

Study 10 – Revelation 4:1-11

1 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."

If we can see things from heaven's perspective, we will be so much better off. These churches were living in the midst of political turmoil and religious persecution. Yet the Lord doesn't take them to Rome, He takes them to heaven!

The voice talking to John was like a trumpet. A trumpet is hard to miss. Often God is speaking loud and clear but we can miss what He is saying due to disobedience, hardness of heart, or expecting God to say something other than what He is actually saying. Our problems in hearing God are often the same ones that we encounter in communicating with others. Even though they are talking to us face to face, we can miss what they are saying for a variety of reasons.

He ordered John to "come up here." That makes me think of what Paul wrote to the Ephesians: **"And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus"** (Ephesians 2:6-7).

We experience resurrection life, having been raised with Christ, and now we are seated where He is. We do not bring Christ down to where we are, but rather join Him where He is.

John saw an open door in heaven. When God calls you to Himself, it is an exciting thing! God opens His world to us and that is what we need to focus on; that is where we need to go. Is there an open window in heaven for you? What is God saying to you? What are you seeing?

You get the idea that God has everything under control. The words "after this" are used twice in this verse. God orders our affairs. There is no need for anxiety when He knows all the "after this" situations in your life.

2 At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it.

John could see more clearly what was going on in the Church and in the world from Patmos because he was in the Spirit. The open door in heaven led him to a throne, symbol of power and authority. It is not an empty throne, but someone is on it.

We are to pray in the Spirit (see Ephesians 6:18) and love in the Spirit (see Colossians 3:18). In essence, we are to live in the Spirit, seeing what the Spirit sees and living by the Spirit's directives. This is what's called a Spirit-led life. This is not the exception, but the rule.

3 And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne.

How can you describe heaven and God? Finite words can never do justice describing an infinite God set in the magnificence of heaven.

Heaven must be a colorful place! We are taken from the problems and weakness of the seven churches in the first three chapters, to the splendor of heaven. We get so “hung up” on earthly things, but the Spirit is contrasting for us the two worlds of earth and heaven. Where should our focus be? Which one is more beautiful? The Spirit is taking our attention to where it should be: on heavenly things!

4 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.

Heaven is not only a place of beauty, it is a place of government. Elders historically sat at the gates of the city and ruled the affairs of that city, kind of like a city council. One of Jesus’ titles is “King of kings.” Jesus does not rule alone in the kingdom of God, but He is supreme ruler. You and I share in that heavenly government when we rule the portions of the Kingdom that God assigns to us.

Any authority we have as believers comes from the ultimate authority, the throne of God. Our ruling is centered on His throne and our qualifications, our white robes and crown, came from Him. We are made worthy to rule by means of Jesus’ sacrifice.

There seems to be a partnership in this picture between heaven and the church. The government of God is often delegated to His servants. I wonder if this is what the elders represent?

5 From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God.

Heaven can also be a terrifying place to those who do not know God or His voice. It is hard to think of heaven like this, but many are afraid of God’s presence. And God is indeed awesome.

Consider the words of the writer of Hebrews:

You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear." But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the

church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect (Hebrews 12:18-23).

The story involving Moses is from Exodus 19:16-25. The people wanted to hear God for themselves, but when He spoke they were so terrified that they changed their mind and told Moses to report all that God said. They had a “heavenly” encounter with God on earth and it was a fearful thing.

The lightning and thunder from the throne is perhaps God’s voice that goes forth from His seat of government. Consider Psalm 29 and how it describes the voice of God:

“Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness. The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD thunders over the mighty waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, Sirion like a young wild ox. The voice of the LORD strikes with flashes of lightning. The voice of the LORD shakes the desert; the LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh. The voice of the LORD twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. And in his temple all cry, “Glory!” The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD is enthroned as King forever. The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace.”

There are also seven lamps before the throne. God’s word brings light to every situation. **“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Psalm 119:105)**. I will try not to involve numerology in our study, but the number seven is the “perfect” number of completion in the Bible. God’s word provides perfect and complete light to any and every situation. There is no shadow in God’s word. It is pure light! You can trust its perspective and content.

The seven spirits have also equipped the church with all good gifts and knowledge to rule and carry out the mission of God’s people on earth. There is indeed a partnership between heaven and earth. The saints are seated in heaven yet carry out heaven’s will here on earth. We are not alone!

6 Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back.

Heaven is a place of purity. The sea of glass can serve to reflect God’s radiance and beauty, thus taking what is already magnificent and making it even more dazzling. There is no end to God’s beauty! No matter how much of His glory we behold, there is still much more.

Heaven is also a place of transparency. There are no hidden agendas in heaven, no lack of pure integrity, and as one hymn said, "No shadow of turning with Thee." Everything is clear and pure: the worship, God's word, and God's will.

The Church needs to apply those two principles as well: purity and transparency.

There are four creatures who are covered with eyes. What weird creatures! But Revelation is of course a vision, so much of what we will see is symbolic. We must be careful not to insist that there is only one way of interpreting these symbols. If the Bible does not directly interpret the symbols, then we must be careful to insist that we have special insight into what they mean.

Symbols are for reflection and learning, discussion and insight into deeper truths, and our objective for this study is to determine how the early church applied this book to their daily walk so we can the same.

You cannot be dogmatic about the book of Revelation and insist you have the answers to its secrets.

The life of the creatures does not come from themselves, but from their position around the throne. The Church receives its life from God Himself. Heaven is the source of everything for the Church.

7 The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle.

There are four living creatures who are alive and watching. These are living creatures and I think (I don't know) that they represent the role of the church on earth. The lion is a figure of strength and majesty; the ox is a figure of diligence and work; the man is of course man in all his humanity, which was created by God; and the eagle is the church's ability to soar into the heavens in carrying out the will of God. What do you think of this?

8 Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."

The creatures had six wings; there is no lack of their ability to go anywhere at anytime. I thought of the Great Commission, which states: **"Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age'"**(Matthew 28:18-20).

I wonder then if the characteristics of the four creatures, strength, diligence, humanity and ability to soar over the earth don't apply particularly to spreading the gospel. Aren't we to use every means and all our ability and strength to extend the

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kingdom of God through evangelism? No matter how much persecution or how difficult times are, we are to soar and with all “eyes watching,” pursue every opportunity to evangelize?

Was that the message to these churches and to us: “No matter what you’re going through, God is with you. Preach the word!” That must be the essence of God’s people, as described here.

We are not to evangelize to build big churches but to increase the worship of God. While these creatures are carrying out their work, they are worshipping God. We can get so bogged down in the work of the Church, we can forget what the essence of that work is!

9 Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives forever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives forever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: 11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

By giving glory to God while we work, we keep the word from becoming “our own.” I am not building “my church;” I can’t talk about “my staff;” I can’t refer to “my vision;” I don’t work with “my people.” Everything belongs to and is about God. All that we do was and is God’s idea; in His church, they are His people, His staff, His vision and His gifts. It’s all about Him and not about bishops, evangelists, builders or televangelists.

We don’t know the names of the elders because it’s all about God and not about the men and women who serve God.

We saw the imperfections of the churches in the first three chapters, now we are beholding the beauty of heaven and how heaven relates to these imperfect churches.

Chapter four is not a picture of how things will be, but rather how things already are. We are partnering with heaven to do God’s will and that will is to be done with all energy, diligence and haste.