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Good morning I am Josh Burnham and I'm the lead pastor here at Bethel. We are excited to begin a brand-new series called "**Because you asked.**" Last year during Christmas we conducted a survey and asked, "I'd like to hear a message on what the Bible says about:" By far, the most requested spiritual topic was heaven and what it will be like."

**You are not alone.** A 2014 Gallup poll revealed that 72% of U.S. adults believe in heaven. 47% of non-Christian faiths believe in heaven including 14% of agnostic and 5% who identify as Atheist. What does this tell us? **That God has written eternity onto your heart (Ecc. 3:11).** "If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next." C.S. Lewis

**How do we proceed?** We are not poor on resources about the heavenly realms. We have **songs** like: **I can only imagine, when we all get to heaven, Eric Clapton singing about tears in heaven (Rock), Heaven (Country), and Robert Plant writing about a stairway to heaven. Bookstores** are filled with titles like heaven is for real and visiting heaven. With all of the cultural references to heaven we must recognize that often our **view of heaven is shaped** in some capacity by our context. The most important question we can ask is, "Father, what does your **Word** reveal to me about heaven?" Thankfully the Lord never leaves you empty handed. ***Yahweh wants you to think about heaven and eternity.***

In the Holy Scriptures, we have **several examples** of people going to heaven. **Enoch** walked with God then he was not there because God took him (Gen. 5:24). **Elijah** was taken up into heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kgs 2:11). **Paul** was called up into the third heaven (The dwelling place of God) and heard inexpressible words, which a human being is not allow to speak (2 Cor. 12:4). **John** the Elder on the island of Patmos was given a glimpse and told to write. Today we walk through this open door in Revelation.

### **What Will heaven be like? Revelation 4:1-11**

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**Sovereignty of God (Rev. 4:2)** The first object that caught John's gaze was a large piece of furniture. This object did not resemble the temple in Jerusalem or an altar of sacrifice. John laid eyes on a throne. Isaiah perceived the same, in the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne (6:1). **No vision of heaven is accurate or complete unless it first begins with a throne.** **Heaven is His throne and the earth is His footstool (Isa 66:1).**

“Thrones” occurs 40 times in the book of Revelation and emphasizes that although God’s throne is separate from the world He is still in **control**. If you only know one thing about heaven, if you only **have one picture: it is the throne**. God is perfectly in control. Isaiah sees the Lord—John sees “One who sat.” *When your world is out of control take refuge that Yahweh is in control and on His throne!*

No only **will** God be in control, He **is** in control. The One who sits, **sits today**. Kingship is not merely a future reality but something that began at the resurrection. Jesus sits on the throne. To **follow Jesus means to recognize his kingship**. A.W. Pink described it this way: Being infinitely elevated above the highest creature, He is the Most High, Lord of heaven and earth. Subject to none, influenced by none, independent; God does as He pleases, only as He pleases always as He pleases. None can thwart Him, none can hinder Him.

**Why does it matter?** It’s easy to feel that God is so holy, transcendent, and sovereign that we will *never have entrance*. Isaiah and John remind us that the atoning work of Jesus Christ grants you **access** to the throne in heaven. **Today** you have access at present and in the future to the throne in heaven if you abide in Messiah. **Never stop praying** to the One who sits on His Throne!

**Who not What (4:2)** In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord; Immediately I was in the spirit, and there was a throne in heaven and someone was seated (4:2)! Did you hear what was not said? No mention of Peter at the pearly gate or Mary the mother of Jesus who John was given charge at the cross. No mention of Matthew, Stephen, or his brother James. Does this mean that we will not recognize one another in heaven? By no means.

The disciples recognized Jesus countless times after the resurrection. At the transfiguration, Peter, James, and John, immediately identified Moses and Elijah, men they never met. The eternal comfort of **1 Thess 4:13 that we grieve as those who have hope and will be caught up together with them in the clouds** is a reminder that we will be **familiar** in eternity with those who God has knit our souls together here on earth. What a glorious thought: *your friendships and relationships today will matter in heaven*.

**Why does it matter?** Heaven is about **Who not what**. Your greatest relationship in heaven will be with the greatest treasure the world have ever known, King Jesus. **Heaven doesn’t make sense without Jesus**. Any “heaven” without Jesus is but a derivative of hell. **I will never treasure Christ for eternity if I don’t treasure Him today**.

**The Majesty of Yahweh is indescribable** Collectively the three stones represent the majesty and glory of Jesus Christ and anticipate the more full and new heaven and new earth in Rev. 21. We know that jasper is opaque, carnelian is a reddish stone, and emeralds are green but can give off rainbow prismatic colors. I believe that **John is seeing and relating the intense light** that is reflecting from the presence of the living God with unapproachable brightness. No matter how beautiful and majestic you think Jesus is, **he is more!** Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life.” I remember our guide in Israel saying, “you will go back home and describe your time in Israel, but they won’t understand.” This is exactly what happened to John. Heaven is a reminder that the glory of Yahweh is indescribable. **My life should be lived attempting to describe the indescribable to a world who needs hope**.

So you might be thinking, “so what is heaven really going to be like?”

**Heaven is an immediate home** Luke 23:43 And he said to him, “Truly I tell you, **today you will be with me in paradise.**” Often, I am asked what happens when we die. The powerful promise to the thief on the cross was **today!** You will not soul sleep, go into purgatory where you must wait, or cease to exist (annihilationism). From the words of Messiah, heaven is an immediate place for those who know Him and are called according to His purposes. **2 Cor. 8 In fact, we are confident, and we would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.** Heaven is an immediate home.

**Heaven is a physical home** Now you might be thinking, “what is paradise?” The word could refer to a park or forest for wild animals kept for hunting. The word also is used in the LXX for the Garden of Eden. Clearly the NT concept is a **physical place**. And not any physical place but a location under the dominion of God and man. It is the same promise when Jesus declares, “I am going to prepare a place.” I believe the master Carpenter knew how to build physical homes. *Heaven is a physical home.*

**Heaven is a purposeful home** About heaven, Jesus said **I have gone to prepare (John 14:2)**. Why does the Messiah remind that He is going to prepare? Because the Lord wants you and I to know that our eternal destination was **not left to chance**. God is not waiting for you to die and then He will find out if you were **naughty or nice**. **Heaven is prepared, created in advance and ready**. What a glorious thought to know that the place God has for me will be ready. **(Jesus will leave the light on)**. This is the power and purpose of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus: preparing the way of your salvation and eternal home.

**Heaven is a familiar home** **You know the way (John 14:4)**. If you know the way it is a familiar home. Throughout scripture the Lord uses clear metaphors to bridge our understanding of heaven. Some key pictures include a **garden, a city, and a Kingdom**. Why would Messiah give us familiar language and images? Because heaven will be a familiar home, you know the way. You will not arrive in heaven and say, “so that’s what a garden/city looks like.” **Rather, we will say, this is the most beautiful garden I have ever laid eyes on, and its familiar because Lord you let me enjoy gardens here on earth.** One day we will walk through the familiar heavenly home look back and think, **God you were there in the earthly garden, you were there in the city, in the road.** God you were building within me an eternal weight of glory!

**Heaven is a place where the curse will be lifted** **“When God walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden, Earth was Heaven’s backyard. The New Earth will be even more than that—it will be Heaven itself.” – Randy Alcorn.** When Adam fell because of sin, all creation fell with him. Everything you know has been tainted by sin’s devastating effects. However, we long for a day when the curse of sin will be removed once and for all. One day, because of Christ’s redemption, work will not be painful toil but satisfying caretaking, death will be no more, and the earth will no longer produce thorns, and one day everything in our lives, body-soul- and spirit will be made eternally whole. **Can you imagine what it will be like to worship and serve King Jesus with perfect reverence and without any hint of distraction? Wow, heaven is a place where the curse will be lifted!**

### **Head-Heart-Hands (Conclusion)**

We can spend many days of our life discussing heaven. But a crucial question is this, if you died today would you spend eternity in heaven?

The reality is that only those who treasure Christ now will be in heaven with Christ for eternity. Jesus must be on the throne of your life today!

I John 5: 13 I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

**Thinking about heaven should change your life.** One of the purposes of the church meeting weekly is to remind themselves of their heavenly existence

“It becomes us to spend this life only as a *journey toward heaven*...to which we should subordinate all other concerns of life. Why should we labor for or set our hearts on anything else, but that which is our proper end and true happiness?” Jonathan Edwards

# Notes

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## REVELATION 4

ï The main point of chps 4-5 is to show God's redemptive purpose for the world is beginning to be accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ

o The great throne-room vision of chps 4 and 5 serves to remind believers living in the shadow of impending persecution that an omnipotent and omniscient God is still in control (NICNT).

o The vision must be understood in close relationship to the 7 churches ï The picture of Christ in 3:21 leads into the vision of 4-5

o This shows Christ's exaltation over the world and Church is a result of his death and resurrection

§ = Lots of same imagery in chp 3 and 4-5

- "receive" 2:28//5:7-9
- "overcome" 3:21//5:5
- "seven spirits of God" 3:1//4:5//5:6
- saints white clothing 3:5, 18//4:4
- seated on thrones 3:21//4:1
- crowns 2:10//3:11//4:4
- open door 3:8//3:20//4:1

o it is most natural that chps 4-5 picture the same one enthronement and not two separate

- Kingship is not merely a future reality but something that began at the resurrection!!! o See Rev. 5:9-10 and Ex. 19:6
- Essential to understanding Rev 4—5 is the use of the OT and OT allusions
- Rev. 4—5 and Daniel 7:9—are closely related o Rev repeats 14 elements with small variation o See also Ezekiel 1—2
- In fact, nothing having anything to do with the Roman empire is part of this divine audience (Stevens)
- In total (Elders + Cherub) represent the combined worship of all creation in praise to God (Stevens)  
**Rev. 4:1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing open in heaven*. And the first voice which I heard *was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this."* Rev. 4:2 ¶ Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold**

ï Introductory vision Phrase

o **Dan. 7:1** In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head *while* on his bed. Then he wrote down the dream, telling the main facts.

o **Ezek. 1:4 ¶** Then I looked, and behold, a whirlwind was coming out of the north, a great cloud with raging fire engulfing itself; and brightness *was* all around it and radiating out of its midst like the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire.

- “after these things” does not place the events chronologically after chps 1—3 but simply indicates a new vision.
    - These are Further visions not Future visions
    - “after these things” also could designate future events”
  - Being called upon to the heavenly realm shows he is called as a prophet (like Ezekiel and Daniel) and has a role to go tell!
  - Keeping with Jewish tradition the heavenly realm is detailed along with the splendor around it (NICNT).
  - Door standing open== “access to God”
    - Whether John goes through the door into heaven or only to the door to look within its not certain (NICNT)
  - Voiceà € that Christ would invite John to a scene in which he, as the Lamb is an integral part of Revelation.
  - True understanding of History is only gained with a perspective from Heaven
  - In the Spirit== that John does not record a physical relocation from heaven to earth shows that we are to understand this in a spiritual sense (ie vision)
    - There is no basis for discovering a rapture of the church at this point (NICNT)
  - **Rev. 4:2 ¶ Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. Rev. 4:3 And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.**
  - Thrones occurs 17 times in 4—5 and 40 times in the whole book
    - This emphasizes that although God’s throne is separate from the world He is still in control
  - The Throne is in the center of John’s vision, the heavenly realm which shows the centrality of the Gospel and Jesus
  - “One who sat”== John was careful not to try to depict God in a human form
  - 4:3 is a combination of Ezekiel 1:26, 28
    - **Ezek. 1:26 ¶** And above the firmament over their heads *was* the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne *was* a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it.
    - **Ezek. 1:28** Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so *was* the appearance of the brightness all around it. This *was* the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. ¶ So when I saw *it*, I fell on my face, and I heard a voice of One speaking.
  - Individual meanings are not assigned to the stones
    - Collectively they represent God’s majesty and glory
- The three stones here anticipate the more full story in Rev. 21 where God’s glory is revealed in heaven and on earth
- Identification of the individual stone is somewhat uncertain §= Modern jasper is opaque
- §= Carnelian is a blood red stone §= Emerald is normally green but can also become a colorless crystal and give off rainbow prismatic colors.
- The stones intensify the light around the throne reflecting God’s glory with unapproachable brightness
  - Rainbow—in light of the Noah covenant represents God’s mercy in light of his judgment.
    - Despite his judgment from the beginning God has been merciful
  - Stones + Rainbow gives a hint that the new creation has already begun in heaven **Rev. 4:4 Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting,**

**clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads. Rev. 4:5 And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.**

• 24 thrones certainly could represent both the OT and NT saints o could also be actual 12 tribes + 12 apostles o See Rev. 21:12-14 when the 12 gates are tribes of Israel and 12 foundations NT apostles o Some suggest traditions of Eastern polytheism being the counterpart of the 24 star gods of by Babylon Pantheon o Symbolic of the 24 courses of Aaronic priests (1 Chr. 24:5) o Attireà the meaning of the attire, on the other hand, is more clean as reigning believers, due to the immediately preceding material in the 7 letters (Stevens, See Rev. 2:26; 3:5, 21)

- Elders probably are angels who are identified with 12 tribes and 12 apostles
- Most likely 24 elders are an exalted angelic order who serve and adore God (Mounce) o **Rev. 22:9 ¶** Then he said to me, “See *that you do not do that*. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”
- If the 4 creatures represent God’s general creation 24 elders represent God’s special creation
- *One of the purposes of the church meeting weekly is to remind themselves of their heavenly existence*
- lightnings, thunderings, and voices. – repeated verbatim in Rev. 8:5; 11:19; 16:18 o this identifies God as the source of the later judgments (7 judgments) o symbolic of the awesome power and majesty of God § In Revelation thunder and lightning always represent the temple of God and mark an important event (Rev. 11:19; 16:18)
- Seven lamps – See also 5:6 o This comes from Zech 4:2-3 § Represents the Spirit of Yahweh

**Rev. 4:6 ¶ Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back.**

- Sea of Glass (3 thoughts) o The laver in the temple o God’s holy separateness o Analogy to the Red Sea § See also **Ezek. 1:22 ¶** The likeness of the firmament above the heads of the living creatures was like the color of an awesome crystal, stretched out over their heads.
- Sea represented Chaos and Evil

o (Jonah wanted to throne into the SEA) o **Gen. 1:2** The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

- Sea shows that Jesus Christ calmed and stilled the chaos/evil/ satan as He sits on His throne o One day there will be no more SEA!!! § **Rev. 21:1** Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.
- *Four Creatures stood around the throne* o See Isa. 6:2 o It is most likely the 4 creatures represent the whole created order of animated life § This is the same concept found in Ezekiel 1 and the four cherubim
- These are worship leaders leading creation in worshipping their creator!
- Eyes in front and back o Signifies divine omniscience and that they are God’s agents
- Are these 4 creatures literal or symbolic? o Most likely symbolic since they differ from Isa 6 and Ezekiel 1 o Represent the whole created order o Some speculate (4 signs of zodiac or 4 gospel writers) **Rev. 4:7** The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf,

**the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature *was* like a flying eagle.**

- Symbolic or depict a higher angelic order? o Differences between Ezek. 1 and Isa. 6 §≡ # of wings vary (4 in Ezek. 6 in pairs Isa; 6 total in Rev) §≡ Position varies (Above throne in Isa; part of base in Ezek) §≡ Different descriptions (Ezek all 4 have faces only 1 in Rev)
- 4 Sides of tribes of Israel (Numbers 2) o each side had different insignia **Rev. 4:8 *The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within (under their wings). And they do not rest day or night, saying:***

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**“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!”**

**Rev. 4:9 ¶ Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, Rev. 4:10 the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:**

**Rev. 4:11 “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.”**

- Creatures: o 6 wings suggests swiftness to carry out the will of God o Eyes: indicated spiritual insight
- This Hymn is the main point of Rev 4!!! o God is Holy, Sovereign, and worthy to be praised o Heaven’s unceasing worship is the believer’s destiny (Stevens) §≡ Believers in Asia minor should be preparing for this destiny from week to week o The hymns in Revelation summarize its theology
- The 4 creatures represent and fulfill what creation should be doing---praising and glorifying God!
- Presenting a crown to the emperor was part of ceremonies for accessions, consulships, victories, and anniversaries (Stevens). **Life Points**
- We have access now and in the future to the throne in heaven (door standing open---4:1) o Never stop praying
- Jesus Christ sits on the throne (4:2) o To follow Jesus means to recognize his kingship
- The majesty and glory of our God is indescribable (4:3-4)
- The main point of our life should be to sing the glory of God (4:8//4:11)

## Illustrations

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## Belief in Heaven and Hell Among U.S. Adults, 2014

% who believe in ...

	Hell	Heaven
<b>Total</b>	58%	72%
<b>All affiliated</b>	67	82
<b>Christian</b>	70	85
Protestant	75	86
Evangelical		82
Mainline	60	80
Historically black		82
Catholic	63	85
Orthodox Christian	59	81
Mormon	62	95
Jehovah's Witness	7	50
<b>Non-Christian faiths</b>	31	47
Jewish	22	40
Muslim		76
Buddhist	32	47
Hindu	28	48
<b>Unaffiliated</b>	27	37
Atheist	3	5
Agnostic	9	14
Nothing in particular	36	50
Religion not important*	22	32
Religion important*	55	72

Source: 2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014.

\*Those who describe their religion as "nothing in particular" are subdivided into two groups. The "religion not important" group includes those who say religion is "not too" or "not at all" important in their lives as well as those who decline to answer the question about religion's importance. The "religion important" category includes those who say religion is "very" or "somewhat" important in their lives.

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# Application

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If God showed favoritism you and I would never be his.