

# COMMUNICATING THROUGH SYMBOLS Sunday School- May 8, 2011

## Unifying Topic: HEAVENLY WORSHIP

### Lesson Text

I. The Throne Of God (Revelation 4:1-2)

II. Worshipers Of God (Revelation 4:6-8)

III. Worthy Of Praise And Honor (Revelation 4:9-11)

**The Main Thought:** And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. (Revelation 4:2 KJV).

**Unifying Principle:** Symbols help people communicate. In what ways do symbols communicate concepts and ideas across time? The symbolism in the revelation to John patterned after the Hebrew Scriptures, points to worship and praise of God.

**Lesson Aim:** To teach students about the purpose and value of worshipping God.

**Life Aim:** To realize that the holiness of God, as described by the visions John witnessed, should evoke passionate praise from all His creation.

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4:1 After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.

4:2 And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.

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4:6 And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.

4:7 And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.

4:8 And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

4:9 And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever,

4:10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

4:11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

### **HISTORY:**

John, identified as one "*who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ*" (1:1-2). While debated by some, he was most likely the apostle John, brother of James, and author of the gospel of John and three epistles. The purpose of the book is to reveal how Christ was going to bring judgment on Jerusalem and Rome for rejecting God and persecuting His people. The book is designed to warn and comfort.<sup>1</sup>

The word "*revelation*" (apokalupsis) means to uncover and unveil. It means to pull back a covering or a veil that is hiding something. Revelation begins with John, the last surviving apostle and an old man in exile on the small batten island of Patmos located in the Aegean Sea, southwest of Ephesus. The Roman authorities had banished him there because of his faithful preaching of the gospel. While on Patmos, John received a series of visions that laid out the future history of the world. The book of Revelation is here to reveal Christ. The revelation was given from God to Christ who gave it to an angel who showed it to John who shared it with us.

**Chapter 1** Again and again Christ refers to Himself: The Beginning and The Ending or The Alpha and The Omega. It is emphasizing that Christ exists outside of time, as we know it. It deals with what John heard (v10), saw (v11), and was to write (1:11, 19). **Chapter 2-3** come the announcement or letters to the seven churches. Seven is the number of completion. The messages have several spiritual, historical, and prophetic values. Each letter has four elements:

1. The manner in which Christ presents Himself;
2. The commendation or condemnation He gives;
3. The reward He promises;
4. The exhortation to hear.

They refer to distinct, historical churches in the province of Asia; hence, they are timely. They apply to types of believers in every age; hence, they are timeless.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://executableoutlines.com/rev/rev\\_00.htm](http://executableoutlines.com/rev/rev_00.htm)

## LESSON:

### Revelation 4:1-2 The Throne Of God

This begins a new vision—Vision Two. The Lord's personal message to the individual churches is now over. He has told them who He is, pointed out their failures, warned, and counseled them to correct their failures. He has also given them the great promises of heaven if they will only overcome. Now it is time for the churches to see the future events that are coming upon the earth. It is time for the churches to know that Jesus Christ is coming back to earth. He is going to end the world and establish the kingdom of God forever and ever in a new heaven and earth.

In this vision two great things are seen:

1. The throne of God is seen.
2. God Himself is seen holding a book which contains the destiny of the world in the end times.

However, the book is sealed, and no one is found worthy to open and reveal the contents of the book. Only one is worthy to open the book—That Person is the Lamb of God; the Lamb slain before the foundation of the earth, Jesus Christ Himself. Now five quick things happened to John.

1. He saw a door opened in heaven.
2. He heard a commanding voice, the very same voice he had heard in the first vision (1:10).
3. He was called to come up here into heaven.
4. He was immediately in the spirit.
5. He saw the most astounding sight imaginable.

There are three doors mentioned in the book of Revelation.

- 1) The open door: "*I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name*" Rev.3:8).
- 2) The door of the human heart: "*Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me*" Rev.3:20).
- 3) The door of revelation: "*I looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven*" (Rev.4:1).

**4:1 After this:** The phrase indicates a change in succession of events. Christ Himself has changed His position: in Chapters 1-3 He is seen among the candlesticks on earth. Now He is seen in heaven. **Candlestick is the symbol or light-bearers; Christ and the church.** Chapter 4 is a transitional verse from "things which are" to "the things which will take place after this. We now move to the category of future things; after church issues, now future issues.

There were 7 lamps of fire burning which are the 7 Spirits of God (4:5b). Later on the vision introduces a series of three sevens: 7 seals (5:1), 7 trumpets (8:6) and 7 last plagues or bowls (15:1).

...a door was opened in heaven: Upon seeing a door standing open in heaven and hearing a trumpet-like voice promising to show him of things which must take place, John seems to be transported to the throne room of God. This is through his vision. John not only sees and looks into heaven, but he is commanded to come up hither, so that he may see and understand the things that are to transpire on earth in future events. God works them out. They are of His divine Will. Remember this is the vision given to John.

When there is an open door in our life, the affect of the "*open door*" is for evangelism and missions; the door which God opens to the churches for bearing witness to the glorious gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is an opportunity to carry the gospel to their neighbors, communities, cities, states, countries, and the world—the uttermost part of the earth. Also seeing a **door in heaven is symbolic to access to heavenly places** (Jh.1:51).

**4:2 And immediately I was in the spirit:** He does not affirm that he was caught up into heaven, but he was at once absorbed in the contemplation of the visions before him. John is having a deep, intense spiritual experience with God, but his body remained in Patmos; he was in an ecstatic state with his mind and spirit. They appeared as real to him as if he saw them, and they were in fact a real symbolical representation of things occurring in heaven. Now John sees the most astounding sight imaginable: **God and the throne of God.** This was one event that would be very hard to describe, emotionally physically or otherwise—God's throne and even God himself! Yet, as it continues, he describes what he sees and hears with vivid and colorful imagery.

### NOT APART OF THE LESSON:

John's description of what he sees through the open door in heaven shows how awesome the presence of God is:

- 1) **4:3** <sup>2</sup>To John's startled eyes is a throne in heaven with the presence of the One sitting upon it. The primary impression received by John is that of color, and he describes the presence of the **One on the throne** as "*like a jasper and a sardine stone.*" **The sight of a rainbow around the throne like an emerald** further enriches the color scheme. The precious stones mentioned also seem to have meaning. The jasper stone is described in

<sup>2</sup> <http://bible.org/seriespage/4-church-heaven>

chapter 21 as a precious stone which is clear like crystal, which would seem to indicate that it may be what we would today call a diamond. The sardine stone, or the sardius, is a familiar stone in color like a ruby, a beautiful red. According to the Old Testament these stones had a relationship to the tribes of Israel. Each tribe of Israel had a representative stone, and the high priest had stones representing each of the twelve tribes of Israel on his breast when he functioned in his priestly office before the altar. This symbolized the fact that he as the high priest was representing all twelve tribes before the throne of God. **Jasper and a sardine stone are also symbolic of glory and brightness of God. The rainbow was symbolic of the covenant of God with earth. Emerald is symbolic of the glories of God and His saints.**

- 2) **4:4** John's attention is now directed to twenty-four thrones upon which the twenty-four elders are seated. There is considerable discussion concerning their identity. The fact that they are a representative group, however, seems to be clear from the parallel of the Old Testament where the priesthood was represented by twenty-four orders of priests. There were actually thousands of priests in Israel's day of ascendancy under David and Solomon, but they all could not minister at the same time. Accordingly, they were divided into twenty-four orders, each of which was represented by a priest. When these priests met together, even though there were only twenty-four, they represented the whole priesthood and at the same time the whole of the nation of Israel. In a similar way the twenty-four elders mentioned in the book of Revelation may be regarded as a representative body.

<sup>3</sup>Another option to look at is that of it being symbolic to the number twelve which is used to represent organized religion. God has made two covenants with man--the Law of Moses and the law of Christ. The Law of Moses was represented by the twelve children of Israel and the law of Christ is represented by the twelve apostles. If we take "12" the number of organized religion and double it for the two covenants, the result is "24." These twenty-four elders represent the lawgivers of the Old Testament and New Testament. **Twelve is symbolic of Divine government; Twenty-four is symbolic of priesthood courses and order.**

The elders are described as being **clothed in white raiment** indicating purity or cleanliness, and **having on their heads crowns of gold**, indicating that the elders had been rewarded for victory accomplished. **The crowns of gold are symbolic of royalty, reigning on throne, authority.**

- 3) **4:5** **There's God's voice** which is so commanding that it sounds like a combination of many **voices** and there's **lightnings and thundering (v5)**. This shows us just how majestic and awesome the voice of God is, not compared to the show on TV-The Voice. This voice brings along with it lightnings and thundering; the great pronouncements of God; His Will sounds from the throne with the speed of lighting with awesome thunder. And His Will is done! The events of history take place as He has ordered. This is reminiscent of God's fearful presence at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16-19 and 20:18-19). **Lightnings, voices, thunders are symbolic to judgment of God in earth.**
- 4) **4:5b** <sup>4</sup>John's attention is also directed to **seven lamps of fire** which are seen **burning before the throne**. These are identified as **the seven Spirits of God** mentioned earlier in 1:4 and 3:1. These are best understood as a representation of the Holy Spirit in a sevenfold way rather than seven individual spirits which would require that they be understood as seven angels. There is but One Holy Spirit. Ordinarily the Holy Spirit is not humanly visible unless embodied in some way. When the Holy Spirit descended on Christ on the occasion of His baptism, the people saw a dove descending. If it had not been for the dove, they could not have seen the Holy Spirit. In a similar way on the Day of Pentecost, the coming of the Spirit would not have been visible if it had not been for the *"cloven tongues like as of fire"* (Acts 2:3). The seven lamps of fire therefore are the means by which John is informed of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The number seven is characteristic of the perfection of the Spirit. In the heavenly scene it may be concluded on the basis of both chapters 4 and 5 that all three Persons of the Trinity are in evidence, each in His particular form of revelation.

## Revelation 4:6-8 Worshipers Of God

**Back to our lesson:** 4:6 And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal:

- 5) There is a **sea of glass** stretching out before the throne. **"Like crystal"** is probably the key here. Pure crystal is completely transparent and colorless. Throughout Revelation the "sea" is used to represent masses of people (Rev.8:8). This must be describing a mass of people without flaws standing before the throne of God. The sea of glass symbolizes at least three things.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.scripturessay.com/article.php?cat=books&id=677&pagenumber=8>

<sup>4</sup> <http://bible.org/seriespage/4-church-heaven>

1. The glassy sea shows us the value and preciousness of God's presence. Pure glass that was as clear as crystal was considered to be as valuable and precious as gold (Job 28:17).
2. The glassy sea shows us how clearly God is able to see everything that is out before His throne. It stands for omniscience and penetrating vision into all things. Nothing is hid from Him who is upon the throne of heaven.
3. The glassy sea shows us the spectacular purity of God, as clear and pure as perfect glass and crystal. It shows us how far away God is from the impurities of a contaminated world.

The sea of glass is also reminiscent of the laver in the Mosaic tabernacle and the bronze sea of the Solomonic temple. **The sea of glass** in heaven looked like a crystal pavement that served as the floor of God's throne stretched out like a great glistening sea which **symbolizes the tranquility of God's presence**.

6) **4:6b and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind:** The picture painted in the midst, around and about the throne are four beasts. It may be understood these creatures to be cherubim; the spectacular angelic beings who surround the throne of God.

- **There is there position:** They are the closest beings to God. They are the angelic beings who are posted in the middle of each side of the throne. They are the guardians of God's throne and of His holy presence.
- **Eyes are everywhere:** These living creatures had eyes all over their bodies. God unceasingly exercises His omnipresence and sovereignty over creation. They would be seen all over the throne and would see everything around the throne having greater insight and perception than any man.

All are under God's infinite wisdom. **Four is the number for universal. Four living beasts is symbolic to four standards of Israel. Full of eyes is symbolic to sight, perfection of insight.**

**4:7** Who are these living beings who are privileged to be in God's presence day and night, and to declare His majestic holiness? These being who never have to leave God's presence, not even for a moment? Undoubtedly, they are beings who were created for this very purpose. They seem to be the same beings as the cherubim seen in Ezekiel's vision (Eze.1:5) and the seraphim seen in Isaiah's vision (Is.6:1-3). What makes them so hard to identify is the fact that they share features of the seraphim and cherubim, yet even their similarities are not consistent. Many commentators offer a variety of explanations, however, I simply don't know. I haven't received one that resonates in my spirit. Many things on earth are given to us as "*shadows*" or "*copies*" of greater heavenly realities. Some things He just do not reveal right away. But, they are certainly amazing and very powerful

Note: John chooses certain animals on earth to describe certain characteristics that he notices. These 4 creatures represent the four fold division of animal life mentioned in Genesis 9.

- One being (*wild animal life*) was like a **lion: symbolizes king of beasts; royalty; power; majesty; supremacy.**
- One being (*domestic animal life*) was like a **calf (ox): symbolizes king of domestics; sacrifice; endurance; strength.**
- One being (*human life*) was had the **face of a man: symbolizes creation; intelligence.**
- One being (*bird life*) was like a **flying eagle: symbolizes king of birds; heavenliness; swiftness; speed in execution of judgment.**

The emphasis is upon the nature of these creatures. These living creatures may simply represent aspects of God's attributes. The idea is that of the majesty of God. Their description:

- They are always found near the throne of God (Rev. 4:6; 5:6; 14:3).
- They have six wings and are full of eyes (Rev.4:6, 8).
- Their function has to do with the holiness and wrath of God (Rev.6:1, 7; 15:7).
- They declare the holiness of God day and night (Rev.4:8).

**4:8 And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within:**— As comparison of the wings of the seraphim which mean "*burning ones; fiery one*" or nobles, in (Isaiah 6:2), they have six wings:

- with two of which they cover their faces because they dared not gaze directly at God's glory which would be too powerful to behold;
- and with the two to cover their feet, acknowledging their lowliness even though engaged in divine service to God;
- and with two they flew in serving the One on the throne.

The Seraphim's position is flying above God's throne, unlike the Cherubim who are beside/around it. Their primary duty is to constantly glorifying and praising God with the eternal song "*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.*"

John's vision shows us that all of nature owes its worship to God, both animal and man. They seem to be in motion, moving through every place. The four beasts are similar in their wings. **Their wings** would emphasize their quickness

and availability in service to the One sitting on the throne. We can also say that this is very much like Ezekiel's description (Ezk.10:5) of the cherubs moving around the throne of God. John's object is to show that the six wings in each did not interfere with that which he had before declared, namely, that they were "*full of eyes before and behind.*" The eyes were round the outside of each wing, and up the inside of each when half expanded, and of the part of body in that inward recess. These creatures swiftly have constant observance and knowledge of the affairs of the earth on behalf of God, plus their spiritual perception of God's governmental purposes and acts.

**4:8b ...and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come:** They stand for all that God is. Their praise and worship never ends. Untiring and without interruption, they worship, ascribing the Triune God. Worship is going on! This is true worship. Remember, there is no night in heaven. The word "*holy*" is three times used here, as by the seraphim in (Isaiah 6:3). The triple "Holy, Holy, Holy" also speaks of the Trinity. Worship is a complete investment of your entire self. Worship is seeing God in His holiness, acknowledging that He is so far and above us; the One who created us, that it would be sin not to fall prostrate in reverence. The cherubim act as guardian spirits. The four beasts declare "*holy, holy, holy*; that the Lord *God is Almighty*, the One who has His hand on everything; *which was and is and is to come.*" This repeats another idea from Revelation 1:8, and refers to God's eternal Being. It translates the thought behind the meaning of the name "*Yahweh.*" Nothing is broken, no pauses; just steady flow of praise and worship. Can you imagine? What an indictment against man! How little we praise and worship God—I mean, truly praise and worship Him.

## Revelation 4:9-11 Worthy Of Praise And Honor

**4:9 And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever:** Here, we are once more pointed to the worshipful activity of these four awesome and holy living beings, symbols of power and holiness. When they begin <sup>5</sup>they're expressing His eternity, and that same phrase is in chapter 10 verse 6 and chapter 15 verse 7; it's borrowed from Daniel 4:34, used there to describe God, when they worship and honor and glorify and thank the eternal God. When they do that that triggers something else. All of a sudden the oratorio moves to a second movement. They begin the quartet and then it sets in motion the accompanying worshipers.

**4:10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: It's repetitive. Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come: glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever: The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne.** Can you see it happening over and over in heaven? This is the vision John saw of the future. He was seeing what will happen before it has happened; he's seeing what hasn't happened but it will! How amazing is this? I'm just so excited about it as I read it; as God is opening up my eyes to it! These twenty-four elders begin to worship God as well. So the motion of this begins to build around the throne. In their worship:

- 1) They show subjection and subservience. They fall down before the throne of God. They yield all they are and have to Him. What a lesson to us! How we must learn how great God is—that He dwells in such glory and majesty, dominion, and power that we owe Him our lives and our all.
- 2) They worship God as the eternal God. He alone is our hope, for living forever. If we fail to worship Him meaning to worship Him in spirit and in truth, then we shall miss eternal splendor of life with Him.

They do a most amazing thing. <sup>6</sup>These elders worship God just as the four living creatures do in verse 8. This shows that these two laws came directly from God. He gave the laws to mankind through a certain chosen few. The Law of Moses was given directly to the twelve tribes of Israel, but the law of Christ was given to all mankind through the twelve apostles. When Christ came, He fulfilled the Old Law and established the New. The law which Christ gave is the method whereby mankind can be spiritually acceptable to God. These twenty-four elders represent these spiritual laws. I can only say what they represent.

At the end of verse 10, they cast their crowns before the throne. These "*crowns*" (*stephanous*) indicate achievement and victory (Rev 2:10; 3:11) or rewards. Casting their crowns at His feet symbolizes the willing subjection of their power to His superior authority. <sup>7</sup>They have received whatever is involved in the crown of life, the incorruptible crown, the crown of rejoicing, the glory crown, the victory crown, the runner's crown. They have received for the gold and silver and precious stones of their life, those fitting eternal rewards. And as it were they wear those rewards like a crown.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.gty.org/Resources/Sermons/66-19>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.scriptureessay.com/article.php?cat=books&id=677&pagenumber=8>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.gty.org/Resources/Sermons/66-19>

Instantaneously, however, when the worship crescendo begins, and as it becomes time to unfold judgment, lost in love and wonder, lost in praise they divest themselves of all honor and cast it all at the feet of their King. It's a voluntary surrender. Indeed the desire to present one's life work of faithful service as a gift to the Savior is a very unselfish and God-honoring motive.

**4:11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created:** The elders' song is similar to that of the four living beasts, but it focuses more on the wonders of God's creation, as the evidence of His glory and power. In their worship:

- 3) They show the supreme worthiness of the Lord. They cast their crowns before the Lord to show that He alone is worthy and they are acknowledging the truth forever and ever.
- 4) They vocally declare His worthiness and they praise Him as the Lord God of the universe and of creation.

God deserves our praise. He carries the highest degree of merit or worth. No one can compare to Him. He meets all our expectations. Therefore, the elders ascribe three affirmations to God: glory, honour and power, as do the four beasts: glory, honour, and thanks. They agree on two things—glory and honour. "*Glory*" is the manifestation of His essence and actions. "*Honor*" is reverence for what we see in God. "*Power*" is God's ability to execute His plans. The elders are really saying, *God You created all things; by His will they exist; and it is for His good pleasure!* (NKJV).

### SUMMARY:

John on the isle of Patmos is given these visions or revelations into a glimpse of glory in heaven, where future things to come unfolds before His very eyes. The most spectacular vision is seeing the throne of God and seeing the One who sits on the throne. <sup>8</sup>Upon seeing a door standing open in heaven and hearing a trumpet-like voice promising to show him of things which must take place, John is immediately in the Spirit looking into the throne room of God. A sea of glass like crystal is also before the throne, perhaps symbolizing the transcendence (to exist above and apart from the material world) of God that presently separates God and His people. Then there are four living creatures, similar in some respects and yet different in others, united in their constant praise of God for His eternal holiness. Though not exactly like the cherubim seen by Ezekiel (Ezek.1, 10), they appear to serve similar functions. As the four living creatures praise Him who sits on the throne, the twenty-four elders join in by falling down, casting their crowns before the throne, and praising God as the Eternal Creator. Their blend truly shows that God is certainly worthy to subjugate (subdue) all things since He is the one who created all things.

Truly God can reveal what He needs to say with or without symbols, as while He walked on earth, He spoke in parables. The object of the lesson He chooses to reveal is a representation, one thing standing for another. This passage of communicating through symbolism reveals that God has a meaning for all things, whether we know or understand them or not. We can't assume to know something; we can't add nor take away from His Word. So why symbols? Symbols paint pictures that man will remember from the Word. It's the visual affect as well as what it represents. Sometimes we don't always get it, but there is a meaning. These symbols we have talked about are to help communicate the brilliance and the spectacular array in heaven; they show His worthiness by all that come before His throne; it conveys His eternal glory shared by all. It's just like a sign that displays what it represents. All these symbols represented a picture of praise, all distinctly different but all conveying unto the One that's sitting on the throne. God revealed to His vessel to convey to others of what will be happening in the heavenly worship. Get ready for an awesome sight; get ready for your value at God's throne. You will not be the only one there.

### APPLICATION:

God wants us to be passionate about the praise you give to Him just as those in heaven. Start on earth to be ready for heaven. "*Your Will be done on earth as it is in heaven*" teaches that it will come to pass, so get ready.

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<sup>8</sup> [http://executableoutlines.com/rev/rev\\_04.htm](http://executableoutlines.com/rev/rev_04.htm)