The Throne and the Lamb - Revelation 4-5

Series: The Lamb Wins - Revelation
Date: 11 October 2026, 18th Sunday after Trinity
Location: St George's Battery Point
Texts: Revelation 4-5, Daniel 7, Ezekiel 1, Isaiah 6

Does anyone know when the selfie stick was invented? It turns out it was 1983, by Hiroshi Ueda who worked for camera company Minolta and wanted to take photos of himself and his family on holidays. But it was with the arrival of social media and the smart phone that they took off. We all love seeing photos of ourselves. But in the age of the selfie we face a challenge, to lift our eyes from ourselves and our phones to see the world. There's a problem if we're the only ones in the picture. The selfie can feed the tendency we all have to be at the centre of the universe and to think the world revolves around us.

We're reading through the Book of Revelation together at St George's. One of the main aims of the book is to give us a heavenly perspective on our earthly reality. It uses very vivid word pictures to shake us out of how we normally see the world, through the lens of our own situation and culture, and to see things from God's perspective. Today we're looking at chapters 4 and 5. In this vision we're invited to lift our eyes from ourselves, to see into heaven itself and gaze upon the Lord God Almighty seated upon the throne. And in chapter 5, to see that there is a Lamb also on the throne. And we are invited to join with all creation in worshipping God and the Lamb. It turns out that having God on the throne and not me is good for me and good for the world, but that is for future sermons. Today we are not in the picture, it's God who fills the frame. So I invite you to read with me and lift your eyes.

The Throne - chapter 4

In chapter 3 we've heard Jesus say that what door he opens, no one can shut, and that to those who are victorious, who stay faithful to him to the end of their lives, he will give the right to sit with him on his throne, just as he was victorious and sat down on his Father's throne.[1] Now John looks and sees a door standing open in heaven. And he hears Jesus' voice say to him, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.' He writes,

> [2] At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it.

He is in the throne room of heaven, and he is able to see this spiritual reality through the power of the Holy Spirit.

[1] Rev. 3.7-8, 21

> [3] And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne.

The scene recalls Ezekiel's vision of one seated on the throne of heaven. The rainbow reminds us of God's mercy, that sign of God's promise to Noah, to never flood the world again. Let's keep looking with John.

> [4] Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. [5] From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits[a] of God. [6] Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

The twenty four elders represent the 12 sons of Israel and the 12 apostles, and this symbolises the leaders of God's Old Covenant and New Covenant people, Israel and the Church gathered around the throne. It's also interesting that in 1 Chronicles 24 and 25 there are 24 orders of priests and 24 orders of musicians from the tribe of Levi who serve in the temple. IN the following chapter we'll see that they hold harps, and also a golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people.[2] The 7 lamps which are the 7 spirits of God, is a reference to the Holy Spirit, 7 being the number of completeness or fullness.

The sea of glass has a double reference. First we're reminded of the bronze basin or "sea" filled with water that stood in the court of the temple where the priests washed before entering the holy place. But second, the sea in the storyline of the Bible symbolises the realm of chaos, uncreation and evil that threatens to swallow the land and the life and order we find there. So right back in Genesis 1.2 the earth is formless and empty, and darkness is over the surface of the deep. God rescued Israel through the waters of the Red Sea. In Daniel 7, 4 great beasts of chaos come up out of the sea, and we'll see that image again in Revelation 13. In Revelation 21 there is no longer any sea, which symbolises the ultimate triumph of God over chaos and death. But here, the sea is glass, and this symbolises God's power over the forces of chaos, death and evil. Before him they are still.

Next John sees 4 living creatures around the throne, covered in eyes, symbolising that nothing in creation is hidden from God's sight.

> The 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.

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[2] Rev. 5.8

Each has 6 wings like the seraphim that Isaiah saw in his vision of the heavenly throne. Each of these creatures is the ruler of their domains in the animal kingdom. They represent all creation praising God.

> Day and night they never stop saying: "'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,"
> who was, and is, and is to come.'

Again these words echo what the seraphim sing in Isaiah 6. The three fold repetition of Holy not only signifies God's infinite holiness, but also his triune nature. He is the thrice Holy God, Father, Son and Spirit. Not only is he Holy. He is also the Almighty, the infinitely powerful Lord of all. And he is God eternal - who was, and is and is to come. He is sovereign over history.

> [9] Whenever the living creatures give glory, honour and thanks to him who sits on the
> throne and who lives for ever and ever, [10] 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:
>
> [11] 'You are worthy, our Lord and God,
> to receive glory and honour and power,
> for you created all things,
> and by your will they were created
> and have their being.'

What does it mean that God is worthy of worship?
When you see beautiful artwork or architecture, or you hear an amazing piece of music, or you gaze at the stunning view from a mountain top, or a gorgeous sunrise; you have that feeling of awe and wonder, and you want to praise. You want to say just how good what you've seen is, and especially if you can say that to the person who made it. They are worthy of praise; because what they have done is so beautiful. There is something right about praising them. It just bubbles up from within you.

Here, all creation praises God, and God's people, symbolised by the 24 elders, join them in falling before God in worship. In Psalm 8 David sings that God has crowned humanity with glory and honour. Now, God's people cast their crowns before the Almighty. And why is he worthy to receive our worship? Because he is our Creator. He is the source of all that exists. He is the one who holds all things together. He is the one who gives us life. This in fact is what we were made for: to join with the rest of creation in worshipping him. Those moments when we experience heart piercingly great beauty are ones where we hear the whisper of the song of the 4 living creatures singing praise to the One who made all things out of his great love. And the question is, will we join them in worshipping our Maker?

The scroll

John's vision continues in chapter 5:

> Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. **2** And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?'

In the prophet Daniel's vision God said to him, "roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end."[3] It is this scroll that John sees because the time for it to be opened has come. It's why Jesus said to John at the beginning of this vision, "I will show you what must take place after this." The scroll is the scroll of history. It represents God's plan of judgement and salvation. Judgement upon his enemies and salvation for this people and for the whole creation. This plan has begun in Jesus' death and resurrection, but is not yet completed. To open the scroll means not only to reveal God's plan, but also to execute it.

The contents of this scroll will be what John sees in the rest of Revelation. The seven seals are the course of world history from the time between Pentecost and the return of Christ. The seven seals are opened over the following two chapters, and then these are followed by 7 trumpets, 7 signs and 7 bowls. Now some commentators take these as a chronological sequence. But I think this interpretation is not correct. For my money, these are 4 visions of the same events, but speaking in different ways. We'll test this as we go.

John weeps because no one in all creation was worthy.

> Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.'

The Lion of the tribe of Judah is a reference to Genesis 49.8-12, and the Root of David to Isaiah 11.1-10. Both of these are prophecies of a Messiah who will conquer his enemies and judge the earth. This is the one who can open the scroll and execute God's judgement. But how does he conquer?

The Lamb

> **6** Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the centre of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders.

The Lamb is the Lion of Judah and the Root of David. He conquers his enemies through his death. The slain lamb alludes to the Passover lamb, killed so the angel of death would pass over the houses which had its blood painted over their doorframes, and also to Isaiah 53:7 where the one who was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities, and

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[3] Daneil 12.4,9

who bore the inquiry of all people was led like a lamb to the slaughter. It is of course a reference to Jesus' sacrificial death on our behalf on the cross. And from this point on, this is the favourite title Revelation uses to refer to Jesus: the Lamb.

Did you also note the deep theology bound up in these words? The Lamb stands at the centre of the throne. He is distinguished from the one on the throne, but he is also at the centre of the throne, surrounded by the four living creatures and the elders who worship him. There is one God who is worshipped, but the Father and Son are distinguished from each other.

The Lamb has seven horns, which signify its complete power. And "seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth." This is again a symbolic way of speaking about the Holy Spirit as being the Spirit of Christ, the gift of the Father whom he poured out on earth on the day of Pentecost.

When the Lamb takes the scroll, the living creatures and the elders - all creation and all God's people - fall down in worship before the Lamb and they sing a new song:

> You are worthy to take the scroll
> and to open its seals,
> because you were slain,
> and with your blood you purchased for God
> persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.
> [10] You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
> and they will reign on the earth.'

In chapter 4 we saw that God was worthy of worship because he is the Creator. Here, Jesus is worthy of worship because he is the Redeemer. Just as God alone is the Creator, so Jesus alone is the one who died on the cross, through whose blood there is forgiveness of sins. Him and no other. No one else is worthy of worship. Not Allah. Not Buddha. Not Krishna. Not the Rainbow Spirit. Not Elon Musk or Donald Trump. Not AOC, Not Jordan Peterson. Not Bob Brown or Pauline Hanson. Not your job, or your boss or your kids or your wife, or your money or your car or your phone. None of these have made you. None of them have redeemed you. Only the Lord Almighty and the Lamb.

Notice how the Church is described. Who are we? The Church is not a right wing or left wing party. It's not American or British. It's not white. It's not English speaking. It's people from every tribe and language and people and nation. There is a place for every people and language and culture in the Church. These things are created by God and precious in his sight. But they are not used to divide. Instead, they are brought to God and offered in

worship. This is what true diversity and inclusion looks like - where we come in all our differences and we bow in worship before the one who redeemed us. It's one of the reasons I love the church and I love St George's. Because here we get to see a glimpse of the great diversity of humanity, coming together in peace, where each of us are seen and valued. But we're here not for ourselves and to defend our turf. We are here to worship the one who saved us.

What is our calling? To be a kingdom of priests to serve our God. It's that call to Israel back in Exodus 19.6, now fulfilled in God's new covenant people the Church. And even to share in Christ's reign on earth, by our service to God bringing in the light of his kingdom in this dark world.

That worship begins here and now as we gather today as God's people. And you may notice that some of the formal parts of our services use words taken straight from these chapters. Because our corporate worship on earth participates in the eternal worship of heaven. We join with angels and archangels gathered around the throne to praise our Creator and Redeemer. But we also carry this out into the world as we are sent from this place. Each day, all we do, can be offered to God in worship as we serve him in this world he made and loves.

11 Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands,
and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and
the elders. 12 In a loud voice they were saying:
'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honour and glory and praise!'
13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and
all that is in them, saying:
'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honour and glory and power,
for ever and ever!'
14 The four living creatures said, 'Amen', and the elders fell down and worshipped.

Do you feel it? Do you catch a glimpse of it? Can you hear the whisper of their song? Will you join in worshipping our God and Father and the Lamb who was slain for you? Amen.