

“WHO WAS, and IS, and IS to Come” (Revelation 4:1–11, 11.28.21)

Revelation 4:1–11 (NIV84)

4 After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” ² At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. ³ And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. ⁴ Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. ⁵ From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. ⁶ Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. ⁷ The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. ⁸ Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

“Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come.”

⁹ Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

¹¹ “You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created
and have their being.”

The word of God for the people of God.

LET US PRAY.

Title: **“WHO WAS, and IS, and IS to Come”**

INTRODUCTION:

How did the Apostle John end up in heaven? Why is he there and specifically at this point? Remember that this is part of the message being sent to the seven churches and in reality, to the Church of the ages. There is a message for us – an application for us. The Lord Jesus is not randomly interacting with the Apostle. There is a deliberate and determined purpose.

John starts this 4th chapter by saying, "After this I looked." After what? He first heard the voice like a trumpet in Revelation 1. Revelation 1:17–18 (NIV84)

¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸ I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."

Jesus then proceeded with specific messages for the seven churches where He commended, rebuked, exhorted, and promised. The churches were being persecuted by Roman authorities and the Jewish community. Inside the church there were false teachers and pagan philosophies. There was moral corruption as the world was brought into the church. Each of the churches had obstacles they had to overcome.

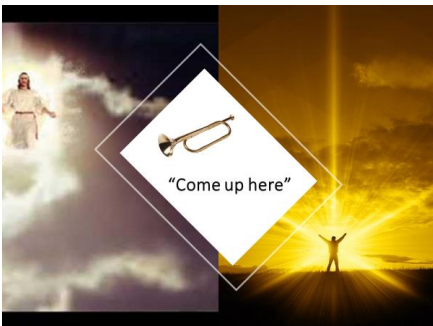
The next stop on John's apocalyptic journey is a glimpse of heaven. John needed this respite. The churches needed this amazing encouragement. We need to see this revelation of the heavenly realm. Why? To equip us for our context in time and culture.



BODY: "There before me was a door standing open in heaven." Jesus holds the keys to heaven and hell. What He opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. He has placed before us an open door that no one can shut. From the Gospel of

John 10:9 (ESV), Jesus says, "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture."

This is a central message of the New Testament. John 14:6 – Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father **except** through me. Acts 4:12 – And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. John 3:36 – Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him. Acts 10:43 – To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. 1 Tim. 2:5 – For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.



Jesus frequently beckons us to come. Matthew 4:19 (NIV84) "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."

When Jesus was walking on the water, He told Peter to come. He tells us to come after Him and carry our cross. When we come together in Jesus' name, He has promised to be with us. He admonished the disciples, "Let the little children come to me." This theme is demonstrated in a parable. Luke 14:23 (NIV84) "Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full.'"

I will just give you one more. From the Gospel of John 5:39–40 (NIV84) Jesus testifies, ³⁹ “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me to have life.” Yes! Coming to Jesus is the Key to the Open Door of heaven.

One preacher proclaimed that the Bible points to the door. The death of good men points to the door. A life lived in Christ points to the door. And, our own best experience points to the door.



Still in today’s first verse, Jesus says, “I will show you what must take place after this.” It is easy to miss the key word MUST – it is an absolute. All five of my favorite translations say MUST. This witnesses to God’s sovereignty. The Lord God Almighty is in control. Human history is entwined with the will of God, The Creator.

This is a key application for John, the Seven Churches, the Universal Church and for Emmaus Church of Smithville. When the Enemy and the world are screaming no, the Amen says YES! During the chaos, the whirlwinds, and the storms of life, God is still on the throne. When the waves of conflict and confrontation are mounting, the One on Mount Zion is still in control. When sickness and the deathbed collapse upon you, Eternal Life awaits through that Open Door – the Lord Jesus.



The Apostle John said, "Before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it." It seems clear that God Himself is on the throne. Repeatedly in this depiction, God on His throne is in the center. You could argue that the inference is that God is the center of All, the universes, creation, history, heaven, and the heaven above the heavens. This is God's rightful position.

The word throne is used eleven times in these eleven verses and will continue to be prominent throughout the Book of Revelation. Certainly, it represents the place and centrality of authority in and over all creation. There are layers of authority as depicted by the encircling 24 thrones. While who these elders are on the 24 thrones has been interpreted in different ways, what is clear is that they hold a prominent place – they are in heaven in the throne room of God. Do note that even the highest placed human king has been created to worship the Living God.

There are theologians who reject the concept of kingdom, kings, power, and authority. They substitute the word "kin dom" for kingdom – emphasizing brotherhood and sisterhood. Because human power has been corrupt, abusive and oppressive on so many occasions, they resist using words like king, master, and slave. But make no mistake, our God insists on a primary position in every single aspect of our existence.

There is an approach in evangelism that speaks about the need for each person to get off the throne of their life

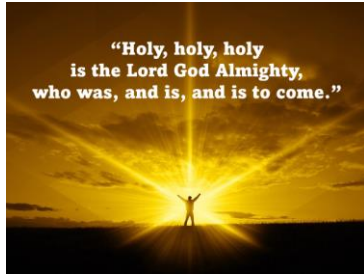
and to put Jesus the Christ on the throne of their life. This requires submission, to which our carnal nature rebels. Nevertheless, Jesus cannot be your Savior unless Jesus is your Master.

Now let us take a minute and hear a caution. It is common and most human to try to identify all the symbols, creatures, and objects given here and in other places in Revelation. Rather than specifics, it may be that we need to focus on the overall effect. A scene that is completely foreign to our human perspective is being described. Yes, there are other snippets of scripture that share similar descriptions. Not only are we given a picture, but there is a sound track to go with it. All these combine to create an overwhelming sensory experience.

As an example for my caution, let us look at the phrase, "what looked like a sea of glass." First, notice that it isn't a sea of glass but looked like a sea of glass. One of the commentaries I often use is called "An Exegetical Summary," and it compares scholarly perspectives. Here is what it says about the sea of glass:

"QUESTION—What is symbolized by the 'sea of glass'?

It symbolizes: God's transcendence [NIC]; his holiness [TNTC]; his providence [Lns]; God's rule being pure, calm, and majestic [Alf]. It is a picture that emphasizes the majesty of God's presence [EC, LD, NIC, TNTC]. It symbolizes the huge distance separating the throne from others [Sw]. It symbolizes the old order as a sea of evil from which arises the beast of 13:1 [BNTC]."



It is likely that you recall the praise song that the four living creatures were singing. In Isaiah's vision, there were seraphs singing in Isaiah 6:3 (NIV84)

³ And they were calling to one another:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory."

The words for the hymn we sang before the sermon by that name, was written two hundred years ago by the Bishop of Calcutta, Reginald Heber. He died at forty years of age. Forty years later, John Bacchus Dykes wrote the music in thirty minutes.

Although I have read this scripture many times, something new about it occurred to me. Notice that the structure is three triplets: Holy, holy, holy, Lord, God, Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come. For me, that emphasizes the triune nature of our God. It turns out that this scripture is sometimes used for Trinity Sunday sermons.

These are words of highest acclamation. Many attributes of God are given in the Bible, but only God's holiness is tripled; or is multiplied? Then there is the naming of God to be considered. While we know there are many names for God, and combined names, Lord God Almighty, is used in 93 verses in our New International Version. This compounding of God's name is an attempt to capture WHO HE IS.

Naming God does create a conundrum. We only have limited human ability to know God. Naming God helps us to comprehend Him in a sense, but we do not want to unnecessarily or inaccurately limit God. This is an age-old challenge recorded for us throughout scripture.

Exodus 3:13–14 (NIV84)

¹³ Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"

¹⁴ God said to Moses, "**I AM WHO I AM**. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: '**I AM** has sent me to you.' "

In John 8:58–59 (NIV84), Jesus claimed this title:

⁵⁸ "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" ⁵⁹ At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

The Jewish leaders were going to stone Jesus because they understood exactly what He was saying. Because they did not believe Jesus, they thought He was committing blasphemy for which stoning was the penalty.

While it might seem unusual, I believe a short grammar lesson here is timely. I looked this up on www.grammar.com. "Am" is the present tense of the verb "be." In the [entire](#) English language, one verb [stands](#) out: the verb *to be*.

It [serves](#) more [roles](#) than most verbs, for it can [serve](#) as a main verb and a [primary](#) auxiliary verb. You need eight

words when conjugating the verb to be: 1. Be 2. Am 3. Is 4. Are 5. Was 6. Were 7. Been 8. Being.

The truth that is being conveyed is that God, that Jesus, has always been, is now, and will ever be, forever. Of course, this would be necessary for the Creator of all things. And, it is one of the characteristics or attributes for which God is being praised here – who was, and is, and is to come.

You might ask where the Holy Spirit is in this fourth chapter of Revelation. In addition to the inference of this praise song, we have the plain statement - Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. These seven spirits or seven-fold spirit are God the Holy Spirit. Again, the Exegetical Summary: "It is a figurative expression alluding to **the effective operation** of the Holy Spirit. The word 'seven' indicates the fullness of the Holy Spirit."

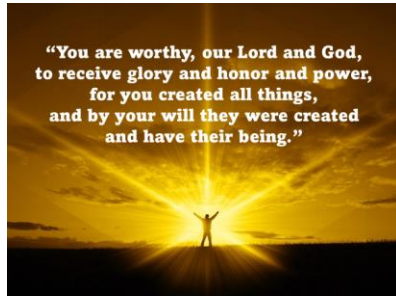
Notice in our text that they are **blazing**.



Briefly, I want to address a seeming disparity between what the four living creatures give and the 24 elders sing in their praise song. The first give glory, honor, and thanks. The second sing receive glory, honor, and power. None of the commentaries or sermons I read explained this difference.

Often times, what we perceive as a problem in scripture is actually an avenue for deeper understanding. The fact that we end the Christian year with the celebration of

Thanksgiving makes this most appropriate to address. We give thanks and God is worthy to receive power, hmm? When your attitude towards God is one of gratitude, then you are submitting to God. You are giving God power over your life. You are putting the Lord Jesus on the throne of your life.



“You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created
and have their being.”

It is critical that we recognize God as Creator. Why? Because it naturally follows that all creation and creatures, come under the authority of the Creator. We, as creatures, need to worship and praise the only ONE, the GREAT I AM, for Who He Is and Was and Is to come. When we join the heavenly choir singing praises to the One and Only God, then there is order in the universe.

CONCLUSION:

This is a wonderful scripture for our first Advent Sunday. As I mentioned to you two weeks ago, in the message to the Church in Philadelphia, Jesus promised, “I am coming soon.” Then we looked at Revelation 22 where Jesus says three times I am coming soon!

As we have just examined, God – the Lord Jesus, is by His identity, the One who is coming again. It is eye-opening how often Jesus talked about His return in the Gospels. In the many epistles of the New Testament, the fact of Jesus’ return was lifted up as a defining hope for the young church. And so, it should be for us today. Jesus’ return is our hope, our confidence, and our security.

In my Wesley Study Bible, there is a Life Application Topic for this fourth chapter of Revelation: "Only Jesus is Worthy"

"From childhood, we have heard stories of "the one who could." Cinderella was the one who could fit the glass slipper. King Arthur was the one who could remove the sword from the stone. Prince Charming was the one who could wake Sleeping Beauty. These stories all have heroic figures who fit the moment and arrive to save us just when hope expires. Long before the stories of slippers, stones, and kisses, however, humans were questing for the one who could. Prophets hoped, psalmists prayed, wise ones searched. In Revelation 4:11, we see the "one who is seated on the throne" and we celebrate because we have exhausted the hope of saving ourselves."

"Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come."

Come Lord Jesus come. Let he who has ears let him hear.
Amen and amen. Let us pray.