

A Vision Of Heaven (Revelation chapter 4)

This fourth chapter, following the revelation of the message to the 7 churches, is introduced by the phrase “after this”. Prophecy in this Book of Revelation has a chronological order. The apostle John was instructed by the Lord Jesus, “Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.” (Revelation 1:19) Verse 19 of chapter 1 becomes the outline for the entire Book.

1. “The things you have seen” is a vision of John of the Lord Jesus. He saw a vision of the Lord Jesus which he has not seen during the Lord’s unexalted earthly existence. He turns and saw one like the Son of man but gloriously magnificent. That is chapter 1.
2. Second, he is told to “write the things which are”. John is told to write letter to each of the 7 churches in Asia Minor through their seven stars which are 7 angels or seven messengers or elders or pastors of the churches. These were actual literal churches in modern day Turkey. Many teachers of prophecy teach that each of the churches represent a stage in church history from the apostolic church period to the apostate church period comprising a panorama of church history. Each of the churches is symbolized by a lampstand. We should remember that Jesus taught that we that compose the church, are “the salt and the light of the world” (cf. Matthew 5:13-14).
3. Thirdly, “the things which shall be hereafter.” The third section is introduced by the phrase, “After this”, that is, after writing the 7 letters to the 7 churches. Revelation 4:1-2, “After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter. And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.” John is now in the presence of God, sees a vision of heaven, and writes about it in chapters 4 and 5. In Revelation chapters 4 and 5, the church is in heaven tucked away in heaven for 7 years while the earth is going through the 7 year of Tribulation below. Tribulation period starts at chapter 6 until

chapter-19. After the tribulation period, the Jesus returns to earth to establish His millennial reign (Chapter 20) and in Chapters 21 and 22 is a description of the new heavens and new earth unto eternity.

Note that in chapters 1, 2, and 3, the church is mentioned 18 times. Then, beginning in chapter 4, the “church” is in heaven and is no longer mentioned until at the end of the book in Revelation 22:16, though the bride of the Lamb mentioned in Revelation 19:7 is a reference to the church. This is a depiction of the Rapture of the church taken up from the earth. The voice that John heard in Revelation 4:1-2 was as it were a trumpet talking to him saying, “Come up hither or come up hear.” In the teaching about the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, a trumpet sounds (the trumpet of God) similar to what John heard, when the door of heaven opened and he was called, “Come up here.” In the rapture, the will descend with a shout with the voice of the archangel with the trump of God and the dead in Christ shall rise first and we, who are alive and remain, shall be caught up (Gr, harpazo; Lat, rappere, used by Jerome in the Latin Vulgate) with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so shall we be with the Lord forever. Likewise, in the other description of rapture in 1Corinthians 15:51-52, a trumpet will sound also, “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. So the trumpet mentioned in the two descriptions of the rapture is an allusion to the voice calling John to go up into heaven. This will be the fulfillment of the promise of the Lord Jesus in John 14:1-3.

There are some who have cast aspersions on the teaching of the rapture.

1. The first is that there is no such word rapture in the Bible.
2. Second, despite the Lord Jesus saying that no man nor the angels know the day and the hour of the coming of the Son of man, there were some people like Edgar Whisenant who predicted and published that the rapture will happen on would occur in 1988, sometime between Sept. 11 and Sept. 13, while Harold Camping predicted the rapture to happen on 21 May 2011. A lot of people have predicted the event of the rapture and because of the failed predictions, many dismissed the idea of the rapture. This is unfortunate because the rapture is a distinct event of the church described

in detail in passages John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 3:16-18; 1 Corinthians 15:52-53.

This event we see in the Chronology in the Book of Revelation. There were only two people in the New Testament who were given a trip to heaven and back on earth. One was Paul and the other is John. Paul was taken to heaven and he heard many unspeakable words which is not lawful for a man to utter (2 Corinthians 12:4). John, on the other hand, is commanded by the Lord Jesus to write everything he has seen and heard. And he does so in chapters 4 and 5 in the Book of Revelation. What is being described here is a vision of heaven when the saints and angels and the sovereign Lord on His throne form an intelligent background for other events that will take place both in heaven and on earth. John said in the opening of Revelation chapter 4, "After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter" (verse 1).

Actually, the apostle John was in the isle of Patmos where he had been exiled and the revelation was given to him in this location and he said, "And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. (verse 2). Whether he was physically caught up to heaven or whether it was simply a vision being caught up in heaven may be debated. Paul on the other hand said when he was caught up to the third heaven, he cannot tell whether he was in the body, or whether out of the body, only God knows.

In either case, John saw the heaven as if he had been present. The voice that gave the invitation, according to John was the same voice he had heard in Revelation 1:10 where he was instructed to write the Lord's message to the 7 churches (verse 11). Because John's experience is similar to what will happen at the rapture when the church is caught up to heaven, it is reasonable to conclude that the rapture has taken place and that what John is seeing is a setting for events in heaven that will take place in heaven and on earth in the period after the rapture.

John's experience upon arrival in heaven was to behold a glorious throne and One is sitting. Way back in the gospels, the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." (Matthew 16:28; Mark 9:1; Luke

9:27) It has very often thought that this statement of the Lord refers to His second coming but it rather refers to the Lord's transfiguration because 6 days later the Lord took Peter, James and John on the mountain (probably Mt. Tabor) where Jesus was transfigured before them in His full glory when His face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. The disciples saw Jesus in His full glory and splendor talking with Moses and Elijah. The glory that John saw in the mount of transfiguration is a snippet of what John sees in chapter 4 and 5, as the full blown vision of the glorious sight around the throne of the Lord sitting on His throne in all majesty exhibiting the sovereignty of the Lord from His throne. John describes the Lord as "He that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald." The throne is dominant, a symbol of authority and sovereignty of the One who sits on the throne. While there is tribulation going on on earth, there is adoration in heaven.

What makes heaven attractive? It is not the jewels and precious stone nor the pearly gates and the street of gold. It is being with the Lord. It is a home where we can be in His presence. He said in His promise, I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go I will come again and receive you unto myself, so that where I am there may you be also. What makes a heaven attractive? The Lord wants us to be with Him.

In John 17:5, the Lord Jesus prays to the Father that the Father glorify Him with the glory that He had with the Father before the world was or in eternity. Why? John 17:24 gives the answer, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." Jesus wants to be with Him and that we may behold his glory, the glory given to Him by the Father because the Father loves Him before the foundation of the world.

Not too long ago, it was in the news media that "Suicide cases are on the rise in the Philippines and the government is now turning to churches and spiritual leaders to provide the necessary counsel and guidance to their constituents to fight a new battle, this time against depression and suicide. The COVID-19 pandemic is taking toll on the mental health of Filipinos. Millions are struggling with unemployment and loss of livelihood while others are struggling with losing

loved ones to the disease, or with loneliness and anxiety. People are desperately looking for hope.

One of the main reasons the Lord is allowing this pandemic is to get us to finally let go of this world and our dependency of this world or to realize that we are not sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from ourselves, but to apprehend that without the Lord we cannot do anything because our sufficiency is from the Lord.

Is there hope? To some hope is the state of mind that believes and desires a positive outcome to situations in their lives the basis of which they are not sure.. To others It is a half-hearted optimism that things will turn out for the best.

But there is a blessed and living hope which the world cannot give. Paul writes to Titus, "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. (Titus 2:13-14)

The throne in heaven is not empty. JESUS is sitting on the great heavenly throne. The throne is a powerful declaration that the JESUS rules from His throne and He is in control of everything.

The rapture of the church. Jesus said, I am coming for you. I am coming to get you out of the tribulation of this world and take you where I am. The disciples were so confused and full of anxiety. But Jesus said, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe into ME." Jesus gave us hope, a blessed hope, a living hope. And I am waiting for that voice of the Lord Jesus when He says to me,

"COME UP HERE!"