

September 17th: Revelation 4-5

Chapter 4

In these chapters, we receive a glimpse into what happens in the heavenly throne room, thus a true revealing of that which is hidden.

Chapter 4 describes a scene of the cosmos as it was created to be, with all creation gathered around the throne of God in worship. “Come up here” is descriptive of John’s belief that the cosmos was separated into 3 parts: the heavens, the earth, and that which is under the earth. John is “in the spirit”, this is a separate vision from the first vision of the Son of Man. John “ascends to heaven” by going inward in his spirit. John’s vision begins with a throne, with God sitting on the throne. Mysteriously, God is described as precious stone (carnelian and jasper), God’s physical embodiment is simply pure radiance beyond specific description. The rainbow surrounding the throne represents God’s protection. The 24 elders could mean a number of things. It’s either a doubling of 12 (for emphasis), meaning perfect. Or it represents the 12 tribes of Israel plus the 12 apostles, or the 24 orders of priests in Judaism. These elders represent the heavenly counterpart to the followers of God on earth. White robes symbolize their spiritual purity/baptism, and golden crowns symbolize that they have “finished their race.” Lightning and thunder were both common symbols of theophany – a physical manifestation of God’s presence. The seven spirits is the Holy Spirit. The sea represented chaos in the Old Testament, therefore a “sea of glass” represents the end of all that causes chaos.

The creatures full of eyes also appear in Ezekiel 1: the number 4 marks the creatures as “representative of the earth.” “Full of eyes” means “full of wisdom or insight.” Eyes in the front and back, represent full understanding of space and time. “Holy, Holy, Holy” is also what they sing in Isaiah 6:3. This was a traditional hymn of both Judaism and Christianity. It’s the song of heaven. In response to the creatures’ song, the elders (that is the church) threw their crowns down before the throne, symbolizing a giving to God all that they are and all that they have of any value or honor, God is the only one truly worthy of “glory, honor, and power” because God is the only one who created all that is. We only exist because God willed us into existence. To “worship” means to ascribe God as “worthy” of glory, honor, and power, and to lay one’s crown down before the Creator. What will heaven be like? Worship! When we worship on earth, we practice and participate in eternity! We join the elders who lay their crowns before God.

Chapter 5

The focus of this chapter shifts from God, to the Lamb. It begins with some “sword in the stone” imagery. “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” is better translated as “Who is qualified?” The image of a scroll with 7 seals with writing on both the inside and outside is reminiscent of how Rome put together wills at this time. This question is somewhat akin to asking “Who’s the executor of God’s will? Who’s God’s POA? Who is equal to God to be able to unbind God’s future plans?” Only one.... The Lion of Judah, the Root of David, Christ. But instead of a Lion, John sees an “itty, bitty lamb.”

Ironically the Lamb is the opposite of the Lion (though both titles represent the Messiah), the Lamb is the victim of violence, not the perpetrator of it. The Lamb is a symbol of sacrifice and undeserved suffering. “Seven horns, seven eyes, seven spirits” = perfect. Horns are power imagery, eyes are wisdom imagery, and spirit is omnipresence imagery. The Lamb is filled with the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is Christ’s own Spirit, which he breathed onto the Church at the end of John’s gospel. The Lamb and God are both seated on the same throne, they are equal, they are One, they are worshipped together. The bowls of incense are the prayers of the saints. These bowls will later be poured out in judgment in chapter 8: the prayers of the saints are powerful and effective and cause divine judgment where necessary. (think of the Hebrews crying out for help from the Lord in Egypt). The saints and creatures sing a new song to the Lamb, which causes unnumbered myriads to fall down in worship and sing at the top of their lungs, this leads then to EVERY creature in heaven, on earth, and under the earth joining the song. This is an unparalleled image of inclusive worship of God. Glory, honor, and power are the highest social virtues in the first century, these are far more important than money.