

A MESSAGE FROM HEAVEN

Revelation 4:1-11

TITLE

My first telescope. Started to see wonders that had never been visible to me before and started to draw them.

MOONS OF JUPITER

What did they really look like? It was a question of sensory overload. Something you see for the first time and it's amazing. Describing it seems somehow very difficult. We all get amazing experiences in life and it's often very difficult to put the experience into words.

John's prophetic vision seems to have been in this category. He was caught up in the Spirit into the throne room of God. What we get is an amazing image of glory unimagined. If you are a newcomer to this kind of prophecy, it may all seem a bit strange, but just as we learn about the nature and purposes of God through other types of writing in the Bible, this is also written for our knowledge and encouragement.

Let's start with these verses - *2 At once the Spirit took control of me. There in heaven was a throne with someone sitting on it. 3 His face gleamed like such precious stones as jasper and carnelian, and all around the throne there was a rainbow the colour of an emerald.*

What makes this passage and Revelation generally most difficult is the imagery and maths involved 24 elders, seven spirits, four winged creatures. The image God gave John was more than just a glory John's mind could not cope with.

John was not just being given a vision of glory, but a message from glory in a set of pictures he could cope with, and the church would find encouraging, challenging, useful.

BASIC 1

We will look at some of the pictures as we go along. People find them difficult, confusing sometimes. Explanations can also be fanciful – so I am going to stick with what I feel are scriptural rather than speculative explanations. That's why I did something on foundations the last two weeks. All this saves us from becoming too fanciful about prophecy. It's possible to spend a lot of time speculating about it, but these words and any other vision of heaven and from heaven is there for our benefit; for us who are firmly anchored and rooted in Jesus Christ.

I might add that Paul in much the same position as John, was forbidden to say what he saw, *because there he heard things which cannot be put into words, things that human lips may not speak* (2 Cor 12:3). And he wasn't allowed to share one jot of it. I know of a few people that have received visions of glory like we have read. Their experience is usually like Paul's – they say little. If you have had one, maybe that is the case for you. There is also nothing wrong to ask God to have experience of His glory in lofty places – we are going to have an eternity of it anyway! But as we shall see, there's somewhere else we

can and should experience His glory.

The reason for that is if something is given for us personally, then it's only relevant for us – it's part of our personal walk with God. If it's for the church, then we share it always (and you WILL know the difference). John's vision was for the church. He says little of what he felt about it, but what is certain is that his vision was prophetic – it was a message for the church from heaven.

BASIC 2

Let's go to another basic. If we are going to think about heaven, then what and where is it? In the Bible there are three ideas associated with the word "heaven".

- the earth's atmosphere and universe Psalm 8:3
- the realm of the angelic and demonic

WHERE GOD IS – the third heaven/highest heaven 2 Cor 12. Is this where John was taken too?

BASIC 3 A MESSAGE FROM HEAVEN

Revelation is a prophetic message. Who is it aimed at and what is it about?

Theologians go into meltdown on this one. They divide into camps, rather like politicians.

Preterist – the book was there to help the church in John's time as it was going through persecution and the prophetic pictures relate to that.

Historicist – the book is a prophetic survey from the First Century to the Second Coming.

Idealist - the symbols in the Revelation do not relate to historical events but rather to timeless spiritual truths. Explanations can also be fanciful – so I am going to stick with what I feel are scriptural rather than speculative explanations. That's why I did something on foundations the last two weeks. All this saves us from becoming too fanciful about prophecy. It's possible to spend a lot of time speculating about it, but these words and any other vision of heaven and from heaven is there for our benefit; for us who are firmly anchored and rooted in Jesus Christ.

Futurist – the book is a set of prophetic visions about the end times so we can be prepared. Most modern evangelical theologians go for this one.

For me I believe that the word of God in general and prophecy in particular was written to make sense to every generation of the church until Jesus returns. What we've got to do is work out what God is trying to say to us through it.

HILLS AND VALLEYS

If we want to understand Revelation, then have a look at how other prophecy works in the Bible because it's going to be the same too. Hills and valleys. Virtually all Biblical prophecy has a meaning for the now when it was written. It

has meaning for intervening generations. It predicts the future and lays down principles and commands from God that are timeless. Hey, doesn't that embrace all four – yes, of course it does.

So was we get a vision of God's throne room glory, what John saw and relates to us isn't just a recollection of an astonishing visit, but a message from the glory of heaven, that's designed to lift us whilst still keeping us anchored in Christ.

WHAT'S THE MESSAGE?

4:1 At this point I had another vision and saw an open door in heaven. And the voice that sounded like a trumpet, which I had heard speaking to me before, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must happen after this."

In the previous three chapters John had written to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia, now Turkey. They were troubled churches and most of them were struggling with or had fallen to error and the prophecy given was a threat to most of them that unless they acted, they were as churches going to be liquidated.

Persecution was rife. John was imprisoned on Patmos. Now was the time for the churches to stand up and be counted or cease to exist. On the other hand repentance came with a promise and that's given in chapter 4 onwards – a promise of glory. But it's not just end-times and eternal glory which the chapters talk about; it's glory for now. It was an antidote to the pressure and depression that faced the people of God.

The message from the throne room can be divided into the following.

A MESSAGE OF GLORY
A MESSAGE OF PROMISE
A MESSAGE OF EMPOWERMENT
A MESSAGE OF AUTHORITY
A MESSAGE OF WORSHIP

A MESSAGE OF GLORY

2 At once the Spirit took control of me. There in heaven was a throne with someone sitting on it. 3 His face gleamed like such precious stones as jasper and carnelian, and all around the throne there was a rainbow the colour of an emerald.

Is John struggling for words here? In one sense yes. We get no description of the occupant, God, all we have is an expression of His glory. We know from elsewhere in Scripture that God defies description, so John talks about what the throne's occupant's face looked like in terms of bright light shining through precious stones. Rather than seeing this as rather odd, remember that this is prophecy – it's part of a message God is relating to us through John's experience and words.

One way we can view this is to see the glory of His face shining though the precious stones mentioned as representing the glory, holiness and purity of

God. But to John's Jewish readers, they would have registered the precious stones mentioned here and also later in Revelation as something else.

STONES

The stones are jasper and carnelian (sardius). Jasper is a multicoloured opaque stone, carnelian is semi-opaque. Both come in a variety of colours. In those times precious stones were chosen for their beauty rather than purity and transparency which are the quality sought after these days.

They were first and last in a sequence of 12 different precious stones in the High Priest's breastplate, representing the tribes of Israel. In the Jewish system precious stones represented the people of God and because as they were the finest of stones, they represented how precious God's people are to Him. (I might add that the same stones are the foundation of the New Jerusalem at the end of Revelation). In the picture John gives us, the glory of God gleams from the stones. It is light that gives these stones colour and beauty. If there was no light, there would be no beauty.

AURORA BOREALIS

There is another coloured item in John's description – an emerald coloured rainbow. Rather than the normal colours, it's emerald green. Why? A rainbow is a sign of God's covenant but the emerald is a mark of life, reviving, refreshing. On the priest's breastplate it was the colour of Judah and it was through a descendant of Judah, Jesus, that we have received new life.

Put it all together, and we see that as a covenant people we are precious to God and in Christ, He has given us life, hope and refreshing. As we face the pressures of life it reminds us of just who we are to the One that sits upon the throne – precious.

The gemstones reflected the glory of the throne. We are people that should reflect the beauty and the glory of the One who sits on the throne. We are made for it. It is our destiny.

Is Jesus shining through me today. This little light of Mine. Jesus wants me for a sunbeam. *In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.* (Matt 5:16) *14 Do everything without grumbling or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky* (Phil 2:14-15). *For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light-- for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.* (Eph 5:8-9)

As I've said in previous sermons in this series, God wants us to experience more of His glory – because that's what is unfolding before us as we contemplate eternity. We should desire it – it is our new-birthright. It should be something that raises us. But we don't have to don't have to go to heaven to experience it, although if the Spirit takes you there as He did John then enjoy the blessing. No, glory is something that can and should be part of what we experience of God here on earth, particularly being part of the people of God.

That is the challenge to us as a church as much as individuals. In previous

sermons I have said that to experience God's glory, we must put ourselves in a position where God can bless us. You won't get a tropical holiday at the South Pole. As a church we need to explore how we place ourselves in a position where we experience more of the glories of heaven. Perhaps some of the small groups would like to think and pray about that one. Hint – a good place is when we worship and pray together!

But there's one last point for wanting to be a people who experience and reflect God's glory. As we shine with His glory, others see it and are drawn to Christ – it's what we are here as a church to be.

Last week was the Baptist Assembly. They used Twitter quite a lot to communicate information and allow people to react to what was happening. Even though I wasn't there, I am linked to the BU's Twitter feeds and got all their stuff. There as one comment by Sam Abramiam '*we are an outpost for heaven... we have the kings protection... we seek to colonise this earth with heaven*'.

Church, let us open ourselves so that as a people God's glory may shine out of us like light reflecting off precious stones. If that happens – we will be world-changers!

*Preached by Mark Reid
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