

The Father Enthroned, The Son Exalted and the Bowls Full of Incense

An overview of the third part of the Book of Revelation – chapters 4-5

I. WHY WE MUST STUDY REVELATION 4-5

- A. There are 3 primary reasons why these two chapters (which constitute the 3rd part of the book of Revelation) are so powerful and so important for us to understand:
1. ***They are the theological foundation that the eschatological realities are to rest upon.*** The foundation of our understanding of the end-times must be these two chapters. They were for John and they must be for us. In chapter 4 John had a vision of the Father on His throne. And chapter 5 John had a vision of Christ being declared worthy and diversely excellent. It's in these chapters that God reveals why He can be trusted to close this age and inaugurate the next. It's in these chapters that we see the heart behind the judgments that are released on the earth during the final years of natural history. And it's in these chapters that we get the clearest glimpse in Scripture of the beauty of our Trinitarian God.
 2. ***They give us a rich and beautiful explanation of what the death of Christ was about in the eternal purposes of God.*** So full and stunning is this explanation that it's difficult to find a comparable passage in Scripture that matches its sublimity and majesty. In chapter 5 we read the chief end of God's purposes in the death of Christ. It wasn't just about saving

sinners. It was about Jesus claiming the whole earth and governing it as a man; and delegating that governance to those whom He shed His blood for.

3. ***They give us the theology of prayer and worship that, like a key, unlocks an important door to understand the rest of the book.*** This foundational relationship between prayer and the release of end-time judgment is absolutely essential to understand. This idea forms a large part of the storyline that runs throughout the book.

II. **THEOLOGY MUST UNDERGIRD OUR ESCHATOLOGY – “WHY WE MUST THINK RIGHTLY OF GOD”**

- A. Revelation 4 and 5 gives us the greatest revelation of God’s transcendence and beauty in Scripture. Here we get a glimpse into the glory of God as seen by (1) what surrounds Him, (2) what those closest to Him think about Him and (3) how He relates to us. And this *must* be the seedbed that revelation concerning the end of the age is cultivated and matured in.
- B. After the glory of God the Father is revealed (Rev. 4), we see His plan for Jesus emerging from the storyline (Rev. 5). To say it simply, the central message of chapter four is the glory of God the Father enthroned and the central message of chapter five is the glory of God the Son in judgment; both *on the cross* and *at the end of the age*.
- C. These two chapters are so necessary for our hearts to connect with. Most people in our generation who have energy about eschatology haven’t committed to the study of the Person of God. And if we study end-time events alone we will wind up in confusion and in opposition to the Spirit.
- D. We must become familiar with the events that will occur at the end of the age. But more importantly we need to be familiar with the One who is orchestrating and releasing them. And that’s what these two chapters are about. Revelation 4-5 is the theological foundation that our eschatology must rest upon. It is the bedrock to the study of the end-times.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION: THE BEAUTY OF JESUS & THE REALITY OF HIS RETURN
Session 7: The Father Enthroned, The Son Exalted and the Bowls Full of Incense (ch. 4-5)

- E. A billion years from now there will be no mystery about the end-time events. They will have happened and we will understand it all. But we will not have seen all of God's worth, majesty and beauty. We will be no closer then to the end of His splendor than we are now. Eschatology must be seen in this light lest we distort the subject.

III. THE GLORY OF GOD THE FATHER ENTHRONED

- A. Rev. 4:2-7 outlines 4 categories of God's beauty and worth with each having 3 specific themes (total 12).
1. The beauty of God's Person (Rev. 4:3)
 2. The beauty of God's Beloved (Rev. 4:4)
 3. The beauty of God's Power (Rev. 4:5a)
 4. The beauty of God's Presence (fire) (Rev. 4:5b-7; 15:2)

² I was in the Spirit; and behold, a Throne set in heaven, and One sat on the Throne. ³ 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. ⁴ Around the Throne were twenty-four thrones...I saw twenty-four elders sitting...in white robes; and they had crowns of gold...⁵ From the Throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the Throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. ⁶ Before the Throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal...around the Throne, were four living creatures... (Rev. 4:2-6)

- B. Rev. 4:8-10, the governmental leaders in heaven and the ones closest to God adore Him declaring their affection and reverence. Their foundational hymn forever magnifies God's holiness.

⁸ The four living creatures...do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" ⁹ Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the Throne...¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down...and worship Him...and cast their crowns before the Throne, saying: ¹¹ "You (Father) are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things..." (Rev. 4:8-11)

THE BOOK OF REVELATION: THE BEAUTY OF JESUS & THE REALITY OF HIS RETURN
Session 7: The Father Enthroned, The Son Exalted and the Bowls Full of Incense (ch. 4-5)

- C. To be holy means “to be totally separated from.” God is separated from everything sinful, thus He is pure. God is also separated from everything created (or common), thus He is transcendent or infinitely superior to all that exists. God’s holiness points to His transcendent beauty.
- D. While it surely includes moral purity, it is more than moral purity. While God possesses that eternally and infinitely, moral purity is not what those in the throne room are awestruck by – it’s His transcendence.
- E. There are 14 hymns in Revelation. The book is a prophetic liturgy for the end time church. We will join with these hymns and proclamations in prayer in unison with the Holy Spirit and the global family of saints.

IV. THE CENTRAL MESSAGE: THE TRANSITION OF POWER AS JESUS IS EXALTED (REV. 5)

- A. Revelation chapter 5 introduces the reality that this season of Tribulation (ch. 6-19) is designed to prepare the earth for Jesus to take it over. In chapter 5 this process begins. The process that is beginning is the taking over of every earthly government.

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth." (Revelation 11:15-18)

¹⁶ *He has on His robe...a name written: King of kings and Lord of lords. (Rev. 19:16)*

⁸ *I (the Father) will give You (Jesus) the nations for Your inheritance (Millennium)... (Ps. 2:8)*

⁸ He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death...⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth... (Phil. 2:8-10)

- B. As song erupted in chapter four about the glory of God the Father, songs now erupt in chapter five about the worth of God the Son. They praise Him primarily for His unique person and work; that is, the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. They love Him for who He is and what He has done. These songs will, as we will see, be the catalytic agent of releasing the Great Tribulation. As soon as these songs emerge, of the worth of the Son to claim His right to execute judgments on the earth and to rule and reign on it, the great drama begins.

V. JESUS TAKES THE SCROLL FROM THE FATHER'S HAND (REV. 5)

- A. As Jesus is commissioned, - by the songs of the redeemed and the delight of the Father – He takes the scroll from the Father's hand (v. 7).
- B. This scroll represents the title deed of the earth and the action plan (Rev. 6-19) necessary to prepare the church and the earth for the transition period between this age and the next.

¹ I saw in the right hand of Him (the Father) who sat on the Throne a scroll...sealed with seven seals. ² I saw a strong angel proclaiming..., "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?"...⁵ One of the elders said, "...The Lion of the tribe of Judah...has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." ⁶ In the midst of the Throne...stood a Lamb as though...slain. ⁷ He took the scroll out of the right hand of Him...on the Throne. (Rev. 5:1-7)

- C. The Father gives the title deed of the earth to Jesus as a human King. He is the only Man with the ability to govern the whole world and lead all its governments (v. 2). He is the only one found worthy (deserving and capable) to take the scroll from the Father. In taking the scroll (v. 7) Jesus accepts the responsibility to cleanse and rule the whole earth.
- D. To "open the seals" means to release the judgments in the Book of Revelation (Rev. 6-19) to cleanse the planet from evil and to restructure all the governments of the earth (Rev. 20:4-6).

- E. Jesus has the fierceness and fearlessness of a lion and the tenderness and humility of a lamb. Jonathan Edwards calls the reality “the diverse excellencies of Christ.” That is, He possesses such radically opposing attributes within Him that we find it possible to believe.

VI. THE WORTH OF CHRIST IN ALL HIS DIVERSE EXCELLENCIES

- A. ***Four Key Themes within the Chapter*** – I see four realities highlighted in this chapter that deserve to be considered before we jump into the text itself:
1. **The Absolute Sovereignty of God** – This chapter clearly portrays God the Father and God the Son as being sovereign and supreme over all of creation. Whatever they say goes. Whatever they want to happen happens. Nothing is outside of their control and nothing challenges their leadership. God is altogether sovereign over everything. The God who spoke in Genesis 1 to make everything come into existence is now seen with a scroll in His hand – there are profound implications bound up in that thought. All it takes for Him to exert His sovereignty and His incomparable power is the tearing of a seal. To approach this text without being willing to embrace the astounding sovereignty and power of Jesus is to completely miss the heart of the text; and to miss the heart of the book altogether. Jesus is *completely* in control of all that occurs in heaven and on the earth during history and at the end of the age. Nothing surprises Him and nothing escapes His wisdom or His power. When everything around us is pressuring us to affirm ideas that get God “off the hook” we must fight to see Him “on the throne.” That is where our confidence and our joy are cultivated. *Sovereignty is most clearly seen in the Father’s Throne and the Son’s Scroll* (Note the phrase “it was granted” or “given” in the book). Doctrines that deny God’s sovereignty will be destroyed when Jesus takes that scroll.

2. **The Intimate Relationship between Jesus' Work at the Cross and His Plan at the End of the Age** – Jesus' death at Golgotha and Jesus' plan to take over the earth at the end of the age are not in contradiction or tension with each other. That is, there is no difficulty in reconciling the Messiah of the first coming with the Messiah of the Second coming. When they sing that He is "worthy to take the scroll" because "He was slain and purchased us to God by His blood," they mean to say – "Your death secured salvation for sinners and the consummation of history. Your blood guarantees you an inheritance of people and of real estate!" We must view Jesus' first coming in view of His second and His second in view of His first. This was His eternal purpose before the foundation of the world and we must view the entire panorama of history as the execution and administration of that purpose.¹

3. **The Role of Prayer and Worship in Releasing the End-Time Transition** – The book of Revelation is filled with prayers and songs. It is the prophetic liturgy of the end-time church. It's important that we understand the prayers and songs as more than that which *they pray and sing* but as that which *we pray and sing*. That's why they were given. In 5:8 the prayers of the saints cause the opening of the scroll. In 8:1-5 the prayers of the saints cause the sounding of the trumpets. In 15:18 the prayers of the saints cause the pouring out of the bowls of wrath. The prayers of the saints do in fact release the end-time transition from this age to the next. In chapter 8 we read that there is silence in heaven for half an hour between the seals and the trumpets. That silence is heaven honoring the prayers of the saints as they ascend to heaven. Those cries actually release the angels to sound their trumpets. Chapter 5 is the first place we see the unique relationship between prayer and worship and the releasing of the end-time events. This reality under girds the chapter.

¹ See Ephesians 1:9-10; Colossians 1:19-20; Acts 3:14-21, esp. v. 21

4. **The Diverse Excellencies of Christ's Persons** – This chapter is most centrally and principally about the diverse excellencies of the person of Christ. In the 1700's Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon entitled "The Excellencies of Christ." In it he argued three things concerning Jesus' excellency: (a) The conjunction [combination] of the excellencies in Christ is, in our manner of conceiving, very *diverse* one from another. (b) The conjunction [combination] of such really diverse excellencies in anyone else would be seen by us to be *utterly incompatible in the same person*. (c) His diverse excellencies are exercised *towards men* who we find to be *impossible to be exercised towards*. Edwards means to say "His wonderful attributes and emotions that make up His person are so incredibly diverse. And because they are so diverse our imagination is stretched to even believe they could be found abiding in one person. And those diverse perfections are so grand and so marvelous that we find it impossible to believe that sinners like us could ever experience or celebrate them; that is, why should we know His kindness, gentleness and mercy and not *only* His justice, righteousness and wrath? What sort of objects are we to have these excellencies exercised towards us?!" Edwards point was to say that it's a miracle of cosmic proportions that we don't only know His excellent wrath. Here are some examples of what he meant by "diverse":
- a. There do meet in Jesus Christ infinite highness and infinite condescension.
 - b. There meet in Jesus Christ, infinite justice and infinite grace.
 - c. In the person of Christ do meet together infinite glory and lowest humility.
 - d. In the person of Christ do meet together infinite majesty and transcendent meekness.
 - e. There meet in the person of Christ the deepest reverence towards God and equality with God.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION: THE BEAUTY OF JESUS & THE REALITY OF HIS RETURN
Session 7: The Father Enthroned, The Son Exalted and the Bowls Full of Incense (ch. 4-5)

- f. There are conjoined in the person of Christ infinite worthiness of good, and the greatest patience under sufferings of evil.
 - g. In the person of Christ are conjoined an exceeding spirit of obedience, with supreme dominion over heaven and earth.
 - h. In the person of Christ are conjoined absolute sovereignty and perfect resignation.
 - i. In Christ do meet together self-sufficiency, and an entire trust and reliance on God.
- B. To be worthy is to be deserving and capable to open the seals of the scroll and rule the earth. The 4 living creatures (angelic) and the 24 elders (human) agree with the song of adoration that Jesus is worthy and they agree with the Father's decree to give Jesus leadership of the earth. This song, this hymn, is a prayer – a prayer of agreement that looses the Great Tribulation.
- ⁸ ***When He (Jesus) had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb...9 They sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals (release God's judgments); for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe...and nation, 10 and have made us kings and priests to God; and we shall reign on the earth."* (Rev. 5:8-10)**
- C. ***Jesus is worthy***: three applications
1. ***Jesus is worth it*** – The world, the flesh and the devil tell us that it isn't worth it to follow the Lamb wherever He goes. Giving in and giving up is at times extremely appealing to us in our weakness and frailty. Paul's response to the excellency of Jesus was to give all to Him with extravagant love.
- ⁸ ***I count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish... (Phil. 3:8)***

THE BOOK OF REVELATION: THE BEAUTY OF JESUS & THE REALITY OF HIS RETURN
Session 7: The Father Enthroned, The Son Exalted and the Bowls Full of Incense (ch. 4-5)

2. ***Jesus is capable*** – He possesses the inner resources necessary to lead the great transitional period at the end of the age that eventuates in the closing of this age and the inauguration of the next. He is capable of judging, ruling, governing and reigning.
3. ***Jesus deserves it*** – The Father will give the leadership of the earth to Jesus because of what He has done.

Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. As many were astonished at you-- his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind-- so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand. (Isaiah 52:13-15)

D. ***Jesus being slain***: Jesus stood in our place and bore the wrath and condemnation that was ours. He secured our salvation and He secured His government role in the age to come by His substitutionary death on the cross.

1. Jesus was God incarnate
2. Jesus was sinlessly perfect
3. Jesus was our Substitute
4. Jesus was our Mediator

E. The Father gives Jesus an unprecedented measure of favor over 7 spheres of leadership.

¹¹ ***The voice of many angels...12 saying..., "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing." (Rev. 5:11-12)***

1. ***Power*** (political) – Jesus will receive governmental leadership over all nations.
2. ***Riches*** (financial) – all the money on earth will be under Jesus' leadership.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION: THE BEAUTY OF JESUS & THE REALITY OF HIS RETURN
Session 7: The Father Enthroned, The Son Exalted and the Bowls Full of Incense (ch. 4-5)

3. **Wisdom** (intellectual) – Jesus will replace every evil government on earth with new leaders and laws along with restoring every sphere of life (political, economic, family educational, agricultural, media, technology, environment, social institutions, etc).
4. **Strength** (emotional) – Jesus will have strength in His inner man (Eph. 3:16) so as to continue steadfastly as He restores the nations and contends against all resistance.
5. **Glory** (spiritual) – all will boast in Jesus with loving delight and joyful trust. Paul gloried in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:3, NIV, NAS). Children glory in their father (Prov. 17:6), young men glory in their strength (Prov. 20:29) and we glory in God’s name (Ps. 105:3; 43:4).
6. **Honor** (relational) – Jesus will be greatly respected and listened to in all nations. Dictionary: to publicly esteem by showing unusual respect to one with superior standing and to listen to their words with reverence.
7. **Blessing** (social) – all will fully cooperate with His leadership resulting in the mightiest work force in history. The nations will bless all of His plans and policies. In other words, they will agree and cooperate with them by putting their resources behind them.

VII. WE WILL REIGN WITH HIM ON THE EARTH FOR 1,000 YEARS

You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe...and nation, 10 and have made us kings and priests to God; and we shall reign on the earth." (Rev. 5:8-10)

Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:4)

¹⁷ ***Your eyes will see the King in His beauty... (Isa. 33:17)***

² ***In that day the Branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious. (Isa. 4:2)***

VIII. AT THE END OF THOSE 1,000 YEARS JESUS WILL GIVE THE RESTORED EARTH TO HIS FATHER

A. Father's promise to Jesus: to make Him preeminent in all things

¹⁸ ***He is the head of the Body...that in all things He may have the preeminence.***
(Col. 1:18)

B. During those 1,000 years Jesus will be restoring the earth to give back to His Father:

Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. (Acts 3:19-21)

C. Jesus earned the right to rule the earth yet gives it to the Father. Jesus delights in humility.

²⁴ ***Then comes the end (Millennial Kingdom), when He (Jesus) delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He (Jesus) puts an end to all rule (hostile, evil authorities during the Millennium)...**28 Now when all things are made subject to Him (Jesus), then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him (the Father)... that God may be all in all.** (1 Cor. 15:24-28)***

IX. "BOWLS FULL OF INCENSE" - PRAYER AND WORSHIP RELEASE THE JUDGMENTS OF GOD ON THE EARTH DURING THE GREAT TRIBULATION

The subject of prayer is massive in the book of Revelation. We could do an exegesis of the role of prayer in almost every chapter. Interestingly, all three sets of chronological judgments are released immediately after a prayer, song or proclamation. The seals are torn after the worthy song (ch. 5:8-6:2). The trumpets sound after the half hour of silence and the offering of the prayers of the saints (ch. 8:1-6). And the bowls of wrath are poured out after the saints on the sea of glass sing to Jesus of His perfection, worth, beauty and majesty (ch. 15:1-16:2). And Jesus returns when "the Spirit and" the praying "Bride say 'Come!'" (ch. 22:17)

A. In Revelation 5:8 we read that John saw "bowls full of incense." This is a prophecy concerning the prayer movement at the end of the age. We are

THE BOOK OF REVELATION: THE BEAUTY OF JESUS & THE REALITY OF HIS RETURN
Session 7: The Father Enthroned, The Son Exalted and the Bowls Full of Incense (ch. 4-5)

approaching an hour of sustained global prayer that will fill the throne room with incense. It is the hour when the people of God step into their identity as “a house of prayer” as Jesus prophesied in Matthew 21:13:

***He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."* (Matthew 21:13)**

⁷ Now shall not God bring about justice for His elect, who cry to Him day and night...? ⁸ I tell you that He will bring about justice for them speedily. (Lk. 18:7-8; NAS)

⁶ I have set watchmen on your walls...they shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent, ⁷ and give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth. (Isa. 62:6-7)

B. These full bowls of incense will cause the outpouring of the judgments of God that comprise the Great Tribulation. Every judgment in the book of Revelation is released on the earth *after* someone prays or sings that God should release that judgment:

1. The 7 Seals

“...And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals...Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals...” (Revelation 5:9, 6:1)

2. The 7 Trumpets

"¹ When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. ² And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. ³ Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. And he was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the Throne. ⁴ And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. ⁵ Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake. ⁶ So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound." (Rev. 8:1-6)

3. The 7 Bowls

"And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire--and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and amazing are your deeds [end-time judgments], O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed." After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever, and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished. (Revelation 15:2-8)

- C. The revelation of the Father (ch. 4) and the revelation of the Son (ch. 5) and His Millennial calling to rule the nations undergird the sort of prayer that will fill the throne room and move Jesus to take the scroll and to tear its seals.