God Will Make All Things Right

Revelation 4

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| **Natural Divisions** | * Revelation 4:1-6a John was taken in the Spirit into the throne room of heaven, where He saw God on His throne, 24 elders on their thrones, and a sea like glass.
* Revelation 4:6b-8 Four indescribable living creatures before God’s throne continually proclaim the holiness of God.
* Revelation 4:9-11 As the living creatures proclaim the glory of God, the 24 elders fall down before Him and lay their crowns before Him, worshipping Him as Creator of all things.
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| **Summary Sentence** | John was taken in the Spirit into the throne room of heaven, and He saw God on His throne and the worship of 24 elders and four living creatures. |
| **Central Idea** |  God will make all things right |

If you just glance at the evening news, you realize that this world is not the way it’s supposed to be. There’s violence between nations; there’s corruption in government; there’s drug addiction, domestic violence, and human trafficking. And then there’s the reality of illness, of aging, and of death. The world is not the way it’s supposed to be. The world is not the way God designed it to be. There is suffering in this world, and we wonder why God allows it to continue.

Our sadness at this reality is not new. As we come to the book of Revelation, we find that in the first century, Christians were as perplexed as we are.

In the first century, the church of Jesus Christ was suffering. These Christians had come to understand the gospel, the good news—that Jesus, the Son of God, had died on the cross for a purpose. Jesus had died in order for His death to pay the penalty for our sins. Because Jesus died and paid our penalty, we can be forgiven. We can be counted as righteous in God’s sight. Because Jesus died and paid the penalty for our sins, we are adopted into God’s family as children of God. We are the children of the Creator and King of the Universe.

The first-century church had an expectation that because they were God’s own children, that they could be confident of God’s protection from any kind of discomfort or disappointment or distress. The first-century believers had an expectation that life would be trouble-free for them because their God—our God—was in control.

It didn’t seem to be working out that way. Life was hard for them. There was a great deal of suffering in the lives of many Christians. First-century believers had faced natural disasters, drought and famine, persecution, and even martyrdom. Where was God? It had been sixty years since the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and the world was still not the way it was supposed to be.

And so, we come to the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation was given to comfort God’s people as they live through suffering. This book was given to encourage believers as they live their lives in a world that is not the way it’s supposed to be. Revelation was given to assure God’s people that one day, **God will make all things right**.

In the first three chapters of Revelation we saw John’s vision of Jesus—the glorious resurrected Christ—as He walks in the midst of His churches. We may not see Jesus with our eyes, but the Bible affirms that Jesus sees us. Jesus sees the circumstances of our lives, and Jesus stands with His people in their suffering.

Now, as we come to Revelation chapters 4 and 5, we learn that our God is not wimpy; our God is not timid; rather, our God is in control of the universe. Our God is sovereign over every creature, over every trial we face, over every fist raised in defiance against God and against His people. You think the world is out of control? It is not. You think the plight of the world economy is hopeless? It is not. You think that truth and justice will never prevail? You’d be wrong about that. One day **God will make all things right**.

Open your Bibles this morning to Revelation chapter 4.

In our passage today we have the privilege of seeing John’s vision of the throne room of heaven.

Follow along with me as I read, beginning in verse 1.

*“After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. 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.’ At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. 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. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.”*

*“In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. 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. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying:*

*‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.’”*

*“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:*

*‘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.’”*

We live in a world that is not the way it’s supposed to be, and Christians all over the world are suffering. You may be living a wonderfully comfortable life today, but you know that you’re vulnerable to illness, to financial setbacks, to natural disasters, and eventually, to death. Christians are not immune to suffering.

We are not immune to suffering, but as we turn our eyes to see the sovereignty of God, we find courage to face our future, because the *final* victory is certain. *Our* future is in *God’s* hands, and God sovereignly controls all things. This vision of God’s throne reminds us that in the midst of our trials, our suffering, and our temptations, God is in control. This world is not the way it’s supposed to be, but in the end, righteousness will triumph, and the wicked will be cast out. One day **God will make all things right**.

Look again at verse 1. John says this: *“After this, I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. 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.’ At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne.”*

John was given a vision of the throne room of heaven, and he saw the glory of God. Notice that John doesn’t describe God Himself, because God is spirit. God doesn’t have a body so that we might describe Him. But what did John see?

As John looked at the glory of God, he didn’t see a physical form. What he saw was light and color. John saw glory. John saw light. The Bible says in Psalm 104:2 that God wraps Himself in *light* as a garment. 1 Timothy 6:16 says that God dwells in unapproachable *light*; that no one has seen God, and no one can see God. When John looked at the throne of God, John saw unapproachable light. John saw a glorious Presence, enthroned in the heavens. John saw that God is exalted above all things. John saw that God is King of Kings.

God is bathed in light, and so what John describes on the heavenly throne is a blazing display of light coming from the throne. John saw three very brilliant predominant colors, and he compared these colors to three precious stones. When John looked at the throne, the light that he saw was like jasper and carnelian. This *jasper* that John was describing was a clear stone, like a diamond—it wasn’t opaque like the stones called jasper that you find today; it was clear. Jasper was a precious gem, like a diamond. It was a perfect refractor of light. If light were shining through jasper. that light would be separated into all the colors of the spectrum—pure and perfect, clear and brilliant, and that is what John saw as he looked at throne of God—brilliant light, in all the colors of the spectrum.

John also mentioned carnelian. Carnelian was a blood red stone, like a ruby.

John said that around the throne was a rainbow like an emerald. An emerald is a rich, clear green. So John saw a glorious display of light in all the colors of the spectrum. This heavenly manifestation of God was breathtaking in its brilliance and its magnificence.

The rainbow encircling the throne would immediately have brought to mind the rainbow as the sign of God’s judgment and also God’s salvation. You’ll recall that in the days of Noah, God judged the wickedness of the people on earth by sending a world-wide flood that destroyed all of the land-based life on earth. The coming of the flood was a day of judgment, but it was also a day of salvation, because God chose Noah and his family to receive God’s grace. God saved Noah, bringing him safely through the flood and providing for Noah a new start on a cleansed earth.

After the flood, God promised that He would never again destroy all life with a flood. The rainbow was given as a sign of that promise.

We love to see the rainbow and to remember God’s faithfulness in keeping His promises, but we need to remember that the rainbow is a picture not only of God’s gracious promise, but it’s also a picture of God’s authority to judge. The rainbow in the sky signifies God’s promise that never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life; nevertheless, God will bring judgment one day. In the throne room of God, the rainbow encircling the throne reminds us of God’s authority to judge the earth, and the Bible assures us that one day **God will make all things right**.

Look at verse 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.”* Who are these elders? We don’t know. Among scholars there are many different views of who these elders might be. Some suggest that the 24 elders represent the 24 courses of priests established in the Old Testament. Some believe that the 24 elders are the twelve patriarchs of the Jews and the twelve apostles. That probably doesn’t work because John would be seeing himself among those elders, and that would be weird. A very common view is that the twenty-four elders are representatives of the people of faith—they’re representatives of God’s people in both the Old and the New Testaments—and that’s what I believe.

It’s my belief that these 24 elders are not human beings; they are spiritual beings. They are like angels. I do believe, however, that they *represent* humanity. I believe that that the twenty-four elders represent the people of faith throughout the ages. I believe that they are an exalted order of angels whose function is to serve God—to administer God’s purposes on earth, and to worship God—proclaiming His holiness forever and ever.

There is reference in the Bible to something called the *“council of God.”* You see that in Psalm 89:6-7. Here, the psalmist says, *“For who in the skies above can compare with the Lord? Who is like the Lord among the heavenly beings? In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; He is more awesome than all who surround Him.”* Apparently there’s a council that surrounds God, and they’re called *holy ones*. I believe that this council is a council of angelic beings—one of the highest orders of the angels, and they are the ones being described here as the twenty-four elders.

The fact that they’re seated on thrones indicates that they have been given positions of great authority. The crowns that the elders wear represent royal dignity and authority. The crowns also represent victory—the assurance that God’s purposes will prevail over all the forces of evil that may be arrayed against Him.

Now look at verse 5. *“From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God.”*

The lightning and thunder portray the majesty and power of God. This should remind us of the lightning, thunder, fire, and smoke that enveloped Mount Sinai when God descended to meet with Moses and to give him the tablets of the law. God controls the wind, the rain, and the forces of nature.

Also in verse 5 there are seven lamps blazing before the throne of God, and John says that these are the seven spirits of God. This is a reference to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit appears before the throne of God as seven blazing lamps.

John also saw before the throne what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. This sea is the floor on which the throne of God sits.

In the Old Testament, the *sea* was often used symbolically to represent the chaos of earthly kingdoms and earthly peoples. The turbulence of the sea represents the reality of continuing strife among the nations—strife that has always characterized our fallen world—strife that is still evident today. We may long for world peace, but world peace has never existed in recorded history. War and conquest and persecution have always characterized man’s dealings with other men. And so, a churning sea is a picture of the perpetual turmoil and conflict among the nations of man.

But before *God’s* throne there is a *glassy* sea, a heavenly sea that is perfectly calm—perfectly still. This sea pictures the peace and beauty and the harmony we will enjoy when sin no longer pollutes our souls and our world. There will come a day when **God will make all things right**.

Now look at the last part of verse 6 and verses 7 and 8. *“In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. 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. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.’”*

There’s a more detailed description of living creatures like these in Ezekiel chapter 1. The prophet Isaiah was also given a vision of these living creatures in the throne room of God, and in Isaiah’s vision the living creatures are called seraphs. Listen to Isaiah’s description in Isaiah 6:1-3. “*I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: `Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory.’ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.* ”

What are these four living creatures?

In the book of Revelation, the number four often represents the totality of physical creation. There are four winds; there are four corners of the earth; there are four regions of the earth—land, sea, rivers, and sky. So when John sees four living creatures, they represent the entire created order. When these living creatures praise God, they represent the whole of creation praising the Creator.

Each of these four creatures is different. One of them looks like a lion; one looks like an ox. One has a face like a man, and one looks like an eagle. Some suggest that these living creatures represent four classes of created earthly life: the lion represents wild beasts; the ox represents domesticated animals; the man represents humanity, and the eagle represents flying creatures. Collectively they picture God’s sovereign authority over all of His creation. These living creatures are ever before the throne proclaiming that **God is holy**.

As these creatures worship God, the focus of their worship is on God’s holiness. The song of the seraphs both in Isaiah and in Revelation is the proclamation *“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty.”*

This threefold repetition of the word *holy* has great significance. Repetition is a form of emphasis that was commonly used in the Hebrew language. In Hebrew, if you wanted to emphasize the importance of something, you would repeat it. If you felt tired and worn out, with no energy, you might say, *“I feel bad.”* But if you had broken bones and suffered pain you thought you couldn’t stand, you’d say, *“I feel bad bad.”* The repeated word serves to emphasize and intensify the meaning.

Jesus used repetition for emphasis in His teaching a lot. You’ve all seen places in Scripture where Jesus would say, *“Truly, truly I say to you…”* By repeating the word *truly* Jesus was emphasizing that what He was about to say was absolute truth—essential truth—truth of crucial importance. When you see a repeated word in Hebrew, you know that that word is doubly important.

Only occasionally in Scripture will you find that a word is repeated three times. To mention something three times in succession is to raise it to the superlative degree, to give the utmost emphasis and importance.

Only once in sacred Scripture is an attribute of God repeated three times. Only once is a characteristic of God repeated three times in succession. The Bible says that God is *“holy, holy, holy.”* Now by contrast, the Bible says that God is *love*, but it doesn’t say that God is *love, love, love*. The Bible says that God is *merciful*, but it doesn’t say that God is *merciful, merciful, merciful*. But the Bible says, and the angelic hosts proclaim, that God is *holy, holy, holy*.

What does it mean to say that God is *holy*? The Bible uses the word *holy* in more than one way. Our first thought when we hear the word is to think of the concept of purity and virtue and moral perfection—and the Bible does use the word in that way. The word *holy* does imply purity and moral perfection, but the idea of purity is a secondary meaning of the term in the Bible. When the seraphs sang of the holiness of God, they were saying a lot more than just God is purity, purity, purity.

The primary meaning of the word translated *holy* is *set apart, separate from the mundane*. When the word is used with respect to God it speaks of God’s transcendence. It conveys the reality that God is far above all created beings. God is infinitely higher, immeasurably greater, fundamentally above everything we can know and comprehend. God is transcendent in His goodness; He is transcendent in His power; He is supremely majestic. He is lofty, high and exalted. The word *holy* speaks of the infinite distance that separates God from every created thing. God is so far above and beyond us in every good attribute that He is completely separate from anything we could even imagine. God is *holy, holy, holy*.

As the seraphs lead the worship of heaven, proclaiming that God is *holy, holy, holy*, the twenty-four elders fall down, they cast their crowns at His feet, and they worship Him as well. God is sovereign; God is holy.

If you were to have a vision of the grandeur of heaven, you would see that God is exalted above all created things. God is the supreme authority. God is the creator; God is the sustainer; God is the ultimate judge and Savior.

On earth people may deny that there’s a God; they may scoff at the notion of God—but the reality is—whatever false view they believe—nevertheless, God is still in control. Whether you believe in God or not, God is still sovereign over all the universe.

As the book of Revelation unfolds, we’re going to see that God is shaping the course of history, and God is bringing all things together to culminate in God’s final, decisive victory over evil. God is bringing all things together to culminate in the glorious provision of His eternal Kingdom.

This world is not the way it’s supposed to be; nevertheless, God is in control. God is sovereign. God has the future in His hands. One day **God will make all things right**. Let’s close in prayer.