

The Apocalypse | Finding Composure in the Unveiled Christ

“The Open Door and the Infinite Center”

Revelation 4

5.9.21

After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and 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."² Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.³ And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.⁴ Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.

⁵ Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God;⁶ and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.⁷ The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle.⁸ And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; 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."

⁹ 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,¹⁰ the twenty-four 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,

¹¹ "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."

We're into this series on The Apocalypse or Book of Revelation. This is where the apocalyptic material starts to pile up and we're faced with the kind of visionary and symbolic writing we find troubling.

This is a two-part vision (CHs 4 and 5) taking us into a throne room... more accurately, a THRONES room because there are 25 thrones here. There's an open door into heaven...an inviting Voice (like a trumpet) and gem-stones and 24 elders... lightning bolts and peals of thunder...a sea of crystal... seven torches and these four living beings... but mainly a Throne.

Fourteen times the word THRONE is used just in case we get sidetracked by other sights – THE THRONE is where it's at (as we'd say). THAT'S what the Voice wants to be the focus: to come, in the spirit, through the open door and to see the Infinite Center of everything – God on His Throne.

It's an awe-inspiring scene, as it would be if we were close to an erupting volcano. We'd want to run for our lives AND we'd also find ourselves magnetically drawn to this glowing, exploding, spectacle that was both deadly AND simultaneously fascinating.

I think if we were there, right at the rim of this volcano, we wouldn't really wonder WHY it's there – instead we'd just marvel at it. The same is true here: it's a marvel BUT it's also a part of a letter so we DO wonder – why IS this here? Is there some problem that this vision addresses? Is there some practical use or benefit/value beyond the AWE/curiosity that it evokes? What are these visions meant to impart to the reader? What's the pastoral value/purpose?

Well, God is on His throne. And what a throne it is! And this has immense implications for the original readers AND for us as well. So let's look at: 1) The Impenetrable Barrier 2) Open Door and Infinite Center and 3) Why Worship is a Royal Waste of Time

In all of humankind's search for meaning and the pursuit of truth and significance/purpose, we sense that there's some transcendent Source and we hope to know from that Source – what else IS there?

I had a professor in college who was raised in India. She shared how in the 1930's she and her brother were children playing in the jungle/forest near their home and they heard a noise. It was a voice making this sort of eerie, repeated sound...

As they got closer, they recognized the word to be "Kali" (Hindu deity – an aspect of the mother goddess) and the two young children got closer and closer until they found this "sadhu" covered in white ash with super long hair and he turned abruptly to see how Kali was manifesting herself in the form of two little children.

The sadhu (Hindu pilgrim) was desperate to have some contact with the beyond, to get some glimpse of spiritual truth and reality – in short: to have a revelation, to know the meaning of life.

And what we get instead, as we pass through this life, is ...opinions. Everyone is groping in the dark and no one really KNOWS... because, no one has been to "the Other Side". Science can't get us there because it's not a pursuit of nature but of super-nature...not an understanding of physics but meta-physics.

We all stand before an impenetrable barrier between the world we can see and sense and test and observe and "The Beyond". And TO our own acknowledged limitations (and this turbulent

ocean of contradictory opinion) the Bible itself adds the problem of “The Fall”. We’re estranged from God and our minds don’t work to discern supernatural, spiritual metaphysical, transcendent truth. In fact, while we THINK we’re seeking God...we’re really NOT.

We draw the wrong conclusions. Left to our own devices we’re all like that sadhu... calling out into the universe desperate to find something or someone we really DON’T want to find. And St Paul’s Letter to Rome opens with this very dismal (in fact despairing) description of how ALL our plots/efforts fail and we end up thinking that God is like a lizard or like US... and it leads us into morality and life that’s broken and absurd and destructive.

And yet there are times in the Bible when God pulls back the curtain and OPENS a door in the Impassable Barrier. Revelation is about that: opening (27X). The seals are opened. The books are opened. The tent of witness is opened. “He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut” ...(3.7)

Jacob saw heaven open (Gen 28.12) and angels ascending and descending. God will open heaven and pour out rain on the Israelites when they settle in the Land: "The LORD will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens..." (Deu 28.12)

Ezekiel, Daniel, Isaiah all have heaven opened to them. And of course, when Jesus of Nazareth is baptized – “behold, the heavens were opened, and John saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and landing on Jesus...” (Mat 3.16)

And when the door is opened and John is invited in past the Impassable Wall... Jesus Christ calls John up and immediately John is IN THAT OTHER REALM. He is immediately “in the spirit” and what He sees... is a throne. God is enthroned and appears like the gemstones on the breastplate of the priests.

He’s radiant and there are loud sounds – thunder and lightening. Terrifying. And yet around the throne is a rainbow. It reminds us of the Days of Noah when God put away His Bow and Arrows – He hung His bow in the heavens (put down His weapon as it were) and in FACT, the bow is not aimed at US but it points upward as if God is saying, “I will take the arrow rather than YOU – My people.”

The terrifying sights and sounds are right next to this sign of peace – of cease-fire (the weapon aimed at God Himself). And then “before” the throne – BTW – have you noticed all the prepositions? (a word expressing a relation to another word – e.g. “under the bridge, after the rain, through the night”) and all these prepositions – standing IN heaven, sitting ON the throne... AROUND the throne... IN THE MIDST of the throne...BEFORE the throne... FROM the throne...

The throne is the epicenter of everything. The door is open and the throne is the Infinite Center of everything. “The Infinite Center” – I love that! A center is usually a point... a theoretical

construct - A point in geometry is a location. It has no size i.e. no width, no length and no depth. A point is shown by a dot.

And yet this point... this Center... is somehow infinite – the throne of God is the Infinite Center of everything. The One on whom all being depends sits, is enthroned on a throne **STANDING** in heaven. He's utterly complete, a seven-fold Spirit burning eternally.

And this God who sits on the fixed throne, the Ground of All Being - is so secure in His place – that He is somehow actually sharing His reign with others. There are 24 thrones around the throne as if Heaven is ruled by a council.

They're called ancient ones – maybe a reference to David and his 24 divisions of priests for Solomon's Temple (1 Chron 24). They're a Kingdom of Priests who rule with God, wearing white robes (cleansed) and crowned and enthroned with God.

There are angels – living creatures as Isaiah saw in His vision; full of eyes a symbol of their seeing everything; all kings of their realms – a lion, a calf or bull, a man and an eagle. The living ones sing the "sanctus" – the "trihagion" – as if the quality of this God that most astounds them is His "holy, holy, holy" being" – He's **UNIQUE**; unlike any one or any thing.

He's acknowledged and celebrated as being sovereign – "THE Lord, God, the Almighty" and they marvel unceasingly that He is eternal – "Who **WAS, IS and IS TO COME...**"

When these all-seeing, flying ("having six wings"), fearsome beings give glory to God, who lives forever and ever...when the beings worship, then the elders fall down and worship and cast down their crowns singing, "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."

It's an enthralling, utterly captivating, celebration of God's will and His unbounded ability to carry out what He will – "You created all things and only because **YOU WANTED** to do so does anything exist at all."

And lastly, we should mention that **IN THIS "thrones room"** where God reigns and when He shares His reign with His priestly people – in this place, where the Infinite Center of reality abides – "worthy are You, our Lord and our God" (reminds us of what the doubter said when He saw the risen Jesus – Thomas said, "My Lord and My God!" - John 20.28)

And before God, the Infinite Center, is something like a sea of glass, perfectly clear and smooth like crystal. It must have been immensely comforting to John... As He, like Isaiah, found himself in the presence of **HOLINESS...** and must have thought that He could be reduced to ashes any second.

As John saw Himself, like Isaiah, a man who had condemned HIMSELF by what came out of his own sinful mouth... and the wild, turbulent, ravenous sea which once swallowed Jonah... is now, subdued.

We're reminded of Him who once said the words –who spoke like a madman to the raging sea, "Peace, Be Still..." -- AND THE SEA OBEYED HIM.

And so, Jesus Christ has calmed, by His own perfect life and sacrificial death – He NOW, in the ultimate sense, has calmed the sea of God's justice, "Peace, Be Still" and John and Isaiah... and people of unclean lips who dwell among people with unclean lips – people like you and me – we're NOT swallowed by the sea of justice/wrath – another, better than Jonah was thrown into that sea – and it's calm...like glass.

It's a little like asking, "Why is this volcano here – what should we DO with it?" Well, what DO we do with a mountain...a volcano... a black-hole or a supernova? – we can only marvel. It's not something to be utilized...just stare at it...just stand in awe.

It's the "mysterium tremendum et fascinans" – the mystery that both terrifies and fascinates; repulses us and powerfully attracts us!

To the first readers... when they knew they were in a very small minority. For worshiping Jesus Christ, they would be ridiculed, some imprisoned, some killed and soon... many would be killed.

And they were taken with John, beyond the Impenetrable Barrier and into the "thrones room" where the Ancient of Days – the Living One – the King, absolutely sovereign, serene, infinitely JOYOUS and utterly unshaken by "wannabe" kings like that silly little, infantile, fly-by-night, flash-in-the-pan group... WHAT WERE THEY CALLED?... Oh, yeah, the Roman Empire (Pf-f-f-f-f! Bunch of posers!)

And see, when we gather, week by week, in this colossal waste of money and time and resources – this silly hour where we sing with our not-so-great voices... AND when we rehearse what we believe and say it out loud...when we confess, "I believe in God the Father Almighty..."

When we confess our sins and hear the good news of sins forgiven and peace with God; when we hear of how the raging sea of God's wrath (a just and good response God has to our own rebellion and un-holiness) and we hear again, "Fear Not – I," says Jesus Christ, "I AM the door... and I call you as I called My servant John, 'Come up here and I will show what must soon take place'..."

When we waste our time (how much we could earn right now corporately? – what a shameful waste of money and time and fun...) but when we stand before The Infinite Center who's totally happy – Truth, Beauty and Goodness Personified... The Holy, Holy, Holy God – when we see Him

enthroned and anticipate our reigning with Him – it's a royal waste of time AND it's the most sane, efficient, wonderful, peace-inducing activity in which we could even engage.

And for our family around the world – God's rainbow Church – millions of prisms refracting His light... for so many of our Christian brothers/sisters who are suffering and wondering – “Why isn't it working? Why did I get this dread diagnosis? Why am I ridiculed and have to live in fear of reprisal, prison...death? Why is the world so ...crooked...evil?”

“Is God losing it? Is God not in control...not real?”

Let's peer through the door and see... more than just see... let's celebrate... rest...rejoice in God, the holy, holy, holy God, the Almighty, who was and IS and IS TO COME... The infinite Center who bids us come.