

Before the Throne

Revelation 4:2-11

8/26/07

Intro

What is heaven like? That's a question many people have pondered. Perhaps it's a place where they have golf courses of perfection, or the most perfect fishing lakes or perhaps a place where we eat the most incredible food and never gain weight!!

As we come to this next section of Revelation, John is taken up to heaven and is instructed to write what he sees. The problem is that there are no words to adequately capture what his eyes take in, but we read these words and it makes our hearts yearn for yet more.

This next section of Revelation will reveal the things which will be, in other words, it tells us the future events of heaven and earth.

John is first given a vision of heaven and there is much to learn as we are brought with John into the scene before him. If only we could see what his eyes saw, but we must take in this scene, gain insight for our own lives, and be changed by it.

There is a phrase that I have come to truly appreciate; "We are changed in the presence of a Holy God." These verses draw us into His presence and give us a deeper understanding of His heart and His character.

It's important to note that the four living creatures continually say, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty." In I Peter 1:16 we read, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Holiness is the character of God and he wants us to be changed to be like Him in heart and character, so there is much to learn from understanding these verses that describe God.

The four living creatures are angels that are nothing like anything we can really imagine, but they represent the nature of Jesus Christ and therefore what God wants to see in us.

Jewish Rabbis taught that the four faces in Ezekiel's vision represent God's greatest creations and was the standard used by each of the lead tribes when Israel camped in the desert:

East	Judah	Lion
West	Ephraim	Ox
South	Reuben	Man
North	Dan	Eagle

The early church fathers taught that these faces represent the qualities of Jesus Christ that He would desire to see in each of us.

I. Have the Heart of a Lion

- When you consider the description of heaven and the throne of God, you see many things that have representative power; such as that which represent the blood of Christ, or the holiness of God, etc.
- Each of the faces represents the greatest creations and the lion is considered the king of the beasts.
- Jesus was called the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

A. Authority requires boldness

- Authority could be defined as the solid word of someone who knows what God wants – perhaps not specifically, but the principles of God's Word.

Illus – Many years ago, before I was a pastor, a friend called and asked for help because his wife had separated from him and was going to an unusual church where the pastor was encouraging divorce.

I called to say that God didn't want them to divorce and he shot back, "How do you know what God wants?" My answer, "It's in the bible." (Mal 2:16)

Matthew 28:18-20, And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

II Corinthians 3: 12, Having therefore such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech.

- The great leaders of the bible had boldness to say what needed to be said because they were directed by the Word of God.

Joshua 24:15, "If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

B. Godly authority requires full commitment

- There is a time to take a stand and not to compromise.

Illus- In the days of LP albums, the cover was one of the best parts and Keith Green's album cover "No Compromise," stands as one of the most powerful. The scene is before Nebuchadnezzar and everyone is bowing down before him, but one meek, yet powerful man.

- You have to know where to take a godly stand, but there are times when we must draw a line in the sand.

II Samuel 23:11-12, Now after him was Shammah the son of Agee a Hararite. And the Philistines were gathered into a troop where there was a plot of ground full of lentils, and the people fled from the Philistines. But he took his stand in the midst of the plot, defended it and struck the Philistines; and the Lord brought about a great victory.

II. Serve with the Power of an Ox

- The ox is the most powerful of the beasts of burden and represents the heart of the Lord in serving.

A. Being steady and faithful

Illus – The ox the greatest beast used for plowing with power. It is steady and faithful to its purpose.

I Corinthians 4:2, Moreover, It is required of stewards that one be found faithful.

I Corinthians 15:58, Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

Illus – if a farmer had to plow in difficult ground, the animal of choice would be the ox. He is powerful, sure-footed and steady.

- One of the qualities of an ox is that he does the work without complaining. Unlike other animals such as the donkey that have to be persuaded at times with a 2x4.
- It's interesting that the scripture says that a man should never plow with an ox and an ass harnessed together. There seem to be many applications of that principle.

B. Not afraid to do the difficult job

- Jesus never backed away from a task because it was difficult.
- Dealing with our sins could not have been a pleasant task

Illus – in every house there are jobs that no one wants to do, but those with servant hearts are willing to do the difficult things that other people won't do.

Illus – I remember when we had our first baby. I knew there were a few tasks that were ...rather unpleasant, but I decided I would go for it. Until Jordi decided she wanted to use cloth diapers...

- We are living in the last days and there will be difficult days ahead. Those who have the heart of an ox will be spiritually valuable.

II Timothy 3:1-2, But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy,

How do you know if you have the heart of a servant?

- By how you react when people treat you like one.
- When you find true pleasure in the serving.

Illus – I was reading Farm and Ranch Magazine one time and I remember a story about a farmer that plowed with a team of two horses. One died so he decided to retire the other one and buy a tractor...

Matthew 20:28, Jesus said, “Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

III. God Desires both Humility and Greatness

A. The face of man is humility

- Though man is the greatest of God's creation, the point here is that when Christ became a man it was an act of great humility.

Philippians 2:7-8, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

- The glory of our existence now is nothing in comparison to the glory to come.

Illus – it would be like comparing an acorn to an oak tree in grandeur.

- We are then to have this same quality of humility in us as we follow after Christ.

Illus – The Lord allows our frailty to be seen

B. The eagle is the majesty of God

- It's interesting that the church fathers taught that the gospels each showed Jesus in a different light.
- Matthew – Jesus as King – the Lion. Mark – Jesus as Servant – the Ox. Luke – Jesus as the Son of Man – the face of a man. John – Jesus the Son of God – the eagle.
- The eagle is the only animal that can look directly at the sun and not damage its eyes; as Jesus is the One who can perceive the Father in all His glory.

Illus – the eagle is the majesty of soaring high, by the lift of great wind. It knows the wind that lifts and it knows the wind that flows downward.

The Holy Spirit is “the wind” which is the power of God and we are in God’s majesty when we walk by and live by the Holy Spirit.

Isaiah 40:31, Yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.

- Catch the right wind

Illus- When Matthew and I were standing on the mountain, the wind was strong... and downward.

- The Holy Spirit is the wind beneath our wings.