

AN EXPOSITION OF REVELATION 4:4-11:
WHAT DO GOD’S SURROUNDINGS SAY ABOUT HIM?

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I. Introduction:

Just like many of you, I really appreciate art, whether classical, neo-classical, impressionistic, or abstract. I love taking art studio classes, studying art history, and reflecting upon the philosophical and theological aspects of beauty. Sometimes I just can get lost in an art museum for hours-focusing on both the style and content of various paintings, frescoes, sculptures, etc.

Well, one day, I had the blessing of going over to the home of a family who was visiting a church where I once served. It was my first serious attempt to get to know them. As soon as I walked into the main living area, one with a cathedral ceiling, I immediately found myself in a room with tall neon lighted plastic palm trees, a bright colored couch, and black walls. I thought to myself, wow!-these are some very eclectic people. Then, all of a sudden, my eyes were fixed upon what was in front of me-

The neon green palm trees, the flaming-red couch, and the black walls all faded into the background as everything else about me was stunned at what I saw hanging, hanging there above the mantle of the fireplace. My heart began to race and my mind began to be filled with questions of bewilderment: Why? Is there any significance? If so, what does that say about them?

There, before me, was a copy of the famous 1893 art piece by Edvard Munch, titled “*Scream.*” Sometimes called “*The Cry*” or *The Shriek*,” this painting, which is of several in a series, pictures an agonized figure depicted against a blood red skyline in Norway. It has been said to symbolize people who have been overwhelmed by existential angst and the only recourse is to scream in despair. In fact, it has been used as a cover to one of Ravi Zacharias’ work, *Deliver us from Evil.*

Ladies and gentlemen:

When you consider with what or with whom you surround yourself, what do those objects or those persons say about you, your identity, your family, your affections, and your goals?

Transition:

If we were to examine what surrounds God in his heavenly court, what would we learn about Him? In particular, who and what surround Him? If so, what is the significance?

This evening, after I review three questions from last lesson, I am going to focus on the identity of those who are in the heavenly throne room who are around and before the One who is sitting on the Throne within his futuristic vision. In particular, we will specifically study the identity of the 24 elders, the seven spirits of God, and the four living creatures. Next time we meet we will focus on the expressions and statements of worship in chapter 4 before we move on to chapter 5.

If I could summarize chapter 4 in one statement I would say that chapter 4 offers a threefold description: ***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.*** In this vision of the future, “that which will take place later,” which serves as a heavenly prologue to the divine earthly judgments, we 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 states, “*Here is the true picture of the universe being subject to the dominion of an omnipotent God.*”¹

Let me review three questions that were posed to me following last week’s lesson:

First: Who is the One sitting on the throne?

Second: If God is unapproachable, then how can John be in His presence?

Third: How can God be sitting on the throne if He is omnipresent?

Regarding the identity of the One sitting on the throne, I am not saying I have final answers here, nor do I want to say anything more or less than what the Text says but in chapter 4 it appears to me that the One sitting is God the Father because Jesus Christ is represented separately as the Lamb. To be sure, there are those who would disagree. For example:²

1. Some have argued that the Father and the Son are properly on the throne using Revelation 3:21 and Rev. 22:1 as the basis for that view [“*to sit*, “*to cause to sit*” is an aorist active infinitive of purpose or result].³ In fact, some covenant theologians see Christ’s throne and the Father’s throne as being the same throne. They don’t see a future millennial Davidic throne whereby Christ will rule on earth during the millennial kingdom.

The present position of Christ is contrasted to His future millennial reign. Christ is sharing the Father’s throne and glory, taking His seat at the Father’s right hand in heaven (cf. Psalm 110:1; Matt. 22:44; Acts 2:34; Eph. 1:20; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2), and this forms the basis of His promise to the overcomer. The day will come, however, when He will establish his earthly Davidic reign on earth (Matt. 25:31) which will be the fulfillment of the predicted earthly throne of David (Psalm 122:5; Ezek. 43:7; Luke 1:32) and the overcomer will share that relational rule with Him as He does with the Father.⁴ Other passages like Luke 1:32; cf. Dan. 7:13-14; Matt. 25:31; Acts 2:30; Heb.

¹ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 104.

² *Ibid.*, 105.

³ On Revelation 3:21-22, Tom Constable writes:

Scholars have explained the relationship between Christ's throne and the Father's throne in two ways. Many interpreters believe they are the same throne (cf. 22:1) [This is the view of most covenant theologians and progressive dispensationalists] However, this verse clearly distinguishes two thrones [normative dispensationalists]. The Scriptures consistently present the Father's throne as in heaven and Christ's Davidic throne as on earth and His eternal throne as in heaven. Here Christ's Davidic (messianic, millennial) throne on earth and the Father's eternal throne in heaven seem to be in view [www.soniclight.com; pg. 44].

⁴ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 99.

2:5-8; Rev. 20:4 assert that he will occupy this throne when He comes in glory. In fact, Christ's occupancy of the throne of David is prominent in Revelation (1:5, 7; 22:16).

2. Others have said Jesus Christ is on the throne in Revelation 4 and the Father on the throne in Chapter 5.
3. Still others don't see Jesus in the throne room at all. Rather, they see this strictly a depiction of God the Father in a way that manifests the O.T. picture of the God of Israel in view of the heavenly vision serving as a prologue to the Great Tribulation.

I have two fundamental reasons why God the Father is the One sitting on the throne in this futuristic vision. In fact, both Pastor Bruce and I contend that Father's eternal throne is in heaven and Christ's Davidic throne on earth will be a millennial, messianic throne.⁵

- a. **The use of language.** In Revelation 4:2 the one sitting on the Throne is unnamed and only described in gem-like colors whereas we have a lengthy description of Christ in chapter 1 and again when Jesus describes Himself at the beginning of every letter to the seven historical churches in chapters 2-3. On the other hand, I believe it is significant that God the Father is not given any anthropomorphic description; no description is given beyond gem-like colors; He is not even named.
- b. **He is distinguished from the Lamb (Which denotes Christ)** in Revelation 5:5-7; 6:16; 7:10 and perhaps from the Holy Spirit in 4:5 (cf. 19:4). For example:
 1. In Revelation 5:5-7 we see the transfer of the Scroll to the Lamb from the One sitting on the throne, because He alone is worthy to take the scroll. 5:7, "*Then he [Lamb] came and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne*" [NET].
 2. In Revelation 6:16 throughout the world people cry out to the mountains and rock "*Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the lamb!*" 17 For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand? They think the fate of being killed by rocks is relatively better than having to face the awful horror of God's wrath.

⁵ R. C. H. Lenski, Robert Mounce, Allen P. Ross, and John Walvoord also believe this is God the Father though it appears that Mounce believes both occupy the throne (see Revelation 3:20-21). Not only does He promise to come into the life of the one who invites Him (vs. 21), but again special blessing is promised to the believer who overcomes. He is promised the privilege of sitting with Christ on His throne. This means the privilege and right to share in Christ's authority and rule in the millennium and eternal future.

On Rev. 3:21 Hampton Keathley, III states, "But note the basis of this: "as I also overcame and sat down." The real victory over death, sin and Satan was accomplished by Christ in His life, death and resurrection. Because of His sinless life and perfect obedience to the Father's plan—even the death of the cross—He overcame sin, Satan and death and was granted the right and authority as the God-man to sit with the Father until operation footstool, until he makes His enemies the footstool for His feet (Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 1:3, 13)" www.netbible.org.

3. Then in Revelation 7:10 a multitude from the Great Tribulation, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes cry out with a loud voice, saying, “*Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.*”

Secondly, if God is unapproachable, then how can John gaze upon God? 1 Timothy 6:16 states, “*God dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man seen, or can see.*” I have a twofold response.

1. Harmonizing what we know about God being directly unapproachable, God presented Himself in a way that John could handle; John best describes God as being gem-like colors, portraying His brilliance, purity, and justice.
2. Secondly, and I have not seen this argued elsewhere, but it seems reasonable to me remember that John was in an ecstatic trance. So while he saw with his eyes, listened with his ears, etc. it was through a trance like state. To me, receiving a vision of God sitting on the throne is not the same as directly approaching or gazing upon Him; his body remained at Patmos.

And third, how can God be pictured sitting on a throne if He is omnipresent? Simply, I would say that while heaven can’t contain Him, He is able to manifest Himself just as He did in the O.T as demonstrated in His glory appearance in the Temple.

Having attempted to answer these questions, let’s continue with our exposition of Revelation 4.

If you recall, we came to a very life-changing fact in verses 1-3: God, who is present, is the Sovereign Ruler. We also came to an incredible and mind-boggling description of Him. In John’s description of the One sitting on the throne, we see the following:

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.⁶

Moving to verse 4 John turns our attention to those who surround the throne. He moves from his description of God to His surroundings.

First directs our attention to the 24 elders with 24 thrones which encircle the throne. Then he directs our attention to the seven spirits of God who are in front of the throne. He then proceeds to the Four living creatures that are in the middle and around the throne and then returns to the 24 elders.

⁶ Quoted from Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 480. He cites it from C. A. Scott, *The Book of Revelation*, 156-7.

II. Who are the 24 Elders?

- A. Vs. 4: *In a circle around the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on those thrones were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white clothing and had golden crowns on their heads.*
- B. Let's make the following observations before we attempt to answer this question regarding the identity of the 24 elders.
1. These elders are the first group of beings that come to John's attention in this heavenly setting.
 2. The number 24 is not used in Revelation in any other connection than what we have here.⁷
 3. We don't know if these 24 thrones that encircle God's throne are smaller, lower, or both. It is reasonable to assume that since they encircle God's throne they are subordinate to the One who sits on the throne. .
 4. They are described as being dressed in white clothing and are wearing golden crowns on their heads.
 5. The big question is: **Who are the 24 elders?** Attempts to determine who they are may be divided into two broad categories: men or angels. Within each category are three variations.
 - a. Regarding the identification of elders as being "*men*" some have argued that they are:
 1. 24 representatives of Israel;
 2. 24 representatives of the church;
 3. Representatives of both Israel and the Church.
 - b. Regarding the identification of elders as being "*angels*" some have argued:
 1. they are angels of the O.T. priestly orders;
 2. the faithful of all ages;
 3. or a special class or order of angels.

⁷ George Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 75.

6. Those who think they might be humans, whether they are 24 representatives of Israel, 24 representatives of the church or a mixture of both typically contend for the following:
- a. The term “*elder*” is used nowhere else in the Bible to describe angels.
 - b. Their number may relate to the 24 priestly orders in Israel that worshipped and served the Lord (1Chron. 23:6; 24:7-18). If you remember there were thousands of priests in Israel’s day of ascendancy under David and Solomon. However, they all could not minister at the same time. So, they were divided into twenty-four orders, each of which was represented by a priest. When these priests met together, even though they were only 24, they represented the whole priesthood and at the same time the whole nation of Israel. Thus, this idea of 24 O.T. priests would have special significance to the religious leaders of Israel, esp. in view of the coming Great Tribulation.⁸
 - c. The elders wore crowns. This word for crown “*stephanous*” often refers to a victor’s crown (2:10; 3:11). If the 24 elders were angels then the Greek word for “*crown*” would be “*diadem*” which is a crown of governmental authority. Nevertheless, this word for crown is used by John 4 times in the Book of Revelation (6:2; 9:7; 12:1; 14:14) to represent authority. Moreover, the Scriptures never speak of angels wearing crowns or victory wreaths as a reward for their faithfulness.
 - d. They must be humans because humans will be co-heirs with Christ and even overcomers are promised to share the throne with Christ whereas angels are never spoken as seated on thrones elsewhere in the Bible.

Keith Krell states, “Yet I believe these elders are men. Jesus told the church at Laodicea, in chapters 2 and 3, that whoever will overcome will sit down with Me in glory. Here are some people sitting. He told the church in Thyatira, whoever was faithful would rule with Him, with a rod of iron. Here are some people with crowns who are sitting on thrones. He told the church at Sardis that if they would be faithful he would clothe them in white. Here are some people clothed in white. He told the church at Smyrna, he who overcomes, I will grant to him a crown (stephanos), and here are some people wearing crowns.”⁹

- e. If they are humans and if they are indeed apostles, Krell, in a conversation Bob Deffinbaugh, makes an interesting insight:

“This verse is interesting to me because in Mark 10:35-45, John and his brother James had their eyes on a throne. Now there are 24. These thrones are in a circle, around the throne. I don’t see a “first or second chair” as James and John were

⁸ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 106.

⁹ Keith Krell, “A Glimpse into Glory: Revelation 4:1-11” at www.netbible.org.

hoping. Although we can't know with certainty, I'm inclined to interpret the 24 thrones as 24 seats of authority given to the faithful. On 12 of these thrones, it is likely that the 12 disciples (minus one, replaced by Paul, I assume) are seated. In Matthew 19:28, Jesus promised His disciples 12 thrones and said they would eventually judge the twelve tribes of Israel. On the other 12 thrones are seated "elders" representing Gentile believers. The point (especially for John) is not who these "elders" are by name, but what they are doing—falling on their faces before God in worship (4:10-11)."

8. Others like Otto Schmitz in the *TDNT* says the twenty-four elders "are certainly to be regarded as angelic powers".¹⁰ Several arguments favor their identification as angels.
 - a. These elders are always closely associated with the four living creatures.
 - b. They appear as separate, distinct groups from redeemed human beings (Revelation 7:9-17; 11:16-18; 14:1-5).
 - c. The elders also occupy thrones around the throne of God while redeemed human beings are "before" the throne of God (4:4 with 7:9, 15).

For example: Revelation 5:9-12 states:

"After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. 11 All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen."

- d. The elders are seated upon these thrones is an indication of privilege and importance. Redeemed human beings are not seated in the presence of God (6:9-11; 7:9-15:2-4); they don't occupy their thrones until after Christ's return to earth (Revelation 19:7-8). They definitely would not be O.T. saints because they are not resurrected till after the Great Tribulation.
- e. Given the term that elders function as ruling priests in this present age, Michael, an angel, is identified in Daniel 10:13 and Col. 1:16) as one of the chief princes. So, we do see ruling or levels of authority among angels. We would just argue that in this case "elders" is being applied to a certain order of angels.

¹⁰ Otto Schmitz, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, volume 3, p. 167. See also, C. Fred Dickason's ¹⁰ *Angels: Elect and Evil*, p. 75.

- f. The twenty-four elders are seated on these thrones before the events of the tribulation whereas the redeemed do not occupy thrones until after Christ's return to earth (Matthew 19:28; Revelation 20:4).
 - g. One of the elders served as an interpreter of God's message to John (Revelation 7:13-17). That is a distinctly angelic function.
 - h. John appropriately addressed the elder as "*lord*".
 - i. Wearing white robes is not unique to redeemed humanity, it is also the attire of angels (Matthew 28:3; John 20:12; Acts 1:10; Mark 16:5).
 - j. The elders are related to the prayers of the saints in a manner that the Bible ascribes to angels (Revelation 8:3, 4 with Psalm 141:2).
 - k. "Their song of praise in Rev. 5:9-10 definitely sets them apart from those who were purchased by the blood of Christ (most certainly the church!)."¹¹
9. If they are not humans but a special order of angels, then what is their purpose? N.T. scholar Robert Mounce offers the following idea:

"...it seems best to take the twenty-four elders as an exalted angelic order who serve and adore God as the heavenly counterpart to the twenty-four priestly and twenty-four Levitical orders (1 Chronicles 24:4; 25:9-13). Their function is both royal and sacerdotal [priestly] and may be judicial as well (cf. 20:4). Their white garments speak of holiness, and their golden crowns of royalty."¹²

10. If they are humans then the wearing of the crowns indicates that the elders have already been judged and rewarded. This may mean that the 24 elders are made up of apostles, maybe other N.T. saints, or faithful church age saints.
11. I favor the view that they are angels for some additional reasons as well:
- a. The elders and later an angel are both as having bowl offerings of incense (cf. 5:8; 8:3):

Revelation 5:8 [NET]. "***And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders threw themselves to the ground before the Lamb. Each of them had a harp and golden bowls full of incense (which are the prayers of the saints).***"

Revelation 8:3-6[NET]. "***Another angel holding a golden censer [which was a bowl in which incense was burned] and was stationed at the altar. A large amount of incense was given to him to offer up, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar that is before the***

¹¹ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 121; he is following N. B. Stonehouse's argument in *Paul Before the Areopagus*.

¹² *Ibid.*, 121-2.

throne. 8:4 The smoke coming from the incense, along with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. 8.5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it on the earth, and there were crashes of thunder, roaring, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake."

- b. Paul refers to certain ranks of angels as thrones, principalities, rulers (Col. 1:16; Rom. 8:38; Eph. 3:10).
- c. In the O.T. God is pictured surrounded by a council of heavenly beings:
 - 1. In Psalm 89:7: "*God is feared in the council of the holy ones, great and terrible above all that are about him.*"
 - 2. In 1 Kings 22:19: Micaiah "*saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the hosts of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left.*"

4:5-6 "From the throne came out flashes of lightning and roaring and crashes of thunder. Seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God, were burning in front of the throne 4:6 and in front of the throne, was something like a sea of glass, like crystal."

- 1. In addition to this phenomenal scene of God sitting on the throne in brilliant and glorious beauty of white light and deep red, with an emerald-like rainbow and 24 elders encircling the throne, we are now told that from the throne comes out flashes of lightning and roaring and crashes of thunder.
- 2. Though we don't know for sure if the "*roaring*" is an allusion to thunder or if it is better to translate this word as "*voices*", it is somewhat similar to thunders, lightnings, and voice of the trumpet which marked the giving of the law in
- 3. Exodus 19:16. If so, the flashes of lightning, roaring, and crashes of thunder are a "*fitting preliminary to the awful judgments which are to follow in the Great Tribulation as God deals with the earth in righteousness.*"¹³ See this associated with judgments in Rev. 8:5; 11:19; 16:18).
- 4. In fact, in Revelation we see that "*the symbols of thunder and lightning are always connected with a temple scene and mark an event of unusual import. In 8:5 they follow the breaking of the seventh seal, in 11:19, the blowing of the seventh trumpet, and in 16:18, the pouring out of the seventh bowl of wrath.*"¹⁴

¹³ Walvoord, *Revelation*, 108.

¹⁴ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 122.

III. Who are the seven spirits in front of the throne?

- A. We come to the third identity, the Seven Lamps or Seven Torches which are interpreted as the seven spirits of God.
- B. We see the spirits burning in front of the throne.
1. The identity here is also in dispute. Some scholars lean toward the view that the seven spirits of God are angels while others suggest this is a pictorial reference of the Holy Spirit.
 2. Tom Constable writes, “The wrath of God proceeds from this throne. The seven burning lamps (or torches, Gr. *lampades*, cf. *lychniai*, "lampstands," 1:12, 20) probably picture divine preparedness for battle against wickedness (cf. Judg. 7:16, 20; Nah. 2:3-4; Isa. 4:4; Zech. 4:2-3, 6, 10; Mal. 4:1). The seven spirits of God (i.e., the seven principle angels of God, cf. 1:4; 3:1) will carry out this judgment. The picture is of these torches ready to go from God's presence to the earth where they will consume wickedness during the Tribulation.”¹⁵
 3. Others, like Dr. Walvoord believe that this is a reference to the seven-fold ministry of the Holy Spirit. Dr. Walvoord puts it this way.

“John’s attention is also directed to seven lamps of fire which are seen burning before the throne. These are identified as ‘the seven Spirits of God’ mentioned earlier in 1:4 and 3:1. These are best understood as a representation of the Holy Spirit in a sevenfold way rather than individual spirits which would require that they be understood as seven angels. Ordinarily the Holy Spirit is not humanly visible unless embodied in some way. When the Holy Spirit descended on Christ on the occasion of His baptism, the people saw a dove descending. If it had not been for the dove, they could not have seen the Holy Spirit. In a similar way on the day of Pentecost, the coming of the Spirit would not have been visible if it had not been for the “cloven tongues like as of fire” (Acts 2:3). The seven lamps of fire therefore are the means by which John is informed of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The number seven is characteristic of the perfection of the Spirit and is in keeping with the revelation of Isaiah 11:2-3. In the heavenly scene it may be concluded on the basis of chapters 4 and 5 that all three Persons of the Trinity are in evidence, each in His particular form of revelation.”¹⁶
 4. Following John Walvoord and George Ladd I take it to be the Holy Spirit as well. In Revelation 1:4 we have the following statement:

¹⁵ Tom Constable, “Expository Notes on Revelation,” www.soniclight.com.

¹⁶ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 108.

“John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth.”

- a. Since the preceding phrase, “*From Him who was and who is to come*” refers to God the Father and the following phrase to God the Son” it really seems reasonable that John is including a reference to God the Holy Spirit, thus including all the persons of the Godhead in this greeting to the seven churches.
- b. It could be that the source of the idea of the seven spirits (which means the Holy Spirit in his sevenfold fullness) is Zechariah chapter 4 where the prophet describes a candle light with seven lamps which are the eyes of the Lord ranging over the whole earth (4:8).
- c. Of course we also have Isaiah 11:2 where we have a reference to the Holy Spirit who produces or gives wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and fear of the Lord (Genitive of Causality).
- d. The first readers of the Hebrew Scriptures may have thought that the Spirit was just another way of speaking of God with awe and wonder. But in the N.T. we learn that the term refers to the 3rd Person of the one and only Triune God (Matt. 28:19).¹⁷
- e. ***If so, why here? In Revelation 1:4 he is pictured as part of the source of divine grace and peace in the greetings to the seven churches. But since the Holy Spirit plays a part in both creation and preservation of the natural world (Gen. 1:1; 2:7; Psalm 104:29-30) It may be there to offer a picture of the heavenly court poised to launch divine judgments in order to purify God’s creation. The eyes of the Lord over the whole earth.***¹⁸

¹⁷ Nelson Study Bible, 1132.

¹⁸ Thomas, Revelation, 351.

III. Who are the Living Creatures?

Let's proceed to examine verses 6-11:

Before the throne there was a sea of glass like crystal. And in the midst of the throne and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. 7 The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. 8 The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying:

**“Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is and is to come!”**

9. Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, 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, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:

**11. You are worthy, O Lord,
To receive glory and honor and power;
For you created all things,
And by Your will they exist and were created.**

- A. Before we examine the four living creatures, let's briefly look at the first part of verse 6, *“Before the throne there was a sea of glass like crystal”*
1. What is the sea of glass? All we know for sure is that it is *“likened unto crystal,”* and in the background are four living creatures. We have no other explanation offered in God's Word.¹⁹
- B. John quickly moves from his observation of a sea of glass like crystal to a description of four living creatures described as in the midst of the throne and round about the throne. They are full of eyes, before and behind, and each of them has six wings. Each of them are distinguished from each other. They are described respectively as like a lion, a calf, a man, and a flying eagle.

¹⁹ Tom Constable offers several explanations: “Some commentators see the “sea of glass” as an analogy to the sea of brass in the Tabernacle or the molten sea in the Temple. Both were washstands so that the priests could cleanse themselves before entering the place of worship. The clear glass-like sea before the throne may represent the need for cleansing before approaching God. The laver (called a “sea” in the Old Testament, e.g., 1 Kgs 7:23; 2 Chron 4:2-6) served the need for cleansing in the Israelite tabernacle and temple. See Steve Gregg, *Revelation: Four Views A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville: Nelson, 1997), 91. Others have suggested that perhaps the fact that this sea is solid indicates that those who can approach God's throne have attained a fixed state of holiness by God's grace. Perhaps the sea represents the forces opposed to God's will and His people. John now saw these forces under God's sovereign control (cf. Exod 24:10; Ezek 1:22, 26).” *Expository Notes of the Book of Revelation* (2007) www.soniclight.com.

- C. Their identity is difficult to determine. At first we might think they are the Cherubim of Ezekiel in the prophet's vision (1:10). Like Ezekiel, John describes them as having the face of a lion, ox, man and eagle. So, the similarity in location and appearance is remarkable.
- D. Notwithstanding, the Cherubim of Ezekiel have only four wings (Ezek. 1:6) while the four living creatures of Revelation have six (similar to the Seraphim of Isaiah 6). Likewise, the four living creatures are "*covered with eyes, in front and in back*" while in the Cherubim, "*all four rims were full of eyes all around*" (Ezek. 1:18).
- E. So, I take it that they too are another order or classification of angels.²⁰
- F. What is their purpose? It appears that these four living creatures have a significant and dual role.
1. **First**, they serve as worship leaders in heaven. Like the Seraphim they never stop saying "*Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.*" (Rev. 4:8). Their proclamation of glory, honor and thanks to God prompts the twenty-four elders to fall down before God in worship and proclaim God's worthiness as they lay their crowns before him (Rev.4:9-11). This worship is extended to Christ also, as the Lamb of God (Rev. 5). This time the entire angelic chorus joins them in worship. Like Walvoord states, "Their ministry before the throne of God is that of ceaselessly ascribing holiness to the Lord."²¹
 2. **Second**, the four living creatures play a key role in directing the judgments of God during the tribulation. Each in turn signals the opening of one of the four seals in Revelation 6. One of their numbers distributes the seven bowls of judgment to the seven angels in Rev. 15. In their final appearance, they lead the entire heavenly chorus in worship at the return of Christ to earth (Rev. 19).

9. Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, 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, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:

**11. You are worthy, O Lord,
To receive glory and honor and power;
For you created all things,
And by Your will they exist and were created.**

IV. How Should We Then Live?

- A. Though next time we will examine their statements and expressions of worship, we may summarize our study by stating the following: surrounding the One who is sitting on the throne, John turns our attention to the following:

²⁰ Taken from Angelology Notes from Dr. Ken Hanna, Dallas Theological Seminary.

²¹ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 109.

1. First: 24 elders with 24 thrones who encircle the throne. I take it be a unique classification of angels.
2. Second: we see the seven spirits of God who are in front of the throne. I take the seven spirits of God to be a reference to the Third Person of the Trinity.
3. And third: In the middle and around the throne are four living creatures. I take this to be another classification of angels.

B Chapter 4 gives us certain truths about those who surround Him in this future heavenly vision:

1. First, the 24 elders and the four living creatures continuously worship Him. They do not cease. **They know their purpose. Do you?**
2. Their activity of worship is God-centered. No attention is drawn to them. There is no first person in their claims of worship. **They know what really counts. Do you?**
3. Notice their location: they are in God's presence. The 24 elders encircle the throne. They fall before Him. The four living creatures are in the midst and around the throne. If they are worshipping Him continuously, they never leave His presence. **They know where to be. Do you?**
4. The content of their worship is most biblical: they continuously bring attention to God and His holiness, eternity, and worthiness. **They know what to offer Him. Do you?**
5. Notice the disposition of the 24 elders: They fall down and they cast their crowns. Whether these crowns are crowns of rewards or rulership, what is absolutely clear is that **they know who their God is. Do you?**

C. Chapter 4 also gives us a central truth about Him in view of the beings that surround Him?

1. All they do is reflect who He is for He alone is worthy of their worship. Do we?

V. Conclusion:

We are continually in His presence. We always say He is with us. To be sure, this is true. No matter how painful or terrible a circumstance is, He is here, He is always sufficient, He is always available. ***But when we say He is with us, have we considered it the other way around- we are with Him!*** We are with Him in our conversations; we are with Him in our thoughts; we are with Him in our dealings with others; we are with Him when we are tempted; we are with Him in our attitudes and actions of arrogance, apathy, our criticisms, hypocrisy, selfishness, and even our flirtations with and enjoyment of sin.