



# Potomac Hills

## Presbyterian Church, PCA



By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

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Revelation 4:1-11

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English Standard Version

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### *“The Opening of Heaven”*

This is the 13<sup>th</sup> sermon in the series on The Book of Revelation entitled,  
*“The King’s Triumphant Return.”*

#### **Revelation 4:1-11**

*“After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”<sup>2</sup> At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God,<sup>6</sup> and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind:<sup>7</sup> the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight.<sup>8</sup> And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, 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!”<sup>9</sup> And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever,<sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who is seated on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,<sup>11</sup> “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.”*

*Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us Your Word and making us Your people. As we look at this vision of heaven, overwhelm us as you overwhelmed John. Remind us of what this is all about. Remind us that we join a worship service already in progress. Lord, help us to meet Jesus in His glory as we see Him in these words. Do this for each of us, this morning, in the majestic name of Jesus we pray, Amen.*

### **INTRODUCTION: *We Need New Glasses.*** <sup>1</sup>

There's a scene in the movie *My Cousin Vinny* about glasses. Now ... this isn't the best movie in the world, but it's really funny. However there's a ton of bad language in it too, so it's one of those mixed reviews.

Anyway, the movie's is about a murder trial in Alabama and one of the witnesses is an elderly lady who testifies that she clearly saw the two suspects leave the scene of the crime. During the trial the defense counsel is able to demonstrate that her vision isn't nearly as good as she claims. To which she sheepishly replies, "I think it's time for thicker glasses."

Glasses determine how we see the world. Now that makes more sense for those of us who actually wear glasses ... or contacts as the case may be. So let me ask those who wear glasses to remember **the first time you put them on**. The world around you came into focus.

Perhaps for you it wasn't all that dramatic. For me it was.

I was in the third grade and parked in the lowest reading group in the grade. My parents discovered I needed glasses one night after dinner ... pretty much by accident. We had company for dinner that night and so I had to sit on the other side of the table ... next to my sister (perish the thought). But from the other side of the table I could now see the clock in the kitchen, which was normally behind me. Now ... to this day ... after dinner my dad has a cup of coffee and takes off his glasses and lays them down on the table. And this night he laid them down next to me. And so I picked them up and put them on.

And I said, "Hey look, there's numbers on the clock."

And I took them off, "Now they're gone!"

And put them back on, "Now they're back!"

And my parents went into a full-blown panic, rushed me to the only evening optometrist they could find ... at the S.S. Kresge's Department Store (which, in 1977, became Kmart) and there I had my first eye exam. And they discovered I was pretty much blind. And so I got my first pair of glasses ... with tortoise shell frames. Which, once again, are very stylish. I was just 40 years ahead of everyone else. And I remember being in the middle of the back seat of my parent's old station wagon (yes, it runs in the family), and since we didn't have seat belts back then I was leaning forward on the front seat ... and looking out the front window with my new glasses ... and I was reading **all the signs** on the way home ... because **I never knew** before that all those signs had words on them.

And my mom cried all the way home.

And three weeks later I was in the top reading group in my grade.

**Glasses** dramatically changed my life. Reality came into focus.

Now for some of you who don't wear glasses ... think about when you wear sunglasses. Sunglasses protect our eyes from the glare, but by doing so, they slightly distort reality. Some

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of the Introduction came from *Discipleship on the Edge* by Dr. Darrell Johnson, pages 129-130

colors are dulled, others sharpened. If we always wore sunglasses, we would have an inaccurate view of reality. And bumps and bruises from walking into things.

The fact of the matter is that every one of us wears a set of glasses. These glasses don't come from an Optometrist. These glasses were given to us by our parents and by our family, by our experiences, by our teachers, and by our culture. These glasses are shaped by our relationships, the books we read, the movies we see, the songs we sing, and the sorrows and joys we live through.

The glasses we wear provide us with **a frame of reference** ... they give us **our perception of reality**. The question is then: Is my perception of reality correct? Am I seeing things the way they really are?

Now when I began this series on the Book of Revelation back in September I told you that this understanding of reality affects our lives profoundly.

**2 Corinthians 4:18** says, "*as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*"

Let me point out a few ways it helps us to see the rest of life differently. I believe that if we really understand who Jesus is and what He's doing in the world, then we'll see every part of life differently. Our possessions aren't things that we've earned or deserve. Nor are they the source of meaning in life, even though we often **act** as if they can provide that for us. But rather, the spiritual reality is that all possessions are gifts from God, to be used for His glory.

How about when we're facing our various trials and temptations? The spiritual reality is that if Jesus is in control, if He's exercising His pastoral care over us, then we have no grounds for getting angry about our lot in life. We have no reason to complain about how unfair life is. Instead we'll see even these trials as controlled by God. He will use them in our lives for His good purposes, transforming us into the likeness of His Son, comforting others through us, and bringing glory to His Name.

The book of Revelation was written to help us **remember these truths**. These truths are available only through God's revelation of truth in His Word — in His living Word, Jesus, and in His written Word, the Bible. The Bible is our authority, the source God gives us to see and understand the spiritual **realities** that we otherwise would never see.

Now put all of this together and what do we have?

What we have in Revelation is the disclosure of **an alternate reality** ... and an exhortation to John's Christian friends to live their lives in keeping with that reality. One scholar suggests that what Revelation is designed to do is to purge our imagination and to give us an alternate vision of the world in which we live. To John's contemporaries and to us, the world, you see, **appears** to be one thing. In fact, it's something quite different from what it appears to be, but only **faith** can see that. Only God can show us **what's really happening** in the world and what life and history mean. The world looks very different from heaven; things take on such a very different meaning when seen from a heavenly, divine, transcendent, eternal perspective.

In imperceptible ways we all succumb to the temptation to accept what we can **see**, what we **touch**, what we **hear** as **ultimate reality** even when we know it's not. The **visible** trumps the **invisible** every day in our lives. The **tangible** trumps the **intangible**. The **temporal** trumps the **eternal**. How many of us would have to admit that far, far too much of the time we live **as if the Almighty were not working out His purposes** of grace and judgment in the world with a view to bringing its entire history suddenly to a dramatic, catastrophic close?

I mean ... we text, we shop, we eat and drink, we make small talk while multitudes drop

dead around us, slip off to hell, while the great prospect of heaven remains so dim to us that we can go for days, weeks without thinking a serious thought about it. **You cannot live the Christian life this way**, says John. You **cannot**, you **must not** allow the **visual** to overwhelm the **invisible**. There's but **one** reality, **one** truth and that is the reality, the truth *as it is in heaven*. John is bringing that reality down to us as he was given to see it and in a form dramatic enough to **arrest** our attention and to **penetrate** our consciences.

And now we've gotten to Revelation, chapter 4, and we're entering the world of apocalyptic images. And it's time to put on our Revelation glasses. So let's do that and begin looking at what John sees, and then what John hears.

We'll start with ...

#### v. 1: **THE SUMMONS OF CHRIST** <sup>2</sup>

*"After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."*

This passage starts out with the phrase **"After this I looked."** It's a phrase that we'll see again and again as we study this book. It shows up in chapters 7, 15, 18, and 19. It's important for us to realize that John is **NOT** signaling a particular chronology of the future by this statement, as though what happens next will be subsequent to whatever happened in the previous chapter. He's **NOT** saying this thing happened and then this second thing happened after the first thing. Not everyone likes that because it kind of wrecks the dispensational premillennial view of coming attractions.

Rather, John is merely telling us the order in which he received these visions. He received this vision, and after this he looked, and he got another vision. Since the visions will repeat themselves, a failure to appreciate this point will lead us astray. Having heard that Jesus reigns over the church in the letters he writes to the seven churches of chapters 2 and 3, John is now given a sight of Jesus reigning in glorious triumph.

The scene now changes from the closed door in Laodicea to an open one that leads to heaven; the mention of a throne in chapter 3 now leads to a glimpse of one in chapter 4. It's as if Jesus is saying, "okay, you won't open the door of the church to me here on earth, then I'll open the door of the church here in heaven." And from the poverty stricken state of the church on earth, John's gaze is taken upwards **to things as they truly are**; the upward glance is often the signal of a new perspective on things. God is in control of providence. The church may be languishing; Satan may be doing his worst; but God is reigning on high. Two issues change our perspective: location and time.

As for **location**, we are taken up to **'heaven'**, not the life hereafter so much as the life here and now, but **from a different perspective**. As Paul reminds the Ephesians in **Ephesians 1:3**, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places."* So here John is reminded of a greater reality than that which can be **seen** and **touched**. The opening of heaven is a **characteristic**

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#### **2 The Exposition of the text is adapted from the books:**

*Triumph of the Lamb* by Dr. Dennis Johnson, pages 95-103

*Discipleship on the Edge* by Dr. Darrell Johnson, pages 129-142

#### **And the sermons:**

*"Jesus' Throne"* by Mark Driscoll, Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, 9/28/08

*"Heaven's Throne"* by Dr. Derek Thomas, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS, 10/7/07

**apocalyptic phenomenon**, preparing us for the giving of new (or perhaps forgotten) revelation. How much the church today needs to pay attention to this! There's a reality which transcends that which we can see with our physical eyes.

As for **time**, John is shown "*what must take place after this*," a reference which appears to include the whole of history from John's time to ours and beyond. We interpret it this way since John has already used this phrase in Revelation 1:19, and so it's reasonable to conclude that its repetition here is signaling **a parallel vision**: what we see in chapter 4 is true **at the same time** as what is seen in chapters 2 and 3. Jesus is reigning **AS** He writes to the seven churches. Encapsulated in a single vision is the future of the church and the world. This is not Science Fiction, **but Biblical reality**: God has the whole world (and the church) in His hands! As **Jeremiah 17:12** says, "*A glorious throne set on high from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary.*"

Chapters 4 and 5 belong together for they establish **the same two truths**: that **God is sovereign**, and that **God is to be worshipped**. These truths complement one another; they belong together as shoes upon feet, but because of the effects of the fall mankind has neglected both, and the church has often failed to see the connection between the two. The saying goes 'If God is not sovereign, then God is not God' ... and how right that is! From the start, God showed Himself as Creator, sovereignly making all things out of nothing, bringing everything that has existence into being by the Word of His mouth.

The story of the Bible is the story of mankind ignoring His kingship, coveting other lords to rule over us, ones that could be manipulated to do whatever we wanted. Worship, consequently, was misplaced: man has worshipped creatures rather than the Creator ... as **Romans 1:25** teaches, "*They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.*"

Now, in one vision, Revelation brings into focus before us the One who truly rules the world. The One ...

### **v. 2-3: WHO IS ON THE THRONE**

*"At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. <sup>3</sup> 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."*

**"Behold, a throne!"** It's not way out there ... it's not way up there ... it's right here ... it's close at hand. You can't see it with the unaided eye. You can't see it with the pair of glasses given to you by the culture. But put on your Revelation glasses. **"Behold, a throne!"** Do you see the throne? Can you imagine the throne? You need to because it's the most **dominant image** of Revelation. The Apostle John directly refers to it 47 times and indirectly another 77 times. **"Behold, a throne!"**

*"Behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne."* Good News! The throne of the universe is occupied! Again, with our ordinary glasses we would think otherwise. It often feels like the headquarters has been abandoned. Like there's no one in charge ... no one in control. Or worse, that there's been a coup, and the powers of chaos, evil, and death have stormed the palace and taken over. But look, **"a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne."**

It's the kind of vision that Bible readers will have noticed before. In particular, it shows some similarities to the vision of God in Ezekiel 1, with its throne and rainbow. If you've been attending Rich's Sunday School class on Ezekiel then this is old hat to you. God's dazzling light

is portrayed by being like brilliant precious jewels. These precious stones are the perfect symbol, for jasper is a translucent stone like glass, revealing and yet concealing. And the colors of carnelian range from yellow to red to green. The One who sits on the throne is altogether lovely, dazzling beyond description.

Several Old Testament images come together: a rainbow whose beauty is a sign of God's covenant mercy to a fallen world, which we see in Genesis 9. The rainbow reminds us of its appearance after the flood as a sign of God's mercy to Noah and his family. Precious stones anticipate an entire list of precious stones in chapter 21. In some respects, the rainbow together with the precious stones anticipates the new creation. But God is not there by Himself. We have to see ...

#### **v. 4: WHO IS AROUND THE THRONE**

*“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.”*

God's throne is surrounded by twenty-four thrones on which sit twenty-four elders. The number, twenty four, is a way of portraying both the twelve tribes of Israel and twelve apostles of the New Testament era, both serving as a representation of the whole church. And this would fulfill the promise of **Matthew 19:28**, *“Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”*

Some scholars see them as representatives of the twenty-four orders of priests in the Old Testament. Either way, what is being shown is of great significance. The saints of the Old Testament period, together with those who have died thus far in the New Testament period, are not only alive; they are reigning! To saints concerned about loved ones who have been martyred ... many of the first readers of Revelation were concerned about their friends and relatives who had died in this way ... this vision could only have come as wonderful news.

Wonderful ... but frightening ... because next we see ...

#### **v. 5-6a: WHAT IS BEFORE THE THRONE**

*“From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God,<sup>6</sup> and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.”*

This language of **“lightning ... rumblings ... and thunder”** is reminiscent of Sinai and the giving of the Law, which we see in **Exodus 19:16**, *“On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled.”*

Before the throne are *“seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God.”* This imagery was also used back in chapter 1, and it comes to us from the prophet Zechariah. **Zechariah 4:2, 6, 10**, *“And he said to me, “What do you see?” I said, “I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it.” ... Then he said to me, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.” ... For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. “These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth.”*

In the next chapter, a further explanation is given describing these seven spirits, **Revelation 5:6**, *“And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I*

saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.” The Zechariah passages help us understand that what is in view here is that the Lamb (Jesus) sees and knows what is taking place on earth (eyes) and is able to do something about it (horns). By the “seven spirits” (signifying the Holy Spirit), God exercises His sovereignty in the earth. The Holy Spirit carries out God’s plan and purpose.

And then we’re told, verse 6, “and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.” This sea, which shows the peaceful purity of God’s sanctuary, appeared in various forms to earlier prophets. To Moses, Aaron, Aaron’s sons, and Israel’s elders, called up to Sinai to meet with God, we read, **Exodus 24:10**, “and they saw the God of Israel. There was under His feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness.”

This sea will reappear as the transparent pavement on which the martyr’s stand to celebrate God’s victory in Revelation 15. This heavenly sea, so tranquil it seems to be glass, contrasts sharply with the earthly sea, a region of rebellion, from which the beast emerges to wage war against the saints. That earthly sea, source and symbol of satanic chaos, is destined for destruction with the passing of the first heaven and earth, but the clarity and purity of the crystalline pavement beneath God’s feet will permeate the New Jerusalem.

John and his contemporaries needed this vision. The church was like a little boat being tossed on stormy waves. With the unaided eye, through the ordinary glasses, it seemed hopeless. Then they got Revelation glasses and were able to sing with the Psalmist, **Psalm 89:8-9**, “O Lord God of hosts, who is mighty as You are, O Lord, with Your faithfulness all around You? <sup>9</sup> You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, You still them.”

Which would remind them of whom? **Jesus! Luke 8:22-25**, “One day He got into a boat with His disciples, and He said to them, “Let us go across to the other side of the lake.” So they set out, <sup>23</sup> and as they sailed He fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. <sup>24</sup> And they went and woke Him, saying, “Master, Master, we are perishing!” **And He awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm.** <sup>25</sup> He said to them, “Where is your faith?” And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, “Who then is this, that He commands even winds and water, and they obey Him?” When we wear the Revelation glasses, we realize that we never need to panic. Nothing — including the sea — can overcome the One who sits on the throne!

Now, I told you that you have to use your imagination to see this. Close your eyes for a moment and try to visualize this scene ... **Throne ... rainbow ... flashes** of lightning ... **brilliant** amazing **colors** of precious **jewels** ... **torches** of fire ... and a sea of glass. The throne room of heaven.

But Jesus is not done with this vision, because next He shows John ...

#### **v. 6b-11: WHAT THEY DO AROUND THE THRONE**

“And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: <sup>7</sup> the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. <sup>8</sup> And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within 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!” <sup>9</sup> And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before

*Him who is seated on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,*<sup>11</sup> *“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.”*

In the center and around the throne were four living creatures. It’s not the worship of the church that’s first alluded to, but that of the entire creation. The **“four living creatures”** are a lion (the noblest), an ox (the strongest), a human (the wisest) and an eagle (the swiftest). What is likely here is that this signals the Bible’s anticipation of the redemption of the creation itself; there will be a new heaven and new earth, as we read in **2 Peter 3:13**, *“But according to His promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”*

In the background are similar (though not identical) passages in the Old Testament (Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1). Like Isaiah’s depiction of the seraphim in Isaiah 6, the three-fold repetition of **“Holy, holy, holy”** conveys what is essential in God’s revelation of Himself. **Holiness** spells out what is different, the way in which God separates Himself from the rest of His creation. The first and the last songs of the Bible exalt God’s holiness. Moses, thinking of what God had done in the crossing of the Red Sea and the deliverance of Israel, sang. **Exodus 15:11**, *“Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?”* And we find in Revelation 15 that those who had been victorious over the beast sing a similar song, **Revelation 15:4**, *“Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. All nations will come and worship You, for Your righteous acts have been revealed.”*

Combining the worship offered by the four creatures and the twenty-four elders, several attributes seem to dominate the worship of heaven:

- **God is Almighty.**

His power and majesty are beyond human understanding. He is the Creator of everything that has existence; by the power of His Word He brought what is ... into being. It’s a truth that’s designed to encourage as much as intimidate. For languishing churches such as these depicted in Asia Minor, facing the onslaughts of Satan, in a wicked and hostile world, the knowledge that God is far superior is of great value. **Psalm 93:1**, *“The Lord reigns; He is robed in majesty; the Lord is robed; He has put on strength as His belt. Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved.”* God’s sovereignty is the guarantee of providence.

He is the Creator of all that is, verse 11, *“for You created all things, and by Your will they existed and were created.”* This echoes what we read in **Acts 17:27-28**, *“Yet He is actually not far from each one of us,<sup>28</sup> for ‘In Him we live and move and have our being.’”* And in **Colossians 1:15-17**, *“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.<sup>16</sup> For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things were created through Him and for Him.<sup>17</sup> And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”*

- **God is Great**, in the sense that He is exalted.

When the twenty four elders join in the worship of God, they fall down before Him, expressing awe and submissiveness. God is incomprehensible. His ways are not our ways; His thoughts, not our thoughts.

The story is told that someone once asked St. Augustine, “What was God doing before He created the world?” To which Augustine replied, “Making hell for people who ask questions like that.” Blunt, but effective!

There is a mystery, Calvin would point out over and over again, about the nature of God

that should make us fear Him in a spirit of reverence and humility. Genuine worshippers wish to blot themselves out of the picture, so that God may become everything. The four living creatures are said to have six wings, as though ready to fly in whatever direction God commands: worship must always yield in service. It was Paul's conclusion to his great treatment of the application of redemption in the Book of Romans when he writes, **Romans 12:1**, *"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."*

- **God is Near.**

The Bible word '*glory*' is often used as a term to express God's deity. But that is to miss a vital Biblical truth. God's glory is His nature and power **revealed or shown forth**. This corresponds to what we read in **John 1:14**, *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."*

When God is said to **receive** glory, it indicates God is being worshiped **AS** God; He is being given the honor that is due Him. When Jesus prayed, *"Our Father, who art in Heaven"* He wasn't saying, "Our Father, who is far, far away," but rather, "Our Father who art on the throne, close at hand."

- **God is Eternal.**<sup>3</sup>

In verse 4 we read, *"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"* In contrast to us, the four creatures exalt the eternity of God's existence. Unlike creation, there is neither beginning nor end to the existence of God.

Worship is being taken up with God. It is giving Him the praise and adoration that is due His name. The more we know of God, the more childlike our faith will become. We cannot know too much, nor can this truth ever be over-emphasized. Even John was to get it wrong, worshipping an angel rather God. **Revelation 19:10**, *"Then I fell down at his feet to worship him [an angel], but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. **Worship God.**"*

What is said is important, too, again, verse 11, *"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."* The words remind us of Nebuchadnezzar's in **Daniel 4:35, 37**, *"He does according to His will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand or say to Him, "What have you done?" ... Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are right and His ways are just; and those who walk in pride He is able to humble."*

God's **sovereignty** is the basis for worship. The will of God is ultimate here. Not man's will, not the church's will; but **the will of God alone**. He creates and upholds to fulfill His own purpose. Appreciating that reduces us to size.

*"To God alone be the glory"* was the watchword of the Reformation ... because they understood the issue of sovereignty. Heaven will eternally reflect this perspective and earthly worship seeks to conform to it.

Again, with our ordinary glasses **we don't see any of this**. That's why we need to put on our Revelation glasses. Lastly, notice that the living God is so secure that in the vision God **sits**. **Not once** in the Book of Revelation are we told that God **stands**. He is on the throne, "pulsating with brilliance, light, life, glory, infinite calm, and absolute power."

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<sup>3</sup> Quote taken from *Revelation and the End of All Things* by Dr. Craig Koester, page 76.

Lutheran scholar Craig Koester sums up the importance of what we've seen so far. He writes, "How would this vision of the heavenly throne room strike members of the seven churches? Since the situations of the readers varied, their responses to the vision would probably have varied too.

**First**, Christians facing the threat of persecution would have found the vision reassuring, since it shows that God reigns despite the hostility that they receive from human beings. Power ultimately rests in the hands of the Creator, not their accusers.

**Second**, those seeking to accommodate pagan culture would probably have been uneasy with the vision, for if God reigns, then compromising one's convictions for the sake of social and economic ease warrants the censure they received in Revelation 2 and 3. In allying themselves with the non-Christian world, they distance themselves from the heavenly court.

**Third**, the complacent and self-satisfied would probably have found the vision disturbing, for in comparison to the splendor of God's presence, their pride in wealth and prestige is shown to be an act of self-deception.

But whether the vision is initially assuring or disturbing, it is designed to attract all types of readers to the heavenly chorus, where they too might join in singing praises to God and to the Lamb."

The entire creation is worshipping God! Heaven is a place of worship.

So do not be afraid. Things are not as they seem. "**Behold, a throne!**" With someone sitting on it. And **from** the throne lightning and thunder and a rainbow. And from **before** the throne the seven spirits of God and a sea, smooth as glass and clear as crystal. And from **around** the throne, creation and the church declaring the glory and praises of the One who sits on the throne forever and ever.

**When we** "come to worship" we're entering a service already in progress. Worship **does** not begin with us and it **will** not end with us. When we gather to worship we step into a worship service that's been going on for a long time!

Think about that. You need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for revealing Jesus to us. Lord, thank You for opening the door to heaven for us to see. For those of us who need a new perspective, enable us to really see. Help us to focus on Jesus. Don't ever allow us to think of worship as an ordinary thing. With these visions of Revelation, change us ... in the Name of Your Son, Jesus, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.*

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### **Revelation 1:4-6**

*Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven*

*spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*