

St. Matthew's Church
Thursday Night Bible Study
Revelation
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Session VI | 8 November 2018 | Chapter 4-5

I. “Come up here...”

- A. *Exodus 24* - The chapter deals with the formation of a covenant between the recently-liberated people of Israel and God. There is a pattern of sacrifice, of a proclamation of the terms of the covenant, and of a consecration of the people under its terms signified by a sprinkling of blood on the people. The people assent to the covenant under these terms. The elders of Israel then ascend to the mountain, they see God and eat in His presence. From there Moses is called up further to commune with God for six days, completed on the seventh day.
- B. *Revelation 4* - We hear again the voice calling the prophet to “come up.” The trumpet image invokes the language of official announcements (calls to arms, marking the new year, etc.). Being “in the Spirit” is a reference to Rev. 1:10, which puts chapter 4 in continuity with the visions of chapters 1-3. At the same time, it expresses the theological truth that it is only through the Spirit and *in* the Spirit that the people of God enter the privileged position to see God as He is. There is a parallelism between the precious stone imagery similar to Exodus 24.
- C. *Liturgical Reference*: “Lift up your hearts...” We can see this moment of the Liturgy, called the *sursum corda*, as an ascent into the throne room of God experienced in the collective worship of the whole church on earth and in glory. This ascent is the operation of the Spirit that binds us in unity with the victorious Church.

II. Cherubim...

- A. *Revelation 4* - there are four beasts full of eyes on all sides that surround the throne of God. There are similarities and differences between this image and parallels in both Ezekiel and Isaiah.
- B. *Ezekiel 1:55, 10:1* - the four creatures make an appearance in the first chapter of Ezekiel's prophecies. By chapter 10, there is an appearance of the cherubim. We know they are the cherubim because of the likeness given to them in the construction of the Temple on the Ark of the Covenant. Ezekiel and John are seeing what was being artistically represented by the statues of these creatures. Thus, in the biblical context, the fantastic images are readily identifiable (especially for someone in a Jewish audience).

- C. See also: Isaiah 37:16; II Kings 19:15
- D. What is surprisingly unique to John's vision is the position of the elders *on thrones* as priests and kings with the other occupants of the throne room around God's throne. This is a shift from Isaiah and Ezekiel.

III. **Lightning, Thunder, Voices**

- A. Revelation 4:5
- B. *Exodus 20:18* - the theophany to Moses was accompanied by thunderings and lightning. There is a fulfillment and continuation of the Old Covenant, a taking of it and making it new.

IV. **Twenty-four Elders**

- A. *Revelation 4:4* - collectively these vicariously represent the whole people of God. The use of "us" reflects this. That there are twenty-four of them is significant owing to the fact that there were twenty-four rotations of priests in the Temple, marking them with a priestly identity. Another possible significance is to indicate the fullness of God's people (12 tribes of Israel and 12 apostles of the Church). Yet they also wear crowns, signifying royalty. They are *both* priests and kings before their God.
- B. *Kings and Priests* - The whole people of God is a priestly people. Within that people there are priests who perform liturgical functions as we all pursue this vocation. But collectively we offer prayer to God. We are a people whose rule with Christ is inextricable from its prayer in Christ. The prayers are the saints' contribution to the rule that extends from heaven. The judgment that God levies against the earth is a fulfillment of the prayers of the saints.

V. **Other Textual Notes on Chapter 4**

- A. The worship of God focuses first on His identity as Creator. Redemption language is definitely coming, but at first the elders and the heavenly creatures extol God as Creator and Preserver of all that has been made.

VI. **Textual Notes on Chapter 5**

- A. *The Scroll* - it has writing on both sides (which harken back to the covenant document of the Old Covenant. This is a covenant document. It has seven seals -- again we see that number of completion -- but this presents a problem because only one who is worthy to open this covenant document is one who has attained the completion of the covenant. This is referring to Christ, but the liturgical drama here plays up the tension of not finding anyone in heaven, on the earth, or under the earth (collectively these three zones refer to the whole of Creation). So

someone outside of the realm of Creation must be the One to open it. This scroll remains sealed, which suggests that everyone has been waiting for the worthy one to open this document and John is there to watch it happen. This scroll also invokes images of a sealed book containing God's revelation and judgments (see Daniel 12 and Isaiah 29) over Israel that was to be concealed. This might also be the open books of judgment in Daniel 7.

- B. *The Lamb* - "in the midst of the throne and the cherubim." To put it bluntly, you have to be God to stand in that spot. The Lamb stands where only God can stand, indicating it as a divine being. The Lamb is alive even though it has all the marks of having been slain -- marking it as a Passover lamb. It is a living sacrifice --dead but alive. Its seven eyes and seven horns indicate a perfection of its omniscience but also of its omnipotence (horn refers to the power to govern). This is contextualized by the seven spirits language again, which as we discussed before is a reference to the Holy Spirit, in which the Lamb exercised dominion. The Lamb receives the scroll from the hand of the Father and begins to rule on the throne of His Father.
- C. The elders offer bowls of incense. This is a worship image that presents the elders in their priestly/kingly role offering the prayers of the saints before the throne of the Lamb and the Almighty.
- D. The hymn of the elders at offering the incense invokes the identity of God as Redeemer. The revelation here is that the true people of God, the true Israel is drawn out of every tribe, tongue, and nation. This is the mystery of salvation going out to the Gentiles, which was always a part of the divine mission of Israel to be the place through whom all nations of the earth would be drawn to God and through whom the world would be blessed.
- E. There is a progression here in the reign of God over the earth. It originates from the Almighty, is received by the Lamb in the Spirit and then through the Lamb's redemption of purchasing a people from all nations extends His rule through that people, here signified by the elders. Their rule is exercised through their priest-king vocation of offering the prayers of the earth to God and calling all of the earth to the worship of God. As the chapter unfolds there is a progressive expansion of the worship until all things in the Creation are made to offer praise to God at the center of all things.
- F. *Cosmic Dimension of Redemption* - Revelation 5 reminds us that the Creation/Redemption actions of God extend through the people of God to the whole Creation which was made and is being made new. The making new of all things is intrinsically tied to its being united to the worship of the elders and the multitudes they represent. This presents us with a vision of restored humanity as the steward priests and kings over Creation.