

Sixteen years ago this September, friends of mine went on holiday to New York to see the sights and enjoy exploring the city, and it was a something they had planned for a long time. But their plans were shattered while they were there, along with the plans of millions of others. Nineteen evil men, with hearts and minds filled with hate and with a twisted sense of self-righteousness and vengeance, hijacked 4 airliners and carried out suicide attacks against specially selected targets. Over 3,000 people were killed during these attacks and it can be argued that things have never been the same since.

Most people in the western world struggled to come to terms with the truth of what had happened and there was no one with answers. What we needed at that time was someone to say; I understand your fear, I know the enemy and I have a plan to deal with them. I know what we're going to do to face the coming days and we will overcome this hardship and tragedy together, and that's essentially the message of Revelation ch4.

Notice John's words from Revelation 4:1 to 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 a trumpet said, **Come up here and I will show you what must take place after this.** At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. 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.*

Jesus is telling John that he's about to see *what must take place after this!* What's coming in the following chapters of Revelation are horrendous pictures of war, famine, pestilence and death. But before we jump into describing the dangers and challenges the future holds, we find ourselves in God's throne room witnessing an awesome worship service filled with strange sights and sounds. When I first began to study this passage I suddenly thought what's going on here?

If Jesus has told John that he's about to see *what must take place after this*, why would the first thing that Jesus lets John see be a beautifully impressive church service? Why not just get right down to business and tell us all about what we really want to know, which is the conflict between the forces of good and evil, the battle between the forces of Satan and the angels of God? But instead we find ourselves being led into a praise service. Why start here?

We start here because that's where God knew we needed to begin. We need to realize that when we read Revelation it's possible for us to focus on the wrong things, and unless we read with humility, we can make the mistake of thinking that the judgement that comes in Revelation is for others and not us. It's easy to focus on the powers of darkness and the battle of Armageddon; and so on. When we read Revelation, there are so many dark and scary aspects of John's vision that we end up making the dark things our focus, which is a mistake.

And it's easy to understand why because with the imagery of judgement, death and destruction, Revelation can be a scary book and rightly so. Throughout the Bible we are told that God is not to be disobeyed and there will be judgement for those who reject His Son. But as well as judgement and death, Revelation is a warning to us to repent and turn to God, and that's why John's vision starts in the throne room of heaven.

**Consider the images of Revelation 4. This worship service is for God. V3: *And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.*** God shines with a brilliance that can hardly be described. John uses three of the most valuable stones he can think of to describe the beauty of our Lord. He uses the diamond white jasper, the ruby red carnelian, and the bright green emerald. Our Sovereign is a God of glory! But more than that, He is also a God of grace. And with Him in the throne room are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.

Who are these elders wearing the white garments in Heaven? According to Rev 3:5, they are Christian believers, so this means we are the ones sitting on those thrones with God. 24 is a representative number for the believers of all ages. Revelation 21 gives us another view of heaven; the Holy City, the New Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven. Revelation 21:12 describes the city gates: *On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.* Those 12 tribes represent the Jews who God made a covenant with in Old Testament. And then we find a description of the walls of that great city in Revelation 21:14: *The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.* They represent all those who have come to faith in Christ as result of the original apostles witness and testimony. 12 represents the OT Jews who were God's chosen people before Christ, and 12 represents those who have come to faith in Christ, making a total of 24.

It's the same 24 in Revelation 4 that are surrounding the throne of God. Which means that you and I will be there, because we have trusted Christ. We're among those NT who came to faith after Christ died and rose again. The point is God will share his throne room with the likes of us! What amazing grace! Someone once offered this picture of grace: If someone brutally murders your child and you take things in your own hands, that's revenge. If you're willing to allow the law and the courts to arrest and punish the offender, then that's justice. But if you pardon the murderer and forgive him, then that's grace!

And that's exactly what God did for us. We through our actions, murdered His Son on the cross; it was our sins that put Him there; but God forgave us when we came to Him in repentance and believe in Him. More than that, God adopted us and He will take us to His heavenly home to live with Him as His children. But even more than that, He will let us rule and reign with Him as joint heirs with His Son, Jesus Christ. He'll share His throne room with us. And that's grace! And in a time of trouble it's good to remember that. In times of challenge we need to see that our Sovereign God is full of grace and glory.

And God warned us that we would face trials on earth, Jesus faced temptations and trials throughout His time on earth and we are no different. Jesus said: ***I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)*** That's what Revelation is trying to drive home to us. We are going to have trouble in this world but take heart because we belong to Jesus and we will overcome.

Revelation 4 is telling us how we can overcome, and that's by following the example of those in the throne room, and look at what they're doing: They're singing praises to God, and they're worshipping the Father and focusing their attention on Him. Everything is centred on the One at the centre of the throne room. And the reason for this is because when we praise and worship God, and we focus our attention solely on Him. If we're focusing all our attention on God, then we can't be focussing on our circumstances and difficulties, or our failures and tragedies. When we learn to worship and praise God like those in the throne room, we focus on God who has the power and the majesty and the desire to lift us up out of our despair and hopelessness.

That's why the four living creatures cry out: *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.* God has always been there in the past and He's always with us in the present, and He'll always be there in the future when we need Him. He'll never leave us or forsake us, even in our darkest moments, which is why the 24 elders cast their crowns before His throne and sing this praise: *You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.* This is the God who created everything that has ever existed. He is a God of awesome power and might.

We started with God giving John a vision: ***Come up here and I will show you what must take place after this.*** And what is going to take place is warnings, destruction of the ungodly, and judgement of the unrepentant, and then the final battle between God and the forces of evil, before God recreates heaven on earth and comes to live with us.

But before all of this, God is calling His people to worship Him, almost as a test to see who have placed their faith in Him. This is what worship is all about, it's so we can demonstrate our faith by gathering to sing songs of praise and glory to God. And the worship to God in Revelation 4 is the predicator to the storm that's to come. The judgement that comes in the following chapters of Revelation is for all time, and our worship is what separates those who believe in the Son, and those who don't and will face judgement. God is with us and He has sent His Son for us. So, let us worship our awesome God, because He alone is worthy of praise. ***Amen.***

*(1767 words)*