

14 ½ years ago... in July of 2010... Paul Crowther... professor of astrophysics from the University of Sheffield's Department of Physics and Astronomy... announced that he and his research team had discovered a star they described as the brightest star ever found in the universe. ...The mass of the star is roughly 265 times that of our sun. ... But that's nothing. The brightness of this star is some 10 million times greater than the light coming from our sun!

Think about that... The star... currently named “**R136a1**”... is not twice as bright as our sun... which would be overwhelming in itself. ... It is not even a hundred times brighter... or a thousand times brighter than our sun. ... (It is said... that) this newly identified star is ten million times brighter than our sun! ... That is far beyond any normal person’s comprehension. ... How can anything be that bright?

Thinking about this star gives us a sense of what the glorious presence of God is like... for Scripture says (in 1st Tim. 6:16) that God is a being who "*lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.*"

The prophet Ezekiel... and the Apostle John... were both given glimpses of God’s glorious presence... but they had great difficulty trying to describe it. Neither one had a proper vocabulary to adequately portray it.

I must be honest and tell you that whenever I have come to their attempts to express what they saw of the glory of God’s presence... in my reading through Scripture... their depictions have been so far beyond my understanding... that I usually want to pass quickly

through it. ... I would almost prefer to preach a long passage of genealogy in the Old Testament book of Numbers... (you know those passages that I mean... “so-and-so begat so-and-so...” as one funny sounding name follows another...) ...I think that I would rather preach on all those names... than try to clarify a Bible passage that depicts the glorious presence of God. It seems much easier!

I have looked to see what Bible scholars have said about these descriptions of what God looks like... but to be very honest... I am usually left scratching my head. Much of what the explanations try to make clear... only confuse me more. I can no more comprehend what Ezekiel and John try to communicate... then I can comprehend a star that is 10 million times brighter than our sun... or the vastness of what God has created in the numbers of stars and galaxies that He spoke into existence.

But then the tension of such an undertaking to comprehend... is slightly eased when I remember... that I really don't want to believe in a God that I can comprehend. That reduces His deity. (He would be less than God.) A God that fits into the realm of my understanding... would be no God at all. In order for God to be God... He needs to completely transcend my thinking and my ability to control and manipulate Him. God can... (and has...) revealed to us... all that He wants us to know... and all that is necessary for us to know - through His creation... through His holy Word (the Bible)... and through the second person of the Trinity - Jesus Christ.

O.K. my apprehension finds some relief... however... I still have a

tension. Why did the ultimate author of Scripture (the Holy Spirit) lead Ezekiel and John to write their incomprehensible descriptions of God's glorious presence...? (I mean) Does God want certain Scripture to frustrate us...? Why are they in Scripture...? Are they really needed...?

The passage that we come to this morning... forces me to try to answer these questions and to contend with this tension... because we come front and center today with John's portrayal of God's glorious presence. And in full disclosure... I WAS tempted to speed through it... in order to avoid exasperating both you and I.... But once I dealt with the question of: "*What is it's value to us?*" ...it was obvious that rushing through Revelation chapters four and five... was not what God would want. ... So this week we will study Revelation chapter four... and next week we will take on chapter five... instead of combining both chapters into one message with a few generalized comments – (as I first thought about doing.)

Now... before we turn to our passage... let me first try to answer: "What is its value...?"

As I tried to wrap my mind around this... I came upon the words of Dr. Kent Hughes... who wrote an excellent commentary on Revelation 4 and 5.

What will it take to set you free from the world's idolatries—what will it take to keep you from trusting in things that are no gods at all? What will make you free from the world's immoralities—what will it take to make you untouched by the lust for smut that the world peddles and with which worldlings ruin their lives? What will it take to liberate you from the world's false perspective on the way things are—the perspective that

assumes there is no god, there is no revelation of truth in the Bible, and there will be no judgment?

I'll tell you what it will take: it will take seeing God as he is. Beholding God will purify you from immorality because when you see God you see what beauty and faithfulness are, and that exposes the ugliness of adultery. Beholding God will give you new lenses through which to look at the world because God himself defines reality.

Building on what Dr. Hughes has written... let me add: if you happen to find yourself in any of situations that I am about to mention... such a passage as this... will benefit you:

- 1) the things of God have begun to lose their luster... you find it harder every day to get into God's Word... or to pray... or
- 2) perhaps you find yourself more interested-in and engaged by the sinful pleasures of this world (their appeal is increasing... as you see other Christians giving-in and falling prey) ...or
- 3) possibly you have been looking at the crazy chaos of the world right now... (It seems so out-of-control!) ... We were reminded this week that Islamic-motivated terrorism exists (Isis is HERE and not just in the Middle-East... Powerful political influences are trying to bring down the United States and other world-super-powers so that they can set-up a one-world system. (They see that as better for mankind.)

People (in general) believe that the world is getting **better**... but God says it will get increasingly worse. ... In Matthew 24... Scripture reveals that in the end times there will be an increase (*just like birth pangs that increase with intensity and frequency*) - wars... rumors of war... famines... disease... floods... disasters... and nation will rise against nation. ... Yet society foolishly assures

itself that (in the years to come)... mankind will **win** the battle against disease... famine... war and hardship.

HERE is my point: By seeing the greatness of God's throne-room... a striking **contrast** is revealed... between GOD'S glorious majesty... and all the assumptions and pretense of mankind's arrogant pomp... futility... and fizzled brilliance.

We need to see TRUE God... as John describes Him in His throne room in Revelation chapter four. ... **God is in full control**. He has a very hands-on approach to the destiny of us all. ... We need the words of this passage to reach out of the page and grip our hearts with the very glory of God.

It **throbs** with God's majesty and power. (LISTEN!) Today's passage is intended to transform your life... to give you a reason to live your life for Christ... to participate with Him *in His eternal plan of the ages*... because **this** is not some game that we are playing here... Seeing God upon His throne... gives us the *motivation to purify ourselves* from every defilement... to take us all the way home.

Revelation 4:1-11

Here we see into the throne room of heaven. God is on the throne and orchestrating all the events that John will record in Revelation. ... It is important for us to see that the world is not spinning out of control... the God of creation will carry out His plans... as Christ initiates the final battle with the forces of evil. ... John shows us heaven (before showing us earth so that we will not be frightened by future events.)

We don't need to be frightened – (unless you are not a believer) because the scene that was just described... reveals that Christians will no longer be on the earth. There are several things in those verse which reveal that. I will get to those in just a moment.

Two weeks ago... we came upon one of the clearest verses that declares believers in Christ will be kept FROM (the Greek word “ek” means “out of”) the hour of tribulation that is coming upon the whole world. (We saw it in Revelation 3:10)... So allow me (now) to briefly turn your attention to *how we will miss this great judgment that is coming.*

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 (ESV)

¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

True followers of Christ will be raptured into heaven - to be with Christ before the great Tribulation.

There are two purposes for the Tribulation. **#1.** Is to bring the Jewish nation to realize that Jesus IS THE MESSIAH. **#2.** Is for God to pour out His wrath on unbelievers who have rejected Him.

Every person who has put their faith in Jesus Christ is part of His church and does not need to fear God's wrath. If we have to fear such a great punishment... then the death of Jesus Christ was completely useless! ... But... let me assure you – it wasn't

worthless. Jesus completely absorbed the punishment that YOU AND I DESERVE. That is why the Apostle Paul wrote:

Romans 8:1 (ESV)

¹ *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

Jesus' death was effective! We are no longer condemned – there is no need for us to be put through God's coming wrath! We will not be on earth... and the scene that we read in Revelation chapters 4 and 5 depict us in heaven – before the Tribulation.

Revelation 4:1

Do you see the phrase "after this"...? ... After what? There is only ONE thing that makes any possible sense. - After what John just described in the preceding two chapters. What did he describe? The entire church age from it's beginning at Pentecost through it's seventh and final era (The Laodicean church age.) AFTER THE CHURCH AGE ON EARTH – THE CHURCH IS IN HEAVEN. How do you know? (ANSWER – by what John described.)

Before I get to the description of God's indescribable appearance... let me show you who the worshippers are (at God's throne.)

Revelation 4:4

Who are these 24 elders? ... Because there were **12** tribes of Israel in the Old Testament... and **12** apostles in the New Testament... the **24** elders in this vision *probably* represent all the redeemed of God for all time... (both before and after Christ's death and resurrection). ...They symbolize all those —both Jews and Gentiles—who are now part of God's family. ... The 24 elders show us that *all* the redeemed

of the Lord are worshipping Him.

(LISTEN TO ME!)... In Daniel 7:9... Daniel (also) described God's throne room. Daniel merely saw EMPTY thrones being placed in God's presence. ... What Daniel saw was the place for these 24 elders being established... but they were not yet occupied. ... Now... (and this is very significant!) **Now**... as John views the thrones - they are occupied. In Daniel they were unoccupied... now in Revelation 4... they are suddenly occupied. And these occupants (watch this!) are "**clothed in white robes**" and they have on their heads **crowns of gold**.

(Do you know what the significance of this is? ... Their golden crowns are "victor crowns." The Greek word is "*stephanos*." (We do not see Angels wear victor crowns anywhere in Scripture. But we do see resurrected saints wearing them as rewards for their earthly service!) The judgment seat of Christ... where He hands out rewards to believers has already occurred... in what John described. The church has been raptured and rewarded. ... And from the two chapters that we just finished in Revelation... it all fits the context.

- Jesus promised the church in Laodicea in 3:21 that the one who conquers will sit with Him on His throne. John here sees those who have what Jesus promised.
- Jesus promised the church in Sardis in 3:5, "The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments," and John now sees these twenty-four elders clothed in white garments.
- Jesus promised the church in Smyrna in 2:10, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life," and now John sees these twenty-four elders wearing golden crowns.

The vision of these twenty-four elders... seated on thrones around the throne of God... clothed in white garments... golden

victor crowns on their heads... is a significant picture for us that God keeps His promises. ... This scene appears in Revelation BEFORE the Tribulation takes place and is described. OUR GOD IS FAITHFUL! ... Jesus WILL give what He said He would give.

In Revelation 1:19 John was told what to write in this book that we call Revelation. He was given three parts. The three parts (according to Revelation 1:19) are as follows: **Part One:** *"The things that you have seen."* That was the vision of Christ in Revelation 1. **Part Two:** *"Those things that are."* That was the 7 letters to the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3... which gives us a picture of the entire Church age on earth. **Part Three:** *"Those things that are to take place after this..."* (after this church age.)

J Vernon McGee writes:

We have seen the history of the church in the seven churches of chapters 2 -- 3, but as we come to chapter 4, the question naturally arises: What has happened to the church? From chapter 4 through the rest of the Book of Revelation, there is no mention of the church except when you get to the invitation at the end, which is a general invitation and hasn't anything to do with the chronology of the book. From here on you will not find the word church mentioned. Up to this point, the word church has occurred again and again, in fact nineteen times. But now the church goes off the air -- there is no mention of it. It has gone off the air because it went up in the air; it was caught up in the air to meet the Lord in the air. The church has gone to heaven - that is what has happened to it.

Revelation 4:2

Let me invite you to consider for a moment the most beautiful thing you can imagine. Now take that beauty and multiply it by infinity... and we might be getting close to what John saw. God created

beauty. There is no defect in Him. He is perfection. He is ten thousand times more lovely than the most compelling thing that you or I could possibly desire. ... That is why this passage of Scripture is so practical... He is ten thousand times more attractive than the most compelling thing here on earth!

Revelation 4:3

Of course there is no possible way for human words to describe what God is like... so John (here) is reduced to using comparisons. Notice the word “like.” ... What John saw was so indescribable that he could NOT explain *exactly what it was* – but only what it was *like*.

The two stones mentioned are especially glorious and... in a figure... tell us the One on the throne was glorious. ... Jasper is described as crystal. ... It is most likely a diamond... the most brilliant of all stones. ... Jasper probably represents God’s holiness and purity. ... The sardius stone was a blood red color... perhaps it is a ruby. It *probably* represents God’s justice and wrath.... Then surrounding the throne was a luminous rainbow that cast an emerald glow. A typical rainbow has a multitude of colors... but this one is simply a beautiful emerald green. This rainbow speaks of the splendor around the throne. And as the rainbow (after Noah’s flood) symbolizes God faithfulness and His mercy in the midst of judgment... it probably means the same thing here.

Rainbows usually appear after a storm... but this rainbow appears before the storm of tribulation that is about to take place. I see this as a reminder that God’s judgment is coming... but there will be mercy mixed in. God will have 144,000 evangelists bringing people

through all the wrath and to Himself. (We are going to see that later in Revelation.)

To the Jews... they would recall that these two stones (the Jasper and the Sardis stones) were the first and last ones in the breastplate of the High Priest (Ex. 28:17-20). All 12 stones on the breastplate of the High Priest... bore the names of the twelve tribes of Israel... the first one was Jasper representing Reuben... and the 12th stone representing Benjamin was Sardis.

Israel is precious to the Lord. He has not forgotten them! In fact... we see in Ezekiel 38... that God will bring them back to a belief in Him. (He starts with an invasion of a Russian-led coalition... which looks like it will completely demolish Israel. But then God wipes these enemies of Israel out... bringing a Jewish revival. More Jewish revivals will occur during the Tribulation. That is one of the primary purposes of the Tribulation that is about to be described in Revelation. God will show His faithfulness to them... and bring them to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah. They will call upon His Name... which will end the Tribulation and bring Christ's return to earth. (We will see this much later in our study of Revelation.) But for now... in this image we see the faithfulness of God... and these symbols that depict that His people are still close to His heart.

Revelation 4:4

You and I simply MUST be more sure that **this** is real. ... What really keeps you from being zealous for God..? (Let's face it) we have been lulled into thinking that earthly pleasure is *more* **certain**... than the

truth of what John saw... which is our future. I don't think Satan wants us to think very much (or very deeply) about this vision of heaven.

Do such things as television... romance novels... impure thoughts and images capture too much of your excitement... ? ... God's glory and His rewards... *are infinitely more interesting* than anything that this world has to offer. ... You were not made to squander your life away. ... Are the white garments promised to those who conquer... worn by these twenty-four elders around God's throne... more precious to you than your being with the "*in-group*" of society? Your enjoyment of those things will be VERY SHORT – in terms of the eternal rewards we are seeing here.

Beg God to impress you very deeply by this. (AND)... there is something else we can do... to move ourselves in the direction of this motivation. ... Read... study... memorize... and meditate on the Bible. ... One reason we give way to temptation is that we're not thinking about what we've been promised. ... If we can say to the temptation in the moment it comes to us... "*You are not better to me than my eternal reward...!*" we can be over-comers. ... So... the next time you're tempted to compromise with the world... ask yourself whether what you will gain from the compromise is more valuable to you... than being clothed in white at the throne of God.

Revelation 4:5

The cosmic disturbances (the lightning and the thunder) were not soft rumblings or weak flashes of light. We should imagine ground-shaking thunderclaps and blinding flashes—the kinds that make

children cry and adults uneasy. After God came down on Mount Sinai this way... He spoke the Ten Commandments to Israel.

Lightning and thunder had filled the sky at Mount Sinai when God had given the people his laws (Exodus 19:16). The Old Testament often uses such imagery to reflect God's power and majesty (for example in Psalm 77:18). In Revelation... thunder and lightning always form part of the scene in God's throne room and highlight a significant coming event—for example... they mark the seventh seal (8:5)... the seventh trumpet (11:19)... and the seventh bowl (16:18).

The seven lampstands represent the Holy Spirit (We saw this when we were in Revelation chapter 1... 1:4. It is also seen in Ezekiel 1:13... and Zechariah 4:2-6). The seven spirits of God is another name for the Holy Spirit.

In Zechariah 4:2-6 we also read about seven lamps (like the seven torches here.) Both of these images are the one (perfect and complete) Holy Spirit. ... The judgment that is about to fall... will not be based on hear-say... but on the perfect all-knowing... all-seeing Holy Spirit. (The seven torches tell us that He sees EVERYTHING.)

Revelation 6:4a

The **sea of glass** appears in prophetic visions of God's throne room in several passages of Scripture (Ex. 24:10; Ezek. 1:22, 26; Rev. 15:2). ... Its transparent tranquility shows heaven's peace in contrast to earthly turmoil.

Revelation 4:6b-7

These angelic creatures represent the universe of God's created

order... **all** of which worships Him and centers itself around Him. Everything will praise the Lord.

The lion is perhaps symbolic of the whole animal creation... being the greatest example. The ox may represent all domestic animals... and the eagle represents the birds... while the figure of a man represents human creation. All that God has created is represented here before His throne. It is the most amazing picture.

The three living creatures that are described like animals are not called a lion, an ox, and an eagle, but they are said to be "*like*" these animals. The third is said to have "the face of a man." The point of these descriptions seems to be the way these four living creatures reflect the glory of God.

Something about God is captured by the likeness of these four living creatures. God is noble, royal, and fast like a lion. He has a massive, patient, slow, serving strength like an ox. God has the sensitivity and spirituality that we can see in the face of a human being, and he has a soaring transcendence like an eagle in flight.

John's vision in Revelation chapter four shouts... He will never fail you! ... He cannot be overcome... outmuscled... outsmarted... or outdone... and His goodness will never fail.

The right response to this God... is given to us in verse 8-11...

Revelation 4:8-11

This passage in Revelation is a reminder that *our primary job as a created being*... is to worship God. The four creatures represent all of God's created beings.

Six wings depicts their ability to move around and observe things from all angles. ... The fact that they are "full of eyes all around and within" seems to indicate that they see everything. Nothing escapes their notice. And it is precisely because they see everything... because they have all the facts laid out before them... because they behold God as He is and history as it happened... all the truth about the way things are now... and because they see God's character and how He will bring all things to resolution... because they "are full of eyes all around and within," they are continually compelled to confess the almighty... everlasting holiness of God.

The elders (representing you and me) fall before God and place their crowns at His feet as a sign of humility and an acknowledgement of God's authority and right to receive worship. In John's day... military generals who were victorious in battle... would participate in a celebration that included a ritual of casting their rewards at the feet of the emperor... but they would still retain those rewards and special privileges.

When we cast our crowns at the feet of God... it does not mean that we will give up our rewards. It symbolizes our acknowledgment that even our ability to earn a reward in this life... is the result of the grace of God.

In closing... I turn once again to the well-stated words of Dr. Kent Hughes... with his comments on Revelation chapter four.

Don't you want to win crowns that you can use for the praise of God? This life is the one chance we have to stand against the world, the flesh, and the devil and to fight to be faithful to God.

Here is the best possible motivation we could have for pursuing

greater holiness, greater Christlikeness. Every triumph on the way will become one more laurel for us to cast at the feet of the one who sits on the throne. Pray right now that the next time you are tempted by sin, called to make a sacrifice, or confronted with a compromise, the Lord will remind you that what is before you is an opportunity to win a trophy you can place before him in his honor.

On that day, when we see him as he is, when we are awed by the living creatures, but most of all by the one who sits on the throne, we will wish we had more to cast at his feet. We will wish we could have suffered more for him, sacrificed more for him, resisted greater temptations than the ones we gave in to. We will wish we had fought more for him, wish we had overcome more for him, and wish we had more with which to praise him.

If you were to ask me why it matters that we study a passage that tries to explain the glorious presence of God... I'd say if we don't ... (if we fail to understand His true character)... we'll never be amazed by Him. ... We'll never feel small as we stare up at Him. ... We'll never worship Him as we ought. ... We'll never run to him for refuge... and we will never choose Him over the worthless pleasures of this world.