

A Glimpse of God
Revelation 4:1-11
#9 in a Series on What Jesus Is Saying to the Church
Faith Community Church, September 30, 2007

Introduction

1. Please open your Bibles to Revelation 4.
2. What factors most shape the way you look at life? What is it that governs how you respond to people, events, circumstances?
3. We tend to interpret life through our experiences and through our senses. We learn, for example, that gravity prevents us from doing some things we think we'd like to do. We learn to respond to pain, to praise, to kindness. We learn that there are ways of negotiating life that generally result in good things happening, so if we're intelligent we make choices that will most often lead to good things.
4. We feel comfortable with this because it tends to work. But there are limits to the ability that our experiences and senses have to work through some of life's harder issues. How do understand why some things happen? How you do grasp life's meaning?
5. Here is where as Christians, our view of reality needs to be informed by revelation – what God has revealed. If we operate without revelation, we are not only going to be unable to rightly address some of life's bigger issues, we will also be shaped by a sense of reality that is distorted because it is ultimately limited by our own limitations.
6. This passage offers us the opportunity to be grounded in reality – a reality that is informed by revelation. How does who God is affect the way we look at life?

About John's Vision

Read Revelation 4:1-11.

1. Let me rephrase the question on your notesheet to read, "What is the vision?" John looks and sees a door into heaven, and is called to come through that door. This chapter is about what he sees. He uses normal language and symbolic language to describe a throne surrounded by two kinds of beings. One group – called 24 elders – occupy 24 thrones. They may be angelic beings or they may represent Israel and the church. In addition there are beings that John calls the four living creatures, each one having a different face. These are most likely angelic beings who live in the presence of God.
2. But as interesting as these details might be, they are not the point of the vision. The point of the vision is the one who sits on the throne, one who John is able to describe only by comparing him to what his readers already know. It is a scene similar to what we find in Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1, Daniel 7. The vision is a vision of God in his glory.
3. The place that this chapter occupies in the overall plot of Revelation is significant. Chapters 1-3 have given us a look at the struggles of the early church. It would be easy for them to be discouraged, to despair, to wonder if it was worthwhile to be

faithful to Jesus. Their own reality was that being a Christian was very hard. But this chapter gives them the opportunity to see life through the lens of a reality that is informed by revelation. It not only encourages faithfulness when they see the character of God, it allows them to see how this God will judge the world that has opposed them.

What This Passage Tells Us About God

Since the purpose of the vision is to communicate some truth about God, let's look at what it says about him:

1. The first thing we see is that God is sovereign (4:1-6).
 - a. That's the point communicated by the throne and by the way the beings around God act.
 - b. **Sovereignty** is the exclusive right to complete political authority over an area of governance, people, or oneself. A *sovereign* is the supreme lawmaking authority, subject to no other.¹
 - c. When we say that God is sovereign, we acknowledge God's right and function as supreme ruler of all. Scripture tells us that he is in absolute control of all things.
 - i. Isaiah 46:8-10
 - ii. Daniel 4:35
 - iii. Ephesians 1:11
 - d. The fact that God is in ultimate control of all – that his rule extends to all things – was a comfort to these suffering people, and is a comfort and encouragement to us.
 - e. John Piper expresses it this way: (read *Taste and See*, p. 266-267 as marked)
 - f. That is why Paul is able to write what he does in Romans 8:28.
2. A second aspect of God's character that we see is that God is holy (4:7-8).
 - a. Note the response of the living creatures and the 24 elders.
 - b. To be holy is to be set apart, and it is a term used to refer to God's moral perfection. The three-fold repetition of the word (Holy, holy, holy) is unique. No other attribute is given this exaltation. As such, God's holiness is a defining quality. Perhaps more than any other quality, it helps us understand who God is.
 - c. Why is this significant?
 - i. First, God's holiness provides the basis, or explains the reason, for judgment. In the chapters that follow (6-19), we are given a look at the judgment God pours out on a rebellious world.
 - ii. Second, God's holiness sets the standard for the way Christians behave. We read that in passages such as 1 Peter 1:14-16. God's holiness is a reminder – for these early Christians and for us – that living in the midst of a corrupt culture does not excuse moral conformity to it, but requires moral distance from it.

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sovereignty>

3. A third aspect of God's character that we see is that God is worthy (4:9-11).
 - a. In response to the declaration of God's holiness, the twenty four elders break forth in a chorus acknowledging God's worthiness. John tells us that they fall down before God and worship.
 - b. Worship at heart is acknowledging who God is. In heaven, where loyalties are undivided, worship we see worship expressed in posture, in word, and in song.
 - c. But here on earth, worship is expressed by means of our loyalty to him. It is a life direction.
 - d. Why is God worthy of our worship? Because he made us. Worship, as Paul says in Romans 12:1, is a life dedicated to live according to God's purposes, something that is a reasonable response to what God has done for us.
 - e. One of the great questions of life is "why am I here." A false reality says that I am here to find success, happiness, make money, get ahead. When those things are our goals, they rule us. Reality informed by revelation says I am here for God's glory. He is worthy of a life that acknowledges his supremacy, which governs not only how I pursue my goals, but what my goals are.

Connecting With This Passage

1. These early Christians in Asia minor were persecuted, marginalized, and tempted to turn away from Christ. It was hard to follow Jesus.
2. Today, we live in relative ease, but live in a culture that seduces us by calling us to get as much out of life as we can because this is all there is. It is hard to follow Jesus.
3. In heaven, on a throne, sits a sovereign, holy, worthy-of-our worship God. Our challenge is to allow the reality of who he is to shape your view of reality, so that – in light of who God is – we are continually hearing and answering the question, "How does God want me to live?"