

Look! Listen! - And Overcome!

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

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Look! Listen! – And Overcome!

**“Come Up Here – I Want to Show
You Something”**

Lord's Day Morning

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Pastor Jeff Crippen

“Appearances can be deceptive. The fact that we cannot see what God is doing does not mean that He is doing nothing.” Sinclair Ferguson

“The title deed to this world does not belong to dictators, to Communism, nor to the devil, but to God.” Vance Havner

“Whatever point of compass the wind is in, it is fulfilling God’s word , and turns about by His counsel.” Matthew Henry

Introduction – 4:1

“We do not arrive at a proper understanding of God by reasoning from specific events to the nature of God; on the contrary we understand specific events by reasoning from the nature of God to those events.”
Wilson Benton

Sermon Text: Revelation 4

“The conclave of hell can do nothing without a commission from heaven.”
Thomas Brooks

“God is absolutely sovereign, but His sovereignty never functions in such a way that human responsibility is curtailed, minimized or mitigated.”
D.A. Carson

“Events of all sorts creep and fly exactly as God pleases.” William Cowper

“Without a doubt, what helps us most in accepting and dealing with suffering is an adequate view of God – learning who He is and knowing He is in control.” Joni Eareckson Tada

We come now, at chapter 4, to a new section of The Revelation of Jesus Christ. This is apparent in its opening words –

“After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven...”

The Revelation is extremely *visual* and consists of a series of visions given to the Apostle John. *I looked. I saw. Then I saw. After this I saw.* It is very *aural* as well – *After this I heard...* – and yet it is most often the sounds emanating from the visions that John hears. Having seen the vision of the risen Lord back in chapter 1, then receiving His dictation of the 7 letters to the churches (chs 2-3), John receives this second vision – *a door standing open in heaven* and that same first voice – *that loud voice like the sound of a trumpet* – the voice of the Lord Jesus Himself – saying, *Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.*

What would it be like to see heaven opened – the door swung back so that we peer into the very throne room of His Majesty the King? What would it be like to gaze into that Holy of the holies?

In our Bible study groups we have heard C.S. Lewis speak about what has been called *the numinous*. That word comes from the Latin word *numen* which means “deity” or “divine.” You remember then that in the very first chapter of The Problem of Pain, Lewis argues that all men in all places and in

all times (cf Romans chapter 1; 2:14-15) has this idea or knowledge of *the numinous*. And more, that man – *dreads this numinous One with a fear that is not like man’s fear of fire or savage beasts, or plague.*

And so we ask once more – *just what would it be like to see heaven opened and to find ourselves in the presence of the numinous?* Let’s look at a few biblical examples to get a better idea of it –

NKJ Isaiah 6:1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His *robe* filled the temple. 2 Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!" 4 And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I *am* a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts."

I am undone. I am coming apart at the seams. You have this repeatedly in the Scriptures when men see the Lord of

Glory – *and remember, this is not even seeing Him in all His glory.*

NKJ Hebrews 12:18 For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, 19 and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard *it* begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. 20 (For they could not endure what was commanded: "And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow." 21 And so terrifying was the sight *that* Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.")

And one more – perhaps one that is most often overlooked and yet which is particularly instructive –

NKJ John 18:3 Then Judas, having received a detachment *of troops*, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons. 4 Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, "Whom are you seeking?" 5 They answered Him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am *He*." And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them. 6 Now when He said to them, "I am *He*," they drew back and fell to the ground.

Something of His divine majesty, the numinous, broke through for only a moment and to only a very partial extent – and men were thrown to the ground in trembling fear.

Do you begin to see more clearly then why this was necessary –

NKJ Philippians 2:5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross.

Else who could endure Him? you see.

NKJ Job 31:23 For destruction *from* God *is* a terror to me, And because of His magnificence I cannot endure.

NKJ Malachi 3:1 "Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the LORD of hosts. 2 "But who can endure the day of His coming? And

who can stand when He appears? For He *is* like a refiner's fire And like launderer's soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the LORD An offering in righteousness.

We have already seen man's reaction to such an appearing in the Apostle John - *when I saw Him I fell at His feet like a dead man.*

Such then is the character of the Lord, and man is aware of this character – if only vaguely and though he does his best to suppress it – man knows. And man dreads this divine awefulness. It is why you hear fools talking about God being quite like a mere man – the “old man” upstairs – and boasting about just what they are going to do and say when they see Him someday. Foolish men. They will fall down like dead men and say “woe is me, I am undone.”

Let's ask ourselves this question as a means of understanding these things –

“What would it be to be ushered into the presence of utter, perfect, essential holiness?”

Not simply into some great cathedral – some holy place – nor into the presence of even the most holy person

(besides Christ) who ever lived. Surely in those kinds of circumstances you would feel some kind of discomfiture – an unease of being unholy yourself. No, *but into the presence of sheer, pure, infinite holiness in a Person of whom heaven's holy ones cry out “holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty.”* This is the thing John is attempting to convey to us.

The door to heaven is swung open so that John, and Christ's church – *us* – are bidden to come up and look and hear. And we *need to see what is there – this is the real world. This is what is really going on.* We find that this world that is passing away is merely a shadow. Compared to those in heaven, men in this life are the ghosts!

I. A Throne and One Sitting on It 4:2-7

NKJ Revelation 4:2 Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and *One* sat on the throne. 3 And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and *there was* a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.

4 Around the throne *were* twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.

5 And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire *were* burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

6 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.

You will notice that John tells us –

“Immediately I was in the Spirit” – or – *“spirit,”* depending upon what the context here requires in the translation of *“pneuma.”* Rather than a reference to the Holy Spirit carrying John into heaven, I take it that John means he was carried there *in spirit* as opposed to *in the flesh*. Why? Because flesh and blood cannot endure heaven (cf 1 Cor 15:50ff). Paul speaks of the same kind of thing in regard to his own experience of seeing into heaven –

NKJ 2 Corinthians 12:2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago -- whether in the body I do not know, or

whether out of the body I do not know, God knows -- such a one was caught up to the third heaven. 3 And I know such a man -- whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows -- 4 how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

“In the body” is contrasted with *“out of the body,”* you see. John’s phrase *“I was in the spirit”* would then be parallel to *“out of the body.”*

Now, let’s take careful note of what Paul means in that 4th verse –

4 how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

I do not believe that he means he heard something that God forbade him to tell us about – though we would concede that such a meaning is possible. Daniel after all was told to seal up the vision he saw as it applied to the “end of the days.” (See Daniel 12:9 and Rev 10:4). I take Paul’s meaning to be simply this – *that it was impossible for Paul to put into human language the words that he heard in heaven.* Inexpressible words. Words that it is not lawful (ie, possible) for a man to utter.

Why do we emphasize this? Because this is how we must approach The Revelation or we will go seriously wrong. Follow along as I read right through Revelation chapter 4 and I will show you what I mean –

NKJ Revelation 4:1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard *was* like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this." 2 Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and *One* sat on the throne. 3 And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and *there was* a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. 4 Around the throne *were* twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads. 5 And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire *were* burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. 6 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."

Now, what is the immediate temptation for the interpreter of such a text? Is it not something like this – "Alright, let's find out just what these things are and what they mean –

- Jasper stone
- Sardius
- A rainbow
- An emerald
- 24 thrones
- 24 elders
- White garments
- Golden crowns
- Flashes of lightning
- Sounds of thunder

- Seven lamps/Seven spirits
- A sea of crystal
- 4 living creatures
- Full of eyes
- One like a lion
- One like a calf
- One like a man
- One like an eagle
- Six wings

You need only consult the many commentaries on The Revelation to find all kinds of interpretations of these various things. Some of those interpretations, you will find, are fantastic and even ridiculous.

Now, we maintain that we must not do this. We must not approach The Revelation in that manner. That is to say, we must not come to these visions and conclude that *John saw a literal throne with a Being seated on that throne* so that we are to have in our own minds a King seated on a throne, as we know kings sitting on thrones and then concluding we have an image very similar to what John saw. Or that there was a rainbow like we know rainbows or elders clothed in white garments as we know men-like beings clothed in white garments as we know white garments. Or that these flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder look and sound like – though much extrapolated in greatness and fearsomeness – what we know thunder

and lighting to be. Or that what John saw was like a lion or calf or man or eagle with 6 wings.

Do you begin to understand? John, it seems to me, is telling us what he saw *in the closest terms of human language that are possible to describe what he saw – yet terms that fall far short of expressing that which is inexpressible to finite beings such as ourselves who speak only finite words.* If you try to take John’s descriptions and images too literally, you will be guilty of *bringing heaven down to earth in ways never intended.* God will indeed tend to become an old, gray-haired man seated on a throne. This tends to idolatry and blasphemy. It destroys the fear of the Lord which men so desperately need to feel.

Now – I can hear the literalist shouting “foul” at this point. The accusation will be that we really don’t believe the Bible if we say that these descriptions are not *actually* what John saw. My response is this –

“To believe the Bible as the Word of God simply requires us to believe what it actually says. In this case, what is important is not that John saw a literal throne such as we are familiar with, but that whatever he saw was something that conveyed the idea of ‘throneness’ and of One seated on that throne –that is, Kingship. We believe

that John was given this vision by God, and that the vision conveyed actual truth about God and about His sovereign reign. John saw REAL things, which things convey REAL truths. But surely it is not necessary to believe that what he saw corresponds exactly to the earthly words he uses in his attempt to describe for us what he saw.”

Consider, in support of all this, how many times the word “like” appears in John’s descriptions – *The first creature was like a lion* – etc.

Take Two Steps Back

And so, let’s step back for a moment and stand away from the details, and ask this –

“What are the fundamental truths that this vision communicates to John and to us”-

And when we ask this question, we find that the answer is quite obvious –

1. There is a King who is absolutely Sovereign over His creation and over all His creatures. He is ruling and ordaining all that comes to pass on earth.

2. This Almighty King is holy, holy, holy and righteous and pure.

3. This King is worthy to receive all glory and honor, for He is our Creator and indeed, all that exists was created for Him.

Do you begin to get it? Let’s state it more succinctly –

“God is King. He rules His creation with all power and authority. All creation owes Him worship and honor and thanksgiving.”

And, as we will see in more detail in chapter 5, this Almighty King who is Holy and Worthy to be praised, *has a plan for His creation, which plan He is effecting to its ordained end through His Son Jesus Christ.*

See it? There is an Almighty King ruling all things perfectly according to His decree. It may not appear that this world and evil men and the devil are under anyone’s rule – but in fact they do nothing apart from His permission.

That is the essence of the message of this vision. As we proceed through The Revelation and see the devil and the beast persecuting Christ’s church, as we see famines and earthquakes and wars – all is undergirded by this great truth – *The Lord God reigns over all. His decree is being perfectly carried out in every detail.*

How to Act Like a Devil

We are not going to go into detail over the various aspects of the vision John records here in chapter 4, but we should note that the highest angelic beings – these 4 living creatures for example – give their unceasing praise and worship to God. They give Him glory, honor, and thanks. They do what *all men should do, but who in their sin refuse to do and thus who commit the highest sin and treason in the universe* –

NKJ Romans 1:21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened...25 who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Men are never more devilish and UN-heavenly than when they fail to give glory, honor, and thanksgiving to God their Creator.

“If the highest angels, in whose presence we as men would fall down with dread, give God glory and honor and thanksgiving, then how is it that we would ever fail to do the same?”

Do we then begin to see more clearly the awful blinding darkness of our sin? Sin hides God from us. It darkens our

minds to His glory. The most natural thing for creatures to do is to worship their Creator and yet man exchanges...

...the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man -- and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Rom 1:23

The next time you sit down at your table and begin to eat without giving God thanks, remind yourself that you are at that moment acting most like a devil. In heaven, the mighty angels never cease giving God thanks.

What Ezekiel Saw

If you would like to read still another account of what a man sees when the heavens are opened to him, you can read Ezekiel chapter 1 –

NKJ Ezekiel 1:3 the word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was upon him there. 4 Then I looked, and behold, a whirlwind was coming out of the north, a great cloud with raging fire engulfing itself; and brightness *was* all around it and radiating out of its midst like the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire. 5 Also from within it *came* the likeness of four living

creatures. And this *was* their appearance: they had the likeness of a man. 6 Each one had four faces, and each one had four wings. 7 Their legs *were* straight, and the soles of their feet *were* like the soles of calves' feet. They sparkled like the color of burnished bronze. 8 The hands of a man *were* under their wings on their four sides; and each of the four had faces and wings. 9 Their wings touched one another. *The creatures* did not turn when they went, but each one went straight forward. 10 As for the likeness of their faces, *each* had the face of a man; each of the four had the face of a lion on the right side, each of the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and each of the four had the face of an eagle.

II. The Rationale for Worship – God as Creator

Let's spend the remainder of our time thinking further about the worship given the Lord by these 24 angelic "elders" John speaks of.

NKJ Revelation 4:11 "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."

Here is an acid test verse by which our worship can be evaluated. Volumes

have been written about "true worship." Much occurs in the church today that is called worship but is not that at all. What are the fundamentals of real worship then according to this heavenly pattern –

- Worship ascribes *worthiness* to God. It acknowledges His *value, excellence, and importance*.
- Worship's object, therefore, is God. HE is the focus of worship, not man.
- Worship admits of the Lordship of God. He is Lord and Master.
- Worship admits that God is God, our God, that there is no other God besides Him.
- Worship is the admission that all glory, honor, and power belongs to God alone.

Now, we also see in this verse WHY/The REASON that God is *worthy of worship*. *For You created all things and because of Your will they existed and were created*. God as our Creator, as Creator of all things – this lies at the base of true worship. Worship is simply the outworking of the fact that God has created all things. The heavens themselves worship God by declaring His glory. The creation groans (Rom 8) as it lies under the curse, yearning to be set free so that it can once more declare God's glory in all fullness and freedom.

Of ALL the created order – man is the perverse oddity. How? Well, the creation declares the glory of God. It is only *man* who refuses to do so. Do you see the irony of it?

“Man, the highest of all creatures, is the only creature who refuses to ascribe worth and worship to the Creator. The lowest life form of the created order declares the glory of God in its existence – but man refuses to do so. This is the fundamental reason (Rom 1) that God’s wrath is set upon man.”

Sin, at its very foundation, is this *rebellion* of man against His Creator. It was Adam and Eve’s sin – that they did not obey their Creator – and it continues to be the essence of man’s sin today. It is not an exaggeration to state that *every time we sin, we are failing and refusing to acknowledge God as our Creator, God, and Lord.*

“The creature owes the Creator glory, honor, and thanksgiving. For it is only by the Creator’s will that the creature exists at all.”

Recently a man who described himself as an agnostic told me that it makes no sense to him that an omnipotent God *needs to be worshipped*. The man utterly fails to understand God. *God needs nothing. God does not need you nor does He need me. God stands in*

need of nothing. The creature can give God nothing that God would somehow be deficient in if it were not given.

The correct way to pose the question would be – *Why does God command His creatures to worship Him?* What is the answer? It is simply this –

“God is the Creator of all things. By His will they exist and are sustained. Every good thing they have comes from Him. Therefore, it is right for the creature to worship the Creator.”

To ask why God commands us to worship Him is the same as asking why the Law commands us not to kill one another or to steal or lie. It is the same as asking a parent – *“why do you insist that your child say ‘thank you’ when someone gives him a gift?”* It is right for the creature to worship the Creator. It is right to give Him thanks.

It must not surprise us then than man the sinner exerts great energy insisting that he is not a created being – that he just happened upon the scene apart from any action of any Personal Being. That, in other words, he has no Creator.

TEST YOURSELF: Is thankfulness to God evident in your daily life? Do you find yourself always giving Him thanks? How often do you thank yourself instead?

God as Creator the Basis of All Worship

Have you ever noticed how often this theme occurs in the Scriptures – that God is worthy of worship because He is Creator and we are creatures? You see it so often –

NKJ Psalm 24:1 A Psalm of David. The earth *is* the LORD's, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein. 2 For He has founded it upon the seas, And established it upon the waters.

NKJ Psalm 33:6 By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth. 7 He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deep in storehouses. 8 Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.

NKJ Jeremiah 10:11 Thus you shall say to them: "The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under these heavens." 12 He has made the earth by His power, He has established the world by His wisdom, And has stretched out the heavens at His discretion. 13 When He utters His voice, *There is* a multitude of waters in the heavens: "And He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the

earth. He makes lightning for the rain, He brings the wind out of His treasures." 14 Everyone is dull-hearted, without knowledge; Every metalsmith is put to shame by an image; For his molded image *is* falsehood, And *there is* no breath in them. 15 They *are* futile, a work of errors; In the time of their punishment they shall perish. 16 The Portion of Jacob *is* not like them, For He *is* the Maker of all *things*, And Israel *is* the tribe of His inheritance; The LORD of hosts *is* His name.

NKJ 1 Chronicles 29:11 Yours, O LORD, *is* the greatness, The power and the glory, The victory and the majesty; For all *that is* in heaven and in earth *is Yours*; Yours *is* the kingdom, O LORD, And You are exalted as head over all. 12 Both riches and honor *come* from You, And You reign over all. In Your hand *is* power and might; In Your hand *it is* to make great And to give strength to all. 13 " Now therefore, our God, We thank You And praise Your glorious name.

"Worthy are You, my Lord and my God, to receive from me glory and honor and acknowledgment of Your power, for You created me and only because of Your will do I exist."

Here is the very beginning then of true religion. That God is Creator and I am a creature of His making. Once that is

sincerely admitted, surely the giving of worship and thanksgiving must follow. The man who insists that he is not the creation of a holy, holy, holy, righteous and personal God will live out that wicked refusal in all wickedness, and he will worship *a god of his own making*. We must not be surprised when we see such a man committing the most evil and atrocious acts. There is, in other words, no such thing as a “good” atheist or agnostic.

NKJ Revelation 4:11 "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."