

LET US PRAISE THE LORD

*4 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 [the sound] of a trumpet, [now] said, "Come up here, and I will show you the things that must occur in the future."
2Immediately I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne set in heaven and someone was sitting upon it. 3He who sat upon it had the appearance of a jasper and carnelian stone. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. 4Surrounding the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated upon the thrones were twenty-four elders. They were clothed in white garments and on their heads were crowns of gold. 5Out from the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings, and [peals of] thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps of fire were blazing, these are the seven Spirits of God. 6Also, [extending from] before the throne was [something] like a sea of glass, [clear] as crystal. In the midst of the throne and all around the throne were four living creatures; they were [covered] with eyes in front and in back. 7The first creature was like a lion, the second creature was like an ox, the third creature had a face like a man, and the fourth creature was like an eagle in flight. 8Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was [covered] with eyes all over, even under [his wings]. Day and night they never stop saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come." 9When the living creatures shall give glory and honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne, to him who lives forever and ever, 10the twenty-four elders shall fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives forever and ever. They shall lay their crowns before the throne and say, 11"You are worthy, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor and to exercise the power, for you created all things, and because of your will they were brought into being, indeed, they were created." (Rev. 4:1-11)*

Introduction

It was a typical winter day in the Pacific Northwest: wet, dreary, and foggy. The wipers clicked back and forth, but the raindrops kept splashing against the windshield as the travelers set out in the pre-dawn hours for the Seattle airport and their flight to the East Coast. By the time they reached the terminal they were greeted by a morning that was shrouded in heavy dark clouds and a continuing rain.

They went through the standard procedure of verifying their tickets, checking their luggage, and passing through the electronic inspection point. Then they walked down the long corridor to their designated gate of departure. At precisely 8:30 a.m. the airline attendant announced that the flight for New York's Kennedy Airport was now ready for boarding.

The travelers passed through the doorway, walked down the chilly ramp, and stepped aboard the plane where they were welcomed by a friendly stewardess. With their seatbelts securely fastened, the travelers watched through the porthole window as the plane slowly backed away from the terminal and taxied down the runway, preparing for take off.

The rain was still coming down and the day was still shrouded in clouds as the plane roared down the runway and lifted off of the ground. With a mighty thrust of the powerful engines, the plane climbed up into the sky. In a matter of minutes the city of Seattle and the surrounding mountains were lost from sight as the plane entered the eerie atmosphere of heavy gray clouds.

The plane continued to climb through the heavy gray mist, higher and higher, until suddenly it emerged above the bank of clouds. And when it did, the travelers were presented with a breath-taking spectacle: they found themselves heading towards the brilliant morning sun; below them was a fluffy white carpet of clouds—they praised the Lord as they took in the beauty of His creation at 30,000 feet.

Such an experience is akin to, but cannot begin to match, the awesome experience of the Apostle John describes for us here in Revelation 4. John was privileged to enter into heaven itself. There he saw the LORD God seated upon His throne. There he heard the angelic host and the great number of the redeemed singing praises to the LORD.

When we behold the LORD in His glory, we appreciate that He and He alone is worthy of our praise and worship. Because the LORD our God is worthy, let us join the heavenly hosts in praising and worshipping Him.

I. Let Us Praise the Lord, ...for His Majesty

John reports that he saw *“a throne in heaven”* (vs. 2.) A throne is the symbol and the seat of power, authority, and dominion. This particular throne was *“set, [or, “established,] in heaven.”* The Greek verb (κεῖμαι) occurring in the imperfect tense indicates a continuous past history—this throne was always present and established in the heavens, as the Psalmist testifies: *“Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations”* (Psl. 145:13.) Again he declares, *“Jehovah is King forever and ever”* (Psl. 10:16a.) Note, too, that this throne is set *“in heaven.”* This throne and this kingdom does not belong to this present world, it is totally transcendent over all—it is divine and belongs to eternity:

Jehovah is exalted over all the nations; his glory is above the heavens. ⁵Who is like Jehovah our God, the One who sits enthroned on high, ⁶who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth? (Psl. 113:4-6)

The LORD describes Himself as *“the high and lofty One—who inhabits eternity,”* and He declares, *“I dwell in the high and holy place”* (Isa. 57:15a.) Indeed, John sees the One who is seated upon the throne. This heavenly throne is not vacant: it is not some impersonal force or blind chance that rules the universe. There is someone seated upon the throne: the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; note Psalm

47:7-8, *“God is the King over all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise. ⁸God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne”* (Psl. 47:7-8.)

John now describes the appearance of God as He is seated upon His throne (vs. 3.) The apostle reports, *“[He] had the appearance of a jasper and carnelian stone.”* *“Jasper”* was probably a clear crystal, referring to the New Jerusalem, John later writes, *“her brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal”* (Rev. 21:11.) *“Carnelian”* was deep orange or blood red in color. What is being depicted by the brilliant appearance of this multiple stone is the glory of God in its depth and radiance. Note that the Apostle John is unable to actually portray the Lord God in His divine splendor; he must use a comparison with precious stones, and even that is ambiguous. He describes the appearance of God as being like a combination of a jasper and carnelian stone—all this conveys to us the sheer, unspeakable splendor of God

John goes on to report, *“A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne.”* In Ezekiel 1:28 the rainbow is employed to display the LORD’s over-arching glory: *“Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Jehovah.”* The presence of the rainbow also reminds us of the LORD’s covenant faithfulness. Following the Great Flood, the LORD declared to Noah,

This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature that is with you, a perpetual covenant for all generations to come. ¹³I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴Whenever I bring a cloud over the earth, the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud, ¹⁵and I will remember my covenant, that is between me and you and every living creature of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all mortal life. ¹⁶When the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it, and so be reminded of the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of every kind that is upon the earth. (Gen. 9:12-16)

“Out from the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings, and [peals of] thunder” (vs. 5a.) These powerful elements of nature are depicting the infinite power and awesomeness and majesty of the LORD God. When the people of Israel stood at the base of Mt. Sinai, the LORD revealed Himself to them in the powerful elements of the storm: *“Then on the third day, when morning dawned, there was thunder and lightning, and a dense cloud was over the mountain, and there was a very loud trumpet blast. All the people who were in the camp trembled”* (Ex. 19:16.)

Before the throne John saw *“seven lamps of fire,”* which he identifies as *“the seven Spirits of God.”* Here is a description of the Holy Spirit, first, in His capacity as the Spirit of holiness—depicted by the flame of fire and the number seven, which is the biblical number for perfection. Secondly, the Holy Spirit also is being presented in His capacity as the third Person of the Trinity who comes forth from

God the Father, as the Lord Jesus identifies Him: *“But when the Comforter has come, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth, the one who comes from the Father—he shall testify about me”* (Jn. 15:26.)

Also, *“extending from before the throne was something like a sea of glass, clear as crystal”* (vs. 6a.) The sea of glass in its clear depths is depicting the infinite purity of God, as the Apostle John describes the LORD in his first epistle: *“God is light, and in him is no darkness at all”* (1 Jn. 1:5.) As Isaiah witnessed, in the presence of the LORD, the angels cried out, *“Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of hosts”* (Isa. 6:3a.) The sea of glass in its expanse, stretching out before the throne of God, is depicting the separation of God from His creation and from sinful mankind, making Him inaccessible to us apart from Christ. When the LORD appeared to Moses in the wilderness from the midst of the burning bush, He declared, *“Do not come near. Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground”* (Ex. 3:5.) But, as the Apostle Paul testifies, *“through [Christ] we ... have access to the Father”* (Eph. 2:18.)

John observes that in the midst of the throne and around the throne *“were four living creatures.”* These “four living creatures,” having characteristics of both the cherubim, (compare Rev. 4:7 with Ezekiel 10:4-5,14, printed below) and the seraphim, (compare Rev. 4:8 with Isaiah 6:2-3, printed below) are “an angelic composite” used to visually portray the attributes of God:

Then the glory of Jehovah rose from above the cherubim and moved to the threshold of the temple. The cloud filled the temple, and the court was full of the radiance of the glory of Jehovah. ⁵The sound of the wings of the cherubim could be heard as far away as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks ... ¹⁴Each of the cherubim had four faces: One face was that of a cherub, the second the face of a man, the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle. (Ezek. 10:4-5,14)

Above [the LORD] stood the seraphs, each one having six wings: with two wings they covered their faces, with two wings they covered their feet, and with two wings they flew. ³They were calling out to one another, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory.” (Isa. 6:2-3)

All four creatures *“were covered with eyes in front and in back.”* What is being depicted is the omniscience of God—the fact that He is all seeing and all knowing: *“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account”* (Heb. 4:13.)

The first creature was *“like a lion.”* Here is depicted the sovereign majesty of the LORD God, the One who *“causes all things to work for the sake of his own plan”* (Eph. 1:11.) That is to say, the LORD has a divine purpose, or, plan, and He proceeds to sovereignly cause all events to work and interact in such a way as to bring about the accomplishing of that divine purpose.

The second creature was *"like an ox."* Depicted here is the sheer power and might of the LORD God, the God who called the entire universe into being by the mere utterance of His word, as the Psalmist declares, *"By the word of Jehovah were the heavens made; their starry host by the breath of his mouth"* (Psl. 33:6.) The writer to the Hebrews informs us, *"the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible"* (Heb. 11:3.)

The third creature *"had a face like a man."* Here is depicted the personality or the personal nature of the LORD our God: He communicates with man and He receives us into His fellowship through Jesus Christ His Son. Our human personality is a derivative of His divine personality: *"And God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness' ... 27So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them"* (Gen. 1:26-27.)

The fourth creature was *"like an eagle in flight."* Here is depicted the majestic awe and sovereign freedom of the LORD, the One who *"does as he pleases with the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth"* (Dan. 4:35.)

As we ponder this divine revelation recorded for us in Revelation chapter four, let us praise the LORD for His divine majesty.

II. Let Us Praise the Lord, ...for His Grace

At the very beginning of this passage, the Apostle John wrote, *"before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me, like the sound of a trumpet, now said, 'Come up here, and I will show you the things that must occur in the future'"* (vs. 1.)

John is not only permitted to gaze into heaven through an open door, he is also invited to pass through that door and enter into heaven. The invitation is not issued for the sake of satisfying his curiosity; he is summoned so that he may learn about *"the things that must occur in the future."* What is being referred to are the events that must take place in history and in the world before the final coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The actual revelation of these things is not given until chapter 6. But because of the nature of these events, (events that involve tribulation for the world and for the church,) it is essential that the apostle and the church be prepared to handle them. That is why John is granted the two visions recorded in Revelation 4 and 5. Revelation 4 contains the vision of God the Father seated upon His throne as the Sovereign Lord of creation and history. Revelation 5 contains a vision of Christ as the Lamb of God standing victoriously before the throne of God, having secured the salvation of His people by the shedding of His blood upon the cross of Calvary.

Here is the grace of God ministered to His children in Christ: He not only informs us as to what must take place before the final coming of Christ; He also grants us a revelation of His majesty and glory to sustain us through the hard times, thereby giving us assurance and motivation. Consider Matthew 16:21,24,28; 17:1-2 for a similar pattern of themes presented during our Lord's earthly ministry:

*From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life ...²⁴Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me ...²⁸I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." **17**After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.²There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. (Matt. 16:21,24,28; 17:1-2)*

Jesus informs His disciples of the trials that He personally and they as His followers will experience (Matt. 16:21,24.) Jesus then allows His disciples to witness His transfiguration in order to sustain them, encourage them, and give them assurance of His sovereign control and certain victory (Matt. 16:28; 17:1-2.)

According to verse 4, John observed that surrounding the throne of God were "*twenty-four thrones,*" and seated upon these thrones were "*twenty-four elders,*" clothed in "*white garments*" and wearing "*crowns of gold.*" Pictured here is **the universal church of Christ:** the Old Testament believers are represented by the twelve tribes of Israel and the New Testament believers are represented by the twelve apostles, together they comprise "*the twenty-four elders.*" What is also pictured is **the triumphant church of Christ:** wearing the crowns of gold and seated on thrones surrounding the throne of God, the church is depicted as she shares in the triumph and glory of Christ her Savior and Lord:

I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation. But have courage; I have conquered the world. (Jn. 16:33)

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God. ¹⁷Now if we are children then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. ¹⁸I consider that our present sufferings are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed in us ... ³⁷... in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Rom. 8:16-18,37)

Finally, what is pictured here is **the church in her spiritual union with Christ:** seated with Christ in the heavenly places (note Ephesians 2:4-6, printed below)

and covered with the perfect righteousness of Christ our Savior—as depicted by the white robes, (note Isaiah 61:10, printed below):

... God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in transgressions he made us alive with Christ (by grace you have been saved) ⁶and he raised us with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms—in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:4-6)

I rejoice greatly in Jehovah, my soul exults in my God; because he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has wrapped me in a robe of righteousness—like a bridegroom adorns his head with a turban like a priest and like a bride adorns herself with her jewels. (Isa. 61:10)

Here, then, is an even greater dimension of the grace of God: He has called us to share in the triumph of Christ over the devil and the world, the triumph won by Christ at Calvary: *“having disarmed the powers and authorities, [Christ] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross”* (Col. 2:15.)

As we study this divine revelation recorded for us in Revelation chapter four, let us praise the LORD for His grace bestowed upon us in Christ, His beloved Son.

III. Let Us Praise the Lord, ...with the Heavenly Hosts

In verse 8 the Apostle John tells us about the activity in which these four heavenly creatures are constantly engaged: They are continuously praising God, as a result of being in His presence—to see Him is to worship Him. The theme of their worship and praise focuses upon three things: 1) the absolute holiness of God, they cry out in praise, *“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God;”* 2) the absolute sovereignty of God, He is identified as *“the Lord God, the Almighty;”* and 3) the eternal being of God, He is the One *“who was and who is and who is to come.”*

Although the heavenly hosts are presently engaged in the blessed activity of beholding and praising the LORD, verses 9-10 (where the future tense is employed) indicate that there is coming a future time of even greater praise. At that time *“the twenty-four elders”* (i.e.; the church of Jesus Christ) shall join with the heavenly host in the ultimate (and eternal) expression of praise to the LORD. The twenty-four elders shall fall down before the One who sits on the throne—a display of absolute, and willing, reverence and submission and homage unto God. The twenty-four elders shall worship the One who lives forever and ever—here is spontaneous worship, rendered with all our being in a condition free from sin. It will be the perfect fulfillment of the great commandment recorded in Matthew 22:37, *“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”* The twenty-four elders shall lay their crowns before the throne of God—an act acknowledging God as the one and only Lord

and acknowledging that the victory (our salvation) is all of His work and is all of His grace.

The future time envisioned here is the consummation of all things; the day when Christ returns, the day when God shall be “all in all,” as the Apostle Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians 15:28, *“When all things have been subjected to him, then the Son himself will be in subjection to the one who subjected all things to him, so that God may be all in all.”*

On that great day the church will proclaim the absolute worthiness of God: *“You are worthy, our Lord and our God”* (vs. 11.) The Lord our God is worthy *“to receive the glory and the honor,”* and He is worthy *“to exercise the power.”* Note: The Greek verb (λαμβάνω) translated, “to receive,” also contains the meaning, “to take,” or, “to claim,” hence, “to exercise power or authority.” God’s worthiness is due to the fact that He is the Creator: *“you created all things, and because of your will they were brought into being, indeed, they were created.”* All things have been created by God’s sovereign will and for His sovereign purpose and glory; at the Last Great Day this truth will be acknowledged and accomplished. Because the LORD God is the sovereign Creator, He is worthy to claim the glory of His creation, receive the honor from His creation, and exercise the power and authority over His creation.

Here, then, is the way in which the church shall greet her Lord when He comes in His glory. As the glory of that Last Day is revealed to us here in Revelation chapter four, let us even now join with the heavenly host in praising the LORD our God.

Conclusion

Let us praise the LORD for His majesty! Let us praise Him for His grace! Let us praise Him together with the heavenly host!