

# Revelation 4-5

## 7<sup>th</sup> March 2010, ACC

### Introduction

As we start take a closer look at 5:12 because that's where we're heading this morning.

You see the passage ends with more angels than you can count singing - or possibly saying - about Jesus. And really the point of the passage this morning is to prove to you that that's true about Jesus. To show you that the angels song is right. That they've understood reality properly and their song is entirely correct about Jesus.

But that's quite a big ask isn't it really?

To say those things about a man who lived 2000 years ago is a big ask. Because the song is really about Jesus' divinity - that's basically what they're saying.

And to see that about Jesus, well that's pretty difficult. And it's difficult for a number of reasons but not least because the people who say they go by his name are more often than not weak and just a little bit pathetic. He said - including himself.

You see if power, wealth, wisdom, might, honour, glory and blessing belong to Jesus you have to ask yourself why he doesn't share some of it with the church.

I was chatting to a friend last week about his church. It's quite a big church but it's not a very happy place. One of the pastors wants to leave.

The leaders don't really agree on core things - and can't agree on a way forward. And the church is in a mess.

Most churches - and we're not immune to this either - the reality is that more often than now we can't even run ourselves - and the angels sing their song because they see the church reigning on earth in 5:10.

Now if you think I'm being over negative then come with me to Revelation 3 - to the bit just before the passage we read.

This is what Jesus says to John to say to one of the 7 churches to whom he's writing this letter. 3:15-20

Jesus talks to a church that goes by his name and in his vision he pictures himself OUTSIDE the church asking to come in!!

You see when you see the two ends of our passage this morning.

A passage which starts in the shadow of a damning verdict on the church and ends with countless angels proclaiming Jesus' greatness.

Well then you've got to say that whatever's in the middle of that is probably quite dramatic.

And guess what - it is.

In fact I want to hazard a guess that if we understand Revelation 4-5 properly we will never look at Jesus or our world or our place in the world in quite the same way again.

Don't be put off by the imagery of these chapters.

They might at first appear mysterious but really John is using OT images to paint a NT picture - a picture of Jesus and his work.

And the meaning is not obscure - even if you've only got a very basic grasp of the OT story.

And what we need to keep in mind as we look through these verses is what John's trying to do.

You see his picture language is not there to show you how to make a stain glass window of the vision but rather to teach you truth. He's appealing to your mind not your artistic flair

And we get those clues right from the start in 4:1 because John's vision is a vision of the unseen realities in heaven. The door standing open in heaven so that John is able to go and see what cannot ordinarily be seen.

You see the Bible is consistent that God is invisible, that God is without a body, he can't be seen. You can't travel into space and see him.

To believe John's vision I have to believe that what we touch, feel and see now is not all that there is.

More than that the Bible is consistent that it's the invisible reality of God and his throne - the unseen - is what lasts forever and governs our world.

So if you've ever read 2 Corinthians you'll remember that Paul summarises Christian living as looking not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen.

Or in 1 Timothy how he describes God as the one who dwells in unapproachable light whom no-one has ever seen or can see.

So here in 4:1 when John gets a glimpse of the invisible - he gets a glimpse into the control room of the universe.

Did you notice that in 4:1?

Because as he looks into heaven he sees what MUST take place. Not what might take place. Not have a look and see what God hopes to happen.

But if you want to know what MUST happen then you need to look here. Because the visible world is ruled from the invisible throne room of the invisible God. And so if we're ever going to understand what's happening in our world we have to listen to John's vision.

Now I'm guessing that for some of us that might all seem a bit too Star Trek.

But for others it makes us wonder whether any of this is real. An invisible throne room where an invisible God rules the world and governs what must happen - Just seems a bit far fetched.

But pause for a minute to think because - it's not as out there as it might first appear. I mean we're used to being affected by things that we can't see.

Gravity - we can't see gravity but we know it's real. And not just because our physics teachers taught us about it - but because we depend on it.

Atoms, DNA, UV Light, Love

Just because something can't be put in a test tube and studied in that way doesn't mean it's not real.

Things that don't fit in test tubes affect us all the time.

You see we can't discount God because we can't see him - anymore than we can discount gravity because we can't see that - **what we need to know is what God is like and what he does - we need him to show us what he's like in ways we can understand - in ways which explains what we do see - so that we can know with certainty that the God who we can't see is there.**

And that's what John's vision of Rev 4-5 is supposed to do for us.

It's a window into the invisible reality - which explains what we DO see. Because in the kindness of God John has been allowed to go right to the top - he's seen the control room where what MUST happen is dictated.

So what does John see as he sees what cannot be seen?

Well let's work through it...

v2 - a throne - and one seated on the throne who he describes as having an appearance of jasper and carnelian. He looks like the most precious things that John can think of.

And round the throne is a rainbow. And here's our first OT image - and it's not an obscure one. On the throne is the God of Noah's day. The one who promised to keep the world turning, to not devastate the world with water again.

Around this throne are 24 other thrones in v4. And seated on these thrones are the 24 elders. The representatives of the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles - God's complete people.

And they're wearing white because they're covered in Jesus' righteousness like Jesus told the church in Laodicea to do in 3:18. They have crowns on their heads because they're victorious and they're seated on thrones to rule under God.

As John looks at the throne he sees thunder and lightening coming from the throne. Which is exactly what happened on Sinai - in Moses' day - as God spoke to the people who'd come out of Egypt. As is the sea of glass before the throne - which is mentioned in Exodus 24. On the throne is the thunderous and unapproachable God of the OT.

And before the throne are 7 torches of fire - 7 being one of John's favourite numbers - here representing the Holy Spirit - the perfect and complete Spirit of God.

Thing in the Oval office...

As John sees into the throne room of God he sees around him things which teach us about how God works.

That God of heaven is the God of Noah's day who sent the flood and remembers his promise not to do that again. That God of his vision is the God of Moses' day and God's promises to Moses still stand.

The vision carries on and in v6-8 you get the picture of the 4 living creatures. 4 is the number for the world - just like we say the 4 corners of the world. So John has the 4 beasts of the earth.

They represent creation and they have 6 wings and are covered in eyes. They are everywhere and they see everything - this is all of the world.

And John's vision is of everything in all creation - represented by these 4 beasts - singing of God's holiness in the song of the second half of v8.

And as they sing the 24 elders cast their crowns and fall at the throne of him who lives forever.

You see John might look around him stuck out on the island of Patmos listening to Jesus' verdict on the 7 churches and think everything's spiraling out of control. But a glimpse into the invisible shows John the world as it really is. God is on the throne and all of the world is subject to him.

And they together are declaring that God is good. Holy, pure without any fault.

Let me ask you a question about that passage? How does it make you feel?

That the world is subject to the invisible God who sits on the throne of heaven. Well I guess in one sense it's really reassuring. It's great to know that God's in charge. It's great to be able to look round our chaotic world and our chaotic lives and know that someone's sorting all this out.

It's like Fabio Cappello walking into Wembley to sort out the John Terry mess - it's good to have someone in charge.

But really I don't think we've really understood chapter 4 until we're a little bit afraid. Even upset.

Because there is nothing in chapter 4 to give you hope.

I mean imagine for a moment going to that church in Laodicea that we talked about a moment ago and saying to them...

Hey don't worry guys. I know you're making a real hash of your lives. I realise that you've lost the plot with God, that your church is a mess and that you're not really living for him but don't worry - I've seen into heaven.

Oh great they say - tell us what did you see?

I saw a great throne. More beautiful than you could imagine. And I saw that the one on the throne was the one who flooded the earth. The one who speaks in thunder and lightning - the thunder that meant that in the OT if the people even touched the mountain - they died.

In front of his throne is a great sea of glass so you can't get near. And when his name is Perfect Perfect Perfect - and when his name is sounded everything in heaven falls at his feet and worships him. Because this Perfect Perfect Perfect God made us all and we're under his rule.

Well imagine the faces. Mouths dropping open.

- This would be like talking to an offender just about to go before the judge for sentencing and telling him that the judge is ruthlessly perfect.

It's not exactly comforting. And so here - if we understand chapter 4 properly we'll recognise just how lost we are.

Because if this is God then he isn't the kind of God who turns a blind eye to our failure. He's not the kind of God who is detached from our world so that we can escape. He sees everything. The bowing beasts are covered in wings and eyes.

There is a throne room. And we're not on the throne. But the world is governed by a perfect God who sees everything. A God who knows where you've been this week. He knows what you've done. He knows your deepest thoughts that you don't even share with your closest friend.

He knows where you're lukewarm where you should be hot. He knows where you're running away from him and building a life as if he wasn't there.

And he's unapproachable. Speaks in thunder. And when his name is so much as mentioned even the perfect creatures of heaven throw themselves at his feet. All those glib remarks we make about God just don't seem to fit any more do they.

It's God's job to forgive so I'll be fine or it doesn't really matter too much if I don't take any of this very seriously.

I mean imagine saying to Fabio Cappello that you're not that bothered about playing your best for England - he'd probably kill you and eat you!

But most of us identify with this lukewarm Christianity of chapter 3 don't we? We're not really straining every muscle, we're not going to take it too seriously. Yet the invisible reality - the place where what MUST happen is decided - is governed by a God who is very serious and very knowledgeable.

And there's nothing in chapter 4 to make any of us feel anything more than just a bit uncomfortable.

And that's how John felt when he saw it. Look with me at the beginning of chapter 5...

Here we zoom in to the right hand of the one seated on the throne. And in his hand is a scroll. A scroll that is full - it's written on front and back.

But it's sealed - sealed perfectly - completely locked up with 7 seals. And the scroll is there to represent the will of God. It's the plan of God to bring judgement and to save. But it can't be opened.

And so John weeps 5:4. Weeps because he's seen what we've seen. That if the scroll can't be opened - if all there is is a throne room of a perfect God and no plan - or better a plan that can't be carried out - for judging sin and saving people - then he's stuffed. So he weeps.

One of the elders seated on the 24 thrones - then tells John not to weep because there is one who can open the scroll.

And here we're introduced to the final character in the throne room. And in v5 it's the lion. But when John takes a closer look in v6 he describes him quite differently. This powerful lion is really a slain lamb.

And John is clear about the identity of the lamb. Because he has the seven spirits of God and the 24 elders and the 4 living creatures worship him as they have done the one on the throne in v8.

This lion-lamb is God himself - the divine Son of God. And the 24 elders and 4 living creatures sing a new song. Because this lion-lamb can open the scroll - he can implement God's plan. But why can he open it? Why couldn't God on the throne who's holding it in his right hand open it? Well look at v9.

The reason he can implement the will of God written on the scroll is because he was slain and his blood has rescued people for God. People from every tribe, language, people and nation. People who are bought by his blood to reign with him in perfection on the earth for all eternity. He can open the scroll because he has achieved the purpose of the scroll by dying.

So that John sees again that Jesus on the Roman cross just a few years previously was the divine son of God dying to save people. So God's judgement can come. And people will be safe. Not everyone. But people **from** every tribe, language, people and nation. People who have been ransomed.

People who in the words of chapter 3 have turned to the lamb and asked for white robes. Robes to cover over their own filth.

You see here's the wonderful hope. That in the heart of the throne room is costly grace. Grace to forgive and rescue. Grace that gives us a place in God's throne room and that cost him his life.

I don't know whether you read the interview with Euan Murray in the Guardian this week.

Euan Murray is Scotland's Prop forward who because a Christian after a freak rugby accident made him realise how empty his life was. And listen to how he explained to the interviewer what that meant...

*In finding God, he says, Murray was able to change his path. He picks up a mug of tea and a glass of water and holds them out in front of him. "This is the tea, all dirty and horrible, this is me, yeah? That's Jesus," he says, motioning to the water. "Pure. He's taken that filth upon himself and before God he says, 'Punish me for it'. He's been punished and look what he's given me. That perfect goodness in the eyes of God. He's declared me innocent." He swills the dregs of the tea and smiles. Can it be that simple? "I'm ashamed of the things I've done. Of course I am. But I'm thankful I have a saviour. He's saved me from that lifestyle. He's given me a new life."*

That's it here isn't it? Well when the throne room sees this - it can't contain itself. The angels come out in force. Thousands of thousands burst in to shout for this Lamb v12

Because the defeated church of chapter 3 has become the people of God who will live in his remade world in perfect satisfaction - even reigning with the unapproachable God seated on the throne. Because the lamb died.

This is really important this isn't and I must get this because this is the key to Christian faith isn't it.

And if this is all still a bit mysterious and the whole unseen thing is causing you angst then we must see this...

That as John sees what can't normally be seen he sees that the key to it all is something that we can all see. A real man who lived a real life that you can really read about. A man who died on a cross and bodily rose from the dead leaving many convincing proofs. And that man is really God in a body. The invisible clothed in visibility. The Lion and the Lamb.

And Jesus' work is finished, he's worthy to open the scroll. He's not still on the cross nor does he need to return to earth to finish any unfinished business.

**Only in Jesus do our lives have any future so we must worship him now.**

You see look again at the things given to Jesus in v12. Power, wealth, wisdom, might, honour, glory and blessing. They're great things aren't they.

And we build our lives around wanting those don't we? But John sees that those things belong ultimately to Jesus. That his work on the cross secures those things for himself.

Because this is his world and its destiny is in his hands. He is in the throne room and the scroll has been opened.

So to assume that we can live life without reference to Jesus. To presume that power, wealth, wisdom, might, honour, glory and blessing can be ours outside of his plan. Well that's the height of arrogance. Because the unseen throne room has been revealed and we know what MUST happen.

So rebellion is a complete dead end. So the most powerful person we know loses it all when they die. The rich among us leave it all behind.

So the point of life now is not to amass those things but to worship now the one to whom those things ultimately belong. Because it's only then that we become part of this people who he's bought.

A ransomed people with whom he will share his power, wealth and wisdom for all eternity.

There's no future in anything else.