

INTRODUCTION

Beginning here in Revelation 4:1, we come to this third and final section of the book of Revelation. The things which he saw were past tense the things which are is where we are right now in time and we begin in chapter 4, verse 1 looking into the future to what is going to happen when Jesus comes to rapture his church.

I read a funny story about a man who was walking by his neighbor's house and saw his neighbor trying to get a large, wooden packing crate through his door. The big wooden case was stuck. He walked up and from the sidewalk he said to his neighbor, "Here, let me try to help you." So they tried to maneuver that wooden crate through the door and they pushed and they pulled and they pushed and they pulled. Finally, after about 15 minutes the man on the inside said, "I guess it's no use. It just won't go out." The man on the outside said, "Out! I thought you were trying to get it in!" Now that may be one door that it's hard to go through, but the door of heaven is not hard to get into. Jesus said, "I am the door." Not only is he the door but he is who you find when you walk through it. Tonight we are going to see a door in heaven is opened up. Let's begin reading in Revelation 4:1:

"After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard [Jesus] 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, [KJV "beasts" but it doesn't mean a vicious animal it is the word *zōya*, which just means "a living creature" but it's the only description John could give to it he couldn't really describe it in terms of words] 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.'"

Now seldom has the veil of heaven been drawn back enabling us to see what is in heaven. Daniel

caught a glimpse of God; Moses got a glimpse of the afterglow of God on Mt. Sinai; as Stephen was being stoned looked up and said, "I see heaven open and I see the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God the Father." But here in the words of John and in his vision we see the clearest picture of what heaven is going to be like when we get there.

Do you picture heaven as some beautiful golf course where you never slice the ball and all your putts roll in? Some think of heaven as fluffy clouds where you float around like an angel playing a harp and eating a Milky Way candy bar for all eternity. Others think heaven is going to be a beautiful, serene, place with trees and flowing rivers. That is a description of the new Jerusalem in the new heaven we are going to be reading about later in Revelation, but when you first get to heaven what's it going to be like? Are you going to notice the streets of gold? As a child that's what first impressed me about heaven. "Wow! Streets of gold!" I told my mother, "I want you to bury me with a pickaxe so when I get to heaven I can dig up some of those streets of gold." Is that what's going to catch your attention? Is this crystal sea going to catch your attention? Gates of pearl? No I tell you it's not going to be something that catches your attention there's going to be someone who catches your attention! If you learn anything from the study of the book of Revelation, it is this: It is not necessarily a book of prophecy it is a book that reveals Jesus Christ to you. If you study this book the way God wants you to study, you'll come away from it with a greater love and a deeper appreciation for Jesus rather than with more information about the future and prophecy. I tell you the thing that's going to make heaven, because Jesus is going to be there. Even if there weren't streets of gold, even if there weren't gates of pearl and a crystal sea, heaven would be heaven enough for me if Jesus were there. I would not mind heaven being in hell if Jesus was there, because where Jesus is, everything is okay.

Now I believe 4:1, depicts the rapture of the church. Let me give you a time line and share with you what I believe the Bible says is going to happen in the future. We are we are living in the church age, but the very next thing on God's prophetic calendar is Jesus is coming in the clouds and there's going to be a shout—the sound of a trumpet—and the church all believers are going to be caught up to be with Jesus. Now the dead in Christ are going to rise first. Then, the Bible says in I Thessalonians, we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them. Now that word "caught up" is the Greek word *harpadzo*. The Latin word, *rapere* that's where we get our word *rapture*. Now our English word, *rapture*, has come to mean "to be carried away" almost like mentally when you hear beautiful music you say you were enraptured by the music and were carried away. That's a pretty good description of it because that's what the word *rapture* means, literally "to be carried away to be caught up." That's the very next thing that's going to happen and I believe chapter 4:1, depicts that happening to the church.

Then for the next seven years (according to Daniel 9), Christians are going to be with Jesus in heaven—all the redeemed of all the ages. But here on planet earth there is going to be a terrible time of Tribulation. Chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation describe what's going to be going on in heaven. Then, in chapter 6-19, it describes the Tribulation on the earth. That's when you get into the seven seals the seven trumpets the seven vials the four horsemen all of these things. Those are just descriptions to describe the terrible Tribulation that is going to be happening on planet earth. Nothing the world has ever experienced before is going to be as bad as that will be! Then, in chapter 19, at the end of the seven years, Jesus Christ will come back at what the Bible calls the Battle of Armageddon. Now some people wonder *when* Jesus is coming back, because the

Bible says in one sense when he comes back it will be "like a thief in the night," quickly, silently, suddenly, then, other passages talk about when Jesus comes back he's going to be "coming with great glory and every eye will see him" which one is it? When he comes to rapture the church, he's not coming to put his foot on earth, he's coming in the clouds and that will be sudden and secretive like a thief in the night. But when he comes back at the Battle of Armageddon with an army of heaven, which we will be a part of, "every eye will see him and he will put his foot down on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem." (Zechariah 14) It also says the Mount of Olives is going to split open. I've been there. Holiday Inn was going to build there years ago, but the geologists who surveyed it said, "Don't do it. There is a fault that runs down the middle of the Mount of Olives and that thing could crack apart." Believe me it will! Jesus is going to come back for the Battle of Armageddon the Antichrist is going to be defeated.

This may be strange to some of you, but then the Bible says in Revelation 20, there will be a thousand years when Christ will reign on the earth. That's called the Millennium and we will reign with him here on the earth in our eternal bodies a thousand years. Then, after this thousand-year period is the Great White Throne Judgment, a new heaven and a new earth, and then the rest of eternity, which is not described in detail, will begin to take place.

1. At the Rapture, there will be the sound of a trumpet

There are five reasons I believe this is going to happen. First, Revelation 4:1 says, "there's the sound like a trumpet." 1 Corinthians 15:51 says, "Behold, I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet, the dead in Christ shall be raised."

2. At the Rapture, there will be a shout from heaven

Second, there's a shout from heaven. John says, "I heard a voice that was like a shout from heaven that said, 'Come up here.'" 1 Thessalonians 4 says "At the shout at the last trumpet of God the dead in Christ shall rise first." That's not coincidental. I think it is intentional.

3. At the Rapture, we will be caught up into heaven

Three, just as John was caught up immediately into heaven, that's what happens here. The Bible says in 1 Thessalonians, 4:17, "Then we which are alive are going to be caught up into heaven immediately." Revelation 4:2 says immediately, suddenly. 1 Corinthians 15 describes it like the twinkling of an eye. That's how fast it's going to happen. Blinking and twinkling are not the same. See how fast you can blink your eye. It's not that. That's about one four hundredth of a second. The twinkling of an eye is the time it takes your eye to see someone you are looking for and recognize them—that's the twinkling of an eye. Some people think when Jesus comes to rapture the church, they are going to have time to get on their knees and repent. They think he's going to come floating down on a parachute. "Hello, Lord. I want to get saved!" No it'll be suddenly and so the Bible says John was suddenly caught up into heaven.

4. Same phrase as Revelation 1:19

Number four it is the same phrase as Revelation 1:19, “I will show you the things which shall be hereafter. *Meta tauta*, that’s what Jesus says in Revelation, 4:1. Let me show you the things that are going to happen in the future hereafter.

5. Conspicuous absence of “church”

Number five—and this is probably the greatest reason—there is a conspicuous absence of the word “church.” For the past few months since we have begun this study in the book of Revelation we have studied about “the church, the church, the church, the church...” But here in chapter 4, verse 1—whoosh!—the church is gone. There is nothing more about the church after 4:1, until chapter 19 when Jesus comes back with his bride his church.

Now there are all kinds of beliefs. Post-millennialists think Jesus is going to come back after the millennial time on earth. Pan-millennialists say, “I think it’s just all going to pan out!” Pro-millennialists say, “I’m just for it. However it wants to be.” A-millennialists think there will be no millennium. They just think it’s symbolic and not really going to happen. I am pre-millennial. I think it’s going to happen before the thousand-year reign. Jesus is going to come back. There are some Christians who believe Christians are going to live through the Tribulation. Some Christians believe Christians will live three and a half years during the Tribulation and then will be caught up. Some believe we are going to have to live all the way through it. I don’t! I believe Christians are going to be taken up before the Tribulation comes. Why? Because after Revelation 4:1, you don’t hear about the church anymore. The church has been transported into heaven. I’ll show you who we are in just a moment, as I believe pictured in Revelation, 4. That’s the rapture of the church.

I. THE PICTURE OF THE THRONE

Let’s see what we are going to experience when we are caught up to be with Jesus in heaven. Notice the picture of the throne. This summer when we were on our way back from our mission trip in Russia, we stopped at the Kremlin in Moscow and took a tour of the armory of the riches of Catherine the Great and the Russian czars. We saw five or six of the Fabergé eggs. I think the last one that sold on the open market went for about seven million dollars. A Fabergé egg is very ornate and intricate in its design with gold and diamonds. There were seven of them in this one case. Then we entered one room and there were thrones from the former czars. I have never seen anything like that. One throne was made of pure gold, was twice as wide and twice as high as this pulpit, with beautiful ornate carvings. There were thrones with every square inch embedded with precious stones. They are priceless. They are so expensive and so valuable but the world has yet to see what is going to be the greatest throne since the beginning of creation and it is the throne we are going to see in heaven.

1. Rainbow around the throne

What is the picture we will see of it? First, there is “a rainbow around the throne.” John says, “There was jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald encircled the throne.” Here on the ground, when we see a rainbow, we only see half of it. Every rainbow is really a complete circle. It’s just that we are not in the perspective where we can see the whole thing. Air Force

pilots and others who fly high enough sometimes can see a whole rainbow and it's a complete circle, but from where we are we only see half of it. This is the picture in heaven a beautiful rainbow encircling the throne.

One of the greatest things I look forward to when I get to heaven is I'm not going to be colorblind. I'm colorblind, but not totally color blind. When I was in college, I went to a church to preach and I had on one green sock and one brown sock. I was sitting on the platform and a lady came up to me after the service and said, “Did you know that you have on a green sock and a brown sock? I couldn't tell the difference I knew exactly what I had done though and I said, “Yes, ma'am. I have another pair just like them back at the dorm.” When I see a rainbow, I can only see maybe two colors in that rainbow maybe a little yellow and a little blue but that's all. My wife will say, “Look at all those colors,” and she can see five, or six, or seven colors. I can't, but when I get to this throne and I get to see this rainbow, I'll see it all and you will too. This is the picture the beauty of it.

2. Thunder and lightning out of the throne

The Bible says there was thunder and lightning out of the throne. This is a picture just of the awesome power and majesty of God. When Moses was on the mountain and God came to give him the Ten Commandments, the Bible says there was thunder and lightning emanating from it.

3. Seven lamps before the throne

There are seven lamps before the throne. The Bible says in verses 5 and 6 that these represent the seven spirits of God. There are not seven Holy Spirits but as we saw in Revelation 1, seven is the number of perfection, and this depicts the perfection of the Holy Spirit as he moves in our world.

4. Someone on the throne

There is someone on the throne and that's where the focus of attention is. At this point John doesn't know who he is. He just says, “There is one on the throne.” He describes this one by how he is addressed by these people there. “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.” The Bible says, “God puts on light like a garment.” (Psalms 101:2) In James God is “the Father of lights.” So when you see Jesus on the throne, the thing you are going to be most impressed with is the radiance the Holy light that shines out from this one on the throne—pure holy light.

II. THE PERSONS BEFORE THE THRONE

1. Four “living creatures”—unique heavenly attendants

Notice the persons before the throne. There are two groups. The first is the four living creatures. These are the ones the King James Version calls “beasts” but it's the word *zoya* as I have said that pictures them like cherubim. The Bible says they are constantly around the throne praising God and it says, “each one has a different face.” These are the same cherubim described by Ezekiel in Ezekiel 10. One of them has the face of a lion, one of them has the face of an ox, one of them has the face of a man, and one of them has the face of an eagle. What's that talking

about? I believe these four creatures (we are going to see them elsewhere in Revelation) have constantly been around the throne of God, praising him from the foundation of creation and they reflect whom they see—Jesus. Have you ever wondered why we have four different gospel accounts? Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Why don't we just have one? Wouldn't you think *one* story of Jesus would be enough? Why are there four? Some gospels say one thing that another one doesn't say. It's like this: If you were drawing a picture of me from the front, back, left side and right side and then you brought all the pictures together, it would be four different pictures, but it would be the same person. That's why God gave us Matthew, Mark, Luke and John: To give us different perspectives on the character of Jesus. If you start thinking about it, the four gospel accounts parallel the faces on these four creatures—a lion represents a king, the king of the jungle. Matthew describes Jesus as the king. Mark represents Jesus as a servant, symbolized by an ox, a beast of burden. Without a doubt, Luke describes Jesus in his humanity, the man Jesus. The third creature has the face of a man. John concentrates on the deity of Jesus like a soaring eagle. So I believe these four creatures merely reflect what they see on the throne.

2. Twenty-four “elders”

Let's move on to the second group around the throne. They are the twenty-four elders seated around the throne on twenty-four thrones. Some interpretations say they are the twelve patriarchs from the Old Testament and the twelve Apostles from the New Testament, twenty-four individuals. Some say these are angels. I don't believe they are angels. Number one, angels are never numbered. The Bible always says there is an innumerable number. Secondly, this group has been redeemed, and angels have never been lost so they never got redeemed, so it's not angels. This group is very, very important. They are mentioned twelve times in the book of Revelation. Who are they? Let me tell you who I believe they are and a lot of other people believe they are too, including Billy Graham and others who have studied this. I believe these twenty-four elders represent all the redeemed of all the ages—every redeemed person who is caught up and either resurrected as the dead in Christ at the rapture or alive. We're caught up and we are represented by these twelve elders just as the elders in a church in the New Testament represented the whole body, these twelve represent Old Testament saints, one group of twelve represents all the Old Testament saints one group of twelve represents all the New Testament saints those who were redeemed under the Old Covenant and some were and those of us who have been redeemed under the New Covenant.

In the study of Jewish numbers called Gematria, twelve is the number of administrative completion. That's why Jesus had twelve disciples. Remember when Judas went out and hanged himself? One of the first things the disciples felt compelled to do was get another one to make the number twelve. They couldn't just keep eleven. They had to have one more for that administrative completion. I believe twelve represent Old Testament saints. You may be saying, “How were Old Testament saints saved? By keeping the law?” No because nobody kept it. The Old Testament people were saved the same way you are saved—by faith! Old Testament saints like Isaiah and Elijah had faith in God's plan and God's plan was Jesus. They didn't know what his name was. New Testament saints (that's us) are saved by faith in God's plan. We just happen to know his name is Jesus. Faith is how you are saved! So, I believe twelve of these represent Old Testament saints and twelve of them represent New Testament saints. So anytime in the book of Revelation from now on out when we read about the twenty-four elders, it's me and it's

you. We are the ones pictured as the twenty-four elders. If you don't get that point of interpretation, a lot of this is going to unravel for you and it won't make sense but if you believe these represent us then it begins to make a lot of sense.

What are two things about these twenty-four elders we learn? First of all we are told they are crowned. Look at what the Bible has to say about them in Revelation 4:4, "Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and they had crowns of gold on their heads." There are two kinds of crowns in the Bible. There is the word, *diadem*, which means "a royal crown." We don't have those. Another word, *stephanos*, means "a crown of victory." It was like a garland given to an athlete when he successfully completed, not as a king, but as a victor. They are golden crowns for victors, for those who have finished the race. You may be saying, "When I get to heaven, I don't really want to wear a crown. I just want to slip into heaven and have my little cabin over there on the hilltop." If you really are faithful to God, he will give you a crown. Have you ever heard about "stars in your crown?" We don't know if there are any stars in them, but we do know they are the golden crowns of a victor. The New Testament speaks of five different crowns. This is another study, but I'll mention them. There is the "crown of life," there is the "crown of glory," there is the "crown of righteousness," there is the "soul winners crown," and there's the "martyr's crown." They are different crowns but you will be wearing one of them.

The second thing about these twenty-four elders is that they are clothed. We are crowned with gold and we are clothed with white. We are going to learn later that these white robes represent righteousness, but it is not our self-righteousness. Our self-righteousness is as filthy rags but this is the righteousness we put on, the righteousness of Jesus. So there is no way you can brag about it. You can't say, "Look at my robe! Look how righteous I am!" because you didn't earn it. It was something given to you by Jesus. It's His righteousness, not your righteousness. These are the persons before the throne—we're going to be there before the throne! So when you get into heaven, don't start looking for streets of gold, start looking for the throne and you will be wearing a crown seated around it.

Number three, notice the praise directed toward the throne. Verse 8 says these four living creatures constantly praise God. "Day and night they never stop saying, 'Holy, holy, holy.'" Doesn't that sound like Isaiah, 6, where Isaiah saw those seraphim with the four wings? "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Omnipotent." Why don't they say, "Great, great, great" or "Wise, wise, wise" or "Love, love, love?" Because according to the Bible the word, "Holy" is the best word to describe God's character. "Holy, holy, holy! Holy Father! Holy Son! Holy Spirit!" The word, "Holy" means he is *different*. He is so different from us, we can't even come up with another word to describe him. God says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts. My words are not your words for as high as the heavens are above the earth so far am I above you." God is just different and that's what the word, "Holy" means. So these four creatures are constantly saying, "Holy, holy, holy."

Then the Bible says we (the twenty-four elders) are going to do four things. First, the full reaction of the elders: we're going to fall down. "The twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne." (verse 10) Up until this point, John has not identified who he is, but he's beginning to understand who he is because he is described as the one who "lives forever" the

Lord Jesus Christ himself.

I have been at meetings in Alabama where I was on the program and the governor was on the program and everybody would stand or sit around waiting for the governor to come, because we wouldn't start he got there. You could hear “He's here! He's in the parking lot.” and a hush would go over the crowd. Then he would walk in and everybody would come to his feet. I suppose if our governor walked in here tonight, we would do that. If the President walked in here tonight—even if you don't like him—out of respect for his office I would say, “Let's all stand” and we would stand. But ladies and gentlemen if Jesus walked in here tonight, we would not stand we would fall to our faces. That's what John did when he saw him in chapter 1. Probably the best human friend Jesus had in his ministry was John, but when John saw him, he fell down as a dead man. If you think when you get to heaven, you're going to buddy up to Jesus and put your arm around him and say, “Hey, Jesus. How are you doing?” you're totally wrong. He is so awesome and mighty in his majesty and his power that the first thing you are going to do is fall down before him. Do you do that now in your prayer time? There are times I get down on my face to pray and it's like I just can't even get my face deep enough in the carpet or when I'm outside, I can't even dig a hole deep enough to put my face in because it just seems like I can't humble myself enough before God. That's the attitude of those who have been redeemed.

When you see the holiness of God, the second thing that's going to happen is we're going to worship him. The Bible says there in verse 10, “They worship him who lives for ever and ever and ever.” If you think when you get to heaven, you're going to undergo some radical transformation and then you are going to start worshipping God, you're wrong. I want to tell you as you worship him now it is preparing you to worship him then. The love and adoration you have in your heart now is going to be multiplied when you get there! On Sunday, some of you who say, “I'm not going to sing. I'm not going to enter into worship.” What's going to be different about you when you get to heaven? You say, “I'll be like Jesus.” We'll be like Jesus right now and begin to worship him right now, because you'll be doing it then for a good, long while. Sometimes we get a little self-conscious and we get a little embarrassed and we think, “What's somebody going to think if I sing and I don't sing on key?” True worship is God-directed not people-conscious. When you are truly worshipping God, you won't be concerned about what that person beside you thinks, because you are focused on the presence of a holy God. I guarantee you, when you get to this place and you fall down and you begin to worship God, you're not going to be thinking about, “What is that person beside me going to think about the way I'm talking and singing?” You'll be thinking about Jesus.

Number three we're going to cast down our crowns. If you get the idea you are going to be wearing a crown for all eternity, just put that on the back burner, because you are only going to be wearing your crown for a while. Then, you're going to take that crown and when you fall down and begin to worship Jesus, you're going to cast that crown at his feet.

And four, you're going to express praise. Praise is not praise unless it's expressed. You can't just think in your heart, “Oh how I love Jesus.” You can't just think in your mind, “Jesus is good. He's wonderful!” Praise the Bible says must be *expressed* to be praise. That's why the Bible says in Hebrews, “Offer the sacrifice of your lips the sacrifice of praise.” We're going to fall down and say, “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and power for you created all

things, and by your will they were created and have their being.” You’d better be practicing, because you are going to be saying these exact words up there. Only Jesus is worthy to receive glory and honor and power.

CONCLUSION

Notice something about the book of Revelation. There are doxologies that build upon themselves. For instance in Revelation 1:6 there are only two descriptions given for Jesus, “glory and honor.” Chapter 4:11 says, “glory and honor and power.” We’re going to see in 5:13, “glory and honor and power and majesty.” Later in 7:12, “glory and honor and majesty and power and praise.” These doxologies get bigger and bigger and greater and greater as we go along. Notice what this one says. It says, “for you created all things and by your will” literally “for your pleasure they were created.”

Do any of you guys have a hobby where you create things? Maybe you do a little woodworking in your shop. And when somebody asks why, you say, “I just enjoy doing it. I get pleasure out of it.” It’s an awesome thought, but do you know why God created this planet? It just gave him pleasure. An angel said, “God, why did you create earth? Why did you create the heavens? Why did you create all of those people in Tyler, Texas?” God said, “It just gives me pleasure to do it. I enjoy the fellowship and the praise these, my creatures, give to me.” I’ll tell you what. When we get to heaven, we are going to know who is boss and who is worthy of praise!

OUTLINE

This begins the third section of Revelation that describes the future

How does Revelation 4:1 describe the Rapture?

1. Sound of trumpet (1 Corinthians 15:51)
2. Shout from heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:16)
3. Caught up into heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:17)
4. Same phrase as Revelation 1:19
5. Conspicuous absence of “church”

I. The picture of the Throne

1. Rainbow around the throne (v. 3)
2. Thunder and lightning out of the throne (v. 5)
3. Seven lamps before the throne (v. 5-6)
4. Someone on the throne (v. 3)

II. The persons before the Throne

1. Four “living creatures”—unique heavenly attendants (v. 6-9)
2. Twenty-four “elders” (mentioned 12 times). These represent all the redeemed of the ages. Every time we read about the 24 elders in Revelation it is describing our future position (v. 4)



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes