

Part 2 - The Throne

I. INTRODUCTION

- A series of sevens are interwoven throughout the book which provide a structure that speaks to the fullness or completeness or universality of the events of the visions.
- Seven Parallel Cycles of Symbolic Visions make up the book of Revelation which makes it relevant for believers in all times and all places throughout the church age.
- In our series, Letters to the Church, the first of the seven cycles of symbolic visions that form the Revelation of Jesus Christ was covered.
- In that first vision, Jesus appears to John and tells him to write what he sees, to write what Jesus tells him is to come, and to write to the intended audience of the book - the Seven Churches in Asia Minor.
- The believers were living in a pagan city, surrounded by the worship of numerous gods and goddesses, idolatry, temple prostitution, and the threats of persecution from the imperial cult and the Jews.
- False teachers would rise up in an attempt to deceive Christians and distort.
- The temptation to compromise was great. The temptation to drift from the gospel and from their devotion to Jesus, was intense.
- What could this book have to offer them that would so grip them to endure faithfully to the end and conquer as Christ exhorts them?
- The second cycle of visions is the answer to that.
- It is by far one of the most compelling chapters in all of the Bible to faithful living and devotion to God.

MAIN POINT: God's throne is the center of everything and everything is governed FROM the sovereign Lord's throne.

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." 2 At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. 3 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. 4 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. 5 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, 6 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: 7 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. 8 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!”

9 And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, 10 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,

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.”

II. THE CENTRALITY OF THE THRONE

1. BEHIND HEAVEN'S DOOR

1a 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.”

- ‘*After this...*’ —It’s not a chronological progression of events but rather what came after the command from Jesus to write what he sees and to send it to the seven churches.
- They are not to be interpreted as the historical order in which the things that he saw are to take place.
- John is seeing the heavenly temple of God.
- We know this from the other parallel visions.
- **Rev. 11:19** The third parallel cycle of the visions, “*Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple.*”
- **Rev. 15:5** in the fifth parallel cycle of the visions says: “After this, I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened,”
- Rev. 4:8 where the living creatures never cease to say, “Holy, holy, holy...” is an allusion to Isaiah 6:1-4 where in Isaiah’s vision, the seraphim, which are described similar to the living creatures are in the heavenly temple and they cry, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts...”
- We have seen the reference to a door twice already in Revelation.
- The first time with Pergamum, Jesus grants them an open door.
- The second time with Laodicea, Jesus standing outside the door of the church, knocking.
- John is now being invited into heaven by the first voice which he heard speak in 1:9-10
- While he was on Patmos on the Lord’s day, he hears a voice like a trumpet—it was the risen Christ.

- Now he hears that voice again welcoming him to a scene that very few in Scripture have witnessed.
- The voice tells him that he will be shown ‘*what must take place after this.*’
- This phrase, as we previously studied, is a reference to Daniel’s vision in Daniel 2.
- Daniel 2:28 refers to last days / latter days—things which have begun to be fulfilled in Christ.
- What we will begin to see with this cycle of visions and the others are that they will deal with events that will take place throughout the entire church age.
- There is a backward look, a present look, and a future look to these events.
- Some of the events have happened, some will happen in the future, and some have multiple fulfillments throughout the history of the church.
- This is comforting to the church because it shows us that Christ knows the future.
- He knows the future because he is directing the future...it’s NOT “what might take place” if everything aligns properly... it’s “what MUST take place.”
- It must happen because it is sovereignly ordained.
- The will of the Lord is what determines the course of human history.

2. THE SOVEREIGN’S THRONE

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

- John is caught up in the Spirit, and as he responds to the invitation to pass through the temple door of heaven, he sees a throne.
- Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on a throne in Isaiah 6, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple.
- Daniel gets a vision of this heavenly temple, Daniel 7:9 “As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat”
- Ezekiel describes this throne in the vision he is given in Ezekiel 1.
- The throne John sees here is the symbolic representation of the Sovereign rule and reign of the Lord Almighty.
- The One seated on this throne is none other than the Creator, the Sovereign Lord.
- The throne of God is a primary symbol in Revelation.
- Revelation pulls back the curtains and reveals the overwhelming reality of the centrality of the throne and the Sovereign One who is seated upon it.
- At the center of everything in the universe—is God’s throne.
- For the churches in Asia Minor living under the constant threat of the military might of Rome and a culture steeped in pagan, idolatrous practices that exerted pressure upon them, this picture of the throne would remind them that those things were not the center of it all—God is!
- I want you to pay close attention to the centrality of the throne and how everything else is in relation to the throne.
- Things come from the throne, or are either around the throne or before the throne.
- Everything radiates and pulsates from and around the throne.
- All of the heavenly beings are referred to by their placement in relation to the throne.
- The throne is central!

- All of the judgments that happen are issued from the throne!
- The throne is the epicenter of universal reality!
- Everything flows from the throne and all worship is directed towards the throne!
- Vern Poythress, The Returning King, “God is the all-important, all-determining spiritual center and power center for the universe.”

3. GLORY AND MAJESTY

3 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.

- The imagery he uses to symbolize what he sees is the finite mind’s attempt to describe the indescribable.
- He is trying to paint a picture for us the brightness of the glory of the One who is seated on the throne of the universe but he is too glorious to describe.
- Now keep in mind that the throne is a symbol. God is not physically sitting on a throne.
- God is Spirit. He has no need for a physical throne. All of heaven is his throne.
- All John can do is give us a comparison of this brilliant light and all of the many colors and compare them to gemstones—jasper, carnelian (Sardis), and emerald.
- That’s how he describes the glory he sees.
- Paul describes the throne and the brilliance of the One upon in it 1 Tim. 6:16 and says that God “dwells in unapproachable light...”
- Look at Ezekiel’s description of what he saw:
- Ezekiel 1:26-28 Above the expanse that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone. And on the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man on it high up. 27 Then I saw as glowing metal, as the appearance of fire all around within it, from the appearance of His loins and upward; and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was a brightness around Him. 28 As the appearance of the rainbow that is in the cloud on a day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell on my face and heard a voice of one speaking.
- Such is the glory of God that Revelation tells us that in the new city, the New Jerusalem, Rev. 21:23 And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.
- John further describes a rainbow around the throne.
- It is like a bow in the sky, but it is a 360 degree rainbow. It completely surrounds the throne.
- This symbol is one that we should recognize immediately because it is the symbol of the covenant God made with Noah and all of creation.
- Gen. 9 God promises to never destroy all living flesh again like he did with the flood.
- While the seals, trumpets, and bowls signify judgment, the rainbow immediately brings to our mind the mercy of God.
- God remembers and is surrounded by his covenant promises.

- The throne is one of judgment, but it is also one of mercy!
- The rainbow is the symbol of God's grace, his mercy, and his long-suffering.
- For us in Christ, the rainbow tells us that the storm of judgment is past because it was placed upon Christ, God's wrath fell upon Christ in our stead. The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.
- All that John attempts to describe with these images highlights the glory and majesty of God!

4. HOLINESS

5a From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder,

- This finds a direct parallel to what Moses experienced as he went up Mount Sinai to meet with the Lord to be given the Ten Commandments.
- Exodus 19 tells us that the mountain was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. There was thunders and lightnings and thick cloud and loud trumpet blasts and the mountain was shaking...And the people of God were shaking in terror.
- What does this signify? That God is a holy God of indescribable glory and majesty and perfect holiness.
- God is to be feared.
- The similarity to the Exodus account is significant because many of the plagues of judgment are modeled after the ones in Exodus and the other references to flashes of lightning and thunder will happen in relation to a specific judgment.
- Final judgment will come from the Great White Throne of God.

5. OMNIPOTENCE

5b,6 and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, 6 and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.

- The next images and symbols speak of God's complete power.
- This taken from Zechariah's vision in Zech. 4 and refers to the fullness of God's Spirit
- In Zechariah's vision he sees a lampstand of gold with seven lamps. As he seeks to understand the vision he inquires of the angel and is told by the angel...
- **Zech. 4:6** *"This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts."*
- This seven burning torches are symbol for the fulness and ministry of God's Spirit.
- All of the things that will take place are carried out by the power of God's Spirit.
- This represents the work of the Spirit in the unfolding of events in human history.
- Now the symbol of the sea of glass like crystal is amazing.
- In Genesis, the Spirit of God hovers over the disordered world that was covered in water and he brings order and life. He divides the land from the sea. God is the one who creates the great sea creatures and has power over them and the sea.

- In Scripture, the sea is where the sea monsters dwell that God overcomes. It's a symbol of evil or impending doom or obstruction that God has to subdue or overcome.
- **Ps. 74:13** You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the sea monsters on the waters.
- God has power over the sea - **Isaiah 59:10** Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over?
- Throughout Revelation, the sea is symbolic of the chaos and evil in the world as a result of the world's rebellion against God.
- The first Beast comes up out of the sea in Rev. 13 to make war with the saints and conquer them.
- This imagery of a sea of glass is not of a sea that is in chaos and uproar.
- It is a picture of the chaos and evil completely subdued by the Omnipotent Sovereign who sits on the throne.
- God has subdued all evil just like he did with his command of the sea so that his people could pass over on dry land.
- This crystal like sea is the heavenly version of the Red Sea.
- Jesus calmed wind and wave with the voice of his command and the created order responded,
- From this vantage point, from this heavenly perspective, the hellish waters of evil have been stilled.
- **G.K. Beale**, Revelation Commentary *"In the new Jerusalem, there is no longer any sea. God has now stilled these demonic waters and established his throne over them. In contrast to the sea, stilled like Crystal, the river of life, clear as crystal, now flows freely from his throne."* Pg104

III. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE THRONE FOR US

- Why is this vision of the throne comforting to first century believers, to Christians of the past and to us in the present?
- How does this vision of the throne help me when I am tempted to fear, when I am anxious, when I am undergoing trials, tribulations and suffering?
- It's comforting because we are reminded that nothing that happens or can happen to us in this world comes by random, meaningless, purposeless chance.
- The sovereign God is in complete control of his universe.
- His hand of providence is in everything from the greatest to the smallest.
- Nothing that happens to you, nothing that happens in the world, is purposeless or meaningless.
- God is ruling from his throne!
- Jesus says to the seven churches, " I know everything that is happening to you, I know everything about you." He offers words of commendation to most, criticism, he commands them, he extends to them the rewards of eternal life for conquering to the end.

- The vision of the throne is what gave them the courage to endure as faithful witnesses.
- Jesus said that some of them were living where Satan's throne is, where Satan dwells.
- But the greater truth, the greater reality was that there is one throne that is above all others.
- If God is on the throne and he is the center of it all, then you can't be the center of it all.
- Revelation reflects the competing thrones: the kingdom of this world vs. the kingdom of God, the spiritual forces of darkness vs. the forces of the Lamb.
- Many want to establish the kingdom of me, myself, and I—where they sit on the throne of their lives, where they are the sovereign who directs and controls everything.
- We want to have our own throne.
- We may say we believe in God's sovereignty but functionally and practically we live with a weak view of his sovereignty.
- This is why we live with fear, anxiety, confusion, and despair.
- But if we grab hold of the centrality of the throne—everything changes.
- Recognize that he is the one in complete control of everything in your world, your spiritual life, your relationships, your work, your family, your emotions, and your physical world.
- How do we surrender to His throne?
- How can we approach the unapproachable, indescribable power, glory, and majesty of the One who sits on the throne of heaven?
- **Hebrews 4:14-16** Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
- We can draw near with confidence and assurance, to the throne of grace!
- Because of Christ, what is a throne of judgment, righteousness, holiness, has become to us a throne of grace that we can approach to receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need!
- Set your mind on the throne and the one who sits on it!
- God has committed the power and authority of his throne to save you in Christ Jesus, to keep you in Christ Jesus, and to bring you all the way to glory on that Day!
- May the vision of the throne and the glorious One who sits upon it captivate your heart, and fill you with faith and courage.