“The Throne in Heaven”
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I appreciate all of the comments you have given me about this sermon series on the Book of Revelation. Honestly, it’s fun for me to teach about the last book of the Bible that has been criticized for many decades, and often ignored or over-interpreted.

Some of you have shared my printed sermon with others, while others have told family and friends about the recorded sermons online. Thank you. It’s an honor to study with you and share what God has in mind for us.

Let’s start with the Golden Gate Bridge. It’s a magnificent structure. Look at it.

Construction started in 1933 after 50 years of debate and planning. Completed in 1937, it was the largest span bridge at the time with a length of 2.7 miles.

What is the most important part of the Golden Gate Bridge?

One could say the paint. The painters work all year long. Without paint, the entire bridge would rust and fall apart. Originally, the US Navy wanted the bridge to be painted with stripes so that they could see it in the fog. While the design team and the Navy argued for some time, the painters put the first coat of primer on the bridge, and everyone said: “That’s it.” The color is called international orange.
One could say the wires. There are 27,572 strands of wire in the two major cables. The construction took 6 months of spinning. Look at the 500 vertical wires coming down to the road. They hold everything together.

One could say the road. The structure of the road is massive to hold an average 110,000 cars per day at $8 per car going southbound. The road has closed only a few times: for two Presidential visits, three high wind days (12/1/51, 12/23/82, 12/3/83) that were above 65 mph, and a few celebrations. At the 50th (1987) anniversary, they expected 100,000 people to walk the bridge. In the morning, they closed the bridge to vehicles, and people came from the north and south to meet in the middle. 1 million people showed up to walk the bridge, and when 300,000 got on the bridge, it flattened.

One could say the rivets. There are 1.2 million rivets that hold the bridge together. After the 1989 earthquake, all of these rivets were replaced.

All of those elements are important, but I think the most important part (parts) of the Golden Gate Bridge are the two foundations – one on the north end (Marin County) and one on the south end (City of San Francisco).

Without these two massive towers, both 746 feet tall, the bridge would not survive. The base for each leg is 33 by 54 feet and the weight for each anchorage is 60,000 tons. The towers are so stable that they allow for the road to move up 9 feet, down 8 feet, and 28 feet sideways.

I think the two towers are the most important parts of the Golden Gate Bridge.

In Revelation 4 & 5, the two towers of Christian theology are identified. The first tower is creation. If we understand these two towers, we will have a great foundation to understand the rest of Revelation.

Ok. Here we go. Say “Oh, my” with me. “Oh, my.” We will need it!

Revelation 4:1-11 NIV

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.”

“After this” means after John wrote down the seven letters to the seven churches. John looked. Looking is a central theme for John. He looks and listens and writes.
There was a door. I like John’s declarations throughout Revelation when he has a new experience. This door was special. Through it, John could see heaven.

What would be in heaven?

A voice speaking like a trumpet called John to come up to heaven, that is to say, enter through the door and discover what God has in mind (“what must take place after this”).

About ten years ago, I heard the phrase “what God has in mind” for the first time. It has been helpful for me. I often pray about discovering what God has in mind for me.

2 At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it.

This is the second time John uses the phrase “I was in the Spirit.” First, in Revelation 1:10, and now in this verse. I use a lean interpretation to understand what John experienced. I think John didn’t have a mystical, magic moment, but instead a deeply spiritual experience.

The Apostle Paul also describes a spiritual experience in 2 Corinthians 12 when he had “visions and revelations from the Lord.” He was “caught up to the third heaven”, “caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things” (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). After Paul’s conversion on the way to Damascus, he spent 10-14 years preparing for his ministry. During those years, God revealed spiritual truth and deep wisdom to Paul.

So, who is sitting on the throne? Here’s what John saw. Get ready with your “Oh, my.”

3 And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne.

4 Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.

5 From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God.

6 Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back.

7 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.

There’s only one thing I can say: “Oh, my.”

Some who use extravagant interpretation will match every color, number, and sight with an historical event or theological truth. My lean interpretation does not.

John saw color and shapes and thrones and crowns of gold. He heard thunder and saw blazing lamps. He saw the sea of glass, clear as crystal and the four living creatures, eyes all around. A lion, an ox, a man, a flying eagle with six wings each. “Oh, my.”

Why is this happening? Who was there? What were they doing?

I think the rest of verse 8 answers all three questions.

Day and night they never stop saying:

“Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come.”

They were saying: “Holy, holy, holy,” just we sang earlier in the worship service.

All the heavenly elders and the heavenly creatures were praising God. God is in the center and they never stop worshipping God. The Lord God Almighty – Yahweh El Shaddai – who was in the past and is today and will be in the future! God is the Lord of Always!

The word “saying” is important because in Greek it has several meanings. It could also be translated “singing.”

In the Christian church, we have been singing “Holy, holy, holy” for a long time. Reginald Heber wrote the poem in 1827. The tune was written in 1861 by John Dykes. Heber was English, serving as a country parson until he was appointed Bishop of Calcutta, India, until his death at 41 years old.

My wife grew up in north east Ohio. At her Presbyterian church, the pastor had “Holy, holy, holy” sung every Sunday as the opening hymn, except for Advent. He had a terrible voice, but sang directly in the microphone each time. “Oh, my.”
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 who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever.

The presence of the living creatures and the twenty-four elders has only one purpose: to worship the one who is on the throne. They are there to sing Holy and give honor the one on the throne.

Who is on the throne?

They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

They lay down whatever glory they have. They want no honor for themselves. They sacrifice it all for the one on the throne.

Who is on the throne?

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.

Who is on the throne? God is on the throne. The Lord is in the center.

Everyone knows God is on the throne, so why did I keep on asking the question?

At the beginning of 2019, my wife and I decided to read Oswald Chambers, My Upmost for His Highest, this year out loud. The one who read also offers our morning prayer. Chambers is amazing. Last week, the reading was about our efforts to be at the center of our lives. I keep asking the question – who is on the throne – because I get confused about the answer.

Notice the word “for.” It introduces why God is worthy to receive worship, that is, to receive glory, honor and power.

God created all things. It was by God’s will that all was created and have existence.

The first pillar, the first tower, is this: Creation.

God created.
And because God created, God is worthy of all honor and praise and glory and worship.

God is worthy.

Proverbs 3:5 is helpful. “Trust in the Lord will all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”

Why is God worthy of your trust? The first answer has to be this: God created you. You are not a creature of chance.
   You are not a creature brought into existence by random action.
   You are not a creature by accident.
     You are not a creature by uncertainty.
       You are not a creature without intention.

No. You are created by God.

Here’s my paraphrase Psalm 139:13-16. “For God created your inmost being. God knit you together in your mother’s womb. You should praise God because you are fearfully and wonderfully made. Your frame was not hidden from God when you were made in the secret place, when you were woven together in the depths of the earth. God’s eyes saw your unformed body.”

You are created by God. You can choose to trust God, and choose to not lean on your own understanding.

That’s what it’s all about! Choosing to not lean on our own understanding! You have to lean somewhere.

Lean on God because God created you. God is worthy of your leaning.

“Oh, my.”

Let us pray.