

## Revelation 4:1-5

### Throne Room of God – Part 1

We return this morning to the book of Revelation and will pick things up in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter.

- Chapter 4 introduces the third major section of the Book of Revelation
  - Chapters 4 through chapter 22:5 is really the last major section of the book
    - And it's there that we see the majority of the book's contents which relate to the Tribulation
      - The time and events of the coming 7-year period when God will finish His discipline of Israel
        - And finalize His judgment on the unbelieving world

Just by way of a brief review, it's clear within the text

- That the apostle John, who penned the book of Revelation,
  - It's clear that he was provided a literary and chronological 3-fold division of the book
    - By the Lord Jesus Himself in Chapter 1 verse 19
- It's there in the first chapter, right after Jesus shows Himself to the John
  - in all His post-resurrected and glorified majesty
    - That John is given instructions by Jesus what to do
      - **19** Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this
- John is told to write. Write three specific things, giving the book a 3-fold segmentation:
  - "The things which you have seen".
    - This is a past tense to John. He is to write the thing which he saw – the resurrected Christ
      - These are the things he wrote about in chapter one
  - "The things which are"
    - These were the things that existed in John's day
      - And the things we just got done covering –
        - The letters to the 7 churches from chapters 2 and 3
  - And then he is instructed to write "the things which will take place after this"
    - The Greek phrase for "after this" is <meta tauta>

- Incidentally, this is the exact same phrase used at the beginning of verse 1 in chapter 4,
  - And also at the end of verse 1 as well
    - Giving an obvious link, and giving a crystal clear marker in the structure of the book

So, as we begin to read this section, keep your eye out for this <meta tauta>

- We will read the entire chapter to make sure we're painting the glorious scene presented
  - And then we'll backtrack and breakdown the first 5 verses this morning
    - **4** 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[h] and were created.”

What we are given this morning in our study is a brilliant view of the Throne Room of God

- In fact, both chapters 4 and 5 both take place in the Throne Room and introduce various aspects
  - Interestingly, the word “throne” appears 58 times in the New Testament
    - Of those 58, 43 appear in the Book of Revelation
      - And 14 of those are right here in chapter 4.
        - That means, 74% of all the usage of Throne in the bible is here in Revelation
          - 24% of all usage is here in this chapter alone.
- As David Hocking points out, the Book of Revelation is the throne book of the bible
  - And chapter 4 is the throne chapter of the bible
    - So let’s break down this great throne chapter
      - and look together at the first things John saw as He was caught up into heaven
        - There are so many tremendous things here...verse 1

“After these things [there’s that phrase <meta tauta>] 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 [meta tauta]. **2** Immediately I was in the Spirit”

- If we remember, John was on the island of Patmos when he heard a voice behind him
  - Like a trumpet saying “I am the Alpha and the Omega”
    - And it’s there that John’s given instructions on what to do
- And as his time is completed with “the things that are” – when he’s done concerning himself with the churches
  - He immediately heard a voice again, like a trumpet
    - And the voice instructs him “come up here”
      - And immediately, he was in the spirit.

There are many things here that I want to deal with.

- First, John's being
  - Some might recall our study of this phrase "I was in the spirit" from chapter 1 verse 10
    - I won't go over all the details, you can listen to the full explanation online
      - But to be clear, this is not a reference to John being in the Holy Spirit
        - As if he was very spiritual that moment
- Given the lack of definite article in the phrase
  - And looking at the Greek tenses
    - The literal rendering of this phrase is "I became in spirit"
      - There was a physical/spiritual movement happening in and with John
- Not that I fully understand how this happened or the full nature of it's implication
  - But what I do know, is that John was translated to heaven, physically "in spirit"
    - Now, don't confuse "in spirit" with not being there physically. John was there –
      - this wasn't just a vision of what's in heaven
        - He was absolutely there and the events and descriptions are from a physical eye witness
          - I know this is true because Jesus tells him – "come up here" and then he was there

I believe simultaneously with John becoming "in spirit", he looked up and saw a door standing open in heaven

- And he heard a voice – loud like a trumpet – saying "come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this."
  - And immediately he was transported to the Throne Room of God
    - Into God's presence Himself
- And John is given the privilege of seeing, hearing and drinking in all that God's presence and heaven is.
  - It must have been an overwhelming experience
    - And if it were not for Jesus being with Him and changing John "in spirit"
      - I believe it would be too much

Now, before we move to verse 2, I want to briefly talk about the symbolism found in this verse

- When we look at the timing of John’s experience – that he was dealing with the church age in chapters 2 & 3
  - And then he was removed from there – translated, as it were, to the presence of God
    - Coupled with the obvious lack of the church’s presence in the remaining chapters
      - Many have conjectured that this is a picture of the event and timing of the rapture of the church
- There are also many interesting parallels between this verse in its setting and the Rapture of the church
  - Like John, the saints will hear a verbal command at the Rapture (1Th. 4:16).
  - Like John, the destination of those raptured is heaven (John 14:1-3; 1Th. 4:17).
  - Like John proximity to Christ here in Rev,
    - those raptured are *in Christ* as well
  - John hears a voice as a trumpet.
    - The raptured saints hear a voice *and* a trumpet (1Cor. 15:52; 1Th. 4:16).
  - The command John hears, “Come up here!”,
    - which is akin to John 14:3 “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also”

Many believe that the symbolism we find here

- is good reason to believe that God is giving us a picture of the Pre-tribulational Rapture of the church
  - When all believers will be caught up to Heaven **before** the judgment is actually poured out upon the earth.
- My personal thought
  - is that even though the similarities and parallels between this passage
    - and aspects of the Rapture may be more than just coincidence
      - Caution should be heeded when evidence is not conclusive

- And frankly, there are many other passages throughout scripture to “prove” the Pre-Trib viewpoint
  - One of which we will look at this morning!
- So, with the symbolism and parallels found here,
  - I don’t think they necessarily ‘prove’ a Pre-Trib view point
    - I do believe the Holy Spirit intended to support here what is explicitly taught elsewhere in scripture.

Let’s continue in verse 2

- John is in spirit and is “caught up” into heaven
  - Don’t you want to know what he sees?
    - Verse 2 “Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold...”
- Behold – A small participle in the Greek to draw special attention to something
  - Not just a “hey, notice this”, but a “you don’t want to miss this!”
    - Some times it used in scripture to point out something that is unexpected but sure
      - Or when something is specified which seems impossible and yet occurs
        - Jesus is telling John - Behold! Don’t look away! Don’t let anything draw your attention away!
          - You are going to see the throne room of God and God Himself.....!!!!
- “... 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.

What is the very first thing that John sees in heaven?

- A throne with God sitting on it
  - The coupling of the throne and the Person of the throne speaks of His ultimate authority and rule and control
    - Particularly, over the events that are shown in this book
- The One sitting on the throne is God the Father – not Jesus
  - We know this because it is Christ who comes to the One on the throne
    - To receive the scrolls with the 7 seals
      - We will see that in Revelation 5

Look how John describes God's appearance:

- He is described like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance
  - The jasper stone is difficult to understand in our modern times as our understanding has become opaque throughout time
    - As Morris says "Modern ignorance of ancient terminology makes precise identification of the stones quite tentative"
- That said, in Revelation 21:11 we see the jasper mentioned in conjunction with the New Jerusalem.
  - It is described this way: "Her light [*that is the light of the New Jerusalem*] was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal"
    - It goes on in verse "18 The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. 19 The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire..." and so forth
- Most scholars conjecture that what's being described here may be like a diamond in appearance
  - But the real point of what seems to be described here is the radiance of God
    - That it is precious, crystal clear light
      - Perhaps this gives us a better understanding of 1 John 1:5 where John says
        - "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all"
- Truly, scholars don't know for certain.
  - It's possible the jasper is either crystal clear like a diamond
    - Or possibly spectrum; a multiplicity of colors that shoot out in all directions
      - From the effulgent, or bright radiant, rays of the holiness of God
- The appearance of the Father is also described as a sardius stone (or a carnelian)
  - A sardius stone is blood red in appearance

Many find a deeper symbolism with the stones believing that the jasper speaks to the holiness of God

- And the sardius speaking to the justice of God.
  - Which is a good description of God as we are entering into the tribulation period
    - Which is the judging of the world by the holiness of God

- One thing we know for sure, is that these stones are found in the breastplate of the high priest (pic 1) in the OT
  - And if we were to read Ex. 28:17-21
    - We would see that the stones on the breastplate (Pic 2) of the High Priest
      - Represented the 12 tribes of Israel
- The sardius stone is mention first and the jasper is mentioned last
  - Sardius representing Rueben and the jasper representing Benjamin
    - Interestingly, Rueben means “Behold, a son”
      - And Benjamin means “son of my right hand”
- And so it is possible that we see here a picture of the incarnation and the exaltation of the Father’s Son –
  - Jesus the Christ, our Savior and our Beloved One.
    - Interesting to think about

His appearance is like a jasper and a sarius stone

- And the last part of verse 3 “and *there was* a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.”
  - Genesis 9:13 - “I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth”
    - The rainbow has been a symbol of God’s faithfulness and covenant
      - But this rainbow is described as like an emerald
        - And encircles the throne of God implying a full circle like a halo

And so when John is caught up into heaven, he sees the throne room and the presence of God

- And his eyes are filled with a brilliance of colors
  - Crystal clear, blood-red, emerald brilliancy
    - And, in my mind, I try to envision what he is seeing
- And of course there’s nothing like it on earth
  - But it does kind of remind me of the Aurora Borealis Pic 1
    - The Northern Lights – pic 2
      - Picture 3
      - Picture 4
- Verse 5 tells us that “5 ... from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire *were* burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God”

- These lightnings and thunderings and voices are the proclamations that come from the throne of God
- Rev 8: **5** “Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw *it* to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake.”
  - 11:19 “**19** Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant[h] was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.”
    - 16: **17** Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” **18** And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth”
- Job 37: **2** “Hear attentively the thunder of His voice, And the rumbling *that* comes from His mouth. **3** He sends it forth under the whole heaven, His lightning to the ends of the earth. **4** After it a voice roars; He thunders with His majestic voice, And He does not restrain them when His voice is heard. **5** God thunders marvelously with His voice; He does great things which we cannot comprehend
  - Psalm 18: **13** The Lord thundered from heaven, And the Most High uttered His voice, Hailstones and coals of fire.[a] **14** He sent out His arrows and scattered the foe, lightnings in abundance, and He vanquished them. **15** Then the channels of the sea were seen, The foundations of the world were uncovered At Your rebuke, O Lord, At the blast of the breath of Your nostrils.”

Now, I believe God speaks to man – speaks to the spirit of man and communicates perfectly

- But we need to be careful when we toss flippantly around “I heard the voice of God”
  - Psa. 29 tell us that the voice of God splits the cedars of Lebanon
    - It divides the flame of fire
      - It shakes the wilderness and strips the forest bare
        - Our understanding of God must come from His description of Himself

Now, that is the throne room of God.

- And this is not the only place we see the throne room of God described.
  - Ezek 1 describes it in verse 26-29

- **26** “And above the firmament over their heads *was* the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne *was* a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it. **27** Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw, as it were, the color of amber with the appearance of fire all around within it; and from the appearance of His waist and downward I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire with brightness all around. **28** Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so *was* the appearance of the brightness all around it. This *was* the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord”
  - Isaiah saw the Throne room and describes it in Is. 6:
    - 6** In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His *robe* filled the temple. **2** Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew [*describing the 4 living creatures which we will deal with next week*]. **3** And one cried to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!” **4** And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke
  - Great and awesome descriptions of the Throne Room of God for sure....
    - But what I find very interesting in all the descriptions of the throne room of God in all the other places except Revelation 4
      - Is what is not described in them –
        - Namely, the 24 elders.....
  - Isaiah vision of heaven did not include the 24 elders
    - And they are also absent from the description from Ezekiel
      - Yet the 4 living creatures are mentioned
  - It seems that prior to Rev 4:1 the twenty-four elders are conspicuously absent from all other descriptions of heaven.
    - And that begs the question - Why?
      - Is it possibly because they were not yet in heaven?

Verse 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.”

- Who are these “24 elders”?
  - Let me start by saying two things:
    - First, there is much debate amongst good bible teachers on this subject
      - To me, it’s very, very clear who they are but it is not a dividing line in fellowship with dear brothers and sisters
        - They can be wrong, and I still love them ;)
- Secondly, the identity of this group, in my opinion,
  - prove to me that the church will be in heaven during the tribulation period
    - So who are these 24 elders
      - Let me give you four possible (and currently taught) answers

Many believe that the 24 elders are **Angles**.

- This is the viewpoint of many who hold to a post-tribulational view of eschatology
  - As post-tribulational advocate Alexander Reese says
    - "They are glorious heavenly beings taking the lead in the praise and worship of God..."
- Can these be angelic beings? No
  - First, reading these as angels twists the scripture and avoids the plain literal reading of the text.
    - Second, the term elder is nowhere used in scripture to describe angels
      - In fact, in the NT, the basic concept of the Greek word <prespeteros>, which is used here in our passage
        - Is that of a representative of the people,
          - one who rules or judges on behalf of God over the people
  - Lastly, and really the nail in the coffin, is Rev. 7:11 in which we see a very clear distinction between the elders and the angels
    - “**11 All** the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God”
      - So, the 24 elders cannot be angels

Some have speculated that they are the **tribulation saints**. Those who are saved while going through the tribulation

- But Rev. 7:13-14 says
  - “**3** Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?” **14** And I said to him, “Sir,[b] you know.” So he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb”
    - It’s obvious they are not the tribulation saints if the elders don’t know who they are.

So the 24 elders are not tribulation saints and they aren’t angels

- Maybe they represent the Old and New Testament saints
  - Ironside held this view.
    - He said “The elders in heaven represent the whole heavenly priesthood—that is, all the redeemed who have died in the past, or who will be living at the Lord's return.... The church of the present age and Old Testament saints alike are included. All are priests. All worship. There were twelve patriarchs in Israel, and twelve apostles introducing the now dispensation. The two together would give the complete four and twenty.”
- Now, aside from this linking Israel and the church with no distinction –
  - swaying dangerously close to the Replacement Theology heresy
    - The 24 elders are described in chapter 5 as singing a song of the redeemed
      - Redeemed by the blood of the lamb who was slain—language used only of the Church age believers

But maybe it’s the nation of Israel.

- And there are many who believe this because the only other time we see the number 24 in scripture is in 1 Chron. 24 and 25
  - Where it deals with the 24 divisions of priests of the nation of Israel
    - And we know that the 24 is representative of a larger body
      - They priests are representatives of the people before God
        - And so, for some, they believe that the whole nation of Israel is being represented by the 24 elders
- Now I agree that the number 24 is representative of a larger body of people

- But I find it interesting in Revelation that they aren't called "24 priests" –
  - But rather 24 elders
- But stronger reason why the 24 elders cannot be the nation of Israel
  - Is because we still have Israel in the tribulation period
    - We have 144,000 in chapter 7
      - We see a great remnant still living at the end of the tribulation period who will turn to the Lord
        - As God pours out His Spirit on the house of Israel according to Zach. 12:10
  - We also see Israel being persecuted in chapter 12
    - And so all of Israel is not in heaven at the beginning of the tribulation
      - So it cannot refer to the completed nation of Israel

So the 24 elders cannot be the tribulation saints, cannot be a combination of the OT and NT testament saints,

- it cannot be the completed nation of Israel and it cannot be angels
  - So who are these 24 elders?
- I think we can learn who they are by how they're described
  - First, if we use scripture to interpret scripture,
    - We know that the number 24 is representative of a larger body of people
      - 24 is not the totality; but a representation of the totality
  - Second, they are called "elders"
    - As we eluded to already, only men are called "elders" in the bible
      - It's a term not used of any other created being other than mankind
- we see them sitting on thrones, positioned around THE throne
  - Interestingly, Rev. 3:21 gives a promise to the overcoming church
    - "21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne"
      - This is particularly strong when we couple this with 1 Cor. 6: 2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? 3 Do you not know that we shall judge angels?"

Notice as well, that these “throne sitters” are clothed in white robes

- Again, interestingly, in chapter 3 verse 5 we have another promise given to the church
  - 5 “He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels”
- Do we see this. These 24 elders are those that sit on thrones and are clothed in white raiment
  - Is this a coincidence that they are described as the church?
    - Maybe.

Look again at verse 4 – these elders are also described as having “crowns of gold on their heads”

- Rev. 3:11, again, speaking to believers - “Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown”
  - Rev 2: 10 Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life”
- These word for crowns upon their heads is not the word used for a kingly crown
  - It’s the word <stephanous>
    - And it is a word used specifically to indicate a crown given to a victor

And so we have this representative group called “the 24 elders”

- That are described as throne sitters, who are wearing white robes and wearing a victors crown
  - All description and promises that Jesus gives the churches in chapters 2 and 3
    - Could it possibly be that these are just coincidental or is there possibly a clue here?
      - Let me answer the way the Jewish rabbis would:
        - “Coincidence is not a kosher word”

The point I’m trying to make is that these 24 Elders are church age believers

- They are not Israel, they are not an amalgamation of NT and OT saints
  - They are not people who become believers during the tribulation
    - And they are not angles

- All indicators points to this group as being the completed church of Jesus Christ
  - And they are in heaven BEFORE the tribulation begins!
    - And remain in heaven throughout the entirety of the tribulation period
      - Never leaving that state
        - Worshipping the Lord during the tribulation period
- And if the 24 elders represents the church of Jesus Christ – as I firmly believe they do
  - Then they represent you and me
    - And as such we will NOT be on earth during the tribulation period
      - But will be in heaven
- We will hear that trumpet voice
  - And, like John here, likely hear those words “come up here”
    - And we will be caught up unto Jesus in the clouds (John 14)
      - As 1 Thes. 4 describes “**16** For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. **17** Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”
- And if this isn’t enough to convince you, just wait until we get into chapter 5!