

# The Apocalypse - Revelation 4

by Steve Gallagher

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*The sermon explores Revelation Chapter 4, emphasizing God's majesty as Creator and the heavenly worship surrounding His throne.*

**Duration:** 40:09

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:1, Matthew 6:33, Revelation 4:1-2, Revelation 4:5-6, Revelation 5:1, Revelation 5:5

**Topics:** "Apocalypse Study"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on chapter 4 of the book of Revelation. The chapter begins with John being summoned to heaven where he is given a new vision. The vision centers around God's throne and the scene is described as magnificent and beyond words. The speaker emphasizes the splendor and majesty of God on his throne, highlighting his purity and absolute holiness. The chapter also mentions four living creatures that are full of eyes in front and behind, further adding to the awe-inspiring nature of the vision.

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## Transcript

The following message is provided by Eternal Weight of Glory. For other sermons, teachings, and articles, please visit [EternalWeight.com](http://EternalWeight.com). Okay, we're going to be in Chapter 4 today. John's vision of Jesus Christ walking amongst the churches has come to an end, and apparently there's been some kind of a period of time when he turned back to his senses, however you want to say it, you know, back to human reality anyway.

And now he's summoned up to heaven where he's given a new vision. So Chapters 4 and 5 constitute two closely related scenes in one unified vision of God's throne, okay? Chapter 4 focuses on God the Creator who delivers the seven-sealed scroll, and Chapter 5 focuses on God the Redeemer, in other words, Jesus Christ, the only one worthy to take that scroll and open its seals. So we're starting to get into the heart of the apocalypse now, but before we get started on this chapter, I want to open with a word of prayer, and I'm hoping that this will give us a sense about this aspect of this great and awesome God we serve.

Lord, you are the creator of everything in existence. You created heaven and the angels who populate it. You created the universe and the galaxy that holds our planet.

You created the sun and the moon and the stars. You created the sky and the atmosphere and all of the many gases there are. You created water, rain, snow, and sleet.

You created streams, rivers, lakes, and oceans. You created mountains and valleys, forests, and deserts. You created trees, bushes, flowers, vegetables, and so on.

You created the four seasons and the entire ecosystem. You created fish, whales, and all the different kinds of bottom feeders in the ocean. You created all the various types of birds and animals.

You created the entire world of insects and the unseen world of germs, bacteria, and enzymes, and all of that. And your greatest feat was to create man, who you created in your own image. You are Jehovah, the great creator of everything.

And you oversee this entire creation from your throne. Lord, we stand amazed in your presence today. We humbly approach your throne and ask you to make it real to us as we study your word.

In Christ's name, amen. All right, let's take a look at chapter four. I'll begin with the first two verses.

After these things. Okay, so this is introducing a new vision. The scene, as I said, is already shifted from that first vision of Jesus Christ amongst his churches on earth to a new vision, primarily, in this chapter anyway, of the Father in his court of heaven.

Okay, so after these things, I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I had heard. That's the voice of Jesus, of course, we heard in chapter one.

The first voice which I had 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. Immediately, I was in the spirit. And behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and one sitting on the throne.

Okay, so there is a sudden change. This word immediately, you know, it's a very strong word. And it's, you know, it is indicating that the change has happened instantaneously, very quickly.

Not only is he in and out of the spirit, in a sense, but also in and out of heaven. You know, let me just read something here that George Ladd said. He says it pretty well and lays it out pretty well.

The metaphorical, picturesque character of the language is further suggested by the great fluidity with which the scene changes throughout the revelation from heaven to earth. John is caught up in vision to heaven in 4.1, and remains there until the end of chapter 9. In chapter 10, he is returned to earth, for he sees an angel, quote, coming down from heaven. And he remains on earth until chapter 11, verse 13.

But in chapter 11, verse 15, the scene of the vision is again in heaven. In chapter 12, the seer seems to be on earth again. But chapter 14, verses 18 to 20, implies his presence in heaven.

It's not always possible to follow the seer's movements. But the frequent change of scene makes it evident that while in a trance-like state, one can move without difficulty from earth to heaven. So you see that throughout the book of Revelation, John is being given different vantage points.

You know, and actually this one, I have this picture in my mind. Maybe it's because of some of these images I've seen in these websites where you can purchase images where you see a door up in the sky, you know. And that's kind of the sense that you get here, that he is taken up through this door.

And I was thinking about this whole scene of God's tremendous throne room, this magnificent scene. And what I had in my mind was like John is perched way up here, almost like in one of those great opera halls,

you know, where the workman is up amongst the lights. And he can look down and he can see the orchestra and all the things that are happening down there, and the audience and everything.

He's perched way up there and he's watching all this stuff unfold. Can you imagine what a tremendous vantage point that would be? Okay, let's continue on, verse 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.

Okay, so John doesn't attempt to describe God in anthropomorphic terms. That's a big word for meaning, you know, human-like terms. He doesn't attempt to do that.

The only thing he can think to use as a metaphor for what he is seeing, this mighty being, is a couple of translucent stones. And, you know, we know that God is described as being in an unapproachable light and so on. And I think that what he is seeing here is some kind of radiance coming from this being.

I don't know if he actually sees God. I don't think he does. I think what he sees is the glory, the splendor, the majesty coming forth from God, that his eyes are allowed to see that in the spiritual realm, but he's not actually seeing God.

I don't think he's seeing God. I think it goes against Scripture. But whatever the case is, it's reminiscent of some other places where God's throne are described, like Ezekiel 1, God and his throne are like the brilliance of glowing metal, of fire and brightness all around.

In Exodus 24, Moses saw God standing on a pavement of sapphire. In Daniel 7, his raiment was as white as snow and his throne as fiery flames, and many thousands were standing before him. In 1 Kings 22, Micaiah saw him seated on a throne with all the hosts of heaven standing around him.

And, of course, Isaiah in chapter 6 sees him sitting on a throne, high and lifted up with the train of his robe filling the temple. So those are some just quick little glimpses at other sights that other prophets have had of God on his throne. Now this jasper, some believe it's the diamond.

Maybe that's what they called it back then, I don't know. But if so, it could be that a diamond, if you shine light into it, it refracts light in a thousand colors and directions and everything. And it could be that that's what he was seeing here, something along those lines when he was looking at God the Father.

And it probably is representing the holiness of God. The sardius was a fiery red stone. They think it's actually a modern-day carnelian, but I was just thinking of a ruby.

I don't know what the difference is, but it was a deep red. And if you shone light through it, just imagine if you've ever seen like a red light in a room or something, and just how that red light, how it just shines off of everything. I don't know exactly how all these colors fit together.

And then you have a rainbow around it, around the throne. Not a 180, but a 360-degree rainbow. And it's emerald in color.

So it's almost like a green halo around God's throne. So you've got red in there, you've got the translucence of jasper or diamond, whatever it is, and maybe all kinds of different colors coming off of that. Then you've got this green hue around the throne.

George Ladd says, We can only conclude that the majesty of what John beheld was so great and ineffable that he despaired of trying to describe it in any but symbolic terms. And I think that's probably right. All right, let's continue.

Verse 4. Around the throne were 24 thrones. And upon the thrones I saw 24 elders sitting, clothed in white garments and golden crowns on their heads. All right, so you've got this magnificent throne that dominates the scene in this enormous hall.

When I think of the size of this thing, I mean, I think in terms of something like the Grand Canyon or something like that, just an enormous room. I can't even imagine using the term room to describe it, but throne room. And so you've got God's throne dominating it and then 12 other small thrones going off the side of it in some way.

I don't know if this is what Paul saw when he went up into heaven, but he says in Colossians 1.16, For by him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through him and for him. And that very well could be what he was referring to. Maybe he got a sight of this also and for some reason was not allowed to talk about it.

But who are these elders? I've always believed that they represented the saints of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New Testament. I got that somewhere in the old-time writers, and I just always assumed that was the case. And there was probably some good reasons to think that way, but when I started reading these modern-day commentators, my mind got changed.

I mean, I couldn't argue with their logic. And they all agree. That was another thing.

It's not like some believe this, some believe that. They all hold to the same viewpoint that these elders, these 24 elders are some kind of a high order of angels. And let me give you a couple of their reasons for it.

Psalms 89 and Isaiah 24 both mention a council of holy ones. Which would certainly seem to fit this group. And it could be that the vision Micah saw in 1 Kings 22, that could be that group too.

I don't know. But there is a council of holy ones. Whatever that means, there's some kind of beings that are with God, at least at certain times.

And these elders, their primary functions are of leading worship and acting as intermediaries and interpreters. These are things that only angels do. You don't find saints doing any of those kinds of things.

Those are the kinds of duties that only angels fulfill in the book of Revelation and elsewhere too. And also they're never mentioned as being part of the saints, but are always grouped with angels. So those are some of the reasons why the commentators have come to the conclusion that these are an angelic order of some sort.

The Pope of Commentary says this, And he very well could be right about that. Because we know that something's going to happen, don't we? In the next chapter, there's some kind of special event of enormous importance is going to unfold. So, you know, he could be right.

All right, let's continue, verse 5. And before the throne, there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal. I'm going to stop there. I'll just say about this sea that it could be what Moses saw in Exodus 24, where he saw a pavement of sapphire.

You know, maybe that was the way that he described it. It said a pavement of sapphire as clear as the sky itself. And also in Ezekiel, the first chapter, he said, That certainly has to be the same thing.

So I don't know exactly what the arrangement of all this is, but, well, John called it a sea of glass like crystal. Osborne says this, Man, that just really brings you into the magnificence of the scene. Robert Thomas said this, All right, so let's read a couple more verses.

This is going to talk about these four living creatures. Second half of verse 6. And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within. Okay, now, these are very closely associated with the four beings that Ezekiel saw, described in the first chapter of his book and also in chapter 10 of Ezekiel.

But they also have some similarities to the seraphim that Isaiah described in his vision. Whatever the case is, are these living creatures, are they an order of their own? Are they the same as the cherubim? Are they the same as the seraphim? Are they all the same angelic creatures? Or are those three different groups of similar type creatures? I don't know. It seems as though they're all the same, but whatever they are, they're definitely of the highest order of angelic beings.

When Kathy and I were in London a year and a half ago, we were at the British Museum, and they had in the British Museum these relics they've gotten from all around the world down through the centuries. And in this one enormous wing of the museum, the whole floor is dedicated just to Mesopotamia, Babylon and so on. And you would see these enormous winged sphinxes and winged lions that used to sit out in front of palaces in those cities in Mesopotamia.

And I think that the idea, the concept for those beings had to have come somehow to those people, maybe from creation, I don't know. I don't know where they got the sense of that. But it seems to have been some kind of a corruption of this high order of angelic beings we're talking about here.

Whatever they are, they are attendants of God, and they are the closest beings to the throne of God. And they perform the work of overseeing and taking care of nature and God's creation. Let's just read a few references to these.

In the Old Testament, the cherubim and seraphim stood guard over the Tree of Life in Genesis 3, stood at each end of the ark with their wings outstretched over it, and that's described in Exodus 25, and they led worship in Isaiah 6, and in Ezekiel 1, and also in 2 Samuel 22, they bore God's chariot through the heavens. In the book of Revelation, these four living beings lead worship in this chapter and in the next chapter, and also in chapter 19. They stand sentinel at the throne in chapters 5, 7, and 14, and they take the lead in the outpouring of divine judgment in the opening of the six seals of chapter 6, and also in chapter 15.

And since they are the nearest to the throne and take the lead in worship, it's likely that they are the leaders of the heavenly court. So you have the throne, and then right around that throne, just in the midst of it even, are these four living beings, maybe on quadrants, I don't know. But then you have these 24 smaller thrones around that.

So there's your concentric circle of some sort, and that's the throne room. All right, let's continue reading and see what they sing about. 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.

So these terms, day and night, they do not cease to say. The sense you get from that is that is all they do, you know, just ongoing forever and ever, nonstop. That's all they're doing is singing that song.

But I don't think it's that way. For one thing, Thomas brought out that some of the terminology here like day and night, Paul used that to describe his working, you know, tent making. When he was writing to the Thessalonians, he said, I've labored day and night.

Well, we know that he didn't work on tents 24 hours a day, right? He didn't do it like that. It was just a form of speech, you know, just a kind of a way of saying that it goes on very regularly. And in fact, we know that these four living beings and also the elders, they all have functions that they are taking care of performing.

So since we know that they're also doing other things and they obviously can't be leading in worship all the time, they're not doing 24-7 sort of thing. So it's just a way of saying that there is continuous praise going on or it goes on in a regular basis there in heaven. And this term holy, holy, holy, which of course the seraphim were singing in Isaiah 6, in the Hebrew, anytime a word is doubled up, it's adding emphasis to the word, you know, like for instance, Lord, Lord, that's adding a strong emphasis.

But the tripling of a word has got to be something far beyond that, you know, and it's really describing the infinite nature of God's holiness. I mean, what else could it be? All right, and let's finish out the chapter here. And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the 24 elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne and will worship Him who lives forever and ever and will cast their crowns before the throne saying, Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed and were created.

So we see two different songs come forth here in this scene. You have the four living creatures who are basically praising God for His essential nature as the eternal one, and then the elders who come forth with their song which is describing Him as the creator. In other words, one is who He is, what He is, and the other is what He does, so to speak.

And apparently, you know, Robert Thomas brought this out, apparently there's a great variety of songs of worship going on up there, and of course that would make sense. Think of all the thousands of worship songs we have at our disposal here on earth. We can only imagine what all is up there.

So it's not like this is the only song or that's the only song or these are the only things that you hear over and over redundantly. It's not going to be like that, and even if it was, it would be so tremendous. You would never get tired of it, that's for sure.

So there's some kind of a difference in the songs that are sung up there, but there's a deeper significance also. Let me read what the biblical expositor said. Here they think of creation with all its wonders, of the heavens which declare God's glory, and the firmament which shows forth His handiwork, of sun and moon and stars in their manifold and resplendent glories, of the mountains and the valleys, of the rivers and the fountains of waters, of the rich exuberance of vegetable life which covers the earth with a gorgeous carpet of every hue.

To God all creatures owe their origin. In Him they live and move and have their being. Yes, amen, praise the Lord.

That would make a great song right there. So in Hebrews 11.3, we're told that God created the universe out of nothing. And here we're seeing that He sustains the universe by His will.

And of course it says that in Colossians 1 also, if I remember correctly. But there's a purpose for this song also. This song is being sung preparatory to what? The destruction of His creation, right? Because that's what we're going to start seeing unfolding in the weeks ahead.

God is going to begin a systematic destruction of His own creation. And so before we start getting into that, they are recognizing and acknowledging that God is the creator. In other words, it's His to do with as He wishes.

And let me read again Robert Thomas. Though redemption does not become a reason for praise until chapter 5, this song prepares the way for the climactic announcement that the long-awaited redemption of creation is on the brink of fulfillment. With the song of the 24 elders, this initial scene in the throne room closes.

Alright, so He's bringing out the redemption of creation. And someone else, I don't remember who it was, mentioned that this is preparing for the destruction of creation. Well, which is it? It's both, isn't it? Because God is going to destroy the earth with fire.

But out of it, He's going to recreate everything, the new heavens and earth. And we'll see that later. Alright, now what I want to do is I just want to talk for a few minutes about the significance of this scene of the throne room.

Let me say something about the word throne. It's used 113 times in the Old Testament and 61 times in the New Testament. And of those 61 times in the New Testament, it's used 47 times in the book of Revelation.

So it's only mentioned another 14 times beyond the book of Revelation in the New Testament. David said in Psalm 11, The Lord is in His holy temple. The Lord's throne is in heaven.

His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men. You know, there's such tremendous concepts that are brought forth in some of the things that are said about God's throne throughout the scriptures. Again, let me read Robert Thomas.

The throne of God is extremely prominent throughout John's prophecy, being explicitly mentioned in every chapter except chapters 2, 9, 10, 15, 17, and 18. Okay, so other than those five chapters, it's mentioned in every other chapter in the book of Revelation. Thronos, that's the Greek term, is used 13 times in the 11 verses of chapter 4. And 11 of those occurrences referring to God's throne, and the other two are the elders' thrones.

It's used 46 times in the whole book. The major focus of chapter 4 upon the throne is its symbolism of God's sovereignty exercised in judgment. Though evil reigns for a time on earth, God will ultimately prevail.

All right, so let me just mention four things about what His throne represents. Number one would be that His throne represents His sovereignty and eternal nature. God's sovereignty over time and space, over

mankind, over history, over everything.

Look at the word that is used here, what must take place after these things, it says earlier. In other words, it's describing what Jesus had said in the first chapter. Remember, the things that must take place? These things will take place.

This is a fixed certainty. They must take place, all the things described in this book. And the things that are going to unfold once the seals start getting broken open.

These things will take place, and God is sovereign over all of it. Psalm 45 says, Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. In Psalm 93, Your throne is established from of old, you are from everlasting.

In Psalm 103, The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all. Those are just a handful of references to God's eternal throne and His sovereignty over all. And we saw this also in the first chapter.

If you remember, it said from Him who is and who was and who is to come, talking about God the Father. And in verse 8, He described Himself, I am the Alpha and the Omega, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. So we're seeing it reinforced here in this scene of God's throne.

That His throne is sovereign and eternal. Number 2, God's throne represents His omnipotence and His government. Psalm 22 says, For the kingdom is the Lord's, and He rules over the nations.

And Psalm 47 says, God is the King of all the earth. God reigns over the nations. God sits on His holy throne.

Psalm 91, The Lord reigns. Let the peoples tremble. He is enthroned above the cherubim.

Let the earth shake. Again, those are just some sites that the psalmist got of God on His throne in heaven, ruling sovereignly over all the affairs of mankind. In this particular situation, He's omnipotent.

He has all power at His disposal. And He governs the affairs of men. You know, He is the Lord of lords and the King of kings.

Right? He is over all mankind. And these big shot leaders, and they are full of their pride, and the way they think, they control things, especially some of these dictators and so on. But it's God behind all of it.

And He raises one up and puts another down, and the Lord controls all of it. Praise the Lord. God's throne also represents His holiness and justice.

You saw back here in verse 5, Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. That all represents the tremendous power coming forth from God's throne. And it's really describing power coming forth in wrath.

It's also the same with Jasper and Sardius. Represent God's wrath. Why? Because it's the reaction of a holy nature against sin.

The wickedness of mankind as He looks down upon earth and watches all of the wicked things that we read about in the newspapers and on the internet and so on. God is watching all of this transpire all the time. And the only reaction He can have as the holy being that He is, is wrath.

Again, Thomas. He says, These visible and audible displays are another reminder that the throne, which is centerpiece of this heavenly scene, is first and foremost a throne of wrath. And the biblical expositor says, The cherubim of the Old Testament and the living creatures of the New represent qualities that strike terror into the hearts of men and suggest the idea of an irresistibly destructive force.

They are sharers of the Almighty's holiness and of that holiness in its more awful form, as a holiness that cannot look on sin but with abhorrence. Their aspect is not that of the sweetness associated with the word cherub, but that of sternness, indignant power and justice. So, you know, His throne is a throne of righteousness, the psalmist said.

It's just another way of saying His throne represents holiness and justice. Man is enjoying his sin and his free will right now, but the day is coming. And lastly, and this is the most blessed part of it all, for us anyway, God's throne represents His faithfulness and His sustaining grace.

You know, the covenant God had with Noah, which is manifested by the rainbow, it's a memorial to the covenant that God made with mankind that He wouldn't destroy them again by water. But it also represents something more than that. His rainbow represents His faithfulness to His people.

And when you think about the first century Christians who were suffering under the persecution and tyranny of the Roman government, and also when you think of these end time believers, maybe you and I will be part of this, I don't know. But when you think about the end time believers who will suffer terrible persecution from the Antichrist and his government, what a blessing it is to know that God is on His throne and He is sovereign over all and He will sustain us by His grace. He will prove Himself to be faithful to His people no matter what may come in the midst of the terrible conflict of the end times.

So this is the vision that John brings forth to the church. You know, this opens it really because now he's going to begin to describe the unfolding events that are going to set loose different circumstances, different events. Partly will be the devil on the loose through Antichrist and people who are following him and the persecution of God's people, but also His wrath which is going to be poured out on mankind.

And through it all, His people need to know and it needs to be solidly established in our hearts that God is on His throne and He is sovereign over all. Amen? So next week we will get into chapter 5 and we'll take a look at what transpires in this heavenly throne room.

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