

Place: Lurgan Baptist 25:11:2003

Reading: Revelation 4:1-11

EXPLORING THE FUTURE

10. GOD IS STILL ON THE THRONE

An American pastor travelled to the Far East and while there took a guided tour of a large Buddhist Temple. As he walked through the religious shrine, he noticed the luxurious furnishings, the lavish fixtures, and the costly materials that had all gone into making this ornate temple. It was more plush than any house of worship he had ever seen before. He was well, overwhelmed. Turning to the tour guide, the pastor asked, “*Do you mind if I ask you a question ? How much did it cost to build this temple ?*” As if insulted the Buddhist tour guide stopped in his tracks and replied, “*Cost ? What cost ? We don’t think of cost when it comes to Buddha ?*” Then leaning a little closer to the pastor, the tour guide said, “*Sir, you must understand. There is nothing too good for Buddha.*” A high view of their god a false god, at that, had driven them to make whatever sacrifice necessary to worship their lifeless idol.

Because they perceived their deaf mute, inanimate god to be so great, there could be no cost cutting in worshipping him. Should not the same be true with us but on a much grander scale ? We alone know and serve the one true God. Our God is the living God. He alone is enthroned in Heaven in glory and majesty. And there is nothing too good for our God. What an indictment against our casual Christianity that wants to give God our leftovers, our second best, our hand me downs. My our God deserves the greatest sacrifice of our lives because He is enthroned on high. Like the old gospel song goes, “*It won’t be old Buddha who’s sitting on the throne, and it be old Mohammed who’s calling us home. And it won’t be Hare Krishna who plays that trumpet tune, cause we’re going to see the Son, not Reverend Moon.*” My only our God is the living God. He alone is enthroned in Heaven in glory and majesty.

And its when we see God upon His throne that we recognise that no cost is too high to pay. No commitment is too deep to make. No sacrifice is too great to offer. Nothing is too great for our God nothing. Now the question is this, have we this high view of God ? John must have had this high view of God for here in (Ch 4) he discovers that “**GOD IS STILL ON THE THRONE.**” Now in order to understand this chapter we must set it in its context.

There are three things here I want you to note by way of introduction.

(1) THE PLAN OF THE BOOK:

Go back to (1:19) Notice here that God divides the book of Revelation into 3 parts. (1) “ *the things which thou hast seen,* ” this was the vision of the glorified Lord in (Ch 1) (2) “ *the things which are,* ” this was the message to the churches in (Ch’s 2 & 3) (3) “ *the things which shall be hereafter,* ” (meta tauta) The meaning is, “ *write the things shall be after the churches when the churches are no more.* ” Now look at (4:1) So (Ch 4) introduces the third section of the book. Now remember chapters 2 and 3 deal with seven successive periods of church history which closes with the Laodicean age, which is the church of today. But look at how (Ch 4:1) opens. “ *After this,* ” After what ? After the church age. So from chapters 4 through 22 we have the third section of the book, which focuses on prophecy after the church age.

(2) THE ABSENCE OF THE CHURCH:

Here is an amazing thing. Up to now the churches have occupied a central place in this book. But at the end of chapter 3 and beginning with chapter 4 the churches disappear. My there are sixteen references to the church in the first three chapters of Revelation, whereas chapters 6 through 18 which cover the Tribulation period do not mention the church once. The natural conclusion drawn from this is that the church will be absent during the events of the Tribulation. My We are not going though, we’re going up, for us it will not be tribulation but translation. Indeed the next time we see the church is in chapter 19 at the end of the age, where she is the Bride of Christ, coming with her Lord in glory. But how did the church get up there ? Well, in this opening verse we are struck with (1 (2)

(3) THE SOUND OF THE TRUMPET:

John says, “ *After this I looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was it were of a trumpet talking with me which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter.* ” (4:1) Now what does that remind you of ? That reminds us of both (1 Cor 15:52 1 Thess 4:16) which tell us that there is going to be a trumpet blown when the Lord comes. Paul says: “ *The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.* ”

(1 Thes 4:16) My one of these days the Lord is going to say to the saints, “ *Come up hither.* ” You see, what we have in (4:1) is a picture of all believers being “ *caught up,* ” to the throne at the Rapture. And the Rapture is the very first event in God's prophetic calendar. Now here is John summoned to heaven.

Why ? Because God wants to show John worldly events from a heavenly perspective. He invites John up to heaven in order to see earthly affairs from an eternal

perspective. Only from the heights of heaven can John see as God sees. Now what exactly did John see ? John sees a throne Gods throne sat in heaven. John finds himself in the control centre for the entire universe. Here is the supreme headquarters of Heaven. And the central object of this headquarters is the throne of God. Now its interesting to note that the throne of God is mentioned 39 times in Revelation, 13 times in

(Rev 4) We could say that Revelation is the "*throne book*." And (Rev Ch 4) is the "*throne chapter*." For everything in this chapter relates to the *Throne of God*. Indeed this is the way I have divided the chapter.

(1) THE PERSON UPON THE THRONE

Now remember everything connected with the throne, as it appears in (Rev Ch 4) is awesome, strange and unexpected. We feel out of depth here for there is nothing to which we can relate. Its like being in a strange country, where language, customs, and architecture are enough like our own to be recognised, yet sufficiently different and strange to make us feel somewhat uncomfortable. Here is John instantaneously catapulted into heaven and immediately captivated by the single, most dominant feature in all Heaven. "*A THRONE*." Now as we look at this (1) I want you to notice:

(a) HIS GREATNESS:

John says, "*And immediately I was in the spirit: and behold a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.*" (4:2) This divine seat of sovereignty is firmly set in place. Stable. Secure. Fixed. Established. Permanent. Immovable. Enduring. Eternal. The Psalmist could say, "*Thy throne O God is forever and ever.*"

(Ps 45:6) This throne is the highest seat of absolute sovereignty. But John sees that this throne is not vacant, but occupied. Someone is enthroned upon it and that Someone is God Himself. (4:8) Now get a grip on this John actually saw God sitting upon His throne. The word "*sat*," describes the position of a king who is actually reigning. For example, if a politician is *seated*, he is said to be in office. If an elected official is put out of office, he is said to be *unseated*. John sees God seated, He is actively exercising the duties of His executive office, administering over the affairs of all His creation.

The message is clear to John. No matter what may happen on earth. God is still on His throne in Heaven. God is still in control. My God is still on the throne. Regardless of earthly appearances, God has not been put out of office. He has not been unseated nor impeached. He is seated and in session, ruling and reigning over all the affairs of providence. Everything is under control because everything is under His control. Was this not the same vision that Isaiah saw ? Uzziah, Israel's long seated King, had just died, and the nation was in crisis. A national crisis brewed. Who

would succeed Uzziah ? Who was in charge ? As the nation mourned Isaiah came into the temple to seek God. And it was while he was in the Temple that Isaiah received a sobering vision He says, "*In that year that King Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up and His train filled the temple.*" (Is 6:1) Although Israel's throne was vacant, Heavens throne was occupied. How comforting to John to be reminded that God was still on the Throne ! You see, John desperately needed this divine perspective. For from his limited vantage point Christianity was struggling. Under the tyranny of Caesar, the Roman Empire was overshadowing and persecuting the Early Church. But hadn't Christ promised that the gates of Hell would not prevail against the Church ? (Matt 16:18)

Hadn't John heard it with his own ears ? But just the opposite seemed true. The Church was being persecuted. Her preachers killed. Her voice muzzled. Her progress stymied. John must have wondered, "***Where is God in all this ?*** Have you been asking the same question ? My the world is sinking deeper and deeper into a quagmire of iniquity, while the cause of Christ seems to be on the short end of the stick. The church seems to be making less and less impact. Like salt that has lost its savour, the church seems to be impotent. Do you ever find yourself asking, "*Lord are you still in control ?*" Oh, as we see our world falling apart, we need to be reminded that God has not resigned. Nor been put out of office. He's not even up for re-election. *God is still on the throne.* My have you looked up lately to see God still on His throne ? Have you come to understand that the events of your life are controlled by His sovereign control ? No matter what may seem out of control in your life, know that God is still in control. (a)

(b) HIS GLORY:

The effulgent glory of God, shining bright light from the throne. (4:3) "*Jasper,*" as described in (21:11) is as clear as crystal. I think this is what we would call today a diamond. And the reason "*diamonds are a girl's best friend,*" is that they so beautifully reflect light enhancing her beauty in a spectacular way. This bright light symbolises Gods absolute, unadulterated holiness. It pictures His flawless character, moral perfection, and unstained essence. What's more John says that God is like a "*sardine stone.*" This was a fiery, deep red gem. A bright glowing stone. It reveals the fiery, red-hot wrath of Gods fury. What a sight for John to behold. To see God Himself enthroned. Ruling. Controlling. Pure. Blazing. Wrathful. Brilliant. Glorious. (Exod 28:17) John says, "*And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal.*" (4:6) Here is a massive ocean, like perfect, crystal-like glass under Gods throne. Can you picture the beauty of this scene ? Those of you who have been to Clearwater, Florida will know about the blinding sun in July and August. The shining ocean and white sand reflect the sun's rays magnifying its brightness. The sun is so bright you have to squint even with sunglasses on. Now that's the effect of the crystal

sea in heaven. It serves to multiply and magnify the full intensity of the dazzling display of Gods blinding glory. The architecture of Heaven is Theo centric, designed for one thing to reflect and magnify the brilliant glory of God. Some of you seen the laser light show at Sea world, Epoct, Magic Kingdom, but here is Gods laser show, showing off His glory for all the universe to see. No wonder the angels cover their faces.

(c) HIS GRACE:

Look at (4:3) " *And there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.*" (4:3) In Old Testament times, the rainbow represented God's faithfulness never to destroy the world again as He did with the flood. (Gen 9:13-15) It represented Gods gracious covenant. The unending rainbow John describes means Gods grace will endure for ever. Amid the white light of His Holiness and the red flames of Judgment, the green rainbow of Gods grace shines brightly. For even in the midst of wrath God remembers mercy. (Jam 2:13) One commentator says, " *God's attributes always operate in perfect harmony. His wrath never operates at the expense of His faithfulness, His judgements never abrogate His promises, God's power and holiness would cause us to live in abject terror were it not for His faithfulness and mercy.*" Of course, a rainbow signifies that the storm is over. And at this future time the storm will be all over for all believers. For the great and gracious God will be faithful to show mercy to His children. So John is getting a glimpse of the (1) (a) (b) (c)

(d) HIS GOVERNMENT:

For though the storm is over for the child of God, another is about to break loose on the earth. Gods great government is about to work itself out on earth. Look at, (4:5) Fast forward with me for a moment in Revelation and John describes this same violent storm in the seventh seal judgment. Look at (8:1-5) Did you notice the same terminology, the same words, the same fury. Look at the seventh trumpet judgment. (11:15-19) Again the same words, the same fury. Its exactly the same in the seventh vial judgment. (16: 17-18) My do you see the wrath that's is going to be poured out on this old world at the end of the age. And this Judgment will be factual for the Holy Spirit is spoken of as " *the seven spirit's of God,*" will be there as the Prosecutor of the human race. (Jn 16:8) Will Gods people will the church, will the saints go through through this terrible tribulation ? No, No, No, Every answer of Scripture is an emphatic No. For when this day of awful judgment comes, God's people will be in glory with their Saviour. My " *God hath not appointed us to wrath but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.*" (1 Thes 5:9)

(2) THE PEOPLE ABOUT THE THRONE

For as John continues to peer into the throne room with captivating awe and amazement he observes another facet of Heaven twenty four thrones around God's throne. Now the word "*seats*," (4:4) is *thronoi*, thrones. These are subsidiary thrones, subordinate to Gods higher throne. And upon these thrones are seated 24 elders who share in Gods reign. Now who are these elders ? Well, *some, such as W.R. Newell, are convinced that these are twenty-four heavenly beings of an angelic order which is associated with God's government in some special way. Most other pre-millennial writers understand them to be twenty-four redeemed human beings around the throne who, though individuals, represent all the redeemed. This is not to say that there were not more than twenty-four around the throne, but it is to say that they represent all the redeemed.*

The Greek word for elders is *presbuteros*, from which we get the English word Presbyterian. I heard about a little girl who came home from her Presbyterian Sunday School one day, and her mother asked her what they had talked about. "*We talked about heaven*," the little girl replied. "*Well*," her mother asked, "*what did they say about it ?*" "*The teacher said only 24 Presbyterians made it to heaven*," the little girl said. Now of course that's only a joke. We all know there won't be that many Presbyterians in heaven. Now I believe that these elders are the ones caught up to heaven at the Rapture and they symbolise all the saints of all the ages. Notice:

(a) *THEY ARE NUMBERED:*

" *Four and twenty elders.*" (4:4) Now what's an obvious reference to ? The twelve patriarchs of Israel and the twelve apostles of the Lamb. (Heb 12:22-23) There were four courses of priests in the O.T. Temple. (1 Chron 24:3-5) John has already reminded us that we are "*kings and priests*," (1:6) So these elders symbolise the people of God in heaven. You see, God's people are definitely numbered. Its not a matter of guesswork, its known to God. Now let me ask you, are angels ever numbered in the Bible ? (Heb 12:22) (a)

(b) *THEY ARE IDENTIFIED:*

" *Four and twenty elders.*" (4:4) Now that is something angels are never called. As I have said the word for "*elder*," here is "*presbuteros*," from which we get the English word Presbyterian. So they are, a, b,

(c) *THEY ARE SEATED:*

Where are they seated ? John says, "*And upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting.*" (4:4) In heaven redeemed saints are seen sitting upon thrones, but never angels. (20:4)

(d) *THEY ARE CLOTHED:*

" *In white raiment.*" (4:4) Now is this not the garment of glorified believers in heaven ? (3:5) White robes represent the imputed righteousness of Christ that makes a perfect covering for our sin. At the same time they also represent the righteous acts of the saints. Will there be a white garment for you ? (19:8)

(e) *THEY ARE REWARDED:*

" *And they had on their heads crowns of gold.*" (4:4) The word for " *crown*," is *stephanos* its the garland of success. Now angels are never crowned, you see only believers are rewarded in heaven. Will you have a golden crown ? My right now counts forever. Will you make your life count for eternity ?

(g) *THEY ARE DISTINGUISHED:*

These elders are clearly distinguished from angels.
(7:11) Here then are redeemed saints reigning in heaven with Christ.

(3) THE PRAISE TO THE THRONE

For as we look at this scene in heaven we see worship. Now what is worship ? It is honour and adoration being directed toward God. Worship is ascribing to God His worth or affirming His supreme value. The thought behind the word " *worship*," in (4:10) is the telling forth of the worth of God. You see, what you think of God will be reflected in how you worship Him, in the worth you ascribe to Him. Someone has coined the phrase that worship is a royal acclamation of His worth.

(a) *THE BEASTS SHOW US WHO WE WORSHIP:*

The word " *beast*," can be translated " *creatures*." Who are these four living creatures ? These are angelic beings probably cherubim, in the immediate vicinity of the throne, forming an inner circle of worshippers.
(Ezekiel 10:15 20 28:14-16) One had the face of a lion, one the face of an ox, one the face of a man, and one the face of an eagle. In other words each reflects an aspect of the likeness of the Lord Jesus portrayed by the 4 Gospels. Matthew is the gospel of the King and is illustrated by the lion. Mark emphasises the servant aspect of the Lord's ministry and is best seen in the ox. Luke represents Christ as the compassionate Son of Man and is obviously portrayed in the face of the man. John conveys the truth that Christ is the Son of God, and is there best likened to the flying eagle. But what are these cherubim doing ? They are doing what they were created to do they are worshipping the living God. They adore God for:

(1) HIS HOLINESS:

They say, "*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.*" (4:8) This means that God is holy to the supreme or superlative degree. In English we express degree by saying that something is good, better or best. In Hebrew to repeat a word three times meant the superlative degree it was the very best. Thus, "*Holy, holy, holy,*" means that *God is holy, holier, holiest.* My ... God is the holiest Person in all the universe.

(2) HIS SOVEREIGNTY:

For this One who is holy is none other than
"*The Lord God.*" (4:8) Lord (kurios) means
"*Sovereign Ruler, Absolute Master, Ruling Potentate.*" My He has authority to do whatever He pleases, whenever He pleases, with whomever He pleases. The Psalmist said: "*Our God is in the heavens He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased.*" (Ps 115:3) But notice the angels are praising God for

(3) HIS OMNIPOTENCE:

For He is "*The Almighty,*" (4:8) This means that He is all-powerful. This term identifies God as the strongest, most powerful being utterly devoid of any weakness, whose conquering power and overpowering strength none can oppose. Do you need to be remind of that
this ? My there is no problem to complex for God to solve, no person to hard for God to save, no need to great for God to meet, no prayer to demanding for God to answer. "*Is anything too hard for the Lord ?*"
(Gen 18:14)

(4) HIS ETERNALITY:

He is "*The Lord God Almighty which was, and is, and is to come.*" (4:8) You see, our God transcends time having neither beginning or ending. (Ps 90:2) Is that not reassuring ? To know that God is eternal provides comfort for us, His children, for unlike a human father, God will be always be there to take care of us. But look the angels are praising God for:

(5) HIS SELF-EXISTENCE:

For He is the God "*Who is.*" (4:8) Do you recall that this is how He revealed Himself to Moses. "*I AM THAT I AM.*" (Exod 3:14) It simply means that He depends on no one or nothing else for His existence. He simply is. He is all and in all. (Col 3:11) He upholds all, provides for all, maintains all, watches over all,

guides all, directs all. All by Himself.

(6) HIS IMMUTABILITY:

For the God who " *was*," is the God who " *is*," and the God who " *was and is*," is the God who " *is to come*." He never changes. He is eternally the same. My this world changes. Culture changes. Society changes. Fashions change. People change. But God never changes. He says: " *I am the Lord I change not*." (Mal 3:6) Now stand back and get a view of your God this (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) Have you lost your vision of such a high view of God ? My behold your God. But notice if the (a)

(b) THE ELDERS SHOW US HOW TO WORSHIP:

We are not surprised to find these worshippers flat on their face before God. People in the presence of God always fall down before Him. John says: " *The four and twenty elders fall down before Him that sat on the throne and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever*" (4:10) Isn't this what we feel when we genuinely worship God ? Unworthiness, Reverence, Humility, Brokenness. A man was walking through an art gallery when he came upon a picture of the Lord Jesus dying upon the cross. He stopped and looked at the beautiful portrait of Calvary's love. As he stared into the face of Christ, so full of agony the gallery guard tapped him on the shoulder. " *Lower*," the guard said. " *The artist painted this picture to be appreciated from a lower position*." So the man bent down. And from this lower position he observed new beauties in the picture not previously shown. " *Lower*," said the guard. " *Lower still*." The man knelt down on one knee and looked up into the face of Christ. The new vantage point yielded new beauties to behold and appreciate.

But motioning with his flashlight toward the ground, the guard " *Lower. You've got to go lower*." The man now dropped down to two knees and looked up. Only then as he looked up at the painting from such a low posture could he realise the artist's intended perspective. Only could he see the full beauty of the cross. Is the same not true in worship ? Only as we position ourselves lower and lower in humble submission can we behold more fully the glories of our wonderful Lord. My this is the scene in Heaven. This is our God, He is still on the Throne. Here is Who we must worship. Here is How we must worship. Let's give Him the glory.