

Revelation 4-5 Sharing God's throne

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Last week we looked at the letters to the seven churches in Rev 2&3. The churches were if you like, just keeping their heads above water. They were in a struggle to survive because of persecution.

"Worship the Emperor or face the consequences."

And some of them were also assailed by struggles from within.

The pressure to compromise doctrine or morality.

As you looked at them,

you might be tempted to compare them to baby chickens when they first pop out of the egg.

You look at them and wonder.

They are so weak and frail.

Can they possibly survive?

This week our focus shifts to the throne room of heaven in Rev 4-5.

These next chapters are not happening after chapters 2&3.

They are two different scenes shot at the same time.

Whereas the church on earth is weak and struggling, in heaven, God's majesty and greatness are unparalleled and unrivalled.

What's the point of showing us mere mortals

what the scene is like in the throne room of God?

How does it help us live our lives?

Well if you are under pressure for your faith,

then it helps to know that God is in control.

The world around you can look like it's going pear shaped.

But appearances can be very deceptive in this world.

What looks like chaos and disaster is actually all part of God's plan.

And when we look at it from the vantage point of heaven,

we see that God has it all under control.

So let us open heaven's door.

In Chapter 4, we are given the big picture of the throne room of God.

And then in chapter 5,
the camera zooms in to two features of God's throne room in particular:
God is holding a scroll, and there is a lamb on the throne with God.

So the big picture in Chapter 4,
what does this tell us about God?

Well here's an artist's impression of it.

It might help you to see the picture while I talk about it.

In the centre of the picture is God.

He's right at the centre

because God is right at the centre of everything.

But John is not clear who exactly is sitting on the throne.

4:2 tells us 'someone' is sitting on it.

The glory is such, that he can't exactly make out who the figure is.

It's a picture of God's incredible holiness.

He shines with brilliance of precious stones, jasper and ruby.

There's a rainbow shining like an emerald around him.

The point is not so much to make us feel insignificant by comparison
as to show us just how important God is.

And so, to show us the importance of our service of God.

If Scott Morrison rang you up,

"Hey look, it's Scott Morrison the PM here.

I wonder if you could help me.

I need a bit of assistance running the country.

I wonder if you would help my by taking care of Hastings."

Well you're not going to say,

"Sorry Scott, I'm too busy.

I have to prune my apple trees."

It's an honour to be entrusted with responsibility
by someone in a position of great power.

Well if that's true of Mr Morrison,
how much more true of God.

God has said to you,

would you help me look after my kingdom.

Well it's an honour to be asked to serve someone

whose glory shines like a precious gem.
We shouldn't discount the value of our Christian Service
however humble.

The picture moves out from the centre of the throne.
around the throne are 24 elders seated on thrones of their own.
These are not shining in glory,
they are people.
They represent all of God's people.
You can think of God's people
as being represented by the twelve tribes of Israel
and the twelve apostles.

12 + 12 is 24.

They are dressed in white because they have been made pure.
Pure because Jesus has died for them.
But we won't find out why they are pure until chapter 5.
They wear golden crowns because they are ruling the nations.
From the beginning of creation, God's people have ruled over his world,
as his second in command.
And in the new creation, we will continue to rule.

There were flashes of lightning, rumblings
and peals of thunder coming from the throne.
These represent the judgements of God going out to the earth.
In the rest of the book of Revelation,
we will see detailed description
of what happens when God's judgements go out.
There are seven seals to be opened,
seven trumpets to be sounded,
seven bowls to be poured out.
And when God's judgements are uncorked later in the vision,
they are uncorked with flashes of lightning,
rumblings and peals of thunder.
Sometimes Christians are uncomfortable
with the thought of God's judgment.

Well fair enough,
it's not something we ought to be relaxed and unconcerned about.
But when judgement such as a pandemic is unleashed,
and there is a pandemic unleashed in chapter 6,
we ought to see that as the judgement of God.
Not on some particular sin.
We don't have the mind of God.
I remember a Christian preacher blaming the Black Saturday bushfires
on the abhorrent Victoria abortion laws.
We can't say that.
But we can say that when calamity strikes,
God is using that calamity to drive things
towards his final purposes for the world in Christ.
It has not taken God by surprise.
And he will use it to achieve his purposes.

In front of God's throne,
there are seven blazing lamps.
These represent the Holy Spirit
who goes out from the throne of God the Father,
to empower his servants in their work.

Also around the throne of God there were four living creatures.
These represent the creation.
And what is the creation doing?
Why, it is saying,
"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come."
That is, the creation is doing what it was created to do.
It is giving praise to its creator.
The creator is the Lord God Almighty.
That is God is the king of the nations.
The Roman Emperor Domitian
who had the apostle holed up on Patmos Island
might think he is the powerful one.

He drastically reduced the powers of the Roman Senate,
so the Emperor would have more power.
He ruled all the way from Scotland to Egypt.
But in actual fact, God is Almighty,
and all creation acknowledges that.
Domitian reigned for 15 years until he was assassinated.
He was the longest reigning emperor since Tiberius.
But the Lord God is the one who was and is and is to come.
He rules the past, present and future
and all creation acknowledges that.

As we leave chapter 4 and before we dive into chapter 5,
it's worth considering
what this picture of creation worshiping its God means for us.
What are we doing as we gather together today?
In part our purpose is educational.
We seek to inform our minds about God and his ways,
so that we can live lives of service.
In part our purpose is mutual encouragement.
It's far easier being a Christian
with your brothers and sisters by your side.
But in part we are here to give to God the praise and glory he is due.
We see the picture of Revelation 4
and we try to make that picture a reality in our lives.
"You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honour and power
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created and have their being."

And now as we enter chapter 5, the camera focuses in
on the right hand of the Lord Almighty on his throne.
In his hand, he holds a scroll.
There is writing on both sides of the scroll,
and it is sealed with seven seals.
What is the scroll?

It's the purposes and judgements of God on the world.
It's written on both sides
because there is nothing more that can be added.
God has written down what must surely take place.
All that is required to put his decrees into action
is someone to break the seals of the scroll.
Then it will be like taking the handbrake off a car at the top of a hill.
Once it gets going, it's going to keep on rolling.
But who can open the scroll?
An angel proclaims,
"Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?"
The proclamation goes out to heaven and earth and under the earth.
You might imagine a heavenly version of the sword in the stone.
Merlin the magician has put a sword, Excalibur, in the stone.
And only Arthur is able to pull the sword out and become king.
But sadly for this heavenly sword in the stone,
no one in all creation is found who was worthy to open the scroll.
And John, who is having the vision is reduced to tears.
He wept and wept because no one was found worthy
to open the scroll or look inside.

Why is he weeping?
When you read the rest of the vision,
the results of opening those seals are horrendous.
Wars and famine, plague and death.
Why does John want the scroll opened?
Because there is no other way to the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem.
The only way to reveal God's perfect plans
for the new heavens and the new earth
is through his judgements on this world.
John doesn't want to sit in isolation on Patmos forever.
He wants to join with all creation celebrating around the throne of God.
He wants to join with every creature
in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea,
saying "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb

be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!"
And so the seals must be broken.

But how?

Well one of the elders tells him the good news.

"The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has triumphed.

He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

Jesus is the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

He is the descendent promised

who would be the future ruler of God's people.

He is the root of David,

the king promised in 2 Sam 7 who would sit on David's throne forever.

He has triumphed!

How has Jesus' triumphed?

By his death and resurrection.

He is able to put into effect God's plans to gather a people
to praise him around his throne.

Jesus death and resurrection are the key

to the next stage in God's plans for humanity.

So John turns to look for this Lion of the tribe of Judah
that the elder told him of.

And what does he see?

Not a lion but a lamb.

A lamb looking as if it had been slaughtered.

But he's not mistaken.

The lion is the lamb.

The great ruler of God's people is the sacrifice for our sins.

And where does he see the lamb?

It's at the centre of the throne.

It's at the place where only God can be.

The shining holiness of jasper and ruby.

The emerald aura of a rainbow.

A sea of glass clear as crystal keeps everyone else at a distance.

But the lamb, the Lord Jesus, is at the centre of the throne.

God himself was the sacrifice for sins.
And anyone who wants to argue the point
about whether the Bible really sees Jesus as God.
Don't argue about words.
Take them to this picture.
Could there be any clearer proof?
The lamb is at the centre of the throne.

The lamb had seven horns and seven eyes.
The horns represent power.
All power has been given to Jesus.
No longer the powerless sacrifice, now he rules.
How does he rule?
By the Holy Spirit, the seven eyes.
The Holy Spirit who he sends out into the world
to achieve his purposes.
Even into our lives.

The lamb comes and takes the scroll
from the right hand of God the Father,
seated on his throne.
And when he does that,
all of creation worships him.
His right to be worshiped alongside the Father has been demonstrated,
because he is worthy to unlock God's plans
for the culmination of history.
And here's a beautiful bit.
As the 24 elders, that is the representatives of God's people,
the twelve tribes and the 12 apostles worship him,
they are holding golden bowls of incense.
The incense is the prayers of God's people.
What that's telling us is that somehow,
the prayers of God's people are answered
as the seals of the scroll are opened,
and God's plans for history are revealed.

You might not think your prayers are much.
But they affect the course of history.

And so creation worships the lamb.
And their song of worship tells us
why the Lord Jesus is worthy to open the scroll.
"You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased for God
persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.
You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth."
It's like Paul says in Philippians.
Jesus became obedient to death on a cross.
Therefore God exalted him to the highest place.
It's through his sacrificial death that the Lord Jesus is exalted.
That he is given the right to enact God's plans for history.
And ultimately to be the judge of the living and the dead.

When God's people have sung their praises of Jesus,
the heavenly host joins in.
They sing, "Worthy is the lamb who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honour and glory and praise!"
What's striking about their song
is that the words mirror the worship
that the 24 elders offered to the Lord Almighty
seated on the throne in chapter 4.
Jesus is worshiped in the same terms as God the Father.

And then all of creation joins in the praise.
And they worship the one seated on the throne and the lamb
and they worship them together.
There is no separation.
"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb

be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

Often our temptation when we hear God's word preached is to want three things to do this week.

What's the application, minister?

But we need to resist the temptation to package our Christian faith up into some bite sized steps.

What is the application of these two chapters?

It is a call to worship.

To worship God the Father who created all things.

To worship God the Son who purchased us with his blood.

To worship them together.

And the Spirit who sits before God's throne,
though the Spirit is less in focus in these chapters.

Worship God because he's worthy.

Don't discount the significance of worship in your service of him.

Recognise that worship is the goal and destiny of all creation.

It's what we were made for.

Let's pray.