

Will and Orv were two brothers who always got into trouble. Their father was a bishop, which caused them to move all the time. Orv caused so much trouble he was even expelled from school before he turned 10. But one day they saw something that changed them forever. Their father brought them home a toy helicopter. It was a simple piece of paper with bamboo, a cork, and a rubber band. But you could twist it around and make it fly. They were totally obsessed. They played with it until it broke. They eventually built their own. And dedicated the rest of their lives to building things that could fly. Their friends called them Will and Orv, or the Bishop's boys, but history knows them as the Wright brothers, the men who built the first airplane. And they always maintained the first time they saw the toy fly it changed them.

Have you ever had an experience like that? When you saw something that just changed the trajectory of your whole life? This morning we will read about another life changing experience. The one the apostle John will have in the heavenly throne room. And it is my belief that this life changing vision, this is available to us. And we can and should have our lives changed forever like John.

Turn with me to Revelation 4

I. We should (behold) God (v. 1-7).

The experience that John has is a vision of God.

He gets to see God in the throne room.

He beholds Him in glory.

What I want us to do as we read this is to imagine ourselves in John's place.

This chapter is one of the high points in the books of the Bible.

It's one of the best chapters in all of the book of Revelation.

And what I want us to do as we read it is to behold God with John.

Behold is a very kind of old testament word.

It's just one that we don't use very often in our day-to-day language.

But I like it and I think it's useful for us.

Because it's much better than just saying, "Look! Look!"

Cause when I tell you, you need to look at God.
It doesn't have the same kind of weight that saying behold God
And what we need to do is we need to pause, to behold God.
To spend this time, fixing or attention or affection on God.
And we need to try to see him.

Verse 1, **"after this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven!"**

Several different times the letters to the churches have mentioned that Jesus is the one who opens and shuts doors.
And here, John finds himself before an open door.
A door in heaven.
And he is invited to come in!
He is invited to not just see the door opening but to step through it into another world.

"And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."

The voice that calls John to come is the voice of Christ.
The same voice that called for him to leave his nets and follow Jesus.
Now calls him to leave the earth and enter heaven.
There is a trumpet here because there's almost always a trumpet that goes alongside the voice of God.
Or God's voice sounds like a trumpet because it is so loud and piercing overpowering.

There's also this phrase that John is now going to be shown what's going to take place in the future.
But before John sees any of those things.
Before he will behold the trumpets and the seals and the bowls.
Before John will see the antichrist and the beast, the 144,000, the city descending from the sky and the horsemen of the apocalypse.
Before he gets a vision of any of those things first, he will see God.

Verse 2, **"At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne."**

It appears that John is not physically taken up into heaven that he is there in spirit somehow.

Maybe it is a vision maybe he is spiritually taken up and caught up into the heavens to get to see it as it is.

When he is there again, we get that word behold he sees the throne.

We don't really get any description of what this throne looks like.

I've always loved thrones.

Probably because it appeals to my boyhood fantasies of living in a world with kings and Knights and dragons.

When I worked at an antique shop, I loved throne chairs.

The old chairs that have very high backs and usually have red or even purple upholstery so that this is the seat that goes with the head of the table and it's a throne.

I love fantasy books, a different kind of thrones that there are.

Some thrones made completely out of thousands of swords of defeated enemies.

Some thrones the tower are high up above. We can barely see the person on it.

Some thrones are simple so to make an opposite statement.

We'll get a lot of descriptions in this vision, but we don't get anything about the throne.

We don't know what color it is. We don't know how big it is or what's going on or what it really looks like at all.

Because John is not interested by what with the throne looks like he is interested on who is sitting on the throne.

And is this figure that is on the throne that gets all of the attention so much so that he doesn't even take a minute to describe it.

It's a throne, but that's all you need to know.

Don't worry about it. Look at the one who sits on the throne.

When we get the small description of the one who sits on the throne.
The one who is on the throne is God the Father.
And he is incomprehensible and indescribable.
God, the father is not bound by a body where a place and yet somehow
His presence is uniquely here on the throne.
He is sitting there in the same way the cloud of glory sat on the temple.
Because He rules and reigns over all of creation.

Verse 3, **"and He who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald."**

The most of a description that we get is some colors and jewels.
And we need to be careful not way too much into what these colors are or
what the stones are.
These are stones that are mentioned in the high priests investments.
They are also mentioned as the foundations of new Jerusalem.
But we need to be careful, even as we were trying to behold God.
Because if we are not careful, we take our eyes off of God.

And around the throne, there's a rainbow.
It's like God is shining all the colors as brilliance come off of him.
And this part of this I think is reference to the rainbow in the sky that got
placed after the days of Noah.
A reminder of the mercy of God that no more will you destroy the world
with water.
And so the rainbow emanates from the throne and from God, not just
because of his brilliant splendor in every color, but because of his mercy.
Joseph was known because his coat had many colors.
God has many colors that just emanate from his presence.

One of the problems with trying to behold, God is that you will never see
all of Him
You will never be able to completely see Him in the fullness of His glory.

If you sat down with all the artistic talent in the world, you would not be able to draw this or created in a computer accurately.

It would be impossible.

We cannot truly see Him as He is.

The most you would rightly get is a bright light.

And yet it is worth it to behold.

In fact that it's more worth it to try and behold God, and to gaze Him and to read the descriptions of God in His word.

To close our eyes as we worship God, the Father and lift our hearts to Him.

To meditate upon Him and contemplate His beauty and His glory and who He is

All of those things are ways that we can behold God and they are worth it to do precisely because it is impossible to be God.

Because we cannot see all of God it means that there's always more to see

If you started right now, and you spent the rest of your life, every single

waking moment, simply closing your eyes and worship, and trying to

behold God, and to look at him, you would not exhaust his beauty, and it

would not be time wasted.

Verse 4, **"Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the throned were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads."**

God is not the only one in the room.

Like many courts of kings, there are others present.

And some of the people present seem to be almost as amazing as God.

Or at least, they capture our imagination and wonder.

First, we see there are 24 beings who are only described as elders.

They have thrones as well, but theirs are minor thrones.

They are in subject to the heavenly Father.

They have white garments, which already throughout the book,

And throughout the Bible itself,

Is symbolic of righteousness and purity.

And surely they would be righteous and pure to be worshipping in God's presence.

Especially to be sitting on a throne in His sight.

And they have golden crowns on their heads.

Which we have seen in the letters is a reward to the righteous.

Our main question is probably who are these elders?

The short answer is no one knows,

We will find out when we get there.

They could be angelic beings.

Maybe they are the highest angels over all the others.

Elder is never usually used to describe angels.

And human beings are promised the garments, crowns, and throne.

So I think these are some kind of human beings.

Or the other guess is they relate to the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles.

It could be representatives of those tribes and the apostles.

Which makes the best sense of the number.

And who they would be if they were humans.

Some see these as being most of the prophets from the OT.

We really don't know.

I think it is probably some kind of representatives of the apostles and tribes.

If not the apostles themselves.

But these elders, whoever they are.

They are around the throne.

They are beholding God.

And they are not more significant than what is happening around the throne.

Verse 5, **"From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God,"**

This should sound familiar.

The rumblings, thunder, and lightning.

This is what happened on Mt. Sinai when God appeared.

This is often what happens when God appears in the OT.

In Oklahoma, we learn to have a healthy fear of storms.

We know the power of wind and the danger thunder can signal.

Just a few days ago outside looked apocalyptic.

Because it is all uncontrollable.

It is unpredictable.

And it surrounds God.

Partially because He controls it.

And also because it emanates from His throne.

His throne is not surrounded by nice purple cushions.

It is not surrounding or garnished with swords or antlers.

It is surrounded by thunder and lightning.

Which just seeing.

Just hearing.

All of that would be enough to make us stop and behold.

Verse 6, **"And before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind:"**

Around the throne is like a sea.

But it is covered with glass.

Why does it not just say a glass floor?

Why does it say it is a sea of glass?

Because the sea has always been a large Biblical symbol.

And it has been an important one in the ancient world.

The sea is a symbol of chaos.
It is what can never be tamed.
It is the home of every kind of monster.
In Revelation the sea is where the beast who wars against God's people
emerges from.
Because man cannot control the sea.
My sons and I like to play a game where we punch the waves.
Every wave that comes we kick and punch it to fight it.
But we can't win.
And no human can tame it.
But here.
When God is on the throne.
The sea is turned to glass.
It has been conquered.
It is controlled.
Because God rules.

And around the throne are these four creatures.
We will talk about them more in our next point.
But all around the throne of God, there is just wonder upon wonder.

What you need to remember is that whatever you picture, it is not
beautiful enough.
Whatever you could paint or create, it would be a pale shadow.
The temple of David and Solomon at the height of their glory, are just
shadows on the wall compared to this.

And what we need to do.
What we need to remember is we need to behold God.
Don't act like this is something to dissect in the lab.
Behold the God who is on the throne.
When we say, God is on the throne.
It should not be pithy.
Or a throw away statement.

We are stating one of the most true things in the universe.
And God on the throne is something we must acknowledge and behold.

Many of you probably have questions about what all these things mean.

What do the kinds of rocks symbolize?

Who are the creatures?

What are the elders?

Those are good questions worth asking.

And I will answer some of those.

I will spend more time doing that on Wednesday night.

We will compare this passage to the other visions of the throne of God in Daniel and Ezekiel.

But I don't want to spend a lot of our time there this morning.

Because that is not the attitude we should have.

It at least should not be our first response and our first question.

I want you to imagine a groom on his wedding day.

He has not seen the bride.

He has not seen the dress she picked out.

And the music swells.

The crowd stands up to look back and the doors open.

Here comes the bride down the aisle.

And the groom asks, oh what song is this?

Is this the piano guys version of that song?

What a great dress did you get a deal?

Where did you get it from?

Is that eggshell white or ivory?

Why did you pick that color?

I love that it is strapless, did you get it altered?

How did you decide which one to pick?

Those are fine questions.

But not right now!

The groom needs to just be quiet and behold.

This is the same thing with us.

You can ask those questions.

But don't ask that until you spend some time just being quiet and gazing at God.

Approach the throne of God like someone who wants to worship Him not like a scientist who wants to dissect Him.

This is a vision of God on the throne.

How could knowing the color of jasper possibly come close?

One of our foundational ideas of God.

One of His attributes, is that He is incomprehensible.

He is indescribable.

You cannot accurately talk about what God looks like.

Especially in the fullness of the glory on the throne.

You have as good of an idea what God looks like from this description as if I told you Brianna looked great in her white wedding dress.

II. Rightly (beholding) God leads to (worship) (v. 8-11)

Beholding God should lead to worship.

It should always lead to worship.

When you hear the words of Scripture, you should worship.

When we gather as a church, you should worship.

When the thought of God comes across your mind, you should worship.

Because this is exactly what is happening in this heavenly throne room.

This is not just how John responds.

This is how the elders and the creatures respond.

They see God, and the worship.

Verse 8, **"And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"**

There are four creatures.

They are like the Seraphim with six wings.

They have eyes all around them, which would be terrifying and horrifying.
And we want to know about the creatures.
If you want to, you will have to come on Wednesday.
That is when we will talk more about the symbols, elders, and creatures.
But for now, in the text, we don't get a lot.
There are four bizarre living creatures.
Some kind of symbol for all living things.

But what is important about them is not who they are.
It is not what kind of creatures they are.
It is not even what they represent.
What is important is what they do.
They are worshipping.

We don't need detailed descriptions of the creatures.

Verse 9, **"And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever,"**

They are glorious creatures.
They are worthy of honor and respect.
But they give it all to God.
Because they are not seated on the throne.
They are not in control.
God is.
And like John, they behold God and it leads them to worship.

Verse 10, **"and the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne saying,"**

The elders.
Whoever, they are.
Whoever we think they might be.
They behold God and it leads them them falling down in worship.

Falling down is actually a central image of worship in the ancient world.

It means prostrating yourself.

Falling down literally on the ground to worship.

I think it is worth considering physical postures of worship.

To not just worship with our lips but with our whole bodies.

Now I am not saying let us become Pentecostal and start running laps with tambourines and flags.

I am not saying you have to fall down on your face or dance in worship.

But I am saying it is worth considering whether we are worshipping.

Standing quietly with our hands in our pockets might not be worship.

It is worth thinking about.

That we need to worship God with our bodies.

Maybe we clap.

Maybe we raise our hands.

Or for some of you just standing is enough.

Or you may not even have the strength to stand anymore.

Or you may only be able to stand for a moment.

For others of us, it is worth asking.

Am I happy to clap, cheer, and raise my hands while doing other things,
but I refuse to during worship?

If I jump and dance during football, but not during worship of God?

Why not?

Again the important part is our hearts.

But on this time.

In this day.

Everyone will fall on our faces in worship.

And it would be inappropriate not to.

So it is worth asking, is our posture worship?

Is our attitude worship?

But it is not just their physical actions.

It is also what they do.

They cast their crowns down at the feet of God.

How can we cast our crowns at God?

Physically I think we will do this one day in the heavens.

But I think we can do this now.

We do it when we bring what has value in our lives to God in worship.

When we give to the kingdom of God, it is casting our crowns.

When we go to our work and do it with our strength and in a way that honors God it is casting our crowns.

When we take what is valuable to us.

And we give it or choose to worship in it, then we cast our crowns.

And we cast them because He is worthy.

Verse 11, **"Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."**

He deserves all of the glory, honor, power, and everything we have.

God is the one who created us.

He fashioned each of us in our mother's wombs.

We are held together now not by bone and skin but by the power of God.

And He is worthy of our worship.

A failure to worship is ultimately a failure to behold.

Because every time you rightly behold God, you will worship.

No one can enter into the presence of God and not worship.

This is why everyone who sees God falls to their knees.

It is why every creature is worshipping.

Because you must worship.

Can you imagine someone walking into this heavenly scene and not worshipping?

Or coming into the room and asking questions about the song choice.

Wondering why they repeat it so much.

Saying that, they just aren't feeling it today but maybe next time?

No! They must be blind to not see what is in front of them.
The same thing is true of us.
We need to behold God.
And when we do, it leads to worship.

And we always have the opportunity to behold God.
You do not need to be taken into heaven to do this.
We can behold Him when the Word is read.
This is why I am adamant we read Scripture.
It is why I preach the way I do.
I am not up here to try and teach you interesting Bible facts, Greek words,
or background information.
I don't want to tickle your ears.
Every Sunday, I am trying to get you to behold God.
Because if you behold Him, then you will worship and be changed.

You have the chance to behold God when the body of Christ gathers.
Every time we get together on Sunday to worship, Christ is here.
You can behold God when we sing in worship.
You can behold God when you step outside.
Look up at the heavens and the stars.
Behold the glory of the sun and moon.
Look at a flower or the creation of God.
The very stones cry out in worship and reveal our God.
It should lead to worship.

One small way to do this as well is through our prayers.
One shift I have made in my prayers, is I dedicate time to just look at God.
I don't come with a big list of my requests.
I try not to say much at all.
I just try to sit for a few minutes and behold God.
To just contemplate His beauty.
To meditate on His glory.
To fix my eyes on the God who is on the throne.

Sometimes I think about a simple word like "Holy"
Other times I might replay a phrase from Scripture over and over.
But I try to just quietly fix my eyes on God.
To behold Him.
Because every time I behold Him, it leads to worship.

You don't have to do that.
But you do need to behold God.
You need to look to Him.
And every single time that you do, it will lead to worship.
It will lead to prayers and praise.
It will lead to a changed life.
Because beholding God changes us.

Where have we been?
We should behold God. And rightly beholding God leads to worship.

Now, we have just been beholding and meditating on the glory and wonder of God.
We have seen that we need to respond to Him with endless worship.
And now we have a chance to worship through song.
We always have this chance after the sermon, which is good and right.
But it especially good to do so today.
We have the chance to sing, clap, and move our bodies and tongues in songs of praise.
Let us worship the God we have beheld.