**Revelation Bible Study**

**Week 6**

**John’s Vision of Heaven**

“John’s description of heaven begins in Revelation 4:1–5:14 (Read from the Bible)

Many years ago, in the home of a humble family on the verge of bankruptcy, a man walked through, trying to give an estimate of the value of the home. As he was leaving, the man noticed a red stone holding the door open. It was a doorstop. The man turned and asked the owner of the home, a man whose name was Gustav Gillman, “Where did you get this red stone?”

The owner of the home replied, “Oh, it’s just an old rock. It’s been handed down generation after generation in our family. My folks had it. Their folks had it. It’s really nothing of value. It’s just more of a keepsake than anything else. We use it for a paperweight. As you can see, we also use it for a doorstop. Sometimes,” he said, “the kids even use it in the yard for a ball.”

The man, whose hobby was jewelry, picked up the stone and said, “Would you mind if I studied this stone?”

“No, I wouldn’t mind at all, as long as you bring it back. It’s really nothing of worth.”

The man took the stone and studied it, and he found it to be “the largest ruby in the world—23 and one-half karats. It was known as the Pigeon’s Blood Red Ruby, worth an inestimable amount of money. It was being used as a doorstop among common, ordinary, mundane things, while its owner was on the verge of bankruptcy, ignorant of its value.

**Worship**

Perhaps the story of the ruby is not the exact picture of worship today, but for many people, it is a portrayal of how they “view this great ruby of worship that God has given to the church. Sometimes, believers can demean worship or make it mundane; in fact, they fail to understand the splendor and majesty of the highest act of all creation. Often believers think of worship as just a time when people stand and sing and get tired, or just a time when people read the Bible or preach. Other people think that worship is the preliminary in a service; it is what people do to get ready for the “performance” of the preacher. Some Christians view worship as a means by which they can feel good. Consequently, they use and even abuse this incredible ruby called worship which God has given to the church.

The voyage into the Tribulation period begins at the throne of God, and it centers on worship. God does not want believers to know about warfare and woes that come upon the earth until they first get a glimpse of the worship that takes place in heaven. The Book of Revelation is not just about “all hell” breaking loose on earth, or about a beast or a false prophet or the number 666. It is not just about dragons, hailstones, trumpets, vials, and bowls. It is about the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the unveiling of Christ, and it is Christ unveiling His will and His Word before His people. So, it is interesting that God wants His people to first come and pause at the throne of God and give full honor, homage, worship, and glory to Almighty God.

**Heaven’s Perspective**

One cannot know God’s plan for man from earth’s perspective. When people look at life through heaven’s perspective, they see things in a different light. God does not want believers to see Revelation from earth’s perspective; He wants them to see it from the throne’s perspective. For example, from heaven’s perspective, one sees the light of sovereignty differently. One television evangelist defined sovereignty this way (God speaking): “I am God. You are not.”

That is sovereignty. Some people think history is cyclical, that it is only a series of emanations going in circles yet going nowhere. That is not biblical history. History is not cyclical; it is providential. History is a straight line. History is God starting in the beginning and building to a crescendo, with His people ruling and reigning with Him forever.

Someone defined prophecy as history written in advance. That is sovereignty. A sovereign, omniscient God sits down and describes history before it happens and calls it prophecy. So when people get to heaven, they can say, “What a wonderful and omniscient God we serve!” When believers look at life from heaven’s perspective, they not only get a sense of sovereignty, they also get a sense of God’s authority. Paul wrote in Romans 13:1: “There is no authority except from God.” Thus, the “powers that be” have received the delegation of their authority from God Almighty. When believers look at earth from heaven’s perspective, they do not see a weak, anemic God. They do not see a world that is out of control; they see a God who holds all authority in His hand. Acts 17:26 reveals that God “has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings.” The reader will also learn that God gives breath and life to everything that is, and that “In Him we live and move and have our being” (v. 28).

Heaven’s perspective not only reveals sovereignty and authority, but also a sense of security. On earth, there is little security. National security can be threatened by terrorism. Financial security can be threatened by thieves. Home security can be threatened by burglars. Personal security can be threatened by assault. The security of one’s life can be threatened by violence.

When one studies heaven’s perspective, he learns that doors are never locked in heaven. There are two reasons. First, Revelation 21:25 says they do not lock the doors at night because there is no night there. Second, they do not lock the doors at night in heaven because in that city, there is no threat on life, abomination, evil, or desecration, because in that city, the Lamb reigns. Only those people who are washed in the blood of the Lamb will have entrance into that city. And the Bible said the nations will come there from the far corners of the earth, and they will bring glory to God. People might lock and dead bolt their doors from earth’s perspective, but from heaven’s perspective, Jesus guarantees heavenly “eternal security.” Believers are in Him, in His heaven, in His glory, in His power, and by His grace.

Finally, when one looks at life from heaven’s perspective, there is a note of finality. In other words, all the things God’s people endure on this earth will end. Sin has enslaved; Satan has lied and rebelled; death has severed; and suffering has brought enormous pain on this earth. Sometimes people look around and say, “Why doesn’t God do something?” God’s people should remember this: Judgment delayed is never judgment denied. Payday is coming. The books will be balanced to the very penny, and the God of glory already knows the finality. One might wonder why God is waiting. He is waiting because He is gracious, merciful, and longsuffering. However, the devil has a date with Almighty God. All rebellion has a rendezvous with righteousness. The devil who has deceived humanity will be judged by God. At that final meeting, righteousness will prevail.

**The Throne**

Revelation 4:2 says, “A throne [is] set in heaven.” The Revelation could be called “a throne book.” The words, “throne” and “thrones,” are mentioned 45 times in the book, as compared to only 15 times in the rest of the New Testament.

Some interesting characteristics about the throne are revealed as one looks at the scriptures in Revelation. It is interesting, however, to observe what is not mentioned about the throne. Neither the color nor the composition of the throne is described. What makes the throne the center of the cosmos is not what it is made of or what it looks like, but it is the Holy Inhabitant who sits on it! God makes the throne the center of everything. So, when believers look at the throne of God, they are looking at a glorious picture. One should keep in mind that God does not have a body. So, in this context, John said, “[I saw] One [sitting] on the throne . . . who . . . was like a jasper and a sardius stone.” And in the view of these two stones, one begins to understand that John is talking about colors. Jasper is a clear, white stone similar to a diamond. Sardius is a fiery red brilliant stone, somewhat like a ruby. From these iridescent and resplendent stones of color—gloriously white, yet fiery red—come a picture of God’s glory.

To understand this picture a little better, one needs to go back to the Old Testament. The priests wore a breastplate into the Holy of Holies when they represented the children of Israel. This breastplate contained twelve stones, each stone representing a tribe of Israel. Two of those stones are mentioned in Revelation 4:3—the jasper and the sardius stones. The sardius stone was the first stone worn by the priest into the Holy of Holies. The sardius stone represented the tribe of Reuben. The name Reuben means “Behold, a son.” God’s glory is saying, “Look at the incarnation of My Son. Look at Jesus Christ, My only begotten Son who lived on earth in humanity.” That is the sardius stone.

The other stone, the jasper stone, was the last stone in the breastplate. The jasper stone represented the tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin means “Son of My right hand.” God is talking of the humanity of His Son— “Behold My Son”—and of the deity of His Son— “Son of My right hand.” Jesus is at the right hand of the Father. He has ascended; His work is complete. From humanity to deity, God says, “I reveal My Son on My throne!

Next, John saw “a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.” An emerald stone is a resplendent green, a color associated with grace and mercy. The rainbow goes back to Noah (see Genesis 9:11-17) and God’s covenant of grace and mercy. Even though the judgment of God is about to be poured out on the earth, the rainbow reminds people that God will remember mercy (see Habakkuk 3:2). The rainbow is “around” the throne—a full circle— symbolizing the completeness of God’s mercy. “His mercy is everlasting” (Psalm 100:5).

Then he says, “Around the throne were 24 thrones.” On those 24 thrones were 24 elders. The elders had “crowns of gold on their heads.” These 24 elders represent all the people who have ever been redeemed. Scholars believe that 12 of the elders represent the tribal patriarchs and the other 12 represent the 12 apostles.

The next scene John records is, “From the throne proceeded lightnings, thundering’s, and voices” (4:5). This is not an ordinary throne. When one reads about thunder and lightning in the Bible, one knows that storms and tempestuous times are coming. This is a different kind of throne from what has been before. There are all kinds of thrones and multiple purposes for those thrones—all of them represented by this one throne. For example, the throne of God is seen as a throne of grace: “Come boldly to the throne of grace” (Hebrews 4:16). Sometimes, the throne of God is listed in other places in the Bible as a throne of sovereignty or a throne of authority. Sometimes, the throne of God is a portable symbol of His presence. The word infinite simply means “God’s center.” In other words, God’s center is every place, and His circumference is no place. That simply means that every place that is a place is God’s place. There are no extremities; there are no perimeters; every place is His place. His throne, however, is portable.

Psalm 22:3 says, “[He] inhabits (enthrones) the praises of [His people].” When people sing praises to the Lord in church, they are not just getting ready for the sermon. It is not just religious exercise. When people worship God, they are rehearsing for heaven. When they are worshiping God, He says, “Where worship is, I will come down and make a throne out of it, and I will inhabit it.”

In heaven, there are five different expressions of worship. John saw four living creatures (beings or beasts). Four is the number of earth and it represents creation. It is God’s number for the earth. These four living beings were four specially created beings who represented the sum-total of creation. Hovering above the throne of God, these representatives of redeemed creation were “worshiping Almighty God and saying, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” (4:8).

The second expression of worship begins when the 24 elders, who represent all redeemed humanity, join in worship. They took their crowns and cast them at the feet of Almighty God, saying: “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created” (4:11).

At this point, John says, “I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, with seven seals. Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?’” (5:1-2). From the context of this verse, the reader knows that this scroll represents the title deed to earth. It represents dominion over the earth. When Adam and Eve were created and placed in the Garden of Eden, God gave them dominion over everything. When they sinned and fell, they lost that dominion (see Genesis 1, 3); earth’s title deed was forfeited. Someone calls and asks, “Who is worthy to come and take the title deed of the earth, hold it, and break the seals?

John said, “I wept much, because no one was found worthy.” John cried. In fact, this is the last time in the Book of Revelation anyone is seen crying in heaven. Suddenly, one of the elders said, “Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals” (5:5).

Who is the Lion of the tribe of Judah? In Genesis 49:10, God said, “Out of Judah will come Messiah.” Thousands of years ago, God wrote history in advance. Who is the Root of David (meaning David’s kingdom)? God said, “I will establish Your “kingdom forever, and Messiah will rule and reign over this earth, and He will be the Son of David” (see 2 Samuel 7:12- 13).

The name Judah means “praise.” The word lion means “king.” Who is Jesus? He is the King of praise. He is the rightful owner to the title deed of this earth. The elders said, “Behold the Lion! Behold the King!”

John turned to see a Lion, but instead he saw a Lamb. John saw the Lamb as though it had been slain (v. 6). It had seven eyes and seven horns. The horns represent dominance and authority. Seven is the number of perfection. His eyes represent those eyes which see all, know all, and understand all. The awesome Lamb stepped forward and took the scroll.

To this point, there has been no singing. The Bible does not say they sang. The Bible said, “They said” or “They praised God, saying.” Redeemed people sing; angels speak. Angels proclaim; angels declare; angels exclaim. But for some reason, God has reserved music for the redeemed to praise and magnify the Redeemer. Thus, the third expression of worship was this song:

Revelation 5:9-10, “You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals, for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.”

Fourth, John said: “Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands” (v. 11).

I know angels do not sing, but the closest sound to a million angels speaking was the time I heard a million men sing at the “Promise Keepers rally on the mall in Washington, D.C. I’ve never heard anything like it in my whole life. I felt what I had never felt in my life. I was awed by a million men singing: “A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing.”

In verse 12, John describes all the redeemed of God plus a hundred million angels praising God with loud voices, saying, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing.”

Then, in chapter 5, verse 13, John describes a fifth expression of worship when all beings in heaven and earth give praise saying, “Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!”

Five levels of worship are expressed in chapters 4 and 5. Believers need to understand that only He is worthy. The highest, noblest call of all is the call to worship the Creator of heaven and earth and to praise the Redeemer. Worthy is the Lamb!