne of God and cast their crowns before His feet. In the end we will say as Paul did, “I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live. ***YET NOT I, but Christ lives in me***.”

Any good things we do in this life we will look back and see **it was Jesus working through us**. Any bad things we do we will look back and see it was US resisting the Spirit of God. So any recognition the Lord will give us, whatever the crowns will actually be, will not be for OUR praise, but will go back for HIS PRAISE in the end.

And don’t miss the thrones these elders are seated on. Our destiny is not just to WORSHIP Jesus forever, but to WORK with Him forever. To REIGN with Him. ***He shares His throne with us, just as He shares His crown with us.***

***Do you feel the extravagant GRACE of this vision?*** We deserve to be vaporized in the holy, glorious presence of God. Instead he wraps us in a white robe, places a crown upon our heads and invites us to take a seat on His throne, joining Him in the administration of the world.

How do we respond when we encounter God? First, we surrender. We fall on our faces. Second, we celebrate His grace with deep gratitude and joy. Third. We have to deal with these wild creatures. Look at verse 5.

**How to Respond to an Encounter with God:**

1. **Sing** praise to the King of Kings

“From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder.” Revelation 4:5

First we see the throne. Then a glorious being on the throne. Then 24 elders around the throne. Now we see **the throne is in a STORM**. So this reminds us of Mount Sinai, the definitive encounter of Israel with their God, and the giving of the Law.

**How to Respond to an Encounter with God:**

1. **Sing** praise to the King of Kings

“And before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God.” Revelation 4:5

The Holy Spirit has already featured heavily in the Revelation, named right alongside God the Father and actually before God the Son in Revelation 1:4. There with the same reference to 7 spirits of God or the seven-fold Spirit of God.

We know **the Holy Spirit is associated with FIRE** in the Bible, since He appeared in tongues of fire on the day of Pentecost. And Jesus had said his followers would be baptized with “the Holy Spirit and with fire.” Fire is used to PURIFY and refine precious metals, so the Spirit is pictured that way. Torches also provide light in dark places, which fits the Spirit’s job of illuminating God’s Word for us.

A burning torch would also remind Jewish readers of ***Genesis 15*** when God confirmed His covenant with Abram by passing between the pieces of a sacrificed animal in the form of a “blazing pot and a burning torch.”

The pillar of fire by night was the sign of God’s presence with Israel in the days of their wilderness wanderings. So these torches are a powerful reminder to God’s people who often walk in darkness and distress, that God’s seven-fold Spirit is always with us ***to encourage us, purify us and guide us every step of the way***.

1. **Sing** praise to the King of Kings
   * Perfect knowledge, total **Supremacy**, absolute holiness

“And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind.” Revelation 4:6

Four creatures, as in Ezekiel 1, cover ***the four points of the compass*** and the four winds of heaven. In other words, they see and travel around the whole world simultaneously. But here they are simply around God’s throne.

These four creatures are **about to start the SONG** that will continue through chapter 5, with more and more voices adding to it. But first we have to appreciate the scene. Four creatures, each ***at the top of their respective food chain***: a lion, an ox, a man and an eagle. The wild land of the lion, the domesticated land of the ox, the dominion of men and the eagle in the sky. What’s missing? The sea. But the sea has already been mentioned as a calm, flat sea like crystal. So there’s no need for a great whale or leviathan here.

So this is **all of God’s creation**, ***including heavenly beings***, since these creatures have six wings and are covered in eyes. Thankfully we don’t have animals exactly like that or we would really freak out. But these four creatures are speaking or singing:

1. **Sing** praise to the King of Kings
   * Perfect knowledge, total **Supremacy**, absolute holiness

“And day and night they never cease to say, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.’” Revelation 4:8

This is their **continual message**: the perfect holiness of God. His infinite power and total supremacy. The eternal God of all-being, the One who sees everything and knows everything is “holy, holy, holy.” There is no one like Him. He stands alone.

Whenever you have a moment of clarity about the goodness and greatness of God, ***the appropriate response is WORSHIP***. To bow down in awe and amazement before the King of all Kings; to pause and give glory to the One most deserving of our attention, devotion and service.

What a privilege that we can lift our voices to join in this heavenly song: “Holy, Holy, Holy.”

In fact, let’s say this verse together right now: ***‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.’***

The song of the 4 creatures inspires the 24 elders to fall down before God’s throne, casting their crowns at his feet. And the 24 elders, standing for the people of God throughout history, Old and New Testament, all say:

1. **Sing** praise to the King of Kings
   * Perfect knowledge, total **Supremacy**, absolute holiness

“Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.” Revelation 4:11

The holy God of heaven and earth is the One who is **WORTHY of all of our praise**. He deserves all the glory, all the recognition, all the appreciation, all the gratitude, all the honor, all the authority, all the dominion, all the service. He deserves EVERYTHING.

***He created everything***. He sustains every molecule in the cosmos by the word of His all-powerful decree. And He appreciates when we slow down from our little rat race to acknowledge this. So let’s say this together:

***“Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”***

Next week we will see the progression of how the 4 living creatures inspired the 24 elders who in turn moved a host of angels to sing a similar song and finally, at the end of chapter five:

“I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, **‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!’** And the four living creatures said, ‘Amen!’ and the elders fell down and worshiped.” Revelation 5:13-14

Let’s say this last refrain together. ***‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!’***

And all God’s people said: “AMEN.”

Now, let me point out one more significant detail. Revelation 4 is clearly inspired by Ezekiel 1. You remember at the end of that chapter Ezekiel fell on his face before God and heard a voice. Look at what happened next:

“And he said to me, ‘Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you.’ And as he spoke to me, the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and I heard him speaking to me. And he said to me, ‘Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels…’” Ezekiel 2:1-3

***So the THEOPHANY of Ezekiel 1 prepares for the COMMISSIONING of Ezekiel 2.*** An encounter with God, met with submission, surrender and worship, becomes the appointing of a servant of the Lord – being sent out with a message.

The other Old Testament hyperlink in Revelation 4 is to Isaiah 6. There Isaiah sees the Lord, high and lifted up on his throne room in heaven, with angelic seraphim hovering over them, each with six wings, singing “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory.” Isaiah is overwhelmed and thinks he is about to be vaporized, until an angel purifies him with a coal from the altar. Then:

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.” And he said, “Go, and say to this people: ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand…’” Isaiah 6:8-9

Is it possible this is a COINCIDENCE? The two throne room scenes Revelation 4 reminds us of are ***BOTH COMMISSIONINGS***. To encounter God is to be sent out on His mission. And of course, that is exactly what is happening for the 7 churches in Revelation. Jesus appears to them, confronts their sin and impurity, and now is preparing them for their last obedience, their final mission to testify, even to the death.

So here is our summary for today. Come back next week for chapter 5 and more worship when the Lamb appears.

**How to Respond to an Encounter with God:**

1. **Surrender** to the One True King
   * The God of infinite glory, matchless **Power** and everlasting peace
2. **Celebrate** the grace of the King
   * The robe of salvation, crown of **Glory**, and throne of authority
3. **Sing** praise to the King of Kings
   * Perfect knowledge, total **Supremacy**, absolute holiness

Whenever you find yourself suddenly aware of the greatness and glory of God, this is the appropriate response.

First, bow down in humble surrender. Fall on your face before the God of infinite glory, matchless power and everlasting peace.

Second, rejoice in the mercy and grace of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Celebrate the gifts King Jesus has given you: the robe of salvation, the crown of glory and the throne of authority.

Finally, join the saints and angels in heaven in singing the praises of the God of perfect knowledge, total supremacy and absolute holiness.

When we encounter God He humbles us, purifies us and then prepares us to go out on His behalf.

Let’s pray and then sing together of the greatness of our God!