Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

A Trip to Heaven, Part 3
Scripture: Revelation 4:6b-11
Code: 66-18

I want you to turn in your Bible for our time in the Word of God tonight to the fourth chapter of the book of Revelation. I want to finish up this tremendous, tremendous chapter we've entitled "A visit to the heavenly throne."

In the wonderful text of Revelation chapter 4 we are taken to heaven. We are taken there by the Apostle John to see the throne of God. And by the way, this is an experience that very few have had. Isaiah had such an experience in a vision when he saw God on a throne high and lifted up, recorded in Isaiah chapter 6. Ezekiel had such a vision which he records in the first chapter of his prophecy, and there he tells us the majesty and the wonder and the splendor and the glory of his vision of the throne and of God.

And then John has this experience. It says in verse 1, "Behold, a door standing open in heaven, the first voice which I heard like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me said, `Come up here and I will show you what must take place after these things.'" And John then is transformed, as it were, beyond time and space to ascend past all of the heavens that we're familiar with as we look up into the heaven of heavens and the very throne room of God. He is going to find out what is going to take place in the future. That begins to unfold in chapter 6. Before the actual unfolding of what is going to take place after these things we find in chapters 4 and 5 his experience of viewing the throne of God. And so on the wings of the words penned under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by the Apostle John here, we take with him this incredible trip to the throne of God.

Now I remind you of what we've already learned, the central piece, as it were, in this scene of heaven is the throne. In verse 2 John says, "Immediately I was in the Spirit and behold, a throne was standing in heaven." This is a set throne. On it sits the ruler of the universe, namely Almighty God.

And then we went through a series of prepositions and we noted that John speaks of "on the throne." He says in verse 2, "One sitting on the throne, and He who was sitting was like a jasper stone," that's a diamond-like stone, you remember, "and a sardius," that's a ruby-like stone, "in appearance and there was a rainbow around the throne like an emerald in appearance." So he tells us who was on the throne. It was none other than Almighty God, shining in brilliant diamond glory with the red representing, no doubt, His provision of sacrifice as well as the flaming fiery judgment that proceeds from the throne against unbelievers.

And then John noted not only what was on the throne, or who was on the throne, but what was "around the throne." And he says, "Around the throne was a rainbow, not a usual rainbow but one like an emerald in appearance." Ezekiel, by the way, in his vision saw the same rainbow. We noted for you that it's probably a symbol of grace and mercy, a symbol of faithfulness for God gave a rainbow to Noah to demonstrate His grace and mercy toward mankind that He would not drown them again and to be a symbol of that promise. So around the throne, first of all, we see a rainbow, symbolizing God's faithfulness and His grace and mercy.

And then we noted also around the throne in verse 4, twenty-four thrones and upon those thrones twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments and golden crowns on their head. We suggested to you that the twenty-four elders are most likely representatives of the church. We said that this, of course, is symbolic then of a glorified and coronated church. The church now is present in heaven, symbolically seated on thrones represented by the twenty-four elders, and thus we can assume that if the church is in heaven now, there has been a Rapture that has taken place. And so we see then around the throne, a rainbow, and around the throne those coronated saints who have triumphed and are now crowned and wearing the robes that symbolized their eternal righteousness. The fact that they are sitting also indicates that their work is done, unlike the angels who have yet much to do, they have reached the point of their rest.

And then the fourth thing we noted was what was coming "from the throne." Verse 5 says, "From the throne proceed flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder," emblems of God's fiery judgment which is about to break out as we will note in chapter 6. John is caught up, he's to see what's about to take place and what is about to take place is fiery furnace judgment, a series of holocausts that break out on the earth as God begins to display His wrath against sin.

And then we noted fifthly another preposition "before the throne." We find that in verse 5 there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne and they represent the seven-fold Spirit of God. We also noted that before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass like crystal. This was a base upon which the throne was set. That crystal platform was there to reflect the glory of God, to refract it like a prism and send His blazing glory through all of the universe.

And so we see the heaven and we see in the heaven of heavens the throne and on the throne is God and around the throne the manifestation of His grace and mercy and faithfulness and the coronated and elevated saints. And from the throne comes the emblems of His fiery judgment and before the throne is the Spirit of God and as well, a platform of crystal that can cause His glory to be reflected. So we see God in His universe rule. We see Him in His glory and His splendor and His beauty and His majesty and His sovereignty and His power and His holiness and His wrath. They're all on display.

The scene then is the scene of the throne of the glory of Almighty God as He begins to unleash His judgments for the purpose that His Son may take over the earth. The Son, you remember, has the right to the earth. He, after all, is its King of kings and Lord of lords. It has been man's day but it is about to be the Lord's day and He will take the earth and give it to His Son who is its rightful heir. And that's what happens during the time we call the Tribulation, the Great Tribulation, the day of the Lord.

So this incredible vision shows us what is on, around, from and before the throne. We go one step further, as we pick up the text tonight, and that is in verse 6 we see two prepositions combined. It says, "And in the center and around the throne, four living creatures."

Now here we see four living beings that are both in and around the throne. In the center or in the middle of the throne and around it. It gives the sense of an inner circle moving through and around the throne very close to the presence of God. They're in it and they're around it all at the same time in motion, surrounding God and moving. Ezekiel describes them very vividly. They are called the four living creatures from the Greek verb zao, to live. They are living ones, not...not really animals. They shouldn't probably be called beasts or creatures, that would be a different word, theria, but they are living ones, living beings.

Let me take you to Ezekiel for a moment so you can see the description that Ezekiel gives. In verse 4 he says, "As I looked, behold a storm wind was coming from the north, a great cloud with fire flashing forth continually, and a bright light around it. And in its midst something like glowing metal in the midst of the fire. And within it there were figures resembling four living beings." And as he describes them, listen to what he says, verse 5, Ezekiel 1, "And this was their appearance. They had human form, each of them had four faces and four wings. Their legs were straight and their feet were like a calf's hoof. And they gleamed like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides were human hands. As for the faces and wings of the four of them, their wings touched one another, their faces did not turn when they moved, each went straight forward. As for the form of their faces, each had the face of a man, all four had a face of a lion on the right and a face of a bull on the left, and all four had the face of an eagle. Such were their faces. Their wings were spread out above, each had two touching another being, and two covering their bodies. And each went straight forward wherever the Spirit was about to go they would go and without turning as they went. In the midst of the living beings there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches darting back and forth among the living beings. The fire was bright and lightning was flashing from the fire. And the living beings ran two and fro like bolts of lightning." And that, of course, gives us the picture that John saw when he said they were in and then they were around and we see them in motion.

"Now as I looked at the living beings, behold there was one wheel on the earth beside the living beings for each of the four of them. The appearance of the wheels and their workmanship was like

sparkling beryl. And all four of them had the same form. Their appearance and workmanship being as if one wheel were within another. Whenever they moved they moved in any of their four directions without turning as they moved. As for their rims, that is the wheels, they were lofty and awesome and the rims of all four of them were full of eyes round about. And whenever the living beings moved, the wheels moved with them. And whenever the living beings rose from the earth, the wheels rose also. Wherever the Spirit was about to go, they would go in that direction. And the wheels rose close beside them for the spirit of the living beings was in the wheels. Whenever those went, these went, and whenever those stood still, these stood still. And whenever those rose from the earth, the wheels rose close beside them for the spirit of the living beings was in the wheels.

"Now over the heads of the living beings there was something like an expanse, like the awesome gleam of crystal extended over their heads. And under the expanse their wings were stretched out straight, one toward the other. Each one also had two wings covering their bodies on the one side and on the other.

"I also heard the sound of their wings like the sound of abundant waters as they went. Like the voice of the Almighty. A sound of tumult, like the sound of an army camp. Whenever they stood still they dropped their wings. And there came a voice from above the expanse that was over their heads. Whenever they stood still, they dropped their wings."

You say, "What does all that mean?" Well I'm not sure about the details. But I'll tell you one thing, he saw something spectacular. He saw these four living creatures with all of these various faces and manifestations. And he saw the spirit of those living creatures in some kind of wheels that were moving and those wheels seemed to be bright and flashing and it was all in motion. This was the original light show, believe me. This was...this was supernatural lasers flashing and refracting through the prisms of these very beings.

Now who are they? Who are these living creatures? These incredibly beautiful and glorious beings who were so utterly indescribable? Don't try to take everything in Ezekiel chapter 1 and comprehend it, it is just a grandiose description of the indescribable. But we know who they are. Chapter 10 of Ezekiel and verse 15, "Then the cherubim rose up, they are the living

beings that I saw by the river Chebar. Now when the cherubim moved the wheels would go beside them. So when the cherubim lifted up their wings to rise from the ground, the wheels would not turn from beside them. When the cherubim stood still, the wheels would stand still, and when they rose the wheels would rise with them for the spirit of the living beings was in them."

He's simply saying that these living beings were the cherubim in blazing light and glory and movement and flashing brilliance, cherubim. Cherubim are angels, that's the plural of cherub, cherubim are angels frequently referred to in the Old Testament in connection with God's divine

power. For example, in Psalm 80 verse 1, Psalm 99 verse 1 and elsewhere we find the cherubim associated with the power of God.

We also can note that they appear also to be concerned about the holiness of God. They then are in God's presence and they are guarding His holiness. And they are there for the purpose of expressing His power when He bids them to do that.

In 1 Kings chapter 6 verse 23, "In the inner sanctuary, the building of the temple, he made two cherubim of olive wood, each one ten cubits high. And five cubits was the one wing of the cherub and five cubits the other wing of the cherub." A cubit is about 18 inches, from the tip of your fingers to your elbow. "The other cherub was ten cubits, both the cherubim were of the same measure and the same form. The height of the one cherub was ten cubits and so was the other cherub. And he placed the cherubim in the midst of the inner house and the wings of the cherubim were spread out so that the wing of the one was touching the one wall and the wing of the other cherub was touching the other wall, so their wings were touching each other in the center of the house. He also overlaid the cherubim with gold."

Now you know, in the inner sanctuary the Holy of Holies, the cherubim were spread out over the Mercy Seat in the ark of the covenant. And there they are, the symbols guarding the holiness of God, the symbols representing the power of God as He acts against sin. They then are the living creatures. They are most beautiful, they are most magnificent. They are most glorious. They are most indescribable.

I think it might be worth just a moment, in Ezekiel 28 we read more about this kind of angel. You might be surprised to meet one who is described in very similar terms. It says in Ezekiel 28:11, "Again the Word of the Lord came to me saying, `Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre and say to him...Thus says the Lord God, you had the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the Garden of God. Every precious stone was your covering, the ruby, the topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx and the jasper, the lapis lazuli, a beautiful blue stone, the turquoise and the emerald and the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets was in you on the day that you were created. They were prepared."

Now listen to verse 14, "You were the anointed...what?...cherub who covers, who's there to guard God, as it were, to guard His holiness. And I placed you there, you were on the holy mountain of God, you walked in the midst of the stones of fire, you were blameless in your ways from the day you were created." Who's he talking about? Satan. "Until unrighteousness was found in you." One of those living creatures, one of those cherubim who may, by the way, be the same as the seraphim, one of them was Lucifer, son of the morning.

These angelic beings are unique. They are elevated. We know there are ranks of angels and they must have been at the top. In the third chapter in the book of Genesis when the man and woman were cast out of the Garden of Eden, it was cherubim who were placed on the east side of the Garden to guard and keep the tree of life, to keep man from eating the tree of life and living forever and ever in his fallenness.

In the building of the tabernacle, the pattern of which God gave to Moses from heaven, there were cherubim interwoven into the fabric of the veil...the ten curtains that covered the tabernacle. Above the ark of the covenant, as I just noted for you, that contained the Ten Commandments which if a man kept he should live, and if a man broke he will die. There they were, over that solid-gold lid, the cherubim. Throughout the Old Testament Jehovah God is called "The One who dwells between the cherubim." And so, they were very special angels.

What they look like is very hard to describe and very, very hard to understand. Let's go back to Revelation and see what we can see and grasp what we can grasp. He says about them, "The four living creatures were full of eyes in front and behind," and that is precisely what Ezekiel said, he said they were like a wheel, their spirit was like a wheel full of eyes. They are an exalted order of angels. That's seen by their closeness to the throne, they were in and around it. They certainly are to be distinguished from perhaps what we could call more common angels. There were, for example, in Revelation chapter 7 verse 11, "All the angels standing around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures."

So they are even sorted out from just the rest of the angels as very special exalted angels. Their task, their duty makes them more elevated, more responsible, more unique if not at all more righteous for all the angels are equally holy.

What sets them apart we find out here. They have eyes everywhere. What does that mean? Their awareness, their alertness. Apparently that's indicative of their comprehensive knowledge and their ability to see and perceive things. They're not omniscient, that's reserved for God alone, but they're aware of whatever pertains to their duty, to protect and serve holy God and to express His power. Nothing apparently escapes their scrutiny. Again he says down in verse 8, "They had six wings and are full of eyes around and within." Twice he reminds us that there are eyes everywhere. That's speaks of their knowledge. They are very knowledgeable. They are the most knowledgeable of angels. And they are aware of the most.

The second thing he says about them in verse 7 has to do with their responsibility. "And the first creature was like a lion and the second creature like a calf and the third creature had a face like that of a man and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle." Now this is similar to what Ezekiel saw. We don't expect it to be exact because it is a vision and it is an indescribable one at that, but it's very, very close. Ezekiel's cherubim resembled human beings, generally and then had these same kind of

characteristics of the lion, the calf, the man and the eagle. And John gives us a simpler description from his viewpoint. Ezekiel's cherubim had four facial appearances. But as John looks, he only sees one of each of their four faces. He sees the face of a lion or calf, or as Ezekiel says a bull or an ox, a bovine animal. He sees the face of a man and the face of an eagle.

Now what do these faces on these cherubim mean? Ezekiel tells us they all had all the faces, but the way they were turned when John saw them, he saw the one with one face, the other with another and another and another. What does it mean? What do they represent?

Well some have suggested that the lion speaks of untamed creatures, the calf or the bull of domestic creatures, the man of the greatest of all creatures, the eagle representing all the flying creatures. And that the angels are seen in their relation to the created world. That they have some duty and responsibility on behalf of God to tend to the created world.

It is also possible that the lion symbolizes strength and power, the calf symbolizes service, the man symbolizes reason and the eagle symbolizes speed. It may well be then that what you have here are cherubim that are represented as being able to see and be aware of vast amounts of information and action. And that these angels are powerful, dutiful serving, rational, swift beings in discharging their duty. I like to think that they are symbolic in that regard. Again the lion symbolizing strength and power, the calf service rendered, the man reason and the eagle speed. They are swift, they are rational, they are service oriented and they are powerful.

In the Talmud the rabbis wrote, "There are four primary forms of life in God's creation...man, calf, lion and eagle." And they felt that creation was represented in those four. In the camp of Israel, three tribes gathered under each of these four banners...several tribes gathered with Reuben, symbolized by a man, several tribes gathered with Dan symbolized by an eagle, several tribes gathered with Ephraim symbolized by the ox or the calf, and several tribes gathered with Judah symbolized by the lion.

So, not only could they represent all of the created order, not only could they represent certain characteristics and attributes of the angels themselves, but it is also reasonable to say that they may even have represented God's people because in the past God collected His people under the banner of these four. Perhaps these angels then have some special role in the life of Israel.

But for now, they are involved in judgment. And they are very involved in it. In chapter 6 verse 1, "I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals," the judgment begins with the breaking of the first seal, "and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, `Come.'" And it is this cherub, this one cherub that calls the rider on the white horse that starts the judgments. In chapter 15 of the book of Revelation and verse 7, "One of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever." When it comes time

for the bowl judgments and these rapid fire wrath judgments are poured out and the final holocaust takes place in a very brief time as all seven are poured out rapidly, it is the cherubim, one of them who hands over, as it were, the bowl to pour out the final wrath of God.

And so, they are very involved in judgment. They may well have been involved and still may be in some way with the nation Israel who was at one time under their banner, as it were. They may be made manifest here with the various attributes that we noted and they may even have some responsibility over the created order. All of those are possibilities and it's difficult to be dogmatic and so it's best perhaps to see them all.

There's a third element, we see not only something about their...their personal nature or their personal knowledge, something about their responsibility, but thirdly, we note their worship. He says, verse 8, "The four living creatures, each one of them having six wings and then are full of eyes around and within." Each of them having six wings. That is reminiscent of Isaiah 6 where he sees the seraphim and each of them had six wings. With two they covered their face, remember that, Isaiah 6:2, with two they covered their feet and with two they hovered. And the Hebrew word is like something like a celestial helicopter, just staying in motion. Here the highest order of heavenly beings had six wings...two to cover their face. Why? Because they were created beings and couldn't look on the full glory of God without being consumed. Two to cover their feet because the very crystal platform on which they stand is holy ground. And with two they hover, ready to do His bidding.

You might note that four of their six wings are related to worship. And only two are related to service. Because worship is always the priority.

And so they have these six wings, just like the seraphim in Isaiah 6:2. They are there in the presence of God and they are adoring and they are worshiping His majesty and His glory. In fact, it tells us about their worship. It says in verse 8, "And day and night they do not cease to say, `Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.'" It is their constant occupation day and night in the eternal sphere to offer God eternal worship. This is their privilege. This is their calling. This is their permanent occupation.

So, we looked at on the throne and we saw and we saw God. We looked around the throne and we saw a rainbow and twenty-four elders. We looked from the throne and lightning flashing, beginning the mood of judgment. We looked before the throne and we saw the Holy Spirit and a crystal platform. We looked in and around the throne and we saw these angelic creatures moving and they're worshiping and praising God and adoring Him. And also, ready to do His bidding in regard to the created order, in regard to the people of Israel, in regard to judgment.

And that leads us to a final note. Another preposition that I'll have to insert, let's call it "toward the throne...toward the throne." We already saw it in verse 8, "The four living creatures day and night do

not cease to say, `Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty who was and who is and who is to come.'" This is toward the throne and they direct worship.

In this chapter, beloved, in this chapter and the next, chapter 5, there are five hymns of praise...five of them in which, now listen carefully, the size of the choir gradually increases. It gradually increases. First here in verse 8 you have a quartet...a quartet of four living beings. You move down in to verse 10 and you add twenty-four elders and you've got a choir of twenty-eight voices. You move in to chapter 5 of verse 8 and you've got twenty-eight voices but added to them, according to verses 8 to 10, are harps, the orchestration comes in. You go down in to chapter 5 verse 11 and added to the twenty-eight voices and the orchestration come all the angels. And then by the time you get to verse 13, every created thing in heaven on earth and under the earth, on the sea and all things in them is added to it. So here the music begins, praise to God.

There are two parts to this oratorio, this crescendo of music. In chapter 4 you have an oratorio of creation. The Lord God, the Almighty, who was, who is, who is to come...the One who lives forever," in verse 9. Verse 10, "The One who lives forever." And then verse 11, "Worthy art Thou to receive," and so forth, "glory and honor and power, for Thou didst create all things. And because of Thy will they existed and were created." Here is the music that is the oratorio of creation.

In chapter 5 you have the oratorio of redemption...of redemption. Beyond creation to recreation, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." And so, you have starting here in verse 8 this thrilling crescendo of praise directed toward the throne...a quartet; twenty-eight voices; twenty-eight voices with instruments; twenty-eight voices, added instruments and all the angels; and to all the angels, every created being in the universe. And first, they praise God for creation, and then they praise God for redemption.

When we pick up this study next time we're going to go in to all of this glorious crescendo of praise. Suffice it to say for now, we've seen the throne, we know who's on it, we know who's before it, in and around it, we know what's coming from it and we know what's being directed at it. This is a true visit to heaven. And may I suggest to you the proper response...the proper response? It doesn't tell us what happened to John here, but back in chapter 1, the first time he had a vision it says in verse 17, "I fell at His feet as a dead man." That is very reminiscent of the experience of Isaiah because back in Isaiah chapter 6 when Isaiah had his vision of heaven, he had a similar response. "Then I said...verse 5, Isaiah 6...Woe is me, I am destroyed for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips."

When John had his first vision, he went into a coma out of sheer fright, panic set in because he knew that if he saw God in His throne, holy God, holy, holy, holy God, that God saw him and God saw his sin and it frightened him into a paralysis. Isaiah had the same response. Woe is me, I am damned, I am ruined, I am sentenced to hell. I have seen God and God has seen me. And if God has seen me,

I am done. Ezekiel, "When I saw it," he says, "I fell on my face."

It's the right response. They all had it, same response...fell over in absolute fear. You can't just take a trip to heaven like this and walk away. You've got to realize this is holy God that you have seen. And it ought to shake all of us to the core to realize that He sees us and sees our sin and our iniquity. He is infinitely holy. The holy angels are there, surrounding Him. His holiness blazes forth in judgment. And that should put fear in all of us. But in every case, He manifested His grace. To a frightened panicked Isaiah who thought he was about to be sent to hell, the Lord sent an angel with a coal from off the altar to touch his lips and said your sins are forgiven. To a panicked Ezekiel lying in the dirt face down, He said get up...get up. To John in chapter 1 who had fainted in fear, the hand of the Son of God reached out and touched him and said, "Don't be afraid." That's the wonderful balance.

Let me tell you something, folks. The world is full of people who when confronted by the holiness of God will be consumed. The first time they take a visit to the throne room, they will be consumed because when they get there it's going to be called the Great White Throne. And all of the ungodly of all of the ages are going to come to that throne and be cast in to the lake of fire which burns with fire and brimstone forever. It's only when those of us who have been redeemed come into the throne room that we can walk back out. And though we may be frightened, to be exposed to a holy God because of our sin, it is His mercy and grace granted us in Christ that allows him to reach out and say, "Get up, you're forgiven." We must have that balance of fear and assurance.

John learned his lesson in chapter 1 and didn't fall over in chapter 4. How we should rejoice that our God is absolutely holy and yet He is loving and gracious to those who are protected by the righteousness of His Son.

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