

A Look Into Heaven (part 1)

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Preacher: Olivier Favre

[0:00] The revelation God gave to the Apostle John, the last book of your Bible, chapter 4. We have two scripture readings today related to the message, and so we're forgoing our regular consecutive reading through the book of Acts today.

Revelation 4, I'll read the entire chapter, and this is God's word. Revelation 4, I'll read the chapter, and the verse 1.

Verse 1.

The first living creature was like a lion. The second was like an ox. The third had the face of 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 stopped saying, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.

[1:49] Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor, and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives forever 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, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.

Let's take our Bibles again and turn this time to the Old Testament, to the prophet Ezekiel. In chapter 10, you'll see here in Ezekiel 10 where some of the imagery that we saw in Revelation 4 is taken from.

So stand together with me for this reading from God's Word, Ezekiel 10, beginning in verse 9, and we'll read to the end of the chapter.

I looked and I saw beside the cherubim four wheels, one beside each of the cherubim. The wheels sparkled like chrysalite. As for their appearance, the four of them looked alike.

[2:56] Each was like a wheel intersecting a wheel. As they moved, they would go in any one of the four directions the cherubim faced. The wheels did not turn about as the cherubim went.

The cherubim went in whatever direction the head faced without turning as they went. Their bodies, including their backs, their hands, and their wings, were completely full of eyes, as were their four wheels.

I heard the wheels being called the whirling wheels. Each of the cherubim had four faces. One was that of a cherub, the second the face of a man, the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle.

Then the cherubim rose upward. These were the living creatures I had seen by the Kebar River. When the cherubim moved, the wheels beside them moved. And when the cherubim spread their wings to rise from the ground, the wheels did not leave their side.

When the cherubim stood still, they also stood still. And when the cherubim rose, they rose with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in them. Then the glory of the Lord departed from over the threshold of the temple and stopped above the cherubim.

[4:08] While I watched, the cherubim spread their wings and rose from the ground. And as they went, the wheels went with them. They stopped at the entrance to the east gate of the Lord's house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.

These were the living creatures I had seen beneath the God of Israel by the Kebar River. And I realized that they were cherubim. Each had four faces and four wings. And under their wings was what looked like the hands of a man.

Their faces had the same appearance as those I had seen by the Kebar River. Each one went straight ahead. It's a great privilege for me and my wife to be with you today, to give you the greetings from the Reformed Baptist churches in the French part of Switzerland, from Lausanne's church, Payenne, and Neuchâtel's church.

I'll do my best to try to make me understood in English, but that's all I can do. I cannot do more. So you have to do your best to try to understand my English with a French accent. Often, when we hear sermons on Revelation, they are limited to the letters written by Christ to the seven churches. [5 : 32] And that's the first three chapters. And we sometimes get the impression that after these three chapters, Revelation is a closed book.

A closed door. And this is a shame because this is not at all what John tells us in verse 1. He mentions a door standing open in heaven.

And I'm like you. Sometimes when I read these chapters, I say, well, it's just closed. I don't understand them. And maybe I'm a bit too proud to preach on such chapters with you, with complicated images.

But we have to remember that this first verse tells us it's not a closed door. It's a door standing open.

And if it's open, it's because we can see a bit through it. Amen. So, what I'd like to do with you this morning is what we do sometimes, what we'd like to do sometimes when we are guests in a home. [6 : 51] You are guests and you see a door just a little bit open. And you want to push a bit to see more what is inside. Aren't you like that?

Yeah? And it's a bit the same with the Word of God. God tells us there is a door open there. Are you ready to come and push a bit the door and see what is in there?

So, that's what we'll try to do this morning with chapter 4 of Revelation and this afternoon with chapter 5 of Revelation.

And the title will be nearly the same for this morning and this afternoon. It's A Look Into Heaven. You want to have a look into heaven?

These chapters give us a look into heaven. You probably know that Revelation is a book that is written in circles.

[7 : 53] You have seven circles that describe the same period going between Christ's first coming to eternity, Christ's second coming, and each one of these circles would show you this same period with another angle.

In the first three chapters, that's the first circle you have. It's the letters to the churches. It concentrates on Christ being working and being present, being taking care of his church. Even if he's in heaven, he's walking around in his church and taking care of his church. This second circle goes from chapter 4 to chapter 7, and it gives us a revelation of heaven.

We won't be able to do everything between this morning and this afternoon. We'll just stay on chapter 4 and 5. But this look into heaven was very important for the Christian at the time of John and for us as Christians today.

because we have to know what is really in heaven, what is happening in heaven, so that to be strengthened in our everyday life.

[9 : 26] The Christians in time of John, as in our time, have sometimes to go through rough time. And Revelation from chapter 8 onwards would show how rough would be the time for the Christians.

Because they have to suffer with the rest of humanity. Because they are part of the rest of humanity. Sometimes Christians would die of sickness.

Some would be struck by epidemics. Others would die by the sword. just like unbelievers. And more than that, in addition to that, Christians would also have to suffer for their faith.

Some would be despised, misunderstood, persecuted. Some would even have to die for their Lord. And so, they had to know what was going on in heaven.

Because when you are in such a rough time, the first question that comes to mind is, what? Is God in control?

[10 : 42] Is God in control? Is He in control when I go through suffering? Is He in control when I see the wicked prospering in impunity?

And the just being mistreated? Is God really in control when we consider how difficult it is to spread the gospel whereas sects, occult movement flourish?

We have this kind of question, don't we? And this look into heaven, sorry, I'm not used to this place. And this look into heaven will reassure us, will reassure Christians, will reassure the church and encourage us to say, yes, God is in control.

And even when I go through hard time. So, before we look at this vision, two preliminary observations, that's my first point.

[11:56] two preliminary observations. The first one about the style. What does the word revelation mean? What does the word revelation mean?

It means unveiling. So, the purpose of the book of Revelation is to unveil God's truth to his church. It's not to mix up the church or to make the church scared. It's just to unveil the truth of God for his church.

But sometimes we feel it's just the opposite when we read Revelation. Because the language is strange, imagery is strange, that we must remember that this unveiling is done by means of many images and symbols from the Old Testament.

moment. This revelation is made in visions to John, is given in visions to John while he is in the Spirit, says the first verse.

[13:15] That is to say that we shouldn't begin to take everything in this book literally. you will get into trouble if you try to draw everything you see and to try to think how it works exactly, all these wheels going on every direction.

that's a vision. And it's not a literal thing to build. It's a vision through which God wants to give truth to John and to the church.

So it's normal that some are just, we could say, spiritual realities that we cannot build in a material wood and iron and other things.

that's for the style. Now the time of the vision. In verse 1, verse 1 tells us that God would reveal to John that which must soon take place or, in other translation, that would take place later.

What does that mean, later? This later is the same word that was used already in chapter 1, verse 19.

[14:36] And we have it a few times in the book of Revelation. And we could think that later means later in the time, and you would have a first circle, and later in the time a second one, later in the time a third one, as if it was a chronological story.

But that's not the sense of the word. What it means is that later in the vision, John saw something covering the same period of time.

Like if you, maybe an illustration to help you, if you go to an opera or musical, you might see many things happening at the same time.

And you cannot explain or explain each one of them because there are too many things at the same time. So you would have to explain what is happening on the left of the stage and then you would have, or later you will tell what's happening on the right side of the stage and then in the middle.

But all these things were happening together. And that's exactly what we have. Seven circles, even if the vision comes later to John, it's describing the same musical, if you want the same musical that is all the history of the Christian church.

[16:09] Two preliminary observations we've seen, style and time period. Now, the main point, God is reigning.

Verse 2 to 8. God is reigning. What does John see? through the open door when he ascends into heaven in spirit.

First, he sees a throne. Verse 2. Immediately, I was in the spirit, and behold, a throne set in heaven. The throne is the center piece of chapter 4 and 5. The word throne appears 17 times in these two chapters.

The throne is the symbol of royalty, sovereignty, majesty, as well as authority and judgment. Who is seated on this throne?

[17:16] Someone, save us too. and one sat on the throne. Someone that John doesn't describe in human terms, but in terms of three precious stones.

And if we consider the entire vision, with the spirit mentioned in verse 5, and the lamb in chapter 5, we can say that God the father is sitting on the throne.

He, of whom Paul tells us, lives in light inaccessible that no one has seen or can see.

1 Timothy 6, 16. This is why this one, the someone seated on the throne, cannot be seen and described as a human being.

This is why he is described for us in terms of precious stones, jasper, sardius, emerald. Jasper is a transparent stone like a diamond, but with colored reflections.

[18:41] It reminds us of the purity and the holiness of God. Nothing in his character is obscure.

Nothing in his character can be hidden. Sardius is a red stone.

It points us to the justice of God. His hatred of sin and the wrath that he pours out on sinners.

The same attribute of God is underlined with the lightning flashes, voices, and thunder which come around the throne in verse 5. Yes, my dear friends, the one who is seated on the throne in heaven is holy and pure.

He is separated from sinners and absolutely just in his judgment. Such is the character of God underlined here.

[20:01] He reigns over the universe. He is seated on the throne and he governs all things without exception.

The little and the big things in your life too. But the description doesn't stop there. In verse 3, the end of verse 3, we see that the throne is encircled by a rainbow.

It's a special rainbow because it is not multicolored like the rainbows we see usually. It has just one color. It's a rainbow which resembled an emerald which is a green stone.

Green is the color of hope. Hope showed itself to Noah after the flood through the rainbow. The rainbow is the sign of the covenant.

It's the guarantee that God will never again destroy the world with water. And this symbol there is important because it shows us that this holy just God is also a merciful God.

[21:30] He is a God who takes care of his creation. He is the one who forgives those who come to him through Jesus Christ.

He is the one who provides for salvation of his people. And when we see that we can say there is hope. There is hope in heaven for the sinner.

Even if God is holy and just. Because he is a merciful God. Isn't this a glorious God? This vision of God should affect all aspects of our Christian lives.

The way we understand circumstances. The way we handle trials. You see there is no reason to doubt. any situation you are in.

Because this God is at work. He is in control. Sitting on the throne. But the reason doesn't stop there.

[22:43] It goes on. What does John see around the throne? Verse 4. Around the throne were 24 thrones. And on the thrones I saw 24 elders sitting clothed in white robe.

And they had crowns of God on the head. Around the throne John sees 24 thorns. With 24 elders clothed with white robes and crowned with gold seated.

Who could these people be? If we think about the title elder presbyteros it's the same title as church elders.

We could think there are people who have a position of authority of responsibility in God's people. If we think about their throne we immediately are driven to a word of our savior to his disciples when he told them that they would be seated on twelve thorns when the Lord would come back.

Matthew 19:28 Assuredly I say to you that in the regeneration when the son of man sits on his throne of his glory you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thorns.

[24:15] If we think about the number contained in Revelation we realize that twenty four is two times twelve. Therefore we can identify these twenty four elders with the twelve patriarchs sons of Jacob and the twelve apostles who are the foundations and the doors of the new Jerusalem in chapter twenty one.

It means these twenty four people seated on these thrones are our representants. The one who represent God's people.

These elders represent God's people in its totality. The church. The bride of Jesus Christ. That means that if you have put your confidence in Christ for your salvation, they represent you.

And look how they are. They are clothed with white because they are purified by Christ from all stains. They wear a crown of gold on their head because they share the work of Christ and his royalty and his glory.

Isn't it amazing to see that those who represent us in heaven are around the very throne of God.

[25 : 54] They rejoice in communion fellowship with him and nothing can separate them from his presence and from his love.

And it's crucial to remember that when you are in time of discouragement suffering nothing can separate you from the love of God from the presence of God from being eternally in his presence. And the vision continues in verse five and six in front of the throne of the father there are seven lamps of fire and a sea of glass.

And in order to understand the sense of this we need to go back to the tabernacle and to the temple and to look at the structure of the temple and the tabernacle in the Old Testament.

at the center of the temple you have the most holy place. Where was the throne of God? The Ark of the Covenant.

[27 : 10] In front there was a veil and you had the holy place. In the holy place you had the seven branch lamp stand symbol of the Holy Spirit who lights the holy place.

And in front of the veil of the holy place there was a bronze basin called sometimes a sea. And this was a big basin where you put water and where the priest had to wash before entering into the holy place.

The sea symbolizes the purification of Christ purification work of Christ without which no man can approach God without faith in his wrath.

You see nothing is forgotten in this vision. The Father on his horn the Spirit with the lamp stands and the sea which is the purifying work of Christ.

But it's still not finished. Because John sees four bizarre creatures living creatures around and in the center of the throne.

[28 : 38] I cannot tell you how it's possible but that's what he says. It's there in the vision and it becomes more complicated because it's difficult for us to visualize these four living beings.

They seem somewhat strange to us. They have eyes everywhere in front and back. One of them has the face of a lion another of an ox the third of a man the fourth of an eagle each one having six wings.

Who are they? To discover that we have to go back to Ezekiel. That's why I asked Aaron to read in Ezekiel because in Ezekiel you have exactly the same beast.

Well, exactly about the same beast. And you same being. And in Ezekiel it is said they are cherubims.

Cherubims are angels of main order, of the big order. And their mission, the mission of the cherubims is to keep God holy and that nobody could come to him if he is not holy.

[29 : 59] It was cherubim who were put in the garden of Eden. When man disobeyed, he could not go anymore to the tree of life. Cherubim were there.

And it was cherubim which was sought on the veil between the holy place and the most holy place. These are cherubims.

And their mission is to be there and we could say to keep the holiness of God. Because they proclaim in verse 6, sorry, verse 8 or 9, verse 8, Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come.

They proclaim exactly what these cherubims proclaimed in Isaiah chapter 6, verse 3. They are there because they are always at God's service to proclaim his glory, to proclaim his holiness.

So, let's stop for a moment. Do you see the heavenly glory through this open door?

[31 : 24] What a blessing to be able to take a glimpse into heaven and to know that these things are there and at this very moment.

it's not something for the future. It's something that is there now. If we could open the door of heaven now and have ceased to see, we would see that.

This glorious God sitting on his throne, the Holy Spirit, the Son there, and all the ones who represent us in heaven, all the Christians who have been there before us because they died, they're in the presence of God.

No one can separate them from the presence of this holy and glorious God. This is the reality, my dear friends.

The reality that should affect your perception your perception of your life today. Remember that you are in the hand of such God, a glorious God, that when you come to leave this earth, it will be to be there triumphing in his presence.

[32:54] Remember that the loved one you left are there already, sharing his glory, singing his praises, and they'll do that forever.

So what do all these beings do in the presence of this glorious God? That's the last point, point two. He's worthy to be praised.

That's verses 9 to 11. God reigns, we've seen it. Now we see in these verses 9 to 11. He's worthy to be praised.

They praise him because when they find themselves in the presence of such a God, there is no other act that is appropriate to his creature. Sometimes when we are in the midst of suffering and trial, we are a bit like Job, who wanted to talk to God and to ask account of God about the way he governed the earth.

But when we find ourselves facing this God, like Job, we should also say, I lay my hand over my mouth.

[34:17] Once I have spoken, but I will not answer. Yet twice, but I will proceed no further. I have heard of you by the hearing of my ear, but now my eye sees you.

Therefore I abode myself and repent in dust and ashes. You see, when you face God, no one can talk to Him and argue with Him.

When we face God, we just have to bow down before Him and praise Him and adore Him. And for you who are still unbelievers today, don't think that when you'll be in front of God, you'll be able to argue with Him or to arrange your situation.

It will be too late when you'll be in front of Him. because once you are in the presence of God, you just have to recognize His sovereignty, His purity, His holiness.

And if you didn't come to Him through Christ, you'll be in silence, humiliation, and under His judgment.

[35:49] And that's a table place to be. You have to come today to Him in repentance.

Today to Him, placing your faith in Christ. Because for those who place their faith in Him, there is no separation. There are there, just in front of the throne.

That's what God promises you. If you come to Him through Jesus Christ, fellowship with Him, family relationship with Him, that's what we see when we open the door of heaven.

That's the good news for you unbelievers. Come to Christ. There will be no separation between you and God.

All these people being there just spend all their time praising God. Sometimes we find it hard to praise Him 10 minutes, 15 minutes, 30 minutes in our prayer.

[37:04] But that's what will happen in heaven. All our time being in praise to God, being so conscious of what He has done for us.

The four living creatures bring glory, honor, and thanks. That's verse 9. Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks, and what happens when these creatures give honor and thanks to God, the 24 elders, that's our representatives during this time, they bowed down before God and throw their crowns at His feet.

Why do they do such a thing? Because they realize that their royalty is undeserved. They do this to show that all what they are, all what they have, comes from Him.

And by throwing these crowns to His feet, they just say, to you God, all the glory. We don't deserve anything except the wrath of God, taken by Christ.

Our salvation comes from Him. And it's He who has saved us. our gift comes from Him because it's Him who has created us.

[38:40] Our good works come from Him because it's He who has prepared them beforehand for us to do them.

And it's Him who gives us the strength to accomplish these good works. Now that we have had the door opened a little, we need to learn to live here below in this perspective.

It's only when we get to heaven that we will be made perfect in His Divine Presence. But this reality should already influence our life here and now.

our salvation is not an end in itself. God has saved us to praise to the praise of the glory of His grace.

Ephesians 1. He has saved us that we might glorify Him, praise Him, adore Him, not only in heaven, but already today in our everyday life, in the trials God sends us sometimes.

[40:04] So ask yourself the question, is my way of thinking, reacting, managing my affairs, using my gift, and coping with the circumstances in accordance with this glimpse into heaven that we just had?

Or am I living like any non-Christian in this world, just coming to church on Sunday and forgetting that there is something special in heaven?

Do I do all for God's glory in my life? Do I, although still on this earth, have this perception of heaven which accompanies me throughout my daily life?

God gave us this vision through John at the beginning of this book of Revelation because he wants us to live a God-centered life with confidence, with submissive confidence in him.

may the Lord help each one of us to live with a clear view of heaven as long as we are on earth.

[41:36] Amen.