

“It Starts Around the Throne” – Revelation Part 10
Revelation 4:1-11

So, we just wrapped up listening to Jesus’ words to each of the 7 churches of Revelation. Now, John hears the resounding voice of Jesus again: *“Come up here.”* To the Jewish Christians, this would have evoked images of Moses being summoned by the Lord to ascend Mount Sinai to receive God’s revelation for His people. That was a hinge-point in history – when God’s people received the Law, when they became the people of His covenant. And now, many centuries later, John the disciple is being summoned to the throne room of heaven ... because this is another hinge-point in history.

Why the summons? Jesus says, *“I will show you what must take place after this”* (v. 1). BUT, instead of the horrendous pictures of war and famine and pestilence that we witness later in the book (the scenes that we often associate with Revelation) ... instead, we find ourselves in God’s throne room witnessing a worship service – filled with strange sights and sounds: beautiful colors; unusual creatures; lightning and thunder and rumblings in the distance ... and most especially, an inspiring example of how to praise God.

As I looked at this passage, I thought, “What’s going on here? If Jesus has told John that he’s about to see *what must soon take place*, why would the first thing Jesus shows him be a “worship service”? Why visit this beautiful but *seemingly* secondary ceremony? Why not just get down to the nitty gritty of it all and tell us about what we really want to know about: the conflict between the forces of good and evil, between the forces of Satan and the angels of God? But instead we find ourselves being led into God’s throne room.

It’s interesting - that when this book begins talking about future things, the first thing it focuses on – is *the Father!* [P] Why start here? [P] Because that’s where God KNEW we had to begin.

Revelation can be a scary book. This would not be a book I would read to my children for a bedtime story. There’s some frightening images in here. But that is *why* it’s so important to point out that the vision starts in the Throne Room of Heaven!

Consider the picture that this chapter places in our minds: It's an *AWE-some* scene ... It's *otherworldly* – odd creatures is an understatement ... Yet somehow *reassuring* – the 24 elders in white garments and crowns at least look something like us.

But the main focus – what can't be missed – is that *God is worshiped by all*. Everyone and everything submits itself to God in adoration. Why? [P] Because He is *Worthy!* The praise is spontaneous, diverse, resounding, far-reaching, unending! [P] There's a clear and constant sense of *Power* here... A Sense of *Wonder*... and an assurance that – if this is our *Holy, Almighty* God – whom else shall I fear!?! [P]

The images that follow this, in chapters 5-18, can be frightening, even overwhelming. BUT our God is bigger than anything the world can throw at us. He occupies the higher ground, and nothing can stand against His power. As John wrote earlier in his first epistle: "*You, dear children, are of God and have overcome... because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world*" (1 John 4:4).

Jesus is able to entrust John with this vision now because he never forgot his Savior's words before: "*I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world!*" (John 16:33)

Jesus prepares us for the same throughout Revelation. He is driving home to us an inescapable truth: In this world, groaning for its redemption, you WILL have trouble ... But take heart, be of good courage, don't despair ... because of the One who is on the throne! Because you belong to Lamb! In him, and because of him, we will overcome!

But Revelation 4 is not simply saying we will overcome. It is telling us *How* to overcome! We will overcome by following the example of those in the throne room. [P] And what are they doing? [P] They are worshiping the Father! They are praising His Name! They are focusing all of their attention on Him. Everything in the room is centered on the throne – more specifically, the One seated upon that throne.

Why? Because, when we do that – when we worship God, focusing our attention solely on Him – we're focusing our attention: NOT on our circumstances; NOT on our failures; NOT on our sorrows or our struggles or our strain. No! When we worship as those in the

throne room do, we are focusing upon the God who has the power and the majesty and the desire to lift us up out of our despair ... our fears ... our uncertainty. [P]

We *could* choose to focus on the *bizarre creatures*. We could talk about how the unsettling image of their bodies covered w/ eyes suggests that nothing on earth is hidden from them. We could discuss how the four creatures – one like a lion, one like an ox, one like an eagle, and one with a face like a man – recall the creatures of Ezekiel 1 & 10, and how his vision, describing the most powerful/regal of animals, communicates the majesty of the creatures.

Or, we can focus on the *One* whom the 4 creatures are focused on – the *Omniscient One* who sees all the more; the *Creator* God who bestows all strength and nobility to his creatures. The key is not the creatures; the key is the King. And the only proper response is worship – to lift our voices with them, singing day and night – "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come!*" (v. 8)

This is how we overcome – by remembering and worshiping the God who has always been there in the past, who is here with us in the present, and who will be there in all the days to come. He will never leave us or forsake us, even in our darkest moments! [P]

We *could* choose to focus on the *24 elders* ... how the number 24 carries symbolism – that it could very well be a doubling of the number 12 – symbolic of both the twelve tribes of Israel as well as the twelve apostles – both Old and New Testament believers together representing all the people of God. We could talk about their white clothes pointing to purity or their gold crowns representing their reign as a kingdom of priests.

Or, we can focus on the One whom the 24 elders are focused on – the God of the New Covenant who removes the barrier, the dividing wall between peoples, even more, between God and ourselves; the God who robes them with His *righteousness*; the God before whom they cast down their crowns in humble submission. We can join them as they sing – "*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.*" (v. 11)

This is how we overcome – by remembering and worshiping the *Omnipotent One* who created everything with a word. Because we belong to Him, the forces of this world that stand against us don't stand a chance! [P]

Martin Rinkart was a Lutheran minister who served in Eilenburg, Saxony during the Thirty Years' War. The walled city became a refuge for victims of the war, but the result was overcrowding, famine and pestilence. The Rinkart home was a refuge for many, even though he was hard pressed to provide for his own family. During the height of the plague in 1637, he was the only surviving pastor in Eilenburg, conducting as many as 50 funerals in a day. He performed more than 4000 funerals that year, including that of his own wife and children. It was in the midst of this catastrophic world that Rinkart wrote that enduring hymn of praise: "*Now Thank We All Our God.*"

Listen to the words of that last verse:

*All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given
The Son, and Him who reigns with them in highest heaven
The one eternal God whom earth and heav'n adore
For thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore."*

In a time of widespread disease, unimaginable tragedy, profound and personal loss, Rinkart wrote these words – words coming right out of Revelation 4. Why did he write this hymn? Because he believed the words of the One who overcame death – the voice behind Revelation – the Risen One who tells him and us: "In this world you will have trouble, but don't despair. I have overcome. I am reigning now. And I am returning soon."

Focus on God's throne. Set your eyes and your heart and your soul on the One who has the power to help you face and overcome your hardships and heartaches.

What is the first part of Riverlawn's purpose statement? [P] We strive to purge pride by *focusing on and glorifying God*. Worshiping together is meant to train us; to prepare us; to drive home into our hearts that *the only sure way we can face the fears and crises of this world is to focus on the Father, the One on the throne*.

This is the wonder of worship. The church on earth is never closer to heaven than when we are offering the Father, the Son, and the Spirit the glory they so deserve. It is then that we most fully experience a foretaste of heaven. *A church that suffers in this world will long for heaven, and in turning our hearts toward our heavenly king, we will find strength to remember that the future world belongs to us.*

Elementary teacher Phyllis Martin tells this story: “Storm clouds and strong gusts of wind had come up suddenly. The Alpine Elementary School radio blared tornado warnings. It was too dangerous to send the children home. Instead, they were taken to the basement, where the children huddled together in fear. We teachers were worried too. To help ease the tension, the principal suggested a sing-along. But the voices were weak and unenthusiastic. Child after child began to cry – we could not calm them.

“Then a teacher whispered to the child closest to her, ‘Aren’t you forgetting something, Kathie? There is a power greater than the storm that will protect us. Just say to yourself, ‘God is with us.’ Then pass on the words to the child next to you.’ As the words were whispered from child to child, a sense of peace settled over the group. I could hear the wind outside still blowing with the same ferocity of the moment before, but it didn’t seem to matter now. Inside, fear subsided and tears faded away.

“Through the years, I have remembered those calming words. In times of stress and trouble, I have been able to find strength and peace by repeating, “God is with us.”

Is God with you? [P] Have you learned to look to Him in your times of deepest trouble? Jesus’ voice beckons to us, “Come up here ... set your gaze upon my Father’s throne.” It all starts there. It all centers there. Come, and “*worship him who lives for ever and ever*” – your Mighty God, your Merciful Father, your Majestic King!