

Study #1 in preparation for:
March 7

Revelation 4:1-5:14

The Throne of the Lamb

“Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.” Revelation 5:6

Perspective: If we invite Christ into our lives, Christ invites us into His presence (3:20; 4:1). The voice of invitation, "Here I am...", is followed by the voice of revelation, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." Open up the door of your life to Christ and Christ will open up the door of heaven. We live by faith, not by sight, but faith is the earnest expectation of sight. St. John does not offer the church an escape from reality, but a great and awesome expectation of the most real world. We move from table fellowship to throne worship. St. John's vision of the churches is followed by the dramatic scene of worship in heaven. These realities do not exist sequentially but concurrently. They are inseparable. They are meant to be together to provide the believer with 20/20 vision: the suffering church and the reigning Christ.

"After this" (4:1; see 7:1,9; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1) does not presuppose a dramatic rescue of the church from the struggle against evil. The transition is dimensional not chronological. The "after" is a visionary sequence not an historical change. "Now this--behold the open door in heaven." As the churches struggle to overcome, heaven is rocking and reeling with praise. Worship on earth has its counterpart in heaven. First earth, then heaven. First the struggling churches striving to be faithful, then the blazing glory of God's throne, full of light and sound, color and cantata. Christ's invitation and promise to the church at Laodicea introduces John's second Lord's Day vision. The curtain is parted, the shade is raised, the door is open to the universe next door--the most real world. What transpires in heaven was meant to inspire and reassure the church.

Outline: The open door in heaven leads to an awesome vision of the throne of God, the unrivaled Creator of the Universe (4:1-11). After John is caught up in overpowering worship, he sees a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" The vision narrows and centers on the one who is seated on the throne (5:1-14). He holds an unopened scroll. The scroll symbolizes the entire course of Salvation History. Everything depends upon the revelation from this scroll, but no one is there to open it. John weeps and weeps, because "no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or look inside." Then one of the elders announces the Lion of the tribe of Judah, but when John looks he doesn't see a Lion, he sees a Lamb standing in the center of the throne. It is the Lamb that takes the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne and when the Lamb does this the elders pour out their praise and prayer to God. They sing a new song in anticipation of the opening the scroll.

Questions:

1. The first word of creation, and God said, "Let there be light" is John's first impression of heaven. The supernatural splendor of God is conveyed through the enameled images of jasper, carnelian and emerald and the image of the rainbow (see Ezekiel 1:27-28; Genesis 9:16-17). How does light make us think of creation and redemption?
2. Who does this light describe? Precious stones in the ancient world were valued not for the material worth, but for their capacity to intensify the light. If these stones recall the High Priest's breastplate what significance do they have (Exodus 28:17-21)?
3. What is the significance of everything in the vision (twenty-four thrones, twenty-four elders, a sea of glass, and four living creatures) being oriented around the throne? How do we go about centering our lives in Christ?
4. The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures form a heavenly worship team. The number 24 is a derivative of twelve, with 12 being the symbol of divine government (12 months in a lunar year, 12 tribes of Israel, 12 apostles, 12 gates in the new Jerusalem, 12 angels at each gate, 12,000 sealed from each tribe and 12 x 12, multiplied by a 1,000 equals 144,000 to represent the last generation of believers). The number four is symbolic of the created order (the four points of the compass). The 24 elders represent the entire believing community and the 4 living creatures represent the created order. With the heavenly hosts praising God why does God expect your praise? Does this widening circle of praise include you?
5. How do the living creatures and elders demonstrate their humility before the one who sits on the throne? How do you humble yourself before the Lord?
6. Why does it make sense to interpret the scroll as the history of redemption? And why does John weep?
7. Why is the Lamb described as having seven horns and seven eyes and why are these interpreted as "the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth" (5:6)?
8. Why does the heavenly host fall down before the Lamb? What has the Lamb done to deserve this devotion?
9. How does this vision of the centering throne of God and of the Lamb impact our worship?