

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **WORSHIP IN HEAVEN Revelation 4:1-11**

One would think from watching the news over the last two to three weeks that the only story worthy of news coverage was the unexpected death of music superstar, Michael Jackson.

On Tuesday, I checked two major news websites and the top stories were these:

“A Kings Farewell;” “Fans pay tribute;” Remembering a Legend;” “A strange, gaudy, moving Farewell”

This is a picture of the memorial service for Michael Jackson, given last Tuesday at the Staples Center in Los Angeles.

Music stars such as Mariah Carey, Lionel Richie, Stevie Wonder and Usher sang at the service.

Some of the statements made by the speakers were: He was one of the world’s most precious treasures. He was an extraordinary success. Because of his death the world has lost joy.

About 17,000 people were able to get into the Staples Center for this service, while thousands of others gathered at other locations or outside the Staples Center.

One couple sold everything they had so that they could take a three-day bus trip to California just to stand outside the Staples Center during the service.

Over 31 million people watched the memorial service unfold on TV, while many others watched on line.

It was as if the world was worshipping Michael Jackson. It was almost as if Michael Jackson was elevated to the same status as God and that this memorial was a well-orchestrated worship service, paying tribute to a king.

While the world worships Michael Jackson at his death, it is not true worship. True worship is what we see taking place in **Revelation 4:1-11**.

This morning as you turn in your Bibles to **Revelation 4:1-11**, we are going to examine a passage that describes a true worship service, a future worship service, a heavenly worship service.

Now, remember that the Apostle John had been exiled on the Island of Patmos seen here.

This Island was a prison colony off the coast of Asia Minor. While exiled here on Patmos, John received a revelation from God; a vision of the glorified Christ.

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Remember that the key verse of this book was given in **Revelation 1:19**, which provides us with the outline/structure of the book of Revelation. Christ says to John, “*Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.*”

- *The things, which you have seen* refers to John’s vision of Christ in Revelation 1.
- *The things, which are* refers to the status of the church at the time of John’s exile as described in Revelation 2-3.
- Thus *the things, which will take place after these things* refers to the remainder of the book of Revelation (chapters 4-22) and these chapters speak of future things; the end times.

So in Revelation 4, we are beginning to examine actual end-time events.

**Here in Revelation 4:1-11, John provides us with a three-fold description of a future worship service in heaven.**

LETS READ REVELATION 4:1-11

*What does John describe regarding this future worship service?*

**First, John describes his Summons to heaven.**

We see this summons recorded in the first two verses of chapter 4. As John describes his summons to heaven, he answers three questions in relation to this summons:

***Question #1-What did John see?***

John suddenly recognized a door open in heaven. The heaven that John is speaking of here is not the earth’s atmosphere, nor the universe, but it is the third heaven, which includes the very throne room of God.

The term “Behold” is used to grab the attention of the reader and it emphasizes John’s astonishment.

John was granted the immeasurable privilege of having a glimpse of heaven and fortunately for us he was given permission to record what he saw.

***Question #2-What did John hear?***

He not only saw something, “a door open in heaven,” but he also heard something. He heard a voice.

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John again hears a voice as he did in the first vision of **Revelation 1:10**. In fact John notes that this was indeed the same voice as the first voice that he heard.

And once again he describes that voice as sounding like a trumpet. Remember that this description is emphasizing the intensity and clarity of the voice.

Back in John's day the trumpet was one of the loudest instruments of the time and thus a good illustration as to the intensity of the voice; an illustration that I am not going to demonstrate this morning.

Using a trumpet to describe the sound of the voice not only emphasized the intensity of the voice, but it signaled its authority and the necessity that its commands be obeyed.

Just as in Revelation 1-3, this voice is the voice of the Lord Jesus and here He issued forth the command, "*Come up here.*"

There have been many Bible students over the years that have suggested and even insisted that this is a veiled reference to the rapture.

But let me say emphatically, it is not the rapture event! This is a command given to the Apostle John, not to the church. It is a singular directive for the Apostle John for the purpose of receiving revelation from God, not for the church to be removed permanently to heaven.

Remember that John is receiving this revelation approximately AD 95. The Rapture event involves Christ returning to the first heaven, the earth's atmosphere and snatching the saints up to Himself and then taking them back to heaven at some future time.

Now, while this event is not the rapture event or symbolic of the rapture event, the events that follow in Revelation 4-22 do depict a future time period that follows the rapture.

In other words, the events that God revealed to John, and are recorded for us in the following chapters of Revelation are all future post-Rapture events.

They are the things, which must take place after the things, which he had seen in Revelation 1; and after the things, which are in Revelation 2-3.

So John has seen a door standing open in heaven and he has heard the voice of the Lord issue forth a command to, "Come up here!"

### ***Question #3-What did John experience?***

John goes on to say, "*Immediately, I was in the Spirit.*" This is the same phrase he used to describe his experience in Revelation 1.

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*Immediately* indicates that this is an instantaneous event. It denotes rapid-fire action (i.e. Timothy instructions with immediately).

The Greek term “*was*” is literally rendered “became” and is therefore indicating something unusual. John is not emphasizing that he was in the Spirit in the sense that we as believers are in the Spirit. So what is he saying here?

John is doing the best that he can do to explain his experience of being transported spiritually into the reality of heaven for the purpose of giving divine revelation.

It is through this unusual experience that John is able to see these future events and record this revelation for us.

Now, before we go any further, I believe that it is absolutely necessary to emphasize that John was an apostle of Christ living at a time when God’s revelation was incomplete.

The Bible is quite clear that visions, dreams, miracles and various sign gifts were given for the purpose of authenticating divine revelation. Once that revelation from God was complete, such phenomenon was no longer necessary.

Is God’s Revelation complete? YES!!!

So, John is experiencing something that we will never be able to experience. We are not going to be given a glimpse of heaven in the here and now. We are not going to have a vision of the glorified Christ like John.

Why? Because, God’s divine revelation was completed with the writing of this book.

Thus, we have everything that God wants to say to us here in our Bibles from Genesis to Revelation. How privileged we are to have the Word of God.

This is God’s revelation to us and the book of Revelation is God’s revelation to us regarding end time events.

Since this is God’s revelation to us then we should read it, study it and apply it to our lives.

That is not always easy to do, but that is why we offer opportunities here at Valley Bible Church to help you grow in the Word: Growth Groups; Adult Education Classes; High School and Junior High Groups; College/ROCK Group etc...

**Second, John describes the scene in heaven.**

John begins the description of this scene in heaven by directing our attention to the central focus of this vision.

What is the central focus of this vision? John says, “*behold a **throne** was standing in heaven.*”

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The throne is the central focus of this passage. In fact the term *throne* is used eleven times here in chapter 4 alone, and it is mentioned in almost every chapter of the book of Revelation.

The term *throne* (THRONOS) is used here in reference to God's heavenly throne.

It is in relation to God's heavenly throne that the Apostle John describes this scene in heaven and in so doing He provides us with 5 different observations.

In other words, as he paints this picture of heaven for us, John describes it in relation to the throne.

*So what observations does John make?*

### **Observation #1- John describes the One who is on the throne.**

Look at verses 2 and 3. John says, *“behold a throne was standing in heaven and One sitting **on** the throne. And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance.”*

As one continues to read through Revelation 4 and 5, it is of little doubt, who the one sitting on the throne is.

It is the omnipotent, sovereign God of the universe. This is not the first time that the Scriptures give us a picture of the throne of God.

The Old Testament prophets have previously described their visions of the heavenly throne room.

Listen to how Isaiah describes God's throne in **Isaiah 6:1-4**,

*“In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.” And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke.”*

Daniel also gives us a picture of the heavenly throne room in **Daniel 7:9-10**,

*“I kept looking Until thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took His seat; His vesture was like white snow And the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames, Its wheels were a burning fire. “A river of fire was flowing And coming out from before Him; Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him...”*

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However it is the description of the heavenly throne room by Ezekiel in **Ezekiel 1** that most clearly resembles John’s vision.

*Listen to what Ezekiel says in Ezekiel 1:26-28, “on that which resembled a throne, high up, was a figure with the appearance of a man. Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and there was a radiance around Him. As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.*

Like these Old Testament prophets, the Apostle John was privileged to have a glimpse of the heavenly throne room.

How does John picture God on the throne? He gives us a two-fold description.

1-God is like a jasper stone.

This is a modern day polished jasper stone.

However most Bible scholars equate the jasper of John’s day with the modern day diamond (**Slide #14**), because **Revelation 21:11** describes the jasper stone as being “crystal clear.”

Like a diamond brilliantly refracting all the colors of the spectrum, God’s glory is shining forth from the throne upon which He is sitting. God is brilliant, full of glory, magnificent and awesome in appearance.

2-God is also like a sardius.

A sardius from which the city of Sardis got its name is like a fiery blood red ruby. Here are some modern Sardius stones. The Sardius stone also expresses the shining beauty of God’s glory.

It is interesting that these two stones were the first and last stone on the high priest’s breast-plate according to (Ezekiel 28:17-20), thus they depict God’s covenant relationship with Israel.

The description here in Revelation 4 is reminiscent of the flashing light, blazing fire and vivid colors of Ezekiel’s vision.

While the glory of God is magnificent and full of splendor, the context of Revelation 4-18 suggests that this picture of God’s throne is not one of peace and comfort.

The flashing, glorious, splendorous magnificence of God’s glory reveals the terrors of God’s judgment that are about to come upon the world. Thus this also carries with it a picture of God as a consuming fire just as Hebrews 12:29 informs us.

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The holiness, righteousness, and glory of the Lord will shine through and penetrate, revealing the utter sinfulness of those who have not trusted in Him.

This not the only observation that John issues forth.

### ***Observation #2-John describes what he sees around the throne.***

After giving a description of the One sitting on the throne, John moves out from the throne to describe what and who surrounded the throne.

#### 1-What was surrounding the throne?

John says that there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.

This is not a rainbow, as we would know it. The Greek term for rainbow here is (IRIS), which suggests more of a ring than an arc. In other words there was an emerald ring or essence encircling the throne.

This emerald ring or essence likely symbolizes God's covenant faithfulness, mercy and grace just as the rainbow in Noah's day (cf. Genesis 9:13-17).

#### 2-Who was surrounding the throne?

John informs us that there were 24 elders upon 24 thrones surrounding God's throne.

These elders were dressed in white garments and had golden crowns upon their heads.

There has been much debate over the years as to the identity of these 24 elders. Do they represent Israel, the church, angels or someone else?

I believe the 24 elders represent the church. Why?

***First***, they are described as sitting upon thrones, which emphasizes that they rule and reign with Christ. Consistently throughout the Scriptures, the believer is promised a reign with Christ.

In fact, just a few verses earlier, Christ promises that those who overcome in Laodicea will reign with Him. He says in **Revelation 3:21**, "*He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.*"

So the fact that they are on thrones indicates that they are probably a representation of the church.

***Second***, the New Testament often uses the term elder in reference to leaders in the church.

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When Christ addresses the seven churches in Asia Minor in Revelation 2 and 3. He is addressing the angel or messenger of each church. These leaders represent their churches.

Thus elders would be seen here as representatives of the entire church.

**Third**, the white garments worn by these 24 elders are most commonly referred to as the wardrobe of the redeemed.

In fact the church in Sardis (Revelation 3:5) was promised that they would be clothed in white garments, while the church in Laodicea was encouraged to purchase white garments (Revelation 3:18).

Since these white garments were promised to church saints, then the identity of these 24 elders must be representing the church.

**Fourth**, they were wearing crowns. The Greek term for crown here (STEPHANOS) is the victor's crown, which is symbolic of honor and reward.

It is this crown that is promised to the believers in Smyrna (Revelation 2:10), and mentioned throughout the New Testament in regards to the believer's reward:

In 1 Corinthians 9:25, we are promised an imperishable crown.

In 2 Timothy 4:8, we are promised a crown of righteousness.

In James 1:12, we are promised the crown of life.

In 1 Peter 5:4, we are promised the unfading crown of glory.

The crowns were promised to genuine believers in Christ and thus those wearing the crowns here in Revelation 4, must be genuine believers in Christ. They represent the church.

**Fifth**, the number 24 could stand for the completed or entire church.

This is based on 1 Chronicles 24, where David divides the Levitical priesthood into 24 courses to represent the complete priesthood.

So many believe that since the church is referred to as a royal priesthood in 1 Peter 2:9, then in like manner these 24 elders could stand for the completed church.

**Sixth**, since the church is never mentioned as being on the earth and going through the tribulation period in Revelation 6-18, there is only one place that they can be: in heaven worshipping God on his throne.



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The evidence rests clearly in favor of the 24 elders as representative of the church. This should bring us great comfort and hope.

While the unbelieving world is facing tribulation, judgment and the cataclysmic events unfolding upon the earth; we as believers will be worshipping our sovereign God in heaven.

What a glorious and magnificent picture to realize that we will one day be standing before the very presence of God offering up worship, proclaiming His majesty, bowing before Him on His throne and casting our reward at His feet.

### **Observation #3-John describes what was coming out from the throne.**

In verse 5, John goes on to say, *“Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder...”*

This thunder and lightning is not coming directly from the throne itself, but is from the one who sits on the throne.

Similar terminology is used in the Old Testament:

First, **Exodus 19:6** describes the giving of the Old Testament Law, *“So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.*

Many other passages in the Old Testament uses one or more of these elements to describe the manifestation of or a display of God’s great glory.

This terminology is repeated at least three other times in the book of Revelation.

It is used in **Revelation 8:5** in the breaking of the 7<sup>th</sup> seal judgment. It is used in **Revelation 11:19** in relation to the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet judgment. It is used in **Revelation 16:18** with the pouring out of the 7<sup>th</sup> bowl judgment.

Do you see a common theme here? Coming out from the throne is not the fury of nature, but the firestorm of God’s righteous fury about to come from an awesome, powerful God upon a sinful Christ rejecting world.

God is holy! God is righteous! His judgment is righteous! Thus he must judge sin. The book of Revelation is the outpouring of God’s righteous wrath upon an unbelieving world

I can’t help but think that if we truly understood how holy and how righteous God is; if we truly understood how much he hates sin; then it might impact how we go about our day to day thoughts, actions and lives.

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We should be striving to be holy as he is holy. We should be striving to be righteous as he is righteous.

We should be living our lives in light of these future events; longing to come before God in worship; rejoicing that we will not be the recipients of his wrath.

### **Observation #4-John describes what is before the throne:**

He says in verses 5-6, *“And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal...”* So what is before the throne?

There are seven lamps of fire before the throne.

These seven lamps of fire are different from the lamp stands of Revelation 1. In fact the following phrase distinguishes them from the lamp stands by calling them the seven spirits of God.

These were not like the seven lamp stands offering the soft gentle light of an indoor lamp. Rather they were outdoor torches and thus giving out the fierce, blazing light of a fiery torch.

The reference to the seven spirits of God is a symbolic reference to the Holy Spirit as it is drawn off the imagery of **Zechariah 4:1-10** in which they are described in **Zechariah 4:6** as the Holy Spirit.

Identifying the Holy Spirit as seven lamps of fire is a way to indicate the fullness and completeness of the Holy Spirit.

Very clearly this heavenly scene in Revelation 4 and 5 highlights all three members of the Holy Trinity.

There is also a sea of glass before the throne.

This is not a literal sea, because **Revelation 21:1** tells us that there is no sea in heaven. John says that “there was something like” a sea of glass.

There was just no other way for John to describe the scene in heaven. What he saw was like a sea of glass. It was a vast pavement of glass, shining brilliantly like sparkling crystal.

**Exodus 24:10** describes it this way, *“and they saw the God of Israel; and under his feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself.”*

Ezekiel explains it this way in **Ezekiel 1:22**, *“there was something like an expanse, like the awesome gleam of crystal, spread out over their heads.”*

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It is probably important to note that glass and crystal were very costly materials in ancient times and Job 28:17 ranks it among the most valuable.

Whatever the case, it surely added to the glorious splendor by reflecting the flashing light coming from the throne. This vision of God's glory and splendor is hard for John to describe and certainly is hard for us to fathom.

But, John is not finished yet. He has one more observation to share. But that will have to wait for next time.

This last picture is an artist's rendition of this heavenly scene. While spectacular to think about, I am sure that it pales in comparison to the real scene.

And this is the good part: Those of us who have trusted in Christ as our Lord and Savior, we will be there! Our future is not pain and suffering. Our future is not trial and tribulation! Our future is the magnificent splendor of God!

Many of you are suffering.

- Some of you are dealing with poor physical health.
- Some of you are struggling with unemployment or are in a difficult financial situation.
- Some of you are struggling in your marriage!
- Some of you are dealing with disappointment from your children or parents or friends or coworkers...
- Some of you are struggling with a difficult work environment.
- Some of you have lost nearly half of your retirement savings.

The Bible never says that we will be exempt from trials, while passing through this world. In fact, we are to consider it all joy when we face various kinds of trials according to James 1. Why is this? It is because trials build endurance and the end result is that we will be more mature in our faith.

So rather than kicking and screaming or grumbling and complaining as we go through difficult times, Let us take great comfort in what will come for us in the future.

I remember growing up in Texas/Arkansas. We had a lot of big family meals and it was always exciting when you were told to keep your fork after you eat the main meal.

It was a signal of great things to come. It meant that we would have desert (maybe apple pie; cherry cobbler or cheesecake etc...)

The saying Keep Your Fork always meant the best is yet to come.

If you're a true believer in Christ, Let me just say to you Keep your fork! The best is yet to come!

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For, there will be a day with no more tears, no more pain, no more fears, There will be a day when the burdens of this place will be no more and we'll see Jesus face to face!

There will be a day when we will cast our crowns at God's feet and we will worship Him in Spirit and in truth! This future time, this future worship experience will be the real thriller and nothing will be able to beat it.

However, my hope and prayer is that we take advantage of the here and now and that we will be driven to worship in spirit and in truth regardless of our circumstances, all the time longing for this future time in heaven.