The Throne in Heaven

Revelation 4:1-11

Key Verse: 4:8b “Day and night they never stop saying, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD God Almighty,’ who was, and is, and is to come.”

Last Sunday through Colossians 3:1-17 we learned that we should set our hearts and minds on things above, not on things on earth. How can we set our hearts and minds on things above amid this pandemic? How can we live with hope of the kingdom of God in this insecure and troubled world? Jesus said in Matthew 5:8, “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God*.” According to Jesus those whose hearts are pure and clean can see the kingdom of God. As the cloud blocks the sky, sinful heart makes the kingdom of God invisible. So, when we repent our sins and renew our hearts with the Holy Spirit, we can see the kingdom of heaven.

In the book of Revelation there are several visions. In chapter 1-3 we studied the vision of the Son of Man among the Lampstands and the letters to the Seven Churches. In chapter 4-19:10 there are four groups of seven visions: the vision of Seven-Sealed Scroll (4:1-8:1), the vision of the Seven Trumpets (8:2-11:19), the vision of the Seven Signs (12:1-14:20), and the vision of the Seven Bowls (15:1-19:10). In chapter 19:20-22:21 we see the vision of New Heaven, New Earth, and the New Jerusalem.

In Revelation chapter 4 John the Apostle saw the Throne in heaven. The vison of the Throne is one vision followed by the vision of the Scroll and of the Lamb in chapter 5. Let’s study how the throne in heaven looks like, what happened when John saw the throne, and what his vision of the throne means to us today.

Look at verse 1. “***After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this***.” What does ‘after this’ mean to John? Right before this John read the Christ’s messages to the seven churches. Jesus’ message for each church contains rebuke to their sins and reward after their repentance. When John heard Christ’s message, his heart must have been troubled. There seemed to have no hope in these earthly churches. In the same way when we think about the sinfulness and evilness of this world, we become disappointed. There seems no hope in this world. But, instead of looking down to the earth and sigh, we must look up to heaven as John did. We have to set up our hearts and minds on things above. We have to put our hope in heaven, where there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain. Amen.

What did John see in heaven? He saw a door in heaven standing open. The door in heaven was not closed, but open for entry. This is very meaningful. John did not describe how the door looked like, but he said that the door is open. The Bible says that Jesus opened the door of heaven for sinners. Hebrews 10:20 says that we enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us.” Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*” (Jn 14:6) The door for heaven is wide open. Whoever believes in Jesus can enter into heaven through the door. John heard Christ’s invitation, “***Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this***.”

Look at verse 2. “***At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it***.” John saw a throne in heaven and someone sitting on it. The one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. (3) Jasper and ruby are reddish gemstones which symbolize the splendor and beauty of God. How does the surrounding of the throne look like? A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. Rainbow is the symbol of God’s faithfulness, his mercy and judgment according to Genesis 9. God’s faithfulness is revealing like rainbow. Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders who were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. (3-4) The twenty four elders symbolize the twelve patriarchs of Israel and the twelve apostles. Being dressed in white reveals their complete holiness, and the golden crowns on their heads are the crowns of their final victory. From the throne came flashes of lightening, rumblings and peals of thunder. (5a) This scene shows us God’s righteousness and justice. and In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These seven lamps are different from the seven lamps in chapter 1. These are the seven spirits of God. (5b) In front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal (6a) This sea of glass is the floor of the heaven. This sea of glass represents perfect transparent tranquility of heaven. This picture is opposite to the sinful and turmoiled earth.

This picture also reminds us of the picture of the tabernacle in the desert and the temple in Jerusalem. Indeed, these are known as the copy of the throne in heaven. The throne in heaven is beautiful and glorious, beyond our human languages. It is better for us to only imagine the throne in our minds.

What else did John see around the throne? Look at verses 6b-8. “***In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings***.” The image of the four living creatures looks so weird to our eyes, but they are the glorious and powerful angelic beings. Some say that they are cherubim in Ezekiel 1:5-24. Cherubim are angels who guards the throne of God. The cherubim in Ezekiel have four wings, but the four living creatures in Revelation have six wings. So, these four living creatures in this chapter are believed as Seraphim in Isaiah 6:2 who have six wings, with two wings they covered their faces, with two covered their feet, and with two they were flying. Seraphim are known as winged angels who carry on God’s work on his throne, especially for worship. Six wings symbolize the swiftness for God’s work, and the fulness of eyes represents complete awareness and knowledge. They have eyes even under their wings. So, there is no blind spot or hidden place to them. They can see all our hidden sins and blind spot of our hearts. What did the four living creatures around the throne?

Look at verse 8b. “***Day and night they never stop saying: “‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,’ who was, and is, and is to come***.” The angels were singing hymn 2. “*holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty! Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee…holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore Thee, casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea; Cherubim and Seraphim falling down before Thee, which were, and art, and ever more shall be*…” The angels sang the attributes of our God. First, the Lord God is holy. They repeated his holiness three times. The Holy Father, the Holy Son, and the Holy Spirit. Holiness is one of the most essential attributes of God. God is holy. Holiness means perfect truthfulness and purity. There is no darkness in him at all. Because of his holiness, he cannot mix with sin. Sinners cannot come to God and enter the kingdom of God because God is holy. So Peter said in 1 Peter 1:15, “Be holy because God is holy.”

Our God is also Almighty. He is omnipotent. Nothing is impossible with Him. By his mighty word he made the world. By his wisdom he sent Jesus Christ as a Savior. By his mighty power he raised him from the dead. He is able to do everything on this earth. He also rules the world. The whole world suffers from the pandemic now, but we know that all things are in his control. He knows when he will take it away. He writes human history. Our God is eternal. He is the everlasting God. He existed even before the creation of the world. He is with us now and he will be with us and with human history until Jesus comes back. We are eager to see the end of this pandemic. But God knows when he will take it away. He was in the Justine Pandemic in AD 541, which took 50 million people’s lives. He was in the year of deadly Black Death in 14th century, which was responsible for death of one-third of world population, and in the time of Spanish Flu in 20th century. God is now in the middle of COVID-19. He knows when and how it will disappear. What should we do then in this situation? We studied in Hebrews which says that we must endure hardship as discipline to share God’s holiness. (Heb 12:7,10) Every day I pray with this prayer topic, “May God help us to endure this pandemic as discipline to share your holiness.” Amen!

As the hymns describes, whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him and worship him by laying their crowns before the throne. (9-10) As the hymns says, “*All the saints adore thee, casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea!”* What did the elders do while they were bowing down to him? They sang all together. “***You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being***.” (11)

The LORD God is worthy to receive glory, honor, and power because he created all things. The Creator is worthy to be praised and honored by his creatures. Yesterday Shepherd Ben West delivered the wonderful message based on Colossians 2 at the North America Leaders’ Conference. God is glorified through his message. Because of Ben, Kit and Melissa are honored and praised because they are his parents. People appreciate and value parents’ labor to raise their children. In the same way God is worthy to receive honor and glory because he is our Creator. All things came from him and were made for him. This is the reason why all creatures in this world praise him and worship him. Psalm 66:1,3 says, “*Shout for joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious…All the earth bows down to you; they sing praise to you, they sing the praises of your name.”* Even nature displays God’s glory. Psalm 19:1 says, “*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands*.”

When we walk on the street, we often feel the greatness of God’s creation from leaves and trees. They changed their clothes each season and reveal God’s faithfulness. Since we suffer from the virus, we came to realize the value of fresh and clean air. We don’t appreciate its value until we lose it. All nature displays the work of God. God is glorified even in the life of sick people. In John 9 Jesus’ disciples saw a born blind man with the eyes of sorrow. They asked Jesus, “*Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind*?” How did Jesus answer, “*Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him*.” (Jn 9:2,3) Jesus saw God’s glory and his divine work in this born blind man. All things were created to display the glory of God. All situations on this earth have chance to display the glory of God. He made all things for his glory and for his good purpose. Amen!

We are created to praise God and worship Him. In the beginning God created men in his image and likeness. God made men spiritual beings who can communicate with God and have fellowship with him. Men are truly happy when we worship God and praise Him. This is because God pours out his Spirit on those who worship him and praise his name. Those who praise the Lord and worship him are full of joy and thanks. Colossians 3:16-17 says, “*Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*” Those who praise God are thankful people. Those who are thankful to God praised the Lord! Let us praise the Lord and worship Him.

God is pleased with those who praise and worship him. We can worship him not only in the church, but also at home, school, and workplace. We can worship him anytime any place. When we pray in silence and sing hymns and memorize his words in our heart, we are worshiping him. Psalm 147:7 says, “*Sing to the Lord with grateful praise; make music to our God on the harp*.” This year we meet another year of the pandemic. But we may overcome this COVID-19 by praising and worshiping Christ. Do you know the meaning of word COVID? Christ Overcomes Virus Infected Disease. By praising the Lord with grateful heart and worshiping him whole-heartedly, we overcome COVID. Amen!

The throne of God should be placed in the center of our heart. Praise and worship should be the daily routine of our lives. Let us fix our eyes on things above. Look at the beautiful throne of God in heaven and overcome all these earthly suffering and pain. As Paul says that our present sufferings are not worth compared to the glory which will be revealed in the future. Amen!