

A Trip to Heaven, Part 4

Revelation 4:8-11

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Let's open our Bibles to Revelation chapter 4...Revelation chapter 4. This is part 4, in case you're keeping score, a visit to the heavenly throne, this wonderful chapter. The beloved Apostle Paul like Ezekiel and like Isaiah long before him, and like John after him, was given the unique privilege of being taken up to heaven before his death. And the Apostle Paul described that experience in his letter to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 12, he said, "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago...speaking about himself...whether in the body, I do not know, or out of the body, I do not know, God knows." In other words, I don't know or understand how it happened and I don't understand whether it's physical or spiritual, but I do know a man who was caught up to the third heaven. "And I know how such a man, whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows, was caught up into paradise and heard inexpressible words which a man is not permitted to speak." The third heaven, the highest heaven, the abode of God, also called paradise which means, interestingly enough, park, suggesting the loveliness, the delightfulness of the place, the beauty of the abode of God, the Eden that is above, splendid and wonderful.

But apart from Ezekiel and Isaiah and Paul and John, trips to heaven don't happen. In fact, in the gospels it tells us that no one goes to heaven, except the One who descended from heaven, even Jesus Christ. So it is a rare, rare experience. What Isaiah saw and heard and felt we learn in chapter 6 of his prophecy. What Ezekiel saw we learn in chapter 1 of his prophecy. What Paul saw and heard, we don't know because he says it was unutterable. What that means is it was outside the realm of human speech. There weren't any words to speak it, to repeat it, it was inexpressible. And even if it was expressible, he wouldn't have been allowed to say it.

So, then why did God give him the experience? For his own comfort, for his own assurance, for his own encouragement, for his own confidence, for his own hope. I mean, after all, he was going to go through a lot. He was going to stare death in the face almost daily. And through it all he could say, "Far better to depart and be with Christ," and he could say it with conviction because he had a preview trip.

Apart from those men, there is John. And here in chapter 4 he is taken to heaven. And whether in the body or out of the body, I don't think he knew either. In some marvelous spiritual way the Lord transported him to the very throne room. And John gives us in this fourth chapter of Revelation an inspired and authentic description of the throne of God in heaven. And, by the way, it's a place where we're going to be. Chapter 3 verse 21 says, "He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne."

And that wonderful hope is then followed immediately by a vision of the throne itself. Chapter 4 verse 1 tells us that a door was standing open in heaven and the first voice which I heard...John writes...was like the voice of a trumpet speaking with me. It said, "Come up here and I will show you what must take place after these things."

John is told, "Come up here." And John is also brought there by the power of God instantaneously. And what is he to see? He is to see what must take place and what must take place? Primarily one word defines it...judgment. He's going to see God preparing for judgment. And then he's going to see the unfolding in sequential visions of the very judgments themselves. The vision of God in chapter 4 and 5 is a vision of God preparing to unleash the judgments that begin in chapter 6 and flow through chapter 19.

We've been focusing on the throne. In point one I gave you was the throne. It becomes apparent that the central point of focus in this vision of heaven is the throne. In verse 2 there was a throne standing in heaven. The throne of God, the throne of God's sovereignty as the ruler of the universe is set in the third heaven, the heaven of heavens. And from there He rules the universe. So we start with the throne.

The second point, and now we get in to a series of prepositions, you'll remember, the second point is "on the throne." And verse 2 tells us, "One was sitting on the throne." Verse 3 says, "He was sitting and was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance," that is He was a diamond on the one hand and a ruby on the other. There was that shining, dazzling, brilliance of a diamond and that deep blood-red shine of a sardius which would be like a ruby. And so he sees God...jasper as a diamond and as a sardius, red and certainly we see His shining brilliant pure glory there and we see also the essence of His sacrificial act on the behalf of man.

Then from on the throne we go to "around the throne," as we follow our prepositions and we find that it says at the end of verse 3, "Around the throne there was a rainbow that was like an emerald in appearance," a very unique rainbow, not multi-colored but the color of an emerald, probably the symbol of God's grace and God's mercy as a rainbow symbolized in the day of Noah. Also around the throne, verse 24 says, were twenty-four thrones and upon the thrones twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments and golden crowns on their heads. And we suggested to you that the best understanding of that is that they are representatives of the church. I know that is a much debated point but I feel comfortable enough to articulate it as the view that I would prefer here. Twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, obviously could be worn by angels but seem to be in the book of Revelation to be the usual garments of the saints. The fact that they're sitting is unusual. We don't find angels sitting, we find them standing or hovering. The fact that they wore golden crowns on their heads is also interesting because angels are never crowned. They are never given that kind of crown that belongs...stephanos...to a victor because they don't triumph over anything really in that sense. But here you have the saints represented who have triumphed over evil and who have come to glory, the church triumphant,

clothed in their white garments and seated on the throne because they have entered into the glory of their rest. This would indicate since they're there and the Tribulation is about to be unleashed the possibility of a pre-tribulation Rapture. There are the representatives of the church indicating the church is with the Lord.

Then we noticed the fourth point, "from the throne" in verse 5. "From the throne proceed flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder." This all speaks of judgment. Then we see "before the throne." It tells us there were seven lamps before the throne representing really the seven-fold Spirit of God. Also before the throne a sea of glass like crystal, refracting off the brilliant, blazing glory of God throughout the universe. The Holy Spirit in seven-fold glory, the crystal platform to reflect God's glory...so John has seen here God in His universal rule, God in His splendor, beauty, majesty, sovereignty, God in His wondrous glory all on display. He sees around God the presence of the Holy Spirit, the presence of twenty-four representatives of the redeemed. He sees the beginnings of judgment, as flashes of lightning and peals of thunder and fire appears at the throne.

So here is God, the God of glory on His throne. So we see the throne, on the throne, around the throne, from the throne and before the throne. Number six in our little outline was "in and around the throne." It tells us in verse 6 in the middle, "In the center and around the throne, four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind." And then it describes them. "The first creature was like a lion and the second creature like a calf, the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within." Now that is an amazing description of these beings that are in and around the throne. You can't say they're in the throne because they're both in and around. They're not just around, but they're in. They're moving through. They seem to be in motion. And this is very much like Ezekiel's description of the cherubs moving around the throne of God in Ezekiel chapter 1. Here is an inner circle of living beings. Some texts, of course, say four living creatures and give you the idea of animal creatures. They are four living beings from the verb "to be."

They're described in Ezekiel 1 as cherubim, angels frequently mentioned in the Old Testament. Four angels, the fact that they have, by way of reminder in verse 6, eyes in front and behind, they are full of eyes, indicates they're scrutiny, their knowledge, their observation powers. They watch for everything. They are sent to minister for the saints and they keep an eye on the saints. They are continually watching, nothing escapes their careful scrutiny. By the way, at the end of verse 8 or actually in the middle, it reminds us they're full of eyes around and within again. This idea of scrutiny, of knowledge, of awareness.

They're also described in verse 7 with features that are quite interesting. Like a lion, the first one, and the second like a calf, the third like the face of a man, and the fourth like a flying eagle. That is a little bit different than Ezekiel. In his description of the cherubim he sees them all having all of those features,

sort of like you can be turned around as a block and each one has a different face. And here maybe they were all turned so that these four different faces appear.

But what is the point of it? Well, it may represent Israel because those descriptions there, those four that are described there are also used to describe the various segments of the tribes of Israel. And so it could be that they have some responsibility over Israel. Some have suggested that it represents angelic involvement with even the animate creation. You have in the case of a lion an untamed animal, in the case of a calf a tamed animal, in the case of a man the highest of God's creation, and then you have the flying things represented by an eagle. And it may mean that they have responsibility...responsibility for God's created order.

It also might mean more than responsibility, it might mean power because if you look at them you will see that each of those describes some kind of source of power. The lion has great strength. A calf is used in a domestic role to serve, either by ultimately providing milk, or even being itself a meal. The third creature would be a man and that is reason. And fourth, the flying eagle and that is speed. Strength and service and reason and speed might describe the innate power characteristic of these angelic beings. They're strong, serving, rational, swift beings who move to minister to the saints and serve God.

In this scene, the four living creatures, these four living angelic beings represent the angels. And they are here about to assist God in judgment. We shouldn't be surprised that they're there, moving in and around the throne as lightning is flashing and as peals of thunder are crackling and as fire begins to appear, as God, as it were, begins to rise from His throne to act in judgment. We see the motion and the activity of these angels who are ready to move out in their judgments. Not surprising at all that angels are involved because we know their involvement even from the teaching of our Lord Himself, particularly in the gospel of Matthew. In Matthew chapter 13, for example, in verse 40, Jesus said, "Just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send forth His angels and they will gather out of His Kingdom all stumbling blocks and those who commit lawlessness and will cast them into the furnace of fire, in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." And verse 49, "So will it be at the end of the age, the angels shall come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous and will cast them into the furnace of fire, there shall weeping and gnashing of teeth.

And over in Matthew chapter 24 and 25, when you have the Lord coming, and when He appears it says, "He will appear in the sky, not only by Himself but He will appear in the clouds of the sky with power and great glory and will send forth His angels and they will gather together His elect from the four winds." And so the angels are very involved. You have the same kind of thing in chapter 25 of Matthew and verse 31.

If you follow through, and I know you will, in the months to come our study of the book of Revelation, you will see the angels appear as well in the judgment

role, even the four living beings do. For example, chapter 6 verse 1, "The Lamb broke one of the seven seals," this is the title deed to the earth as judgment unfolds. "I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, 'Come,' and I looked and behold, a white horse." And now we begin to see the unleashing of the various judgments of the Tribulation initiated by one of the four living beings who speaks thunderously and says the word, "Come."

Chapter 15 verse 1, "Another sign in heaven great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues." And here are angels again dispensing plagues on the earth. Chapter 15 down in verse 7, "Another one of the four living beings gave to those seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever."

So it appears as though these four living angels, living beings, cherubim, holy angels are involved in judgment. So we look at them and we can see that they are knowledgeable, that they have eyes everywhere, as it were, and they can see and perceive and recognize and scrutinize and evaluate and nothing escapes their vision. They can see from the front and the back and that's just the writer's symbolic way of saying that nothing escapes their vision, they know what's going on. They're aware of it, they're knowledgeable.

Secondly, we see something of their responsibility, perhaps toward Israel, perhaps toward the animate creation. We see something of their power symbolized by those creatures that are named there. But all of that leads us to this conclusion just made, they are part of judgment. Their role is a role of judgment. And they will be passing out the bowls to pour out the final fury of the wrath of God.

Now before that happens, however, they're engaged in very clear worship. And we would have to say that judgment is a temporary role for them. It comes and it goes in a rather rapid-fire succession in that brief time we know as the Tribulation time, the day of the Lord, the unfolding of final judgment. For all eternity they have been occupied with one enterprise dominantly and for all eternity past judgment they will be occupied with the same enterprise and that enterprise is worship, worship. It tells us at the end of verse 8, "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.' 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." We'll stop at that point.

They're engaged in worship. They are engaged in praising and glorifying and honoring God. You'll notice in verse 8 that they each have six wings. Isaiah tells us in chapter 6 verse 2 that with two, these angels because he saw them too, with two they covered their face because they're created beings and cannot look on the fullness of God's holiness without being consumed. With two they covered their feet for the ground on which they stand is holy. And with two they hover, ready to be dispatched duty. And worship is always their priority. They must cover their face lest they be consumed by seeing the fullness of God's glory. They must cover their feet lest they be consumed because they stand on

fiery holy ground, as it were. And so they are engaged in worship day and night, non-stop. This is their eternal occupation, their eternal joy and their eternal privilege.

Now this brings us to the one remaining feature of this incredible vision. We've been on the throne, around the throne, we've seen what comes from the throne, what is before the throne, what is in and around the throne. And now we come to the final point, toward the throne...toward the throne. And that really takes us all the way to the end of the chapter.

Simply said, what is toward the throne is worship...worship. And as we embark upon the text of verse 8, the word "holy, holy, holy," we move in to an oratorio of praise that goes all the way to the end of chapter 5. And there are five hymns of praise here. The most interesting feature of them is this, they can be divided into two categories...first the redemption of creation and secondly, the redemption of man. It is an oratorio of redemption. Chapter 4 focuses on God as the God of creation, anticipating that He is going to redeem creation. Chapter 5 focuses on God as the God of redemption, the God of salvation who is going to redeem man.

The second most interesting feature to me is that there is a crescendo in the orchestration of this oratorio. It starts with a quartet and then are added twenty-eight voices, and then are added to the quartet and the twenty-eight voices, harps, and then are added to the quartet, the twenty-eight voices and the harps, all the angels, and finally every living being. And it all crescendos at the end. Verse 14 of chapter 5, when they collapse in worship.

The scene here then "toward the throne" is one of worship. God is being honored. God is being worshiped. God is being glorified. The scene in heaven culminates then in worship. God all glorious is worthy of such worship. It's reminiscent of Exodus 15:11 which says, "Who is like Thee among the gods, O Lord?" Here you have all of heaven worshiping God, a quartet, then all the angels, then every living being. Why? Because there is none like God. Who is like Thee among the gods, O Lord? The answer is no one. First Chronicles 17:20 gives the answer, "O Lord, there is none like Thee, neither is there any God besides Thee." All the worship of the universe goes to God because there is no need to reserve any worship for anyone else. There isn't anyone else to worship. Psalm 86 verse 8 says, "There is no one like Thee among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like Thine. All nations whom Thou hast made shall come and worship before Thee, O Lord. And they shall glorify Thy name for Thou art great and doest wondrous deeds. Thou alone art God."

There isn't anyone else. When the Bible says worship the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, that is to say worship the Lord with everything you have because there's no one else to reserve anything for. God alone is God. Psalm 89 verse 6, "For who in the skies is comparable to the Lord? Who among the sons of the mighty is like the Lord? A God greatly feared in the counsel of the holy ones and awesome above all those who are around Him. O Lord God of hosts, who is like Thee, O mighty Lord?" No one. The absolute,

unique and only God is alone worthy of worship and that is why we are commanded to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, leaving nothing for anyone else. We're to use up all our worship on Him and Him alone.

And the four living creatures then set this oratorio of worship in motion. The oratorio begins with a quartet, four living beings. Let's look then at the themes that are in their initial worship.

First of all, they strike the note of God's holiness. They say, unceasingly, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God." Stop at that point. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God. Their worship focuses, as all worship should, on the character of God, on the attributes of God, the nature of God. And the first thing that causes them to worship is God's holiness. You remember Hannah's worship in 1 Samuel 2:2, "There is no one holy like the Lord." You remember that Isaiah when he saw the same place, when he in chapter 6 of Isaiah saw the same throne room, the angels were there saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." He heard them saying the same thing. They were saying it in Isaiah's day, they were saying it in John's day. Why? Because unceasingly they say it night and day and throughout all eternity.

Now what does it mean, "holy, holy, holy"? Well, first of all, it is the only attribute of God repeated three times like that. The Bible never says God is love, love, love, or mercy, mercy, mercy, grace, grace, grace, wisdom, wisdom, wisdom, justice, justice, justice. But it does say He is holy, holy, holy. Now why is it repeated three times?

Well I believe it is because it is the summation of all that God is. It is His most salient attribute. God's holiness is His utter and complete separation from evil in any form and that makes Him different than His creation.

You say, "Well wait a minute, what about the angels? Aren't they holy?" But angelic beings can be touched with iniquity as the fall of angels proved. God is utterly distant. He is utterly separate from evil in any form in His nature and in His being. He is absolutely free and untouched by any mixture or presence of evil of error or wrong. It is absolutely impossible for His nature to ever be tempted and to succumb. Impossible. I suppose it would be right to say there is not one aspect of God more holy than the other, not one aspect of God more righteous, more separate from sin than the other. As Exodus 15:11 says, "He is majestic in holiness." It is consummate. He is completely separate from sin. Habakkuk the prophet, chapter 1 verses 12 and 13 said, "God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, cannot look upon evil." It is utterly foreign to His being.

Even the incarnate Christ when the onslaught of Satan came against Him had no capacity within Himself to sin. God is utterly apart from sin. Majestic in holiness.

Having said that, God is utterly other than we are, and utterly other than anything He created, we then define that otherness, that separateness, that holiness in all of the attributes which we are familiar with. Psalm 47:8 says,

"God sits on His holy throne." Psalm 27:4 says, "Holiness is the beauty of the Lord. It is the shining of His glory and His majesty." It is who He is. Holy and awesome, says Psalm 111:9, is His name. I am holy, He says. And Peter repeats it in 1 Peter 1:16. So God is worshiped for His holiness, His separateness from sin.

But in this scene, this worship of His holiness takes on a very direct purpose and perspective because here what they are exalting and what they are praising and what they are adoring in God, listen very carefully to this, is His holiness exhibited in judgment. Holiness has a fearfulness in it. Holiness, frankly, is furious with sin. God as a holy God is not only unable to be touched by sin but He resents it with every ounce of His being. God rejects sin. Not only is He not tainted by it, but it repulses Him. He can't even look at it and He must destroy it.

That's why Psalm 89:7 says, "God is greatly to be feared." That's why Job 13:11 says, "Shall not His excellency make you afraid?" That's why the question is asked in 1 Samuel 6:20, "Who can stand before this holy God?" See, that was what so intimidating to Isaiah. When he saw God and he heard the...in the vision and he saw the marvelous sovereign majesty and glory of God in that vision in the temple that day and heard the angels say, "Holy, holy, holy," he says, "Woe is me, cursed is me, damned is me, I am doomed, I am consigned to hell because mine eyes have seen God, the Lord of hosts."

What he was saying was I saw God and I saw holiness. If I saw God, God saw me and if He saw me He saw sin and if He saw sin I am destroyed...I am destroyed. He knew God hated sin. God hated iniquity. He knew that God was angry with the sinner every day. And Isaiah feared for his own life. He had reason to fear. God is in the habit of destroying sinners. Isaiah knew it full well. Many before him had dramatically been destroyed, some times the ground opened up and swallowed them. Sometimes God had struck them with leprosy, including his own King Uzziah. Sometimes it had been an army. Sometimes it had been something frightening like a bear ripping and tearing the person. There was a track record for God. He was angry about sin and He destroyed people for sinning. In the case of Isaiah, God was merciful and didn't destroy him, merciful to him because of Isaiah's faith.

But in the case of Revelation chapter 4, as the holiness of God moves out in its fury, there isn't going to be that mercy. Mercy is going to come to an end and grace is going to pass its time and the sinful world in the final judgment is going to feel fury against sin without mercy. So when they say, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God," they're focusing in on the holiness of God expressed in devastating reaction against sin. And the fury will unfold as you see beginning in chapter 6.

There's a second element of their worship. Not only the holiness of God is part of it, but secondly, God's power. You will notice they identify God in verse 8 as the Almighty...the Almighty. El Shaddai, some songs have made that a common name, it just means the Lord, the strong One, the mighty One, the almighty One. It is a superlative, that is to say we know what a word is and what its comparative is and what its superlative is. In language we say fast, faster,

fastest. The superlative one means the fastest of all. This is a superlative. God, the strongest, God the most powerful, God who has the prevailing strength. And the term itself, almighty, has the idea of a conquering power, of an overpowering strength that cannot be withstood.

To sum up God's power as the almighty One, the strongest One, we could simply put it this way, He can do whatever is do-able. He can do whatever is do-able. He can do whatever He wills to do. There isn't anything that is do-able that He can't do and there isn't anything that He wills to do that He can't do. And having done it, He is never tired. And having expended His energy, He has never lost any energy. He is never weary. He is never tired. He loses no energy and yet He can do anything that is do-able and He can do anything that He wills to do. This is God's claim for Himself. In Genesis 17:1 He said, "I am God Almighty." Jesus said of Him, "With Him all things are possible," Matthew 19:26. Job says, "If it is a matter of power, behold, He is the strong One." Psalm 115:3 says, "But our God who is in the heavens, He does whatever He pleases." Daniel 4:35 says, "He does according to His will and the hosts of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth." He can do whatever He wants to do. And whatever is do-able, whatever is conceived in His mind that can be done, He can do.

That's not true with you. You can conceive of things to do and can't do them, plenty of them. Anything God conceives as do-able, He can do. Anything He wills to do, He can do. He is mighty in strength. He has infinite power.

You might say it this way. God has power equal to His will. Don't you wish you did? Whatever He wills He can do and no one can stop Him. No one, not men nor angels.

In Isaiah 46 I think it's probably best said in that chapter, verse 10. It says of God, "My purpose will be established and I will accomplish all My good pleasure." His power is equal to His will. That is a tremendous concept. I might will to be the fastest runner in the world, but I don't have the ability. I might will to be the most intelligent student in the world, but I don't have the ability. I might will to fly, but I don't have the ability. But whatever God wills, He can do.

Think about creation. God worked without tools to create the universe. He worked without elements. He worked without materials. And He worked without help. Psalm 33:9 says, "He spoke and it was done." He controls everything in His creation at all times and no one can help Him and no one can hinder Him. He is sovereign in everything and absolutely competent and absolutely powerful to control it all.

I suppose the sum of it is in 1 Chronicles 29:11, "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty. Indeed, everything that is in the heavens and the earth, Thine is the dominion, O Lord, and Thou dost exalt Thyself as head over all, both riches and honor come from Thee and Thou doest rule over all and in Thy hand is power and might and it lies

in Thy hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. Now therefore, our God, we thank Thee and praise Thy glorious name." You're everything.

If you want to do an interesting little Bible study, find the phrase "He is able." That little phrase "He is able" and trace it through the New Testament. You'll find it about six times...He is able...He is able...He is able...He is able...in a number of different passages. Let me just briefly give you a little glimpse. For example, Hebrews 2:18, "He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted." Hebrews 7:25, wonderful, it says, "He is able to save forever those who draw nigh to God." Ephesians 3, "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think." Second Corinthians 9:8, "He is able to make all grace abound to us." Second Timothy 1:12, "He is able to guard what I have entrusted to him against that day." Jude 24 and 25, "He is able to keep you from stumbling." He is able...He is able...He is able, and there is nothing He is not able to do.

But, go back to Revelation 4, the scene here is related again to His power released in judgment, as it was to His holiness exhibited in judgment. And what they are saying, calling Him the almighty, is that no one can stop His judgment, no one can hinder His power expressed against sin. It was God who threw the sinning angels out of heaven. They couldn't stop Him. Satan has tried to thwart Him and tried most to thwart His judgment and can't. It was God who shattered the most powerful king in the world, Nebuchadnezzar, and made him eat grass like an animal for seven years. And it is God whose power will be unleashed to judge sinners in the end and there isn't anybody who can stop Him. The prophet Nahum spoke of God's supreme power in judgment with these words, "Who can stand before His indignation and who can endure the burning of His anger?" Nahum 1:6. Who can stand before God's indignation? No one. Psalm 2 says, "The nations of the earth may laugh at God but He'll laugh at them in the end and they won't be able to withstand the fury of His judgment." His judgment power is so great it's beyond our comprehension. In Psalm 90 and verse 11, "Who understands the power of Thine anger and Thy fury?" the psalmist asks. Who can even conceive of it?

So almighty then is a name associated here with judgment. And that's not unusual because it is so associated in the Old Testament. Listen to Isaiah 13:6, "Wail, for the day of the Lord is near. It will come as destruction from the Almighty." And there the name Almighty is associated with final judgment in the day of the Lord. Joel 1:15, "Alas for the day, for the day of the Lord is near and it will come as destruction from the Almighty."

Sometimes we think about God as all-powerful in terms of His saving purpose, or all-powerful in terms of His providential purposes or His creative, or His sovereign purpose. But here they are worshiping God for His might in terms of judgment.

Then these living creatures move to another attribute of God. At the end of verse 8, "God who was and who is and who is to come." That same description is in chapter 1 verse 4 and verse 8, we studied it there. Him who is and was and

is to come. Later on in chapter 16 you read, "Who was and is," and who is to come is left out because He's coming immediately. But what it speaks of is God's eternity. Psalm 90 and verse 2 says, "From everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God."

Now there are three kinds of being, follow this and I think you'll understand. There are three kinds of beings. There are beings who had a beginning and will have an end. They're called animals. They have a beginning, they have an end. And then there are beings who have a beginning but will never have an end...angels and people. And there is one being who had no beginning and no end and that is God. He is the eternal king, 1 Timothy 1:17 says, He is Jehovah, He is Yahweh, the verb "to be," the being one, the I am that I am One, continual state of existence.

Now that can be comforting to know we have an eternal God. And it is intended in Scripture to comfort us. But it can also be terrorizing. It's wonderful on the one hand to know that we have a God who lives forever because that means heaven is forever. And that means we do receive an eternal weight of glory and divine pleasures are forever more. And we will have an inheritance and a crown that never fades away. But on the other hand, it also means that hell is forever. And punishment is forever. And torment is forever. And weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth is forever because God is forever. As long as God lives we live in glory, and as long as God lives the damned live in hell. The breath of the eternal God kindles the eternal lake of fire. So when you think about the eternity of God, on the one hand it's a source of joy, on the other it's a source of fear. His holy wrath, His powerful judgment will lead to an eternal punishment. And they praise Him for this because He has a right to punish sin. They praise Him for this as much as they would praise Him for the positive aspects of His holiness and His power and His eternity. He has the right to redeem and He has the right to judge.

So the four living creatures offer Him worship and worship associated with impending judgment. And I have to believe that when that scene is unfolded in the future, there will be an

anticipation and an exhilaration in their praise because they have waited long for God to destroy iniquity.

Then more praise, look at verse 9, we'll wrap this up. "When the four living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever." In other words, when these angels start their worship which is here identified as glory, honor and thanks, when they direct that to God who again is called "Him who lives forever and ever," expressing His eternity, and that same phrase is in chapter 10 verse 6 and chapter 15 verse 7, it's borrowed from Daniel 4:34, used there to describe God, when they worship and honor and glorify and thank the eternal God, when they do that, that triggers something else. Verse 10, "Then the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne and will worship Him who lives forever and

ever." All of a sudden the oratorio moves to a second movement. They begin the quartet and then it sets in motion the accompanying worshippers.

Would you notice the future tense verbs? The twenty-four elders will fall down and will worship and will cast their crowns. This is a vision of the future. He is seeing what will happen before it happens, the miracle of this vision transports him to an unrealized future and he sees what hasn't happened but will. The twenty-four elders, who are they? We noted that, I believe they are best seen as representatives of the church. Some would see them as angels. But they join in and they begin to worship God as well. So the motion of this begins to build.

Would you please note the nature of their worship. They fall down before Him who sits on the throne. This is the first of six times when these elders prostrate themselves before God and the Lamb, six times in the book of Revelation...chapter 5 verses 8 and 14; chapter 7 verse 11; chapter 11 verse 16; chapter 19 verse 4 complete the remaining five. And their posture is a posture of worship. They fall down prostrate before God.

How do they identify God? "Him who lives forever and ever." Again that's the second time, that was in verse 9...the eternal God, the sovereign, glorious, majestic, holy, powerful, eternal God.

And then they do a most amazing thing. At the end of verse 10, they cast their crowns before the throne. Now remember back earlier I told you in verse 4 they were crowned, they had golden crowns on their heads. And now they cast their crowns before the throne. What does this mean? They have no preoccupation with their own excellence. They have no concern about their own beauty and their own holiness, their own honor, their own reward. That means nothing to them. They are so lost in adoration that if indeed these are representatives of the church, they have been to the Bema Seat judgment, as it were, they have received the reward that the Lord said was with Him to give to them when He appeared. They have received whatever is involved in the crown of life, the incorruptible crown, the crown of rejoicing, the glory crown, the victory crown, the runner's crown. They have received for the gold and silver and precious stones of their life those fitting eternal rewards. And as it were they wear those rewards like a crown. Instantaneously, however, when the worship crescendo begins soon after the church enters into the presence of the Lord, and as it becomes time to unfold judgment, lost in love and wonder, lost in praise they divest themselves of all honor and cast it all at the feet of their King. It's a voluntary surrender. This is another reason why I believe these are representatives of the church because if they aren't, I can't understand how the angels could have kept these things on their heads until then...if you understand what I mean. And they join the oratorio of creation's redemption.

In verse 11 they add the next movement, "Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power, for Thou didst create all things and because of Thy will they existed and were created." Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God. That word "worthy," axios, is used in the political language

of the day, used when the emperor marched along with a triumphant procession. Actually, the truth is to attribute worthiness to anyone else would be blasphemy, wouldn't it?

And then that personal pronoun, "our Lord and our God," could also support the idea that this is the church, intimate, first person, personal pronoun. The focus of this worship is on God's glory, manifested in creation. Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and authority or power. Why? For Thou didst create all things and because of Thy will they existed and were created. They're praising God because He created. And in effect what they're saying is you certainly have a right to judge and redeem your creation. They are beginning to feel the momentum of paradise regained.

By the way, verse 11 is a once and for all answer for evolution. Thou didst create all things and because of Thy will they existed and were created. God is the Creator. All heaven knows that, even if earth doesn't. God is the creator, He made everything and He is exalted here as the Creator. He is so identified again in chapter 10 of Revelation and verse 6 as the One who created heaven and the things in it and earth and the things in it and the sea and the things in it. It is the Creator God set out to redeem His creation.

And so, it is an oratorio of creation's redemption. They are celebrating God as creator and at the same time celebrating His judgment on His own creation, as He restores it, as He brings it back. In fact, in the next chapter you'll see a title deed which is the title deed to the creation, it belongs to God and as He unrolls it Jesus Christ step by step takes back what is rightfully His.

God is the creator. Scripture says it again and again. And He has every right because it is His world and His creation to set out to redeem it.

So the scene in heaven then is brought to us by the inspired pen of John. God is about to take back His creation. He's about to unroll the title deed in chapter 5. The angels are ready to move in action. And both angels and glorified men stand in awe and wonder, worshiping the great God of glory as He begins to move in judgment power, stirring toward that wonderful, wonderful day which the Apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote this, "For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but because of him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its slavery to corruption, into the freedom of the glory of the children for we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now."

Paul writing there in Romans 8:19 and following says the creation is waiting for its restoration. Paradise lost is waiting to become paradise regained. The whole of the world and all that is in it, men and angels are crying out to God to take back His creation.

And so, we have seen a monumental vision of the throne of heaven, ready to pour out its fury. When Ezekiel had his vision and saw the same thing, he fell on his face in fear. When Isaiah had his vision and saw the same thing, he fell on his face in fear. When Paul had his experience, he was utterly speechless. John

when he had his first vision in chapter 1 fell over like a dead man. We can't treat such a vision trivially, there is an awesomeness in this that should make us fall on our faces before God, exalting Him on the one hand as holy and powerful and eternal, and on the other hand fearing Him because of His utter holiness.

The right response of any vision of God is to fall before Him, broken, contrite, sensing our sin and our unworthiness, overwhelmed with a holy fear that translates into obedient worship, obedient duty and a heart of gratitude for His mercy to us as sinners. Amen? You can't just look at this and walk away. You must be thankful because this fury could be unleashed on you if it weren't for God's grace. And it will be if your salvation isn't real.

Father, again tonight as we've looked at Your Word we have been elevated beyond this vile world, this sinful sphere in which we have our existence. We have been translated to the heavenlies and O how thankful we are on the one hand for such a vision, we want to join in the oratorio of praise and honor and thanksgiving. But at the same time we want to have a holy fear and fall on our faces and say we're sinners and we deserve judgment and plead for your mercy in Christ. Thank You that You've promised it to all who are of a broken and a contrite heart and who will acknowledge their sin and embrace the Savior.

Father, as we no doubt live on the edge of this event, for it must draw nigh when judgment will unfold on this earth, even though we may be standing by Your side in that day and represented by the twenty-four elders singing Your praise as judgment begins to move, at the same time our hearts are broken for the world that will feel the fury. We would ask before that day comes You would bring many to Yourself, add many to the number of the redeemed who can join us in that everlasting praise, for Christ's glory we ask. Amen.