

Revelation 4

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Preacher: David Karoon

[0 : 00] We're looking this morning at Revelation chapter 4. I don't know what kind of a week you've had.

I don't know what you were doing on Thursday evening. But I had a very lazy one. I flunked myself in front of the television and started looking for a program to watch.

And interestingly, I stopped at Channel 4 and they had a stimulating program called Meet the Natives.

It is part documentary, part reality show, written by an anthropologist from the London School of Economics.

And it traces the experience of five tribesmen from a Pacific island on their first visit to Great Britain.

[1 : 18] And so they spent a few days with a middle class English family. And then they spent another few days with what they called a working class English family.

And then another few days with a member of the aristocracy. And when they spent these few days with this family just outside Manchester, I was interested to see how outsiders think of us as a society.

These five men from Kana could not understand how in our country there could be so much wealth and yet so many people living in poverty.

They wanted to know from their host, why is it that we as a society spend so much money caring for our pets and yet there are so many homeless people in our cities.

Interesting questions. And I saw the English host trying to answer them. And one day they wanted to see what we did with all our rubbish.

[2 : 44] And so they were taken to a plant where all the rubbish is processed. And they looked with wide-eyed astonishment that we had machines to do so much of the work in our incinerators and in our rubbish collection points.

And then they saw something that intrigued them. They saw a bank for recycling. And they had never seen anything like that before.

And they said, recycling? What do you recycle? How do you recycle? And they could not believe it, that we could recycle waste and use them again.

And then they looked at their English host and they said, Do you also in your country recycle human beings?

Their English host was staggered. For once, they had no answer to the question.

[3 : 58] And so they looked at the ground in complete embarrassment. And then the wife of the host said, You mean to the human body?

And the chief of the tribesmen said, Yes, do you recycle human bodies? And again there was the look of embarrassment in the faces of this English couple.

And slowly they said, Maybe, maybe, who knows? Some day will know. Why is it that for all our technological advancement, for all of our intellectual sophistication, Why is it that the simplest and the most natural experience of the human life is so embarrassing to us?

Why is it that for all our education, we struggle to understand and to explain and to answer the most fundamental question of human existence?

Why is it that a famous and a rich musician like Eric Clapton, in a moment of utter desperation, falls down on his knees and begins to pray to an unknown God?

[5 : 26] Why is it that in the sorrow of the loss of his son, Eric Clapton is forced to write a song, Will there be tears in heaven?

Why is it that you and I living in a scientific age, constantly are forced to live with rumors of another world?

Is this world all that there is? Is this the end of everything? Or is there something more? Is there something else? In Revelation chapter 4, the Apostle John is in exile on the rocky island of Patmos.

He has been sent there because of his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And there he is met by the Spirit of Jesus.

[6 : 37] And so in chapter 4, verse 1, we are told, After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven.

And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.

And so, my dear friends, this world is not the only place. There is another place, and it is called heaven.

And so the Spirit of God lifts up the Spirit of the Apostle John, takes him to another realm of glory, and opens a door, and he begins to see another place, and this place is called heaven.

What you and I have in Revelation chapter 4 is not a comprehensive teaching on heaven, because all that John is allowed to see is only through a door into heaven.

[7 : 57] So what you and I have through John is a peek into heaven. And then he tells, at the end of verse 1, Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.

This world is not the only place. There is another place. It is called heaven. But where is this heaven?

It is out there. It is up there. It is beyond this created earth. It is beyond this created sphere.

It is beyond this earth. So there is another place. But secondly, there is another person.

Verse 2, At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven, and someone sitting on it.

[9 : 01] So the Apostle John looks into heaven through this door, and he sees another place. And in this other place, he sees a throne full of splendor.

And on that throne, he sees somebody sitting. Who is this person? Well, we are told, in verse 8, Each of the four living creatures had six wings, and was covered with eyes all around, even unto his wings.

Day and night they never stopped saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.

So there is another place. There is also another person. And this being is God. And so he looks into heaven, and he sees the throne, and he sees God sitting on the throne in heaven.

And what do we know about this God? According to verse 8, and the rest of chapter 5, this God has a name. It is Jesus.

[10 : 19] And what more do we know about this God? Well, from verse 2, we can see that this God is powerful.

He is the monarch of all creation. He rules over all things. He holds all things in the palm of his hands. History is his story.

Everything that happens in your life, and in my life, is determined by him. Without him, you and I will never exist. Without him, you and I can never do anything.

He is the king over all kings. He is powerful. And maybe you are here this morning. Maybe you are here, your dreams broken, your hopes dashed.

Life seems to be spinning out of control. You seem to have lost control of your own life, and maybe the lives of those whom you love.

[11 : 27] May I say to you, dear friend, you and I may have lost control. All the powers on earth might never be able to help us.

But there is a God in heaven who holds all things. And if you and I would only call upon him in the day of our calamity, this God has promised to hear and to answer our prayers.

So this God is powerful. But this God is also merciful. Verse 3, And the one who sat there had the appearance of Jasper and Carnelian, a rainbow resembling an emerald, encircled the throne.

It is most interesting that these precious stones that are referred to in chapter 4 of Revelation are the same stones that are mentioned in Exodus 28, and they are put on the breastplate of the high priest.

So this God that you and I meet in Revelation chapter 4 is a high priest himself. He is a high priest. He is a merciful God.

[12 : 45] He prays for his people and he makes atonement for the sins of his people. And of course, this is the whole story of Calvary, where Jesus goes to the cross to make atonement for the sins of his people.

So, a God who is powerful, a God who is merciful, and then at the end of verse 3, a God who is faithful.

You remember the rainbow, the covenant promise with Noah, that God will never again destroy the world by water.

So this is a God who keeps his promises. When he speaks, he means every word that he says. A God who is faithful.

Verse 5, A God who is wrathful. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing.

[13 : 53] These are the seven spirits of God. This God whom you and I see in the person of Jesus Christ is one who loves sinners.

But make no mistake, this God hates sin. He is intolerant of sin. He is of purer eyes than to behold evil.

And then verse 6, Also before the throne, there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. So imagine, John is standing at this door, looking into heaven, and he sees the throne in heaven, and he sees Jesus seated on that throne.

But he also notices that there is a huge chasm separating him from this God, separating him from this throne, and it is a sea of glass.

[14 : 59] This God looks so approachable, yet he dwells amidst light unapproachable. This God is the holy other.

He is not like you and me. He is different. You and I are creatures. He is the uncreated creator. You and I have to have life given to us.

He has life in himself. And you know, I think we evangelicals need to recover our vision of God.

Because for too many of us, God is the almighty. He is not the almighty. God is holy.

He inhabits eternity. His name is holy. So he sees another place. It is called heaven.

[16 : 01] He sees another person. It is God. And thirdly, he sees other personalities. Verse 4, Surrounding the throne were 24 other thrones, and seated on them were 24 elders.

They were dressed in white, and had crowns of gold on their heads. Almost all the Bible scholars are agreed that the 24 elders represent the 12 elders of the ancient church of Israel, and the 12 elders of the New Testament church.

So what you and I have here is the church in total. The Old Testament church as well as the New Testament church taken together.

And so, in heaven, there are the sanctified spirits of Christian men and women.

We hear this so often, but I am not ashamed to repeat that. You know, dear friends, when you and I reach the end of our lives, it is not the end of everything.

[17 : 21] Your body and my body is buried into the grave. Sometimes, it is cremated. But your soul and my soul goes to another place.

And if you and I are Christians, it is taken into the very presence of God in heaven. And there, in the presence of God, your sanctified soul and my sanctified soul will await the day of the glorious resurrection of the saints.

And it is only at the second coming of Jesus that our sanctified souls that are in heaven will be united with our glorified bodies on earth.

And then, you and I will become new creatures. So, in heaven, there are the Christian people, those who have already gone before us.

but there are others as well. Verse 6 Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

[18 : 37] In the center around the throne were four living creatures and they were covered with eyes in front and behind. The first living creature was like a lion.

the second was like an ox. The third had the face of a man. The fourth was like a flying eagle. There are not only sanctified persons in heaven, there are also sinless creatures in heaven.

And I think what you and I have here is the picture of the cherubim who are before the throne of God, who are constantly protecting the throne of God.

And so they are strong like a lion. They are productive and energetic like an ox. They are intelligent like a human being.

And they are fast, they are swift like a flying eagle. And these creatures are full of life, always ready and willing to do the commands of their God.

[19 : 47] So sometimes children ask us, don't they, are there aliens? Are there extraterrestrial creatures?

The scriptures teach us that there are. There are angels in heaven who are ministers of God's people. There are sinful angels that we call demons that are ready to do the bidding of the evil one. And there are cherubims in heaven who are ready to do the will of their God. So there is another place. It is called heaven.

There is another person that you and I must meet at the end of life. It is God. There are other personalities beyond the human being.

There are cherubim, there are angels, there are demons. And finally, there is another pursuit. What are these people doing in heaven?

[20 : 53] What are these creatures doing in heaven? Verse 8, day and night they never stop saying, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty who was and is and is to come.

And then the sanctified human beings in verse 10, the 24 elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever.

in this world, you and I get an opportunity to worship God once every seven days because God sanctified the Sabbath and this is the day of worship.

But in heaven, every day is the Sabbath and in heaven, your preoccupation and mine will be the worship of the triune God.

and if you and I do not find the Sabbath interesting today, maybe you and I will never find heaven interesting at all.

[22 : 09] So we come back to our questions. Is there another place? There certainly is.

It is called heaven. Is there another being that you and I have to do with? Yes, it is God. And at the end of our lives, we have to stand before the bar of his judgment.

Are there other personalities beyond the human being? There are. There are sinless angels, there are sinful demons, there are holy cherubim, and there are the sanctified human beings in heaven awaiting the resurrection of the just.

What are they doing in heaven? What will you and I be doing in heaven? There is the other pursuit, the worship of God.

You and I are made for God and you and I will spend eternity enjoying God. there is another place that is called heaven.

[23 : 21] There is another person he is God. There are other personalities beyond this earth. And there is another pursuit, it is worship.

I only have one question for you. Sir, Madam, as I ask you, I ask myself, will you be in that other place?

Have you got the hope of glory? Have you got Jesus Christ in your heart? May God bless the understanding of his word.

Amen. Amen.