

I. Intro

A. A few years ago, the purse of a multistate lottery – called Power Ball - got up to \$1.58 billion dollars. Your ticket for a chance to win \$1.58 billion cost \$2 and so, in spite of the odds being only 1 in 260 million (which are also the odds that you will be killed by an asteroid that lands on your head) the lines to buy a ticket were long. Very long.

B. In one tv interview with a clerk selling them, the reporter asked, “what do you make of this?” And he said, “the people in line are here to buy hope.”

C. Two dollars for hope is not bad. I’d pay \$2 if I could buy hope. But those odds seem hopeless, and besides, hope is free.

1. Paul wrote to Titus about a “blessed hope.” Peter wrote about a “living hope.” And both – which referred to Christ’s return – were free.

2. And that hope is part of the story we get from our passage today from the Book of Revelation.

D. We are continuing in Revelation 4 – this deeply disturbing and deeply devotional picture book - which provides us with a view from Heaven and amazing insights about God.

II. Now:

A. I realize that some of you do not think a vision of heaven is helpful for life today. It is. The first chapters of Revelation are the seven letters we have looked at, and they show lots of suffering. When John gets invited up to heaven, what he sees is how things are going to be resolved. He sees that God is in control.

1. In some ways, the holiness of God is the most prominent attribute of God, but not in Revelation. There it’s his Sovereignty. It’s the promise that He is in control. He’s got everything worked out.

2. The eternal view from heaven is massively important today. We need to see ultimate reality.

3. I’m not much of a Science Fiction fan. But as others have noted,¹ the sci-fi books that are most intriguing are those that suggests that our universe is a side alley to a much bigger, more important world. They suggest that we have been caught in the back waters of what is ultimate. That our whole universe is growing on a leaf in a puddle in a much bigger world.

4. Because if we are living in a side story – and in many ways, we are, then knowing about the real story is important. Well, we are and it is.

5. We need to live in light of ultimate reality – of God and eternity.

B. Of course, I realize, that some of you are not sure you believe this is true. You are not sure you believe in heaven. Well, if you are a follower of Christ, you have to, because He sure did:

1. He claimed to have come from Heaven; He claimed he was returning to heaven; He said He was going to get things ready for us;

2. In I Corinthians 15, Paul calls Jesus the man from Heaven.

3. And, as I have noted many times, the Christian faith quickly falls apart if there is no eternal life. If we can’t trust Jesus on this, why trust Him on anything.

C. Now, if you say that you are not sure about Jesus, that's a different point. Talking about why we should trust him is a different sermon. We can't rehearse all of those arguments every week, but if you are interested in a Zoom study on this, send me an email. I have kept waiting to relaunch the skeptics study until we could meet – but if you are up for Zoom, send me a note and if we have critical mass we'll reboot that.

III. Today the plan is to unpack chapter four which:

A. Is where the big vision starts (there are visions and sub visions, but this is the big one that goes through chapter 22).

B. And will teach us some things about worship.

1. The Bible has a lot to say about this topic. And coaching about how to do it well. Some might think that the Psalms would be the key place to go for this, but I think Revelation 4 and 5 is probably better.

2. Of course, as you will see, this is where things get confusing. Chapters 1-3 were easy to understand. Chapter four is where you need to remember that our goal is to keep our focus on the forest. We accept that we may not be able to make sense of every tree. I suspect it is just a bit beyond us.

3. There were two New Testament people – other than Jesus – who saw heaven and returned to talk about it

a) Paul – who says after what he saw the Lord gave him a thorn in the flesh to keep him grounded.

b) And John – who is given the assignment of writing about it. And he ends up using a lot of symbolism. It is as if he is writing out a dream or perhaps he simply cannot describe what he sees.

C. For all their success as writers, Tolkien, Lewis, Fielding and Vonnagut were not able to write non-fiction accounts of their war experiences.

1. Tolkien – who almost died of “trench fever” in WW I – wrote *The Lord of the Rings*, one of the epic accounts of the battle between good and evil.” But it is fantasy.

2. Lewis – who was likely the victim of friendly fire and briefly left for dead in WWI – writes *The Chronicles of Narnia* – which is a fight of good versus evil set in a fantasy.

3. William Golding – who wrote *Lord of the Flies* – was gravely injured in World War II. He creates a fictional island where evil plays out among children.

4. Kurt Vonnegut – who is one of the very few who survived the Allied bombing of Dresden - wrote *Slaughter House 5*, which I am not sure how to categorize other than non-fiction.

D. No one could write a clear account of what they saw. It was too overwhelming. Maybe that is what is going on with John – who sees heaven and then is told to write it out, and - fueled by the Holy Spirit – gives us this very symbolic, prophetic, apocalyptic book. And in it he describes what is going on in heaven – and Jesus and events from the future. And if we get it, we are encouraged.

IV. Let me read Rev. 4.

A. After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven.

1. “This” refers to the seven letters that Jesus dictated to John. So, John is describing what happened next.
2. By the way, this is the third time the word “door” has been referenced in this book so far.

B. 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.”

1. This is Jesus – this is where we turned last week to get our perspective. I wanted to make the point that we need to look at Jesus.
2. It is not that politics do not matter. It is that God matters more. And we need to take our cues from Jesus. A right approach to life starts by seeing him for who He is.

C. V2: At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it.

1. The throne – which is mentioned a lot in Revelation - is the center of everything. It’s where God manifests his presence most fully.
2. Understand that it is also a jab at Caesar – who had his own throne. And while he might have thought it was the center of everything, it was not;
3. And notice that John make no effort to describe God – “someone was sitting on the throne,” other than say:

D. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby.

1. These are precious stones. Later in the book we will be told that this jasper is clear like glass, so scholars do not think the jasper we have today.² The ruby is also translated Carnelian – which is a deep red. And we have no idea what to make of that. Reading on:

E. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne.

1. Emeralds are usually green. Rainbows are not usually green – they are multi-colored. Again, no real idea about what this means.
2. However, back in Genesis the rainbow is a sign of the Covenant with God – the covenant of grace.

F. ⁴Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders.

1. The 24 thrones lead to nearly endless speculation. It is likely that they represent the 12 patriarchs of Israel and the 12 apostles – which is code for all that God is doing.

G. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.

1. White represents holiness – they are now in glory.
2. The crowns represent their victory. They conquered.

H. ⁵From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder.

1. A throwback to Mt. Sinai.

I. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. ⁶Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

1. Lots of speculation on the sea.

J. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. ⁷The 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.

1. This is an image hearkening back to Ezekiel’s vision of God’s throne. Also of Isaiah. And the animals likely suggest a span of all of God’s creation

K. V8: Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: “‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,’ who was, and is, and is to come.”

1. There is fixed attention on God. You get the idea of singing. (There are five hymns in Revelation).
2. And also the stability and eternity of God – no beginning or end. He was (in the past) and He is (now) and, not He will be (which would be parallel to the structure here, but “is to come,” which focuses on his return as judge
3. By the way, Domitian – a uniquely evil Emperor – demanded that people call him “Lord and God.” (Dominus et Dues in Latin, and Kyrios kai theos) in Greek.

L. V9: Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, 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:

1. 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.”

M. Three things here:

1. He created all things – this is always category blowing. When I need a bigger view of God, I like to look at the universe. Look up distances in the galaxy:
 - a) The Milky Way spins on its spiral axis once every 250 M years
 - b) The distance from one end of a galaxy to the other (which varies, because they are all kind of shapes (pancakes, square, spirals) is usually about six hundred thousand trillion. And there are billions of them
 - c) And the microcosm is just as amazing.
2. He created all things by the power of his will
3. And he sustains them as well.

V. So, what do we do with this? John is invited up for a heavenly perspective. He gets to see reality from Christ’s vantage point.

A. A few years ago, I was invited to a Brewers game – not to be confused with a visit to heaven, especially for a Cubs fan - by a guy who attended Christ Church. He had grown up Jewish, recently finished an MBA at Kellogg, recently come to faith, and recently returned to a job in baseball.

B. He worked in analytics and he could go to all the games. And I said, “tell me what you see and what you are thinking about, because I am not even sure I am looking in the right direction.”

VI. What we want to see is God’s view here. And as I noted, what we get here is focus on worship. It is easy to quickly note that the message here is:

- A. Worship God alone
- B. Focus on His attributes
- C. Don’t stop – it is ceaseless in heaven
- D. It’s best when done with others
- E. And some singing is helpful.

VII. Let me suggest that the Bible sees the worship of God as the essence of ultimate reality and the answer to a lot of our problems.

- A. It is the way we find alignment. It is at the heart of why we serve others. There is a sense in which worship is the Bible’s answer to all the big questions.
- B. It’s certainly the answer to the question of where History is headed. Worship.
 - 1. I’ve been doing these history pod casts for a while now. Looking at the 100 most significant people, events and ideas
 - 2. One of the reasons I wanted to start these is to help people fill in the back story. For many, the time between the Apostle Paul and Billy Graham is a bit blank.
 - 3. I also want to show that, history has an end point. We are on a trajectory. It ends with the full and final exaltation of Christ.
- C. You can make a pretty strong case that worship is the answer to the big questions of life.
 - 1. What is the axis mundi – the center around which everything pivots?
 - 2. What is our ultimate call? Worship.

VIII. Let me tease this out a bit because I suspect that, for some of you, this sounds like religious blather. My claim is that worship – to be clear the worship of God, of Jesus - is the way forward. It is what you need more of.

- A. I could take you to Psalm 19, which note that, “The heavens declare the glory of God.”
 - 1. Point out that the beauty of earth – canyons, mountains, stars, seashore – are all beautiful because they are doing what declared to do. They are worshipping – declaring God’s glory.

IX. Let me return to another point I have tried to make in the past. That is, that you were designed for worship. Do you see it?

- A. I’ve generally noted that when people ask me what the biggest church in Chicago is, I say, “more people worship at Soldier Field than anywhere else.”
 - 1. And you get that. Football fans spend all week studying the object of their adoration. They read the sacred texts – scouting reports and the coaches comments.

2. On game day he – or she - shouts, their face all aglow. They sing, shout, clap. That is worship.
- B. Back in the 80s, Tom Wolfe wrote a Harpers piece in which he said that many of the wealthy elite worship art. They may sneer at religion, but:
1. In all great mansions built in NYC at turn of century had chapels – now they are filled with art.
 2. Be reverent. Be quiet. People used to leave estate to churches, now you do it to Metropolitan Museum
- C. Sex is being worshipped.
- D. Celebrities – the athletic, the rich, even criminals – are worshipped.
- E. Nature – the environmental movement can easily go here. This week I listened to a discussion about the rights of nature and river and other things. And while sometimes I thought they were just being clever, other times it felt very odd.
- F. Last week David Brooks dropped a piece in which he claimed that politics has become so divisive because it’s now a holy war – and it is a holy war because many have turned politics into a secular religion:
1. Consequently they (you?) bring the same passion to their “faith” that religious people bring to their faith in God.
 2. Brook’s claim is that:
 - a) the political world now consumes some people’s life.
 - b) He suggests that this is now happening on both sides – suggesting that - what he calls “Trumpism and Wokeism” – are secular religions offering:
 - (1) a binary logic of good and evil;
 - (2) a membership experience.
 - (3) a deep sense of moral superiority.
 - (4) utopian visions, witch trials and excommunication of the impure.
 - c) He goes on to name the “bishops” and “priests” of both sides.
 3. His suggestion is that things are a bit out of hand.
- G. I would note: we are made to worship, and if we are not careful, our first love – what is most important, what we hold in sacred awe- slips.
1. Something will be in that space. To go back to Revelation – we are going to cast our crowns at something. You are going to cast your crowns at something. What?
 2. Who?
- X. Next week we will look at how John sees Jesus. It is quite shocking. Very disruptive.
- XI. I said the Book of Revelation is deeply disturbing and devotional.
- A. It is disturbing in part because of the evil it discusses
 - B. But it is more disturbing because of its implications. Once all the symbols are analyzed and the riddles solved and the sulphureous smoke has settled, we are in the presence of a holy, powerful God. And there is right way to respond.

XII. As I noted, next week we will look at how John sees and describes Jesus.

¹ Thanks to Tim Keller for this point – from a sermon on Rev. 4.

² Boice, p. 155.