

**A GLIMPSE INTO GLORY ©
30 November 2012**

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I. Introduction:

On Christmas morning believers who love Jesus Christ celebrate the most critical theological fact in human history, namely, the incarnation of Jesus Christ when the Son of God pitched his tent in our midst as the God-Man, undiminished deity and perfect humanity in one Person as predicted in the Hebrew Bible. When that sage, Simeon, a devout and godly Jew, looked upon this babe who was being dedicated at the Temple, he not only knew he was holding "Salvation" in his hands (Isaiah 52:12-53:12), he also realized He was beholding the image of the invisible God, the God of Glory. All too often people who celebrate Christmas fail to worship Him because their focus is elsewhere. We somehow separate the babe from the manger of long ago from activities of worshipping God himself. One of the most fascinating glimpses we have the God of Glory in Scripture is found in Revelation 4 & 5. Not only do these two chapters serve as a prologue to the Great Tribulation but Revelation 4-5 also gives us a scene that discloses a reverent heavenly worship that focuses on the holiness of the Father and the worthiness of the Son. In his most excellent book, *The Wonder of Worship*, Dr. Ron Allen puts it this way, "These heavenly previews [Revelation 4 & 5] give us focal points for the subject of our worship, namely, God the Father and Jesus our Redeemer, and they emphasize that our worship of God will endure into eternity."¹ Just like the mother Mary upon news of the coming Messiah turned her response to worshipping the Most High, so should we.

Therefore, in this month long series I will be specifically drawing upon Revelation 4 & 5 to help us in the midst of this Christmas season to focus on the person and activities of God. Thus, in this first installment, I will focus on Revelation 4:-3. But before I do, let me help set the context by summarizing chapter 4 in one statement: *John describes his transition to a state than enabled him to view the heavenly throne room in order to show both the person and location where the Great Tribulation judgments will originate.* To be sure, the heavenly throne

¹ Ronald B. Allen, *The Wonder of Worship* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2001), 205.

room does not reveal a "cosmic demon" that plays with us as if we are some chess game for his hedonistic amusement. No, he is no evil genie. Rather, we will see a Sovereign Creator God who is infinitely holy, just, gracious, and merciful; one to whom alone all worship is due. As Dr. John F. Walvoord penned in his classic commentary, *"Revelation of Jesus Christ"*, "Here is the true picture of the universe being subject to the dominion of an omnipotent God."²

II. Exposition:

1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And 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."

Let us make some observations of verse 1. The Apostle John is invited to heaven. The phrase "*after these things*" seems to imply the beginning of a new vision. The first vision had extended from Revelation 1:10-3:22. In essence, the scene changes from a picture of the glorified Jesus Christ walking in the midst of the churches to that of the Father in the heavenly throne room. John "*looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven.*" By using the word "*behold*" John calls special attention to an opened door. To be sure, this door is different than the door in Revelation 3:8 that cannot be shut or the door in Revelation 3:20 where Jesus stands is knocking, seeing entrance into His own church. No, this door is different. This is a special door opened for John whereby he was taken up through the door into God's very presence in the court of heaven. Thus the door's location is in heaven, once again, into the very court room of God. The fact that the door is opened indicates that the door had been opened and left that way for the apostle's arrival (passive voice of the verb). It also enhances the fact that the apostle is about to receive divine disclosure.

As John looks upon the door, the apostle receives specific instructions from the glorified Christ "*in a voice like a trumpet.*" The voice of Jesus summons John upward: "*Come up here, and I will show you the things which must take place after this.*" Notice, that this is not a two-way conversation. Christ is speaking to John. This summons is somewhat similar to the command God gave Moses in Exodus 19:18-20:

² John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 104.

“18 Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. 19 And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered Him by voice. 20 Then the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, on top of the mountain. And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.”

In both cases you have a note of authority in the summons to come up here with the purpose here being that Christ will show him what must take place *“after these things.”* John is offered a new vantage point for the information that is about to be disclosed to him

When Jesus says, *“I will show you what must take place after these things,”* notice that these future events are not merely probable, they are fixed. This is clear because Jesus uses the words, *“must.”* These are fixed, determined, binding events because they are the outworking of God’s will, His decrees. So, immediately, the predictions that follow in John’s *Revelation* remind us that God is sovereignly in control over both human and cosmic history (e.g., heavenlies).

John reports in verses 2-3: *“Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. 3 And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.”*

Thus, in this prophetic ecstatic trance whereby John’s ears hear, his eyes saw, and his emotions real as though his body was literally in heaven, John receives his second revelation when he states *“Immediately I was in the Spirit”* (*“egenomen,” “I came to be”;* *“eutheos,” “immediately”*). It seems that this is somehow a spiritual ecstasy or trance into which he was transported in heaven. *“And behold, a throne was standing open in heaven.”* There is no description of the throne. All we know is that throne, in Greek originally might have been used as teacher’s chair or a judge’s bench. While this word throne came to be reserved for kings and gods, interestingly, the word throne is used 37 times in Revelation whereas it is used 15 other times in the N.T. This idea of God’s throne, esp. associated with the Temple is a prominent part of the O.T. For example, Psalm 11:4-7: *“The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord’s throne is in heaven. His eyes watch; his*

eyes examine all people. Psalm 47:8-9: God reigns over the nations! God sits on his holy throne! 47:9: The nobles of the nations assemble, along with the people of the God of Abraham, for God has authority over the rulers of the earth. He is highly exalted.

I take it that the throne is merely standing in its place because John just *“arrived”* in heaven and *“behold,”* he first sees an established throne.

Now we come to the climax of John’s look into the heavenly throne room. *“And upon the throne [was] one sitting.”* This person is God the Father because He is distinguished from the Lamb in Revelation 5:5, 7:5:16; 7:10, and from the Holy Spirit in Revelation 4:5. Look how he is referred to in this passage: *“And upon the throne [was] one sitting.”*

Why did not John name Him more directly? It could be that he was unwilling to use His divine name for the same reason it is reverently avoided among Jews. It could also be that it is impossible to express in one word the awesomeness of our glorious, majestic God. While John gives a detailed expression of Jesus Christ in Revelation 1, he does not do so here with God of the Father; we don’t even have any anthropomorphic expressions mentioned here. Indeed, what word could describe Him?

But what John sees reveals this truth: **God wants his readers to know that He is the Sovereign Glorious God who is in absolute control; He is sovereign.** So, when the judgments come forth in the Great Tribulation, those on earth may know that they flow from His hand, He is control, He is God, and there is no other such as the Anti-Christ. This is the deep breath he wants the readers to experience before the storm of judgments that are soon to follow. The repetition of this word *“sitting”* and the fact that this word *“sitting”* is in present tense (participles; *kathemenos*) denotes the activity of our God firmly reigning as the supreme, sovereign ruler; God is in control. As the New Testament scholar Lenski states, *“Sitting is not rest but reigning as when a ruler is on his throne, with his power ruling his domain.”*³

John now moves to describe the *“One sitting on the throne”* (vs. 3). *“And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in*

³ R. C. H. Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament: The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation*, repr. (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson, 1998), 170.

appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance."

There are occasions in Scripture where God and His throne are seen by His people. Consider the following:

Exodus 24:10: God appears standing on a pavement of sapphire;
1 Kings 22:19: He is seen on His throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the Temple. Ezekiel 1:26-28: God and His throne are like the brilliance of glowing metal, fire and brightness all around. Daniel 7:9: His clothing was white as snow and His throne as fiery flames and many thousands were standing before Him.

But here in Revelation 4 our sovereign Lord is described in terms of two precious stones, the jasper and the sardius. Rather than human-like characteristics to describe God, God is described in gem-like colors.

We need to recall that God's essential glory cannot be fully disclosed to man. God's Word declares that God "*dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen, or can see*" (1 Tim. 6:16). Thus, these gem-like colors are used to portray something of God's eternal glory, awesome holiness, and majesty. "*Jasper*" was a clear, crystal-like gem, a translucent rock, possibly even a diamond. To equate the modern jasper (which is green and rather opaque in color) to an ancient stone called jasper is a bit misleading. Rather, this ancient jasper offers a word picture of the purity and brilliance of God's holiness (see Rev. 21:1; 21:19). Since such a stone picks up and reflects light, it calls our attention to the fact that God is light, a holy God who reveals, and unmask the darkness.

"*Sardius*." This stone is a fiery deep red stone, most likely a carnelian. In antiquity, it was most often the one used for engraved stones. This stone symbolizes God's wrath and justice. Some scholars have argued that it may also be symbolic of His redemptive work of love and grace in the person of the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world through His death on the cross. It seems most probable that these two gem-colors together symbolically offer a word picture of the holiness, wrath, and justice of God because of the same mixture of white light with fire which is reminiscent of O.T. and apocalyptic visions of divine majesty in such passages like Ezekiel 1:4; 8:2; Daniel 7:0; and Revelation 1:14.

Dr. John F. Walvoord makes an acute observation about these two stones. He states that in the Old Testament these stones had a special relationship to the tribes of Israel. Each tribe had a representative stone which the High Priest wore on his priestly garment. As the High Priest, he was representing each tribe before God at the altar. The Jasper was the stone representing the first tribe, the tribe of Reuben. Reuben means "*Behold a Son*." The last tribe, Benjamin was represented by the Sardius. Benjamin means "*Son of my right hand*." So these two stones may also have special application to Israel if it represents the whole nation of Israel, the first tribe, the last tribe and all in between." Surely, these two stones too remind the nation Israel of the claims of Jesus Christ: "*Behold a Son*" and "*Son of my right hand*."⁴

But if these gem-like colors represent God's holiness, wrath and justice, it may very well be tempered by what follows in verse 3. "*And there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.*"

As part of the majesty and glory of this heavenly scene of our sovereign reigning God, John saw a beautiful rainbow of emerald green. No doubt this rainbow is reminiscent of the covenant God made with Noah, reminding the readers that God's mercy is equal to His majesty. The rainbow encircles the throne. However, no indication is given as to the relationship of the rainbow to the throne. In other words, we do not even know if the rainbow encircles the throne vertically, horizontally, or even diagonally. This rainbow is distinguishable from other rainbows because it has a green color, "*like an emerald*." We know of rainbows as having seven colors.

Perhaps, the best answer is that the rainbow possessed a number of shades of green similar to a rainbow. Green is typically used to represent life and fruitfulness. In this specific case it seems to be used to refer to both the grace and mercy of God. This bow has only the one color, namely, emerald green, which symbolizes grace.

Therefore, these jewels represent the divine attributes of the Person himself; the green bow indicates the effects of this Person's rule manifested in these attributes. It is His rule and dominion as exercised

⁴ Hampton Keathley, "Introduction to Things Predictive (Rev. 4:1-22:1)" in www.netbible.org.

that shines like a bow of grace. If the emerald green depicts grace, then it most certainly reinforces the allusion of God's mercy.

It is as if God is saying to both Israel and the rest of the world, all of whom are about to enter into the Great Tribulation, "**Turn to me through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the first begotten Son, and I will pour out my grace and mercy to you for the Great Tribulation, which is decreed in my fixed plan, is about to come upon you.**" Even during the Great Tribulation mercy and grace is possible in the midst of a horrific series of divine judgments.

III. How Should We Then Live: Revelation 4:1-3:

Having considered Revelation 4:1-3 whereby we see a heavenly depiction that affirms God's presence, position, and power as the One who His Sitting on the Throne, how we should then live? We see a very life-changing fact: **God, who is present, is the Sovereign Ruler.** As C.A. Scott states: "His presence scintillating with the brilliance of a diamond, glowing like a carnelian, with the concentrated redness of a furnace, and yet overarched with fresh and living green as of an emerald. Blinding brilliancy, the glowing of a consuming fire, the soft radiance of rainbow promise, these were the contrasted elements in the impression made upon the heart of the seer by the vision of Him who sat upon the throne."⁵

I think if we could see Him as He is, we would immediately filter out the essential from the incidentals. For example, we would give up our pettiness, the routine hum-drum of living, rekindle our intimacy with God, flee from sin, and unequivocally trust Him with all our circumstances, problems, and difficult situations.

If we could see God exalted on His throne in His glory...

1. Our pettiness would not find pertinent expression. Mike Yaconelli, editor of the *Wittenburg Door* once wrote:

Petty people are ugly people. They are people who have lost their vision. They are people who have turned their eyes away from what matters and focused, instead, on what does not

⁵ Quoted from Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 480.

matter. The result is that the rest of us are immobilized by their obsession with the insignificant. It is time to rid the church of pettiness.

It is the time the church refused to be victimized by petty people. It is time the church stopped ignoring pettiness. It is the time church quite pretending that pettiness doesn't matter...

Pettiness has become a serious disease in the church of Jesus Christ-a disease which continues to result in terminal cases of discord, disruption, and destruction. Petty people are dangerous people because they appear to be only a nuisance instead of what they really are-a health hazard.⁶

George Will once stated, "Pettiness is the tendency of people without large purposes."⁷

2. We would give up the rut of routine: There is a sign along an Alaskan highway that I am sure has brought a smile to motorists: "Choose your rut carefully...you'll be in it for the next 150 miles." I also think we would give up the routine after having a glimpse of glory. I would argue that many of us have no idea how deeply entrenched we are in the rut of the routine. Externally, everything looks great. We are involved in church, we have Christian friends, we study Scripture, and we meet needs. To be sure, faithfulness it is a big part of Christian maturity-we need to do those things. But I would think that if we were called to heaven like John, we would come back immediately with a new direction, a new path; we would immediately jump out of that rut and strive enflamed for God. We would truly make it our singular aim and ambition to please Him. Prison couldn't hold us back and home arrest would be out of the question. In fact, I believe we would...

3. We would rekindle our intimacy with God: Rekindle our intimacy with God. After being in His throne room seeing Him who is depicted with white light and fiery red with an emerald like rainbow encircling the Throne depicting His mercy and grace, I suspect our minds would constantly dwell on it; I think we would be on our face in long periods of prayer. We would find that memory occupying our

⁶ *The Wittenburg Door*, December 1984/January 1985, quoted from *The Finishing Touch* By Charles Swindoll, 517.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 517.

thoughts, our day dreams, etc. I think we would find ourselves lying on the grass, sitting on a front porch, taking long walks, pondering all the implications of the vision we received. Moreover, we would be motivated like never before to worship God by turning the focus from us to the one who made us in His image. Dr. Allen states it so well, "True biblical worship concerns the whole of one's life; its ultimate meaning is rooted in one's wholehearted love for God."⁸ I think it would no longer be so quickly said of some of us, "*This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.*"

4. We would immediately flee from sin: We would separate ourselves from that which is profane and wicked. We would proactively seek not to offend Him. We would whole heartily turn away from sinful appetites and fleshly tendencies because it is so ugly and He is so pure and beautiful. Our disposition would be like Ezekiel and Isaiah: "*Woe unto us for we are sinful people.*"

5. Lastly, I believe we would really be able to trust Him with every circumstance. Going back full circle to our introduction- I think after we saw Him, we would trust Him so much more with our circumstances, no matter how difficult they may become. After seeing Him, when we found ourselves faced with troubles, I bet our response would be "God is well able to handle this." In fact, the "What if's" would no longer be part of our vocabulary. No longer would we be immobilized by the unknown. "Worry occurs when we assume responsibility for things which are outside of our control." If we saw God sitting on His throne, ruling and directing His plan for the ages, you and we would immediately realize that worry and faith never mix well.

IV. In conclusion:

There is no need to experience the court of heaven in order to change our perspectives, mindset, and choices right now. **We have enough information from His Word to apprehend a Christ-centered mindset about His Trinitarian Essence, His Glory, and His Perfections to deeply cultivate disposition that says, "I will make it my singular ambition to pleasing before you in the choices I make, the values I embrace, and the pleasures I pursue."** We are not in the dark; we are not outside the loop; we have received the

⁸ Allen, *The Wonder of Worship*, 55.

memo. Moreover, when we place our salvation in Jesus Christ, believing that He is the Son of God who died on the cross for our sins, we were indwelt with the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the one and only Triune God. Because of our union with Jesus Christ whereby we have a new mind to know God, a new heart to love God, and a new will to obey God, our issue is not our capacity. Rather, our problem is our willingness. But greater is He that is in you! Therefore, if you find yourself distracted, too busy, even with good, and honorable things, or in a life that is rather mundane, dry, fragile, and brittle, I would like for you to do two things. First, right now, commit yourself to praying to God, asking Him for an unquenchable passion for Him. And second, ask that God that He may give you a grievous burden for the lost. If you will commit to these two requests every day to sincere prayer, I am truly confident that God will answer you. Your will life will become an adventure, your longings will be realized, and your joy will be complete.