

THE VISION OF THE THRONE IN HEAVEN 4:1-6

Well let's turn in our Bibles, please, to the book of Revelation chapter 4. We're going to read together the entire chapter, even though we're not going to cover it all today, because it opens to us an important new section of the book of Revelation. So follow along, please, as I read Revelation chapter 4.

“¹ After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter. ² And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. ³ And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardis stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. ⁴ And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. ⁵ And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. ⁶ And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. ⁷ And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. ⁸ And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. ⁹ And when those beasts give glory and honor and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, ¹⁰ the four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ¹¹ Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”

Now in our studies together of the first three chapters of this book of Revelation, we have come to an understanding of the first of the seven parallel sections that this book contains. You recall in our introduction to the book of Revelation, we said that this book consisted of seven parallel sections. Each of these sections took us on a journey that spanned the time period between the first and the second coming of Christ. Each parallel section described, from a different perspective, the spiritual warfare that we will experience during the time between the first and the second coming of Christ.

This first parallel section we looked at in chapters 1 through 3 showed us what spiritual warfare would look like in the local church between the first and the second comings of Christ. The spiritual condition and the spiritual struggles of these seven churches were not only a reality for them, they also represent the struggles of all the local churches that will exist between the first and the second coming of Christ. What happened in these seven churches has been happening in churches for the last 2,000 years, and it will continue to happen until Jesus Christ returns.

When we see what Christ commended in these churches, when we see what Christ criticized in these churches, when we see the warnings that Christ gave to these churches, when we see the promises Christ bestowed on these churches, we see that all of this instruction is not just for those seven churches that actually existed at that point in history in Asia, but they are also for our church and every church throughout the entirety of the age between the first and the second comings of Christ. And so these seven churches are symbolic and typical of all churches of all time, and the struggles they have and the triumphs that they enjoy.

Now the one great question that faced each of these seven churches is this: Were they being faithful to Christ and the instruction that He had given to them? Were they being lampstands that shed the light of the gospel in the world around them, or had their light grown dim? Were they preaching the truth of the Scripture, or had they let false teaching enter into their church? Were they faithfully confessing Christ before the world, or had they given in to the pressures of persecution? Were they living lives of holiness and righteousness, or had they yielded to the temptation to compromise with the world and its wickedness?

These same questions that Jesus set before these seven churches are the questions that have to be answered by every church, including ours. We must shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. We must preach the truth of the Scriptures. We must faithfully confess Christ before the world. We must live lives of holiness and righteousness. In a word, we need to be faithful to Jesus Christ and the instructions that He has given to us.

Well then, having completed the first parallel section of the book of Revelation in chapters 1 through 3, today we come to the second parallel section in the book of Revelation, which consists of chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7, and the first five verses of chapter 8. So chapter 4, verse 1, through chapter 8, verse 5, comprise this second parallel section.

Now here we have the vision of the throne in heaven, chapters 4 and 5, and then we have the vision of the seven seals in chapters 6 and 7. This section, from chapter 4 through the end of chapter 7, like all of these parallel sections, takes us once again on a journey from the first coming of Christ to the second coming of Christ.

In chapters 4 and 5, we see Christ having just accomplished His saving work on the cross, and He stands before God as the ascended Christ and receives the scroll out of His hand, being the one who just redeemed His people to God. Then in chapter 6, we see the trials and the triumphs of the people of God which they will experience between the first and the second coming, as those first six seals are opened. Then in chapter 7, we see the saints in heaven with Christ forever, after His second coming.

So we see redemption in chapters 4 and 5. We see the period of tribulation and struggle in chapter 6. We see the consummation in heaven in chapter 7. This is the journey that we are going to go on, the same journey we've just traversed—the journey between the first and the second comings of Christ.

Now then, even though we recognize these parallel sections in the book of Revelation, we must not lose sight of the flow of thought that transcends them and ties them all together and unifies them. This book, as we have said, sets forth the spiritual warfare that exists between Christ and His people, and Satan and his people.

This book opens, as you recall, with a glorious vision of Christ in chapter 1. We see Him there as the glorified, omnipotent God, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the one who has the keys of hell and of death. No one and nothing can stand before Him. All must fall at His feet like John did, in fear and submission and worship.

But this almighty Savior that was revealed to us in chapter 1, before whom the universe trembles, is also the one who stands in the midst of His churches and who holds their pastors in His right hand. This exalted, glorified, and majestic aweinspiring Christ loves His church, and sends His church out into the world to invade the kingdom of darkness and to build the Kingdom of God.

In chapters 2 and 3, Christ speaks to His church and He gives direction to His church for the conduct of their spiritual warfare. He tells them how they are doing in the battle. He tells them where they are succeeding and encourages them to continued faithfulness. He tells them where they are failing and exhorts them to change and reform their tactics.

What we see in chapters 1 through 3 is Christ at the head of the church militant as they do spiritual warfare in this world to advance and build the Kingdom of God. But this battle to advance of Kingdom of God against the forces of Satan is not merely an earthly battle. It is carried out from the very throne of heaven itself.

Chapters 4 and 5 open to us a vision of heaven and the role that it plays in this spiritual warfare. What we see is that the Father sits on the throne of heaven, and from that throne gives to His Son the book containing His decrees. And as the Father's decrees are opened and revealed by the Son, the conflict and victory of the church that's taking place down *in* the world, and the conflict of the church against the world, and of Christ against Satan—that conflict is unveiled, and we realize that the enthroned God and His Son fight with us and fight for us and that they together assure us of victory in the battle, as they direct that battle from the throne room of heaven.

This battle to expand the Kingdom of God is not merely an earthly battle that we fight down here by ourselves. This battle is fought from heaven, and God on His throne has decreed how it will go, He has decreed who will win, and the Son in heaven carries out the Father's decree contained in the scroll, and in doing so defeats the Devil and delivers victory to His saints, who are fighting the good fight of faith.

What do we have in chapters 1 through 5? We have an exalted Christ, we have a warring church, and we have an enthroned God, working together to defeat Satan and his people. And will we

triumph? There can be no doubt. We are and we will be more than conquerors through Him who has loved us, and saved us, and supplied us with everything that we need for victory.

So we have moved from a vision of the glorified Christ in chapter 1 to a series of letters from Him to His militant church on earth in chapters 2 and 3, and now in chapter 4 we will see the vision of the throne of heaven and the one who sits on that throne, and who rules and reigns over all the spiritual warfare on earth, and who leads His church to victory in that battle.

Well let us, then, begin to examine Revelation chapter 4. As we begin Revelation chapter 4, there is a dramatic shift in the literary style of the writing. In chapters 2 and 3, the literary style was that of ordinary prose. Chapters 2 and 3 were ordinary letters, dictated by Jesus to John, and were literal in their language and content, with very little symbolic imagery or symbolic language in them. Chapters 2 and 3 were verbally focused and directed to the ear, because each of them concludes with the exhortation, “He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

But beginning in chapter 4, and continuing clear to the middle of the last chapter of the book, chapter 22, the emphasis dramatically changes from a verbal focus that is directed to the ear to a visual focus that is directed to the eye. Dozens of times in these subsequent chapters, John says, “I saw,” “I looked,” “I beheld.” So beginning at chapter 4, Revelation becomes a visual picturebook, presenting in highly symbolic visual imagery the message that God wishes to convey to us.

It is important as we shift our focus from ordinary prose to highly visual symbolic imagery, that we not get caught up in the details of these symbolic visual images, but rather that we focus on the overall message that these pictures present. We must ask as we look at these visual pictures, What is the main message of these images? What is the big picture telling us? And we need to beware of trying to literalize these symbols, or make too much of their details.

So without further ado, let us then begin to consider chapter 4. Chapter 4 is a vision of God the Father sitting on the throne in heaven. The chapter contains two halves: there’s first of all the description of God on His throne, in verses 1 to 6; secondly, there is a description of the worship of God on His throne, in verses 7 to 11. So we have the description of God on His throne, and the worship of God on His throne.

Today we’re going to look at the first half of chapter 4 in verses 1 to 6, the description of God on His throne. And God willing, next week we’ll look at the second half, the worship of God on His throne. It says, Here’s what’s here; and then, Here’s what’s happening. This is what it looks like, and this is what is being done. And we’re going to do the first part this morning.

In considering together the description of God on His throne, in the first place this morning, let’s consider together the introduction to the vision. The introduction to the vision is in verses 1 through 2a. Let’s read together verse 1: “After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in

heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.”

So verse 1 opens with this phrase, “After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven.” Apparently, after having received the letters to the churches, John reverted back to his ordinary state of mind, and how long this lasted is uncertain, but subsequent to his vision in chapters 1, 2, and 3, he had another vision in which he sees a door standing open in heaven. He hears the voice of Christ inviting him to come through that open door and enter into heaven. The reason why we know this is the voice of Christ is because this voice that speaks to him is described as being like a trumpet.

You recall back in chapter 1, in verse 10, John says, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, ¹¹ saying, I am Alpha and Omega,” etc., and that voice of the great trumpet was the voice of Jesus. And of course, Jesus talks through the remainder of chapter 1 and on into chapter 2 and 3. So when he says in chapter 4, I heard this voice like a trumpet, it’s the same voice he heard back in chapter 1.

Christ here in chapter 4 and verse 1, tells John that He’s going to reveal to him what is going to unfold in the future. So He says, I’ve given you a vision. I’m now giving you the next vision, the subsequent vision, and this vision will also reveal to you future events. So John is invited by Christ to come into the dwelling place and presence of God; that is, to go through this door into heaven in order to obtain further revelation about the future.

Now I want you to notice in verse 1, it says, “Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.” So Jesus is inviting John to come up into heaven, and there heavenly realities will be made plain to him. Notice it says in the last half of verse 1, These things *must* be hereafter. He’s says, I’m going to show thee things which *must* occur.

So this book is not a record of what just happens to come to pass in the future by chance, but rather it is a record of what comes to pass in the future by divine decree. These things about to be revealed will *certainly* come to pass, because they are contained in the book of God’s decrees, that book that is sealed with seven seals that we’re going to be looking at in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Now this is a great comfort to believers, to know about what *must* come to pass, what *certainly* will come to pass, will come to pass because God has decreed that it *must* come to pass. The spiritual warfare is unfolding according to a plan, and the struggles we face are all under the control of God. History is occurring just as it should, and everything is proceeding according to plan. We know what we face, we know the struggles that we’re going to have, and we know the outcomes that we’re going to experience, because all of these things *must* occur.

So John is being called up to heaven to see things from that perspective, because it is only from the vantage point of heaven that the things that occur on earth can be properly understood and

seen for what they really are. So this vision helps us to see things that occur on earth as God sees them.

We often think, Well if I could just understand what God's thinking here, if I could just see this for what God sees it as, wouldn't that be great? Then you could have a proper perspective and give a proper response to it. Well that's exactly what is afforded to John, and through him, to us, because all things proceed from the throne of God. It is only from that perspective that we understand the details that occur in our lives and throughout history on the face of the earth. So it's a great comfort to know that heaven's in control. It has directed what must *certainly* come to pass, and in that direction is the security, the safety, and the triumph of the saints.

That brings us to verse 2. It says, "And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne." Here John declares in verse 2 not that he was transported physically and bodily into heaven itself, but rather, what is said in verse 2 is that he was "in the spirit"; that is, he went from a state of merely seeing a vision, in which he is still aware of everything going on around him, to a more profound state, a state of "being in the Spirit".

Remember when Stephen was stoned, he looked up and he saw God sitting on the throne and Jesus standing at his right hand? That was a vision, right? But at the same time, Stephen was fully aware of the people around him and the rocks that were landing on him, because he was praying for them—"Father, forgive them." So he had this vision of heaven, but he also had this awareness, at the same time, of where he was and what was going on. So in verse 1, that's what's going on with John. But in verse 2, something additional happens. In verse 2, it says "And immediately I was in the spirit."

So John went from a state of merely seeing a vision to now entering into a prophetic trance, in which the reality of the world around him faded into absolute oblivion, and his eyes were opened to see the spiritual world that is ordinarily invisible. The result is that he sees the throne of God, and then he sees the God who is sitting on that throne, and then with vivid symbolic imagery, begins to describe what he saw. In this spiritual trance, John goes through the door he previously saw. He enters into the throne room of God in heaven.

So John, as it were, ascends to the throne he sees in his vision, and loses all consciousness of the island of Patmos, upon which he physically remained. Having this vision in the spirit makes it as real and vivid in his mind's eye as though he *were* actually physically there. And that's what he means when he says, "And immediately I was in the spirit."

That brings us then to our second major point this morning. Having seen the introduction to the vision in verses 1 through 2a, notice secondly the substance of the vision. This is in verses 2b through verse 6. Verse 2b says, "and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne." Here is the spiritual center of the universe, around which everything revolves. We need to

understand that the spiritual universe is Theocentric. From the throne, God controls everything that occurs in both the physical and the spiritual realms.

It is only from the perspective of God's throne that all can be understood, because of Him and through Him and unto Him are all things. And the purpose of this vision is to show us that all things are governed by the Lord on the throne, and that includes the spiritual warfare we experience and the trial and the tribulations that we go through.

The throne of God is in control of all things in heaven and in earth. This is why the description of the throne precedes the setting forth of the symbolic descriptions of the trials and the tribulations that the church must experience here on earth in chapter 6, following all the way through to chapter 21. Chapters 6 through chapter 20 all need to be understood from the perspective of the throne of God. When dealing with any issue, or any event in our lives, we have to start with the throne first, and from there and from that perspective, seek to understand and interpret what happens to us. In chapters 4 and 5, the term "throne" occurs 17 times. Clearly, God wants us to have our lives and our faith and our focus firmly anchored in the throne. That, people, is our starting point for everything else.

Now in verses 3 to 6, we have a description of the throne of God that employs symbolic language, and we want to try to understand those symbols in order to understand the realities that they represent. John begins describing God Himself in verse 3. Notice what he says in verse 3. "3 And he that sat [on the throne] was to look upon like a jasper and a sardis stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald."

Whatever John is seeing on this throne is not God Himself, because we read in Exodus 33 and in many other passages that no unglorified man can see God and live. Furthermore, this is a vision. So John is not able to see God Himself, because no unglorified man can see God and live. But what he does see is the outshining of God's glory, and what he sees is that the glory of God is like, or similar in appearance to, three things. This glory of God that is outshining from the throne is similar—like unto, after the fashion of—these three things.

First of all, he says the glory is like, or similar in appearance to, a jasper. Verse 3: "And he that sat was to look upon *like* a jasper." It wasn't a jasper, it was like one. This word in the original language that's translated here "jasper" is only used in the book of Revelation, and it is uncertain what this stone actually is. But we are told some things about this stone in Revelation 21. I'd like you to turn there for a moment, please, and we'll look together at verse 11. He's talking about the New Jerusalem descending from heaven, out of heaven from God. Now notice Revelation 21:11: "having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal."

Now Revelation 21:11 tells us two things about this jasper stone, whatever it is. It tells us that this stone is very precious, and what that means is, exceedingly valuable. It also tells us that this stone was as clear as crystal. So it was something like a diamond would be. A diamond is

something that is very valuable, and it's also something that's white and clear. So what we have here is the flashing brilliance of a diamond that is pure and white. And this represents, of course, the purity and the holiness and the infinite value that God Himself has.

The second thing that John sees is that the glory of God is not only similar in appearance to this jasper which represents the purity and the holiness and the value of God, but it is also likened to a sardis stone. In the King James it says, "sardine," but the idea is "sardis." In fact, one of the cities in which the seven churches existed was the church of Sardis, you recall. This stone is one we know more about. It is one that is actually blood red in color, kind of like a ruby or a garnet.

Red, of course, is the color of wrath and judgment, just like white is the color of purity and holiness. Of course, the reason why red is the color of wrath and judgment is because red is the color of the blood that is shed for the atonement of sin, representing the wrath of God against that sin. And of course, the flames of fire that are in hellfire are a reddish-orange color. These are all the result of God's wrath against sin.

So these two stones represent by their color the holiness of God and the wrath and the judgment of God against sin. They represent His purity, and they represent His avenging justice. Pure white, blood red. His purity, His avenging justice.

If this were all that was represented of God, we would be in a terrible condition. But the good news is that there is a third likeness to the glory of God that is set before us. Notice the last part of verse 3: "and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald." You recall that the rainbow was given to Noah as a sign of the Noahic Covenant that was made after Noah and his family were saved from the wrath of God in the ark. That sign of the rainbow was given in Genesis 9:13. This rainbow, then, is a symbol of God's mercy and God's salvation. It is a sign of God's goodness and God's grace.

This rainbow is said, furthermore, to be like unto an emerald, which is a green gemstone. Now green in the Scripture is the symbol of life. You recall, for example, in Psalm 23, it says, He makes me to lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside the still waters. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Green grass was necessary for the life of animals and for the people. A green plant is alive. God is a God who gives His people life, and God is a God who saves them from His wrath and judgment in the ark of His safety, who is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

So what we have represented of God on the throne in verse 3 is that He is a God of purity, He is a God of avenging justice, and He is a God of saving mercy and goodness, who gives eternal life to His people. Purity, justice, salvation.

That brings us to verse 4. It says, "And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold." Now this saving mercy and goodness of God, which is manifested

in this rainbow that recalls to us the salvation of Noah and his family, this saving mercy and goodness is manifested in these 24 elders sitting on 24 thrones placed around the throne of God, who are dressed in white robes and who have crowns of gold on their heads.

These 24 elders represent those whom God has saved, of both the Old and the New Testaments. You recall that there were 12 tribes of Israel; you also recall that there were 12 apostles; added together, they make 24. Now to demonstrate that we're not speculating about this, turn please to Revelation chapter 21. In Revelation chapter 21, we see the 12 tribes and the 12 apostles together, making up the doors and the foundation of the New Jerusalem. We're going to read together Revelation 21, verses 10 to 14:

“¹⁰ And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal”—that is, the city's perfectly holy. That's the verse we looked at earlier, you recall. Verse 12: “and had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: ¹³ on the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.” And so Israel, 12 tribes, reached out to the whole world—north, south, east, and west. And people from all points of the compass were brought into the Kingdom of God through the ministry of the 12 tribes. That's what gates are for—let people in, right? Verse 14: “And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”

The church is built on, what? The foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. So this city is simply, not a literal city, but a picture of the church, and the church is made up of those who came in through the 12 tribes and those who came in through the 12 apostles, and they form its entrance and its foundation.

So when we come to the 24 elders back in chapter 4, it seems very apparent that these are what they represent—the whole body of people saved in the Old Testament and in the New Testament combined together, represented by these 24 elders.

Now it says of them that they wear robes of righteousness. It says they're clothed in white raiment. It furthermore says in verse 4 that they had on their heads crowns of gold. Now these white robes and these crowns of gold are exactly what Jesus promised to the overcomers back in chapter 3. Chapter 3 and verse 5 says, “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment;”—exactly what it says these 24 elders have on—“and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”

So these elders that have on these white robes have what Jesus promised to His people who overcame. But notice they also have crowns on their heads, which is a sign of authority and rule—kings, right? Notice chapter 3 and verse 21: “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”

Jesus promised thrones and positions of rulership, which implies crowns. You remember Paul said in Second Timothy 4 and verse 8: “henceforth there is laid up for me”—he says, I’ve fought a good fight, I’ve finished my course, I’ve kept the faith—“henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

It is specifically the crown and the throne, the position of rule and authority, that Jesus has promised to His people, and that’s exactly what we see these people having and doing. So they have the white robes, they have the crown, they follow the pattern of the 12 apostles and the 12 tribes spoken of in chapter 21.

Furthermore, these 24 elders are called *elders*. That’s never a designation that’s given to any other being than humans. Angels are never called elders anywhere in the Scriptures, but people are called that time without number.

Finally, these 24 elders confess in chapter 5, verses 8 through 10, that they have been redeemed by God and made to be kings and priests, things true only of the church, the whole body of God’s elect. Notice chapter 5, verses 8 through 10: “⁸ And when he had taken the book, the four beasts”—and here it is—“and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints.” So they’re engaging in priestly activity here, because they are priests. “⁹ And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed”—who?—“us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; ¹⁰ and hast made *us* unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”

Now you would say, Well, Max, why didn’t you just jump to chapter 5, verses 9 and 10 first, because it’s so plain there? The reason why I didn’t do that first is because there is a textual dispute about the true reading of verses 9 and 10. I think the King James has it right; nevertheless, there is another textual reading that has some significant support, certainly in verse 10, but not so much in verse 9. I think the KJV reading in verse 9 is quite strongly supported. The reading in verse 10, not quite so strongly supported. But clearly, based on all of these other pieces of data, these 24 elders have to represent the redeemed of God.

So the throne of God is surrounded by the saved of God, who share in His throne and who share His holiness, because He has saved them and given the crown and the robe to them as a result of His saving grace. We have God on His throne, we have the saved people of God sitting on thrones wearing robes of righteousness, having crowns of authority and rule on their heads. They are the collective church of God surrounding the throne.

Now verse 5 says, “And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.” The language of verse 5 causes us to recall the lightning and the thunder and the voice that was

heard at Mount Sinai when the law was given and the people trembled before the authority and the presence of God. You remember, that's in Exodus 19, and Exodus 20.

Now here, these glorified saints around the throne are reminded that although they have escaped the wrath of God, there is still going to be the lightning and the thunder of God's judgment falling upon those who have broken God's laws. You remember this whole thunder and lightning and voices from the Mount was designed to cause the people to tremble before the authority and the power and the wrath of God, and to fear to break His law. Well, people had broken His law, and now that thunder and that wrath and those voices are coming *for* them, to bring God's wrath upon them.

Furthermore, before the throne, it says in verse 5, there are seven lamps of fire burning, and this of course reminds us of the menorah that was in the tabernacle, that seven-armed lamp that was in the holy place, which had seven flames on the top of it. We have seen this applied to the Holy Spirit in chapter 1.

So before the throne there are seven lamps of fire, which it specifically says here represent the seven Spirits of God. Now as we've seen before, there's only one Spirit, but the number seven is the number of completion. So here we have a representation of the complete perfection of the Holy Spirit, in all the fullness of His divine nature and work. He is not just a Holy Spirit, He is a perfect, complete Spirit.

Now notice as a way of an aside, the Trinity here. God the Father, sitting on the throne; the Holy Spirit is before the throne, represented by these seven lamps; and then of course, the Lord Jesus Christ appears and receives the scroll out of the hand of the Father. We're going to see this even more clearly when we get to chapter 5.

But putting that aside, as we take verse 5 altogether, these seven burning lamps and these lightning and thundering voices all manifest the authority of God and the righteous wrath of God that will be poured out upon those who have broken the laws of God. At Mount Sinai, God thundered out His threats of judgment on those who would defy His authority, and now He is going to carry out those threats against those who have in fact defied His authority. Here we see the dreadful power and majesty and authority of God coming in judgment on those who have dared to defy His authority and His law.

That brings us to verse 6: "And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind." Now verse 6 gives us the final descriptive statement of the throne of God, and it says two things: Number one, "before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal."

Let me say up front that the meaning of this symbolic imagery is unclear and many different suggestions have been offered as to what this "sea of glass like unto crystal" represents. I've looked at them all, and I think the best explanation is that this sea of glass represents the

peacefulness and the purity that surrounds the throne of God—the peacefulness and the purity that surrounds the throne of God. The reason why I say that is because it is the *opposite* of what is spoken of in Isaiah 57, verses 20 and 21. In Isaiah 57, verses 20 and 21, it says this: “But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. ²¹ There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.”

Now in polar opposite to that statement, and in direct contrast with it, here is not a troubled sea, but a perfectly calm sea; not a sea that cannot rest, but one that is perfectly peaceful; not a sea of filthy mire and dirt, but one that is perfectly pure, like clear crystal. The turmoil and the trouble and the mire and the dirt of wickedness is entirely absent from the throne of God, and it is the opposite of all that characterizes the throne of God. Everything—this sea, this ocean that is around the throne—is pure and peaceful and tranquil and stable. There is around the throne no ripples of anxiety, no mire of filth, no restlessness of conscience that marks the environment around the throne of God—none of these things. No ripple of anxiety, no mire of filth, no restlessness of conscience marks the environment around the throne.

Finally, there is the angelic presence around the throne, represented by these four creatures full of eyes before and behind. Now we’re going to talk more about these creatures next week, as we study the worship that takes place around the throne. But suffice it to say for now that there are four of these angelic creatures so that they may be sent to do the will of God in the four corners of the earth—north, south, east, and west. And not only do they do the will of God, we’re going to see that they lead in the worship of God. They are God’s ministers to do his will, and they are God’s attendants to sing His praise, and they are God’s leaders to provoke His worship.

Well what we have here, then, is a glorious description of the glory of God. We see His sovereignty as He rules from the throne upon which He sits. We see His purity as He dwells without any sin. We see His power as He executes His wrath upon His enemies. We see His grace as He saves His church and brings them into His very presence. And above all, we see His glory as He displays His majesty to the world and to the saints and to the angels.

This is indeed a God to fall down before and worship. And this is a God that we can trust and serve, even when, in His providence, He appoints our sufferings in the execution of the spiritual warfare that He appoints to us, which we’re going to see as these seven seals are opened and unfolded in the rest of the book.

People, in your spiritual warfare and in your struggles, you’ve got to start with God. You’ve got to start with, not the god of modern culture, but the God of divine Scripture—the God who sits on the throne, who is pure, who is an avenging judge, who is a compassionate Savior, who executes His wrath and shows His grace, who displays His majesty, and before whom all the world falls down to worship.

And if this God puts you through a little trouble in the spiritual warfare that's required to build His kingdom, He's worthy of the worst of your sufferings in order to bring to Him the glory that is possible out of your life.

Well, this is the God that we will be seeing carrying out His decree and His plan in the rest of the book. Shall we pray together.

Father, I just really feel the sense of consciousness of having struggled with words to describe this scene. Words cannot do it justice. We see John struggling for imagery to describe it. And Lord, we know that whatever we know, it isn't nearly all that there is. So Father, we just pray that you would accept our humble worship. Father, we recognize your exalted glory, and Lord, we bow before you, and we adore your self-revelation and your glorious person. And Father, I pray that we would always and ever keep this vision of God before us as we go through, down here on earth, whatever you have decreed for us to experience. Father, we just pray that we would set our affections and our eyes and our minds and our hearts on the things above. In Jesus' name. Amen.