A glimpse into heaven

Revelation 4-5 – Leaders version

Check in – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

What does the passage say and mean?

90 minutes

Explain to the group that the overall structure of the book of Revelation that we are trying to help you to see as we study together is

- the struggles of the 7 churches, Ch 1-3
- the spiritual battle that is going on now and will continue until Jesus comes back, Ch 4-20
- the assurance of our salvation, Ch 21-22

Today we are starting to look at the spiritual battle. The scene is set in Chapters 4&5 for Chapters 6-20. It might help to have the 3 bullet points above written on the flip-chart, to help the group make sense of the overall book.

Revelation 4

Read Revelation 4

1. John's vision from God continues. What does he see in Revelation 4 v 1 and what does Jesus (the voice like a trumpet, see 1 v 10) say?

John sees the door of heaven standing open, so he can see inside. Jesus tells him to 'Come up here' and that he will show John what must happen in the future. Think about the significance of Jesus inviting John into the throne room – there is no other mode of access!

2. How does John 'come up here' in v2, and what does he see?

*He enters the throne room of heaven 'in the Spirit' and sees a throne with **someone** sitting on it. 'In the spirit' refers to a 'state of heightened spiritual awareness' (NIVSB footnote).*

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3. What are we meant to understand from Revelation 3 v 3-6a about the one who is sitting on the throne?

Read the passage again slowly, and ask the group to close their eyes and try to build up the picture as you read each detail, without needing to know what all the details mean. Then ask them what they understand from the description of the throne – we should pick up an image of holiness, splendour and majesty with one who is very important and powerful on the throne.

Now explain to the group what the specific imagery refers to:

- *One with the appearance of jasper and ruby – God the Father is described in the reflection of precious stones because he cannot be seen by man (NIVSB). We are not given enough detail to allow us to create a forbidden image of God (Johnson 2001, p98)*
- *Emerald rainbow – God's covenant (promised) faithfulness (Bewes 2003, p41)*
- *24 other thrones / 24 elders – maybe representing 12 OT tribes + 12 apostles (Bewes 2003, p42), these may be angels representing God's people*
- *Lightening, rumblings, peals of thunder – remind us of the giving of the 10 Commandments to Moses at Sinai i.e. holiness (ibid)*
- *Seven lamps, the seven spirits of God – the Holy Spirit in the perfection of his attributes (ibid), as 3 v 1, seven being a biblical number of perfection*
- *Sea of glass – God's shining transcendence (ibid), 'the peaceful purity of God's sanctuary' (Johnson 2001, p99) (compare with the earthly sea, symbolic of wild restless untamed rebellion in Jewish thought, to be destroyed in Rev 21 v 1)*

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Revelation 4 v 2 tells us that Someone is sitting on the throne in heaven. Fate is not in control of the world and our lives. Nor are the stars are in control. Someone is in control. How does this challenge your understanding of the world?

4. Read Revelation 4 v 6b-8. What are we meant to understand about the four living creatures?

Consider the big picture, not the detail. They are all seeing, they are like a lion/ox/man/eagle (similar to the creatures seen in Isaiah 6 (seraphim) & Ezekiel 1 (cherubim)) and they worship God continually. Remember, this is an apocalyptic vision – the four creatures may be symbolic, not literal.

5. Read Revelation 4 v 8-11. What are we meant to understand about God from the description of the worship from the living creatures?

- *God is holy (saying something three times = Jewish way of underlining or highlighting)*

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- *He is Almighty*
- *He was and is and is to come (echoes of God's Name and description of himself in Ex 3 v 14)*
- *He is worthy to receive worship*
- *He is the creator of all things*

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How can we relate to such a God?

Spend some time thinking about the fact that we, as sinners, cannot relate to such a God. But Jesus has made this possible by his death and resurrection. He has taken our sin and given us his obedience. Only through Christ can we relate to the Father.

Revelation 5

6. Read Rev 5 v 1-4. What do you think the scroll is?

The scroll makes sense of history (Bewes 2003, p46). It is written on both sides so that nothing more can be added to it and sealed with seven seals so that nothing can be taken out of it.

*A helpful quote to lead into the next questions, '*The cry goes up for one who is worthy to open the scroll, interpret its meaning and actually carry it through – someone who can make real sense of our existence and our destiny.*' (Bewes 2003, p46).*

The best way to find out what the scroll is is to open it! We will do this as we read on…

7. Why do you think it matters so much that no-one can add to the scroll or take away from it?

That the scroll cannot be altered shows us that God is sovereign and is in control. (This is not the same as saying that everything is predetermined and we have no choices or responsibility). Think again about the fact that Someone is on the throne – it's not the stars, fate or any other impersonal force that shape our lives. God is on His throne and He is sovereign.

8. Read Rev 5 v 5. Who is able to open it and why?

In the ancient world, you could only open a scroll if you had authority from the author to do so. The one who could open it was the one who could action the contents (Johnson 2001, p105). The angel asks, 'Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?' i.e. to carry out God's plan? 'The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David…' is the one who is able to open it. This is a description of Jesus. He is able to open it, to unlock history, 'because he has triumphed.' Don't try to unpack 'triumphed', we'll address it in Q9.

9. John looks for the Lion but what does he see in v6?

A lamb which looks as if it has been killed, but is clearly alive. It is standing at the centre of God's throne ('the

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lord of all history… sharing in the sovereign rule of Almighty God' (Stott 2002, p38)) with the living creatures and elders surrounding it. This lamb is clearly divine; it is Christ, who was killed but is alive. Jesus is the Lion and the Lamb, the Lord and the Saviour.

Now ask, 'In what way has Christ triumphed, and why does this mean He can open the scroll?'

'The Cross is at the centre. Only through the crucified Christ can we establish a relationship with God… He alone could fulfil God's saving purposes for the world.' (Bewes 2003, p49)

NB if anyone asks, the seven horns depict perfect power and are 'the visual equivalent of the title *Almighty…' (Johnson 2001, p106). The seven eyes depict* 'perfect spiritual vitality, coupled with perfect all-seeing omniscience' *(Bewes 2013, p50).*

10. Read Revelation 5 v 7-10. What happens when the Lamb takes the scroll from the one sitting on the throne and what does this tell us?

The four living creatures and the twenty four elders (who had been worshipping the Father) now fall down before the Lamb and worship Him.

11. Read v9-10 again. What do we learn about Jesus from this song of praise to Him?

He is worthy to take the scroll and open it because,

- *He died*
- *He paid our ransom*
- *He has made his followers into a kingdom, priests who will reign on the earth.*

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If you are a follower of Christ you get a mention in Revelation 5 v 10! What does this verse tell us about followers of Christ?

- *We are a kingdom – we are united with all other followers and we belong to King Jesus*
- *We are priests – we may not all be church leaders, but the Bible says that we are all priests, meaning that we can approach God through Jesus. Our role is to serve God.*
- *We will reign on the earth (also Rev 20 v 4&6 and 22 v 5)*

12. Read Revelation 5 v 11. What do we see and hear with John as the camera pans out? What are we to understand?

There are so many angels around the throne that they can't be counted! Ask the group to shut their eyes and paint a mental picture of the scene; God on the throne, the Lamb holding the scroll of destiny, four living

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creatures and twenty four elders falling down and worshipping him and myriads of angels around them. We are to understand something of the holiness of God.

13. Read Revelation 5 v 12. What are the thousands and thousands of angels saying? What does this tell us about Jesus?

Jesus, the Saviour (slain Lamb) is worthy to receive power, wealth etc. This seems to mean that Jesus is worthy, because He was slain, to have these things ascribed to Him.

14. Read v13-14. Now who joins in? Who else now recognises God and Jesus?

The whole of creation and give praise, honour, glory and power to God the Father and to Jesus the Son. It's like a Mexican wave of worship and reverence and awe radiating out from the throne to the whole of creation topped off by the four living creatures saying 'Amen' and the elders falling down again and worshipping!

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How has this studied changed your view of God the Father? How has it changed your view of Jesus? What impact has the scene of worship in heaven from Revelation 4-5 had on you?

Encourage the group to think about how this glimpse into heaven has affected their understanding of who God is and who we are before him as well as how this might affect their relationship with God and their prayer life.

Check out – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.

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