

Week 52 - THE KING UPON HIS THRONE

Revelation 4:1-11

December 28/29

Yahoo for week 52 of our 52 Weeks to Know the Bible series. Congratulations!

It has been a year-long journey that has taken us from Genesis to Revelation. A journey that has opened our eyes to the story of God throughout the 14 Eras of biblical history. God has consistently and faithfully shown His love for the world from the moment He created it as recorded in Genesis 1:1, "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*"

Think about the year 2019: 12 months, 52 weeks, 365 days, 8760 hours, 525,600 minutes, 31,536,000 seconds. Where has the time gone?

2019 is about to come to an end as we welcome a new decade in the year 2020. For those of us who were born in the last century, we remember what it was like 20 years ago in 1999. Everyone was concerned about Y2K.

Books were written and money made on the possibility of the civilization of the world collapsing with the changing of a "second" of time, as the clocks rolled over to midnight entering the year 2000.

There was fear of the unknown. Individuals, families, companies, and corporations spent a lot of time, money and resources to prepare for that which may or may not happen. Some were making decisions based on fear, others thinking about safety and self-preservation, while others shook their heads and watched all the commotion.

I remember watching TV on December 31, 1999, as Peter Jennings was commentating on the celebrations that were taking place around the globe as countries in other time zones welcomed Y2K with great fanfare of music, fireworks, costumes, and relief. It became obvious quickly that the world was going to be okay as civilization entered the new millennium of the 21st century.

There is always a concern about the unknown. God's people did not know what life would be like outside of Egypt, it was an unknown. The Israelites did not know what the land of promise would look like on the other side of the wilderness. God's people did not know what Babylon would look like during the time of exile. No one knew what God would look like when He put skin on in the form of a baby born in a manger in Bethlehem.

In recent weeks we have looked at the Gospel Era, the Church Era and the Missions Era of the New Testament all of which serve as preparation of the people of God who believe in the Son of God to live in heaven for all eternity. Jesus told His disciples the night before He was crucified that He was going to "prepare a place" for them and us. It was in that upper room that Thomas asked the infamous question in John 14: 5, *Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?"* Thomas was admitting that there was an unknown destination. Jesus answered him succinctly without shaming or embarrassing Thomas for asking the question.

John 14:6 *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."*

Today, our last lesson of the year and week 52, we are going to get a glimpse of the unknown, the place that Jesus has prepared for all those who confess and believe Him to be Lord and Savior as we look at the book of Revelation.

If you think about the last 52 weeks utilizing the Chronological Bible as a road map, this lesson is about the final destination. This is where the road leads to the Apocalypse.

The word Apocalypse gets a bad reputation based on movies, books, and pop culture. As people were preparing for Y2K twenty years ago, they would talk about preparing for the Apocalypse.

The reality is "Revelation" represents the Greek word, "*Apokalypsis*" and hence some English versions and scholars speak of this book as the Apocalypse. The word in the Greek language literally means "unveiling; the removal of a veil or to disclose what is behind."¹

The book of Revelation is an unveiling of that which is to come. Revelation points us to the long-awaited King of Kings who will defeat the world's dark lord and his armies to usher in a new world of divine justice and eternal peace.²

John, who also wrote the Gospel of John and 1, 2, and 3 John, was in exile on the small island of Patmos and likely in his 90's when he wrote this book. It was in that location that God "unveiled" the unknown of that which was to come. John recorded it by the leading of the Holy Spirit. Revelation can be intimidating, fearful and strange. No other book of the Bible has provoked greater fascination or led to more controversy than Revelation. Yet this is where the previous 65 books of the Bible lead us.

Thankfully, Revelation itself gives us a succinct map of the unveiling as John is told in Revelation 1:19 to *write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.* (*Chronological Bible, December 26th, page 1585*).

The road map of Revelation looks like this:

- **Chapter 1:** What John "had seen;" the unveiling; the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ
- **Chapters 2 and 3:** "The things which are;" the Church Age, which we are still in as of 2019, entering into 2020
- **Chapters 4-22:** "The things which will take place after this;" that will eventually take us to our final destination, Heaven itself.

One of the more well known verses in Revelation is found in Chapter 3.

Revelation 3:20-22 Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him and he with me." 21 He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and

¹ Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb, a Commentary on Revelation*, P & R Publishing, 2001, pg. 7.

² Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary Revelation*, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2014, pg. 3.

sat down with My Father on His throne. ²² He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. (Chronological Bible, December 27th, page 1588).

It always comes down to a choice. From Adam and Eve in the garden to Noah choosing to believe God and build an ark; to Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel, Nehemiah, the disciples, and more, each person had to choose to believe God. Even in the book of Revelation, we are reminded that we have a choice to open the door which leads to salvation, or not. God has never, nor will He ever force Himself on anyone; rather He stands at the door and knocks.

Revelation Chapter 3 ends with a knock on the door and Chapter 4 begins with the door opening. This is the Apocalypse in its more literal meaning, unveiling what is behind the door.

Revelation 4:1-11 After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this."

² Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. ³ And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. ⁴ Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads. ⁵ And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

⁶ Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. ⁷ The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. ⁸ The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying:

*"Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is and is to come!"*

⁹ Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:

*¹¹ "You are worthy, O Lord,
To receive glory and honor and power;
For You created all things,
And by Your will they exist and were created." (Chronological Bible, December 27th,
page 1588).*

This is the final destination. Where the road leads and the doors open. This is Heaven.

If I were to ask you to close your eyes for a moment and picture 'Heaven' in your mind's eye, I would venture to say some of you would picture something "tropical," some would picture

“majestic mountains,” some would picture “fluffy white clouds,” some would picture “streets of gold,” some of you would picture a land of “chocolate with no calories.” But, none of us could ever picture what Heaven is really like. Even John who was taken there in this vision, cannot even explain to us what Heaven is like specifically.

But, John gives us a glimpse of Heaven “*after these things.*”

In verse 1, we have taken a turn on the map, changing directions and moving to the future. The phrase, “after these things,” means “after the Church Age,” which is the age we are currently living in. So, Chapters 4-22 are yet to come, we just get to look at the map leading the way. Chapters 4 and 5 serve as the “on-ramp” to the highway of Chapters 6-22.

The promise we find at the end of Chapter 3 is that if we do open the door of our heart to Jesus Christ and ask Him to be Lord and Savior, then we have access to the Throne, an open door. This is the doorway to Heaven.

Now when we read the phrase, “*I looked and behold a door standing open*” we probably think of a big door, maybe a grand ornate door or perhaps even picturesque door. This is not an earthly door-- this is an entrance into Heaven! It is unlike anything John had ever experienced before, but for our understanding, he puts it in terms we can relate to, “a door.”

And then John hears the voice. This is the voice he had heard before; in fact, in Revelation 1:10 he had heard the voice “*like the sound of a trumpet.*” It is Jesus Christ revealed. The unveiling of Jesus, the apocalypse of Jesus.

It was not a trumpet, but it was “*like*” a trumpet. In Revelation, we need to always pay attention to the words “*like*” or “*as.*” A trumpet is designed to get your attention, it causes you to stop what you are doing and listen intently, to be alert. The sound of a trumpet has the ability to cut through both silence and the noise of distraction.

The voice John heard sounded “*like*” a trumpet and said, “*Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.*” The voice, which was like a trumpet was a voice of invitation.

Notice John did not waste any time. In fact, scripture says, “*Immediately I was in the Spirit.*”

There was no pushing back, there was no negotiating, John did not even have to speak, the Spirit took over in this vision. John’s response to the invitation took place immediately.

How do we respond to the invitation of Christ? Do we push back? Do we attempt to negotiate? Or, do we flat out ignore the voice like a trumpet?

How many times have we hesitated at the invitation of Jesus Christ? Perhaps it is,

- An invitation to serve?
- An invitation to teach?
- An invitation to help or volunteer?
- An invitation to pray?
- An invitation to give?

Looking back on the last 52 weeks of your life, how have you responded to the invitation of Jesus Christ? How have you responded to the leading of the Holy Spirit?

For John, Jesus said, “*Come up*” and the response was very simply “*Immediately.*”

Then John specifies what he saw in the Spirit as he beheld a throne standing in Heaven and One sitting on the throne. Eleven times we see the word “*throne*” in this chapter of 11 verses and 2 other times we see “*thrones*” related to the 24 elders.

A throne has always been a place of authority and power. Earthly Kings and Emperors would be “seated” on the throne and they had the power and authority over the people. Yet this throne is so much more than an earthly throne, this is the Throne of Heaven.

Without a doubt, God wants us to see the unveiling of Heaven and the first thing John sees is not fluffy clouds, not streets of gold, not majestic mountains, not a tropical paradise; John walks through the open door of Heaven and BEHOLD a THRONE!

Interestingly, note that John does not describe the Throne. He does not give any dimensions of any sort, nor does he even attempt to describe the “One of the Throne” in any great detail.

The only description of any sort of the “ONE” on the Throne is in verse 3, *And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance.* The One on the Throne was not jasper and sardius but “*like*” it; basically, saying how unique, precious, of great value this One was. Some say this represents the first and last gem on the breastplate of the High Priest as described in Exodus 28:17-20.

Then John goes on to say *there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.* It was not an “*emerald*” but “*like*” an emerald. But we do know it was a rainbow which represents the covenant and promise of God never to destroy the earth again by flood. This serves as a promise and a reminder that God is in control. Warren Wiersbe notes, “Judgment is about to fall, but the rainbow reminds us that God is merciful, even when He judges. Usually, a rainbow appears **after** a storm, but here it appears **before** the storm.”³

In this first glimpse into heaven there is beauty and wonder; awe and comfort. John continues to describe the scene but focuses on what is *around*, *in front* and even *from* the Throne. Notice all attention is centered on the Throne.

Around the primary Throne are 24 other thrones. It is almost as an afterthought. It seems like the attention would be on the 24 other thrones, but even those 24 thrones are focused on the ONE THRONE. On the 24 thrones were 24 elders.

Several commentaries say these elders could represent the 12 tribes of Israel in the Old Testament and 12 Apostles in the New Testament. 12 and 12 do add up to 24 and it does make sense...but we are not told this specifically. All we know is that John saw 24 elders on 24 thrones; who they are is not as important as what they were doing.

They were focused on the One on the Throne! And so, as we study Revelation, we should do the same. Remember this is a book of Worship. Worshiping the God of Creation, the God who is in Control. The God who WAS, who IS, and who IS TO COME. The God who is even now on His Throne.

³ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible New Testament Commentary*, David C. Cook, 2007, pg. 1048.

That thunder and lightning are coming *from* the Throne is a reminder that nature itself is under the power and authority of the One on the Throne. Seven lamps of fire burning *before* the Throne which are the seven Spirits of God. The number 7 appears 54 times in Revelation and means completion, fulfillment, and perfection. *Before* the Throne was something like a sea of glass, like crystal.

And *centered around* the Throne, four living creatures:

- These creatures were unlike anything we see on this earth.
- Each of them had 6 wings; very clear.
- Full of eyes around and within; strange but clear.
- The first one was *like* a LION.
- The second was *like* a CALF
- The third had a face *like* that of MAN.
- The fourth was *like* a FLYING EAGLE.

There are many different views of what these 4 creatures represent. So often we want to get caught up in the peripheral things in life. Even when it comes to scripture we want to dissect “this or that.” It is not important what they look like as much as it is important to notice what they are doing, they are worshiping.

Worshiping the One on the Throne.

Holy, Holy, Holy...is the LORD GOD ALMIGHTY,
who WAS and who IS and who IS TO COME.

Day and Night never ceasing to say.

Holy, Holy, Holy...is the LORD GOD ALMIGHTY,
who WAS and who IS and who IS TO COME.

The Hymn Holy, Holy, Holy was based on this verse. These 4 unique looking worship leaders were focused on God on His Throne.

Look again at verse 9,

Revelation 4:9 *And when the living creatures give **glory** and **honor** and **thanks** to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever,*

When they are worshiping, giving **glory** and **honor** and **thanks** something extraordinary happens. The 24 Elders each of whom had their own throne fell down before HIM in worship, even casting their crowns before the THRONE. Not holding anything back; complete and utter humility before the God of Heaven and all Creation.

They were saying:

Revelation 4:11 *“Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.”*

Sometimes when life comes full force at us and we are facing difficult circumstances, we feel like everything is out of control. Perhaps 2019 was like that for you and you cannot wait for 2020 to begin.

Perhaps 2019 was the year you experienced job loss, relationship struggles, health issues, death of a loved one, financial problems, etc. It is easy to focus on those hardships and take our eyes off the One seated on the Throne. The truth of the matter is God is still on His Throne. The great reminder of Revelation 4 is the one truth that should give us comfort and peace regardless of any circumstances; God is on His Throne.

Over the last 12 months, 52 weeks, 365 days, 8760 hours, 525,600 minutes, 31,536,000 seconds. God has been on His Throne. God was and still is in control.

There is a song by Twila Paris titled *God is in Control*. Read these lyrics:

This is no time for fear
This is the time for faith and determination
Don't lose the vision here carried away by the motion
Hold on to all that you hide in your heart
There is one thing that has always been true
It holds the world together

God is in control
We believe that His children will not be forsaken
God is in control
We will choose to remember and never be shaken
There is no power above or beside Him, we know
Oh, God is in control, oh God is in control

Where is your focus today?

Are you focusing more on circumstances or God on His Throne?

Are you able to say: Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty...who Was and Is and Is to Come?

And can you say with confidence,

Revelation 4: 11 “Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive **glory and honor and power**; for **You created all things**, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.”

2020 is our year to Focus Our Influence. May each of us allow God to influence us in such a way we can influence others.

As we say goodbye to 2019 and hello to 2020, let us keep the focus on the truth that the God of All Creation is on His Throne.