

You Gotta See This! Revelation 4, 5:6

Introduction

Apocalypse. It is the first Greek word in the Book of Revelation. It's a word that conjures images of doomsday, the end of the world, and...Zombies of course! But as we learned over the past few months the word Apocalypse meant something much more positive to the people who first heard it. For them Apocalypse meant an "unveiling" it meant "to pull back the curtain" and reveal what is really there. The Book of Revelation is all about pulling back the curtain to see what is most real about God and us and our world, it is a book that pulls back the curtain of history to see Jesus, the one who holds it all together! This morning, we step back into the Book of Revelation, picking up where we left off in December. Our text comes from Revelation 4, the whole chapter, and one verse in Chapter 5, verse 6. Whoever has ears let them hear the Word of the Lord.

[Read Rev 4, 5:6]

Glasses

I was thirteen years old when I first got glasses. I remember the day vividly, because it was the first day I remember seeing vividly. My glasses were round - tortoise shell - think John Lennon or Harry Potter - I was cool like that. One memory is burned on my mind - on the drive home after getting my new glasses I turned to my mom and said, "I never knew I was supposed to see the actual leaves on the trees!" Up to that point, trees were a big blur to me. But my glasses helped me see what was really there, but I couldn't see before. I'm sure many of you can relate.

John, the writer of the Book of Revelation, is handing his churches a set of glasses to help them see what they could not see with the unaided eye. He writes down a series of visions to help them see what they needed to see in order to make it through the tremendous pressures they were under, both from external and internal forces. Externally, they felt the pressure from Rome. Emperors Nero, Vespasian, and Domitian exerted extreme force against those who professed Jesus as Lord! Within a span of 30 years the centre of the Christian Church, Jerusalem, had been destroyed and most of the prominent church leaders had been killed - Peter and Paul were crucified, Timothy was murdered. The apostle John found himself imprisoned on the Island of Patmos. But there were also great internal pressures. Many of the saints had lost their way, or lost their desire for holiness, or lost their grip on the gospel's transforming power. So John writes into the pressure. He writes down a series of visions to help them see what they could not see with their unaided eyes!

Back in Chapters 2-3 John helps the church see the reality of their situation from an **earthly perspective**. Through letters to the 7 churches in Asia Minor he gives us a vision of the Resurrected Jesus walking among the churches. But now in Chapters 4-6 John is helping us see what is most real from a **heavenly perspective**. The vision here is of the Ascended Jesus ruling and reigning over the cosmos with God the Father. [Pause] Today, I want to help you put on a new set of glasses. I want to help focus your vision to see what is **most real** about your life today from the heavenly perspective of Revelation 4. It's a big vision! Ready? Here we go!

Chapter 4:1: "After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven..." "After this" connects the vision of Chapter 4 to what came before; an earthly vision of Jesus walking among his churches. After a vision rooted in life on the earth, John then sees a door

open to heaven. Now, when John uses the term “heaven,” he is not referring to a far away place, somewhere people go when they die. For John heaven isn’t a **destination** somewhere up there, but rather heaven is a **reality** that’s close at hand down here. Heaven and earth are often closer than we think. The point is, John isn’t being transported to some other time and place to see what he sees. Rather, with feet firmly planted on the Island of Patmos, John is worshipping in Spirit and in truth on a Sunday morning, and as he worships the Risen Lamb, Jesus pulls back the curtain; he opens the door and gives John a picture of what is going on presently in the other dimension of reality that is heaven.¹ Jesus helps John see what was most real, but could not be seen with the unaided eye.

So what does John see? What does he see that is so close at hand, even closer than our next breath? What does he see that is most real about your life today?

Partway through verse 2: “there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it.” John sees a throne! A heavenly throne! He sees the control centre of the universe, the seat of authority and power that rules over the cosmos. John wants us to see the reality of God’s heavenly throne!

The NIV translation doesn’t capture the force of what John says in the original Greek language in verse 2. Literally, John says, “Behold! a throne” or “Look! a throne.” The ESV and NASB translations capture the force much better. In the Greek there is an imperative verb. For those non-linguists, an imperative commands your attention! John isn’t passively describing the throne he sees before him. He is commanding our attention to see it! “Look! A Throne!” Look! Church! Don’t miss what should not be missed. Though you cannot see it with your unaided eye, “Look! A throne in heaven ... and someone is seated on it!”

Oh how this must have encouraged the churches John addresses in this book. They were living under a great pressure — persecuted from the outside, eroding from the inside. Looking through their ordinary set of glasses they may well have concluded that God was nowhere to be found! That he had abandoned them. That he was powerless! Ever think that in your own life? Looking through their ordinary lenses they may have concluded that the Emperor was the ruler of the world! Looking through their ordinary glasses they may have thought that the powers of chaos, evil and death had stormed the headquarters of heaven and were now in control of the world’s fate. “But Look! A throne in heaven, and someone is seated on it!”

We can’t help but see our present lives through ordinary lenses, can we? Looking through ordinary lenses, we can view the events of life — the tragedies, natural disasters, terrorist attacks, corrupt governments, injustice of all kind — we view these events of life and wonder where God is in all of it? We look around and we’re left scratching our heads saying, “I thought God was in control. I thought Jesus had power over the forces of evil. I thought God was making broken things new...yet mostly all I see are broken things.”

But John commands our attention: “Look! Things aren’t how they seem! There is something that you cannot see with ordinary lenses, “Look! A Throne! And someone is sitting on it!”

The entire vision of Revelation 4 revolves around the throne. And there are five specific things about the throne that John commands our attention to see: He wants us to see what is 1) on the

¹ Darrell Johnson, *Discipleship on the Edge*, p. 131.

throne, 2) coming from the throne, 3) encircling the throne, 4) in front of the throne, and 5) around the throne. I want to help you see each part.

First, what is on the the throne. Verse one told us: someone is sitting on the throne, and of course that someone is God! Verse 3 describes him saying, “the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby.” Now, John is describing something that is not easily put into words. The Bible tells us that no one has ever seen God, and likewise here, John describes God in a rather abstract way using terms of radiant, dazzling beauty, with the appearance of jasper and ruby.” Steve Jobs tells the story of getting to know the famous Cello player Yo Yo Ma - who plays the most beautiful moving music. Ma was supposed to play at Job’s wedding, but the musician was out of town. Well a few years later Yo Yo Ma finally played Jobs the song he was going to perform at his wedding. And As Yo Yo Ma played Jobs began to weep. And through his tears he said, “You playing is the best argument I’ve ever heard for the existence of God, because I don’t really believe a human alone can do this.” Sometimes beauty says what is hard to put into words: “the one who sat on the throne had the appearance of jasper and ruby.”

Then there are two songs that describe the One on the throne. In verse eight, 4 creatures sing of him as “Holy, Holy, Holy.” Three times marks the superlative. God’s character is most holy. Absolutely pure, Set apart in every way. [Pause] He is called “The Lord Almighty.” His power and authority are unrivalled, limitless. He is the one who, “was and is and is to come.” Past, present, and future. Time does not contain him, he knows know bounds. Governments will come and go, the axis of power will shift from one regime to the next, but the One who sits on the heavenly throne is steadfast through it all. Theresa May, Donald Trump, Justin Trudeau they can try their best, Bashar Al-Assad, Nicolas Maduro, Vladimir Putin, they can try their best, but in the end all power and authority lies with the Ageless One who sits on the throne.

Then the song in verse 11 goes, “you are worthy, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.” The One on the throne is the great Creator of all things. Everything that is, owes it’s being to him. In Darrell Johnson’s words, “Were God to cease to exist everything in the universe would also cease to exist. Whether the world realizes it or not, whether we acknowledge the fact or not, we all live and move and have our being in him. Evil can strut on the stage of history only as long as the Ancient of Days on the throne allows.”²

And as Creator, God can create again. In Revelation 21, that is what God says from the throne, “Look! I am making all things new!” Things are not what they seem. Your present circumstances are not all there is to reality. Put on Revelation 4 glasses and you will see The One who sits on the Throne! He is radiant beauty, his character is holy, his power and authority is unrivalled, not even time can contain him. And Look! he is making all things new church! Today! right now! He is making all things new. For you and for me. And you know how I am sure of it? Know why we can be sure that the pressures of this life will not crush us? Know why we can be sure that discouragement will not win? Why sickness, and evil, and death will not win in the end? Because of the One we see on the Throne next! Chapter 5:6 “Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne.” The Lamb is on the Throne! The Lamb who was slain - Jesus! He is on the throne! The weight of sin and evil did not break him, death could not hold him in the grave. The Lamb has overcome! And Look! He is making all things new through the power of his Holy Spirit! Oh how we need to see the One on the heavenly throne in order to make it!

² Darrell Johnson, Discipleship on the Edge, p. 133

John commands our attention to also see what is coming **from** the throne. Chapter 4:5 “**From the throne** came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder.” This is an image taken directly from Exodus 19 when Moses ascended Mount Sinai to receive the 10 Commandments. Its a scene where the Holy God invites unholy people into covenant relationship. God’s promise: “I will be your God, he says, and you will be my people.” Yet, though this God invites people to know him, to know his heart, to be embraced by his love, we should not loose sight of who he is! The one on the throne is not one to be ignore, he is not one to play games with. Whether we see it or not, we are always standing before a Divine power and authority that commands our attention.

And Look! at what is **Encircling** the throne. It’s the third thing to see. Halfway through verse 3: “A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne.” Do you remember the rainbow? It was another one of God’s promises - the promise to never again destroy the earth with a flood! The rainbow is a reminder of God’s mercy, a reminder of his faithfulness. Where peels of thunder and flashes of lighting evoke in us fear of the Lord for his Awesome greatness, the rainbow evokes in us the assurance that it is safe to come to him! The holy welcomes the unholy into his presence. No matter what you’ve done in the past, you are welcomed into the powerful and saving presence of God.

Fourth, we can see what’s in front of the throne. Halfway through Verse 5: “In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.” There are two things to see in front of the throne.

First, seven lamps that are the Seven Spirits of God. Back in Chapter 1 we learned that when John speaks of “the Seven Spirits of God” it is his way of saying “the complete presence and work of the Holy Spirit.” Seven was the number of completeness. In front of the throne the complete presence of God is being poured out - Friends, God does not hold himself back from us! In front of the throne the complete presence of God is being poured out as he completes his work.

That’s what the second thing in front of the throne represents. God’ completing his work. Let me explain: The second thing in front of the throne is “A sea of glass, clear as crystal.” This is my favourite image in Revelation 4. The sea throughout the Bible was an image of chaos; the sea was wild and untamed. During John’s day many people believed the myth that the world was created by a war between the god’s; that the world’s existence came about by the forces of chaos and evil. And there was this looming belief that the forces of chaos were always trying to suck the orderly world back into the void. It was the idea that the wild, untamed, ruthless sea of chaos was always a threat to the vitality of life. But Look! Before the throne is a sea of glass, clear as crystal. The sea is still, it is calm. John is saying that before the One who sits on the throne, the chaos of life will not win!

The remarkable thing is that at the end of Revelation, in Chapter 21, when we see a picture of God’s intended destiny for creation we are told that there is no longer any sea! Revelation 21:1 says, “Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.” The picture of God’s destiny finally manifest in creation is a picture without any sea! It’s not that there is no water! It’s that there is no chaos! God has finished his work.

Here's the point: The completed work of God will be manifest in your life one day. There are lots of people here today that walk with a limp. Yes, for some it is physical kind of limp, but also emotional, or relational. Maybe you have wounds from the past that have left a scar that stand in the way of your flourishing; or fears that keep you from experiencing the peace of God's Kingdom life. Others may be living in patters of sin that rob you of sustaining joy. Friends, lets put on Revelation 4 glasses: "Look! A Throne! And in front of the throne God is pouring out his complete presence, the chaos doesn't win, his work will be finished in you - you will not limp forever!

Finally, we see what is **around** the throne. Verses 4 and 6: "**Surrounding** the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads...In the center, **around** the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back."

Around the throne were 24 Elders and 4 living creatures. Who were these elders and creatures? The elders most likely represent the people of God. 12 tribes of Israel plus 12 disciples of Jesus. The 24 Elders represent the Old and the New Covenant people of God. They represent you and me. So, what about the 4 living creatures? There was one like a lion, one like an ox, one like a man and one like a lion. What are we to make of these creatures? It's most likely that they represent the whole of God's creation. Just like the 4 corners of the earth in Revelation represents the whole of God's created earth, the 4 living creatures represent the whole of God's created creatures. Around the throne all of God's creatures are represented, all of his covenant people are represented, but what is most important is what they are doing around the throne.

And what are they all doing? Worshipping. Day and Night. Night and Day. They worship the one who sits on the throne. "Holy, Holy, Holy. Is the Lord God almighty, who was and is and is to come." They lay down their crowns at his feet and they worship! "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power,"

When we come to see things as they really are, when our eyes adjust to what is most real about our lives today, when we Look! And see the One who sits on the throne, all that he is, all that he has done, all that he has yet to do, there is only one appropriate response! We join the song. "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God almighty, who was and is and is to come. You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power.

Revelation chapter 4 brings us to the central axis of the entire Book. It leaves every human being with the same simple question: Will you worship the One who sits on the Throne? Our ultimate destiny as creatures will be determined by our answer to that question.

So for those of you who are feeling lost, "Look! A Throne...with someone sitting on it!" And for those who are growing bored and uninspired, "Look! A Throne!" For those who feel stuck, those struggling with sin, those who are looking for direction, for all those who are discouraged. "Look! Things are not as they seem! Look! A Throne...and someone is sitting on it! He is radiant beauty, his character is holy, his power and authority is unrivalled, not even time can contain him. And Look! He is uncompromisingly holy, yet he welcomes the unholy, it is safe to come into his presence. He is pouring out the fulness of his presence into his world, chaos will not win, he will finish his good work in you life, he is making all things new!

So church, having seen, lets take our place! Let's join the chorus! He is worthy. He is worthy.
He is worthy of all our praise.