**Press On to Heaven** (April 5, 2017)

**The Main Attraction of Eternity**

**Revelation 4:1-11** (NLT)

4 Then as I looked, I saw a door standing open in heaven, and the same voice I had heard before spoke to me like a trumpet blast. The voice said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must happen after this.” 2And instantly I was in the Spirit, and I saw a throne in heaven and someone sitting on it. 3The one sitting on the throne was as brilliant as gemstones—like jasper and carnelian. And the glow of an emerald circled his throne like a rainbow. 4Twenty-four thrones surrounded him, and twenty-four elders sat on them. They were all clothed in white and had gold crowns on their heads. 5From the throne came flashes of lightning and the rumble of thunder. And in front of the throne were seven torches with burning flames. This is the sevenfold Spirit of God. 6In front of the throne was a shiny sea of glass, sparkling like crystal.

In the center and around the throne were four living beings, each covered with eyes, front and back. 7The first of these living beings was like a lion; the second was like an ox; the third had a human face; and the fourth was like an eagle in flight. 8Each of these living beings had six wings, and their wings were covered all over with eyes, inside and out. Day after day and night after night they keep on saying,

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty—
    the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come.”

9Whenever the living beings give glory and honor and thanks to the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever), 10the twenty-four elders fall down and worship the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever). And they lay their crowns before the throne and say,

11“You are worthy, O Lord our God,
    to receive glory and honor and power.
For you created all things,
    and they exist because you created what you pleased.”

***Helpful Background Notes***

1. Beginning in Revelation 4, John was shown another vision. He “saw” an open door, and “heard” the voice of the Lord commanding him to come up and see. (Ez. 1:1) It is God who opens the door, and chooses to reveal realities beyond our perceptions to John and to us.

2. Four times in Revelation John mentions that he was “in the Spirit.” (1:10, 4:2, 17:3, 21:10) This expression means that the Holy Spirit was giving him a vision, showing him situations and events that he could not have seen with human eyes alone. All true prophecy comes through the Holy Spirit from God the Father, and is revealed through human messengers. Whether or not John was “physically” present in the heavenly places or just spiritually present is debated by scholars, theologians and pastors.

3. The throne of God is mentioned 40 times in the book of Revelation. These references are similar to the few mentions in the OT. (Is. 6:1, 1 Kgs 22:19, Ez. 1:1) Mere human language cannot describe the incredible beauty of the throne of the Almighty God. Jasper and carnelian were beautiful, colorful, semi-precious stones. The glow of an emerald circled the throne, and the entire area was lit by God’s glory, reflected by countless jewels and precious stones. The gem stones were the purest substances known at the time, and reflected light perfectly and colorfully.

4. The primary activity in the throne room of God is praise. This genuine praise is acknowledging God and expressing gratitude for each aspect of His divine nature. The inward attitude becomes outward expression. Worship, or “worth-ship, giving God His worth,” becomes the pure, focused activity of those who truly understand the character of God the Father.

5. Surrounding God’s throne were 24 lesser thrones for the 24 elders. These beings are not identified, as the praise they are providing is more important than their names. Scholars have suggested some possibilities for the identities of these elders:

a. Because there were 12 tribes of Israel in the OT and 12 apostles in the NT, the number represents all of the redeemed of God for all time. (OT, NT, and beyond.) These 24 symbolize the completeness of God’s family, made up of Jews and Gentiles, faithful ones from the OT & NT, and with every tribe and nation represented.

b. The 24 elders are the heavenly counterpart to the 24 priestly ranks that served in the earthly temple in Jerusalem. (1 Chr. 23:6, 24:7-18) These heavenly priests mirror the functions of the earthly priests, but are perfect in their activities and praise, untainted by human sin.

c. The elders are an angelic group whose main function is to worship in the throne room. The 24 elders are heavenly beings, who reside in God’s presence, and are not meant to represent the Church.

6. In Revelation, lightning and thunder are associated with significant events in heaven. Similarly, when God gave the Ten Commandments, the presence of the Lord on Mount Sinai had been indicated by thunder and lightning. (Ex. 19:16) The OT frequently used lightning and thunder to symbolize God’s power and majesty. (Ps. 77:18)

7. Glass was rare in NT times and crystal clear glass was extraordinarily rare and nearly unknown. For the floor of God’s throne room to be made of a “sea of crystal glass” was the most amazing reality for any first century believer. The crystal glass was not literally an ocean or body of water, but rather was so large and reflective that it reminded the former fisherman, John, of the sea.

8. The four living creatures around the throne are high order angelic creatures, known as seraphim, who constantly serve the Lord God. (Is. 6:2) These creatures surround God’s throne, lead others in worship, and constantly proclaim God’s holiness. The eyes indicate knowledge and alertness, as the seraphim see and perceive all.

9. The vision of the four living creatures is very similar to the OT vision of four living seraphim in Ezekiel. (Ez. 1:5-10, 10:14) In the vision revealed to Ezekiel, each creature had each of the four “animal/human characteristics,” while in Revelation each seraphim has the characteristics of one of the animals/humans. The resemblance mentioned is to provide an understanding that the seraphim possess the traits indicated: lion = majesty/power, oxen = faithfulness, human = intelligence and eagle = sovereignty.

10. “Holy, holy, holy,” is a phrase that echoes throughout the book of Revelation. In Hebrew, when a descriptive adjective is used twice, this indicates a significant increase in magnitude. Biblical Hebrew only has one use of the descriptive adjective used three times, “holy, holy, holy.” (Is. 6) This indicates the completeness and fullness of God’s perfection. The echo in Revelation indicates the most significant attribute of God, His perfect holiness, for which He is praised.

11. (4:10b-11) This hymn of praise to God affirms that God created everything for His glory and for His own purposes. The point of chapter 4 is summed up by this verse: all creatures in heaven and on the earth will praise God, because He is the creator and sustainer of life. All authority belongs to God, as the one who is eternal, and who created everything in all of creation.

***Review Questions***

1. (4:1) What words indicate a transition into a new section? What did John see & hear? What is significant about the doorway?

2. (4:2-3) Who was seated on the throne? How did John try to describe what he saw? How is this description limited by language?

3. (4:4-5) What surrounded the throne? Who are the 24? What is the significance of thunder and lightning? What else was before the throne?

4. (4:6) What was also before the throne? What’s the big deal about glass? What is the “sea of glass?”

5. (4:7-8) Where were the living creatures located? What are they? What do the various characteristics of each creature represent? What do the eyes represent? What do they say?

6. (4:9-10a) What is the purpose of what the living creatures say? What do the 24 elders do in response to the living creatures? What is meant by “fall down?”

7. (4:10b-11) What does “laying their crowns down” represent? What do they say as they offer their crowns? What is powerful about what is said? What is the main point?

SO WHAT?

\*8. Now that we have been given a view of God’s throne room, what difference does it make? What aspect of God’s throne impacts you the most? Why?

9. What’s the “main attraction” of Heaven? What is the focus and purpose of those shown to be in the presence of God in this glimpse of Heaven?

10. How does this quick view of the throne room of God encourage you today? For what should we prepare?