

God Is On His Throne

Text: Revelation 4.1–8; Exodus 15.11–18

Theme: A holy, sovereign God judges the wicked and saves the righteous

Introduction – Dragons and beasts and whores, oh my!

- Dorothy wanted to go back home to Kansas when she was afraid
- you and I should long to be home in God’s presence too
- but not because we’re afraid
- are we not told over 350 times in Scripture: Be not afraid! Fear not! Be courageous!

But how can we be when we hear of such great and powerful evil?

- last Lord’s Day we heard of two horrifying beasts
- their power and influence, their persuasive voices and marks upon all who bow to them
- all this and more ought to make us a afraid, right?
- that’s what the wicked Dragon is hoping

But we’re not...and we shouldn’t be

- why?
- because, as we see all through Revelation—indeed, through all of Scripture—is this
- a holy, sovereign God judges the wicked and saves the righteous
- God is still on His throne: has been, is, and always will be
- those who refuse to hear His voice...well, God has a few things to say to them no matter
- and to those who believe: He has not lost control, no matter what it looks like here on earth
- the One who rules is perfectly good, infinitely holy and righteous, and full of beauty

See that...

I. He is a Sovereign King

- Revelation reveals both who God is and what He does

After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.

(Revelation 4:1–2 ESV)

- this throne tells John, and us, the readers, that a sovereign God rules over all things
- clearly throne is important to our understanding in Revelation: it occurs 41x/37x to God’s
- in ch. 4–5 alone, “throne shows up 15x, 7x in ch. 7, and 6x in last three chapters
- many of these views of God’s throne has Him seated upon that throne
- this speaks loudly of His authority: He rules from there on high
- and this throne is always depicted in heaven; He reigns over all He sees
- so when believers suffer, even are being put to death, He is still in control

1. “It was given”

- another powerful phrase connected with God’s sovereign reign and rule
- it occurs 21 times; each time referring to what God allows to take place on earth
- sometimes it is His precious grace; other times it is His judgment over the world
- as the OT informs us & John picks up on in his prophecy: God is ultimate cause

2. But what about evil?

but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months.

(Revelation 11:2 ESV)

- God is the one who permits the beast's wicked influence and work
And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months.

(Revelation 13:5 ESV)

- God even allows the beast to make war upon His saints
Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation

(Revelation 13:7 ESV)

- when second beast, voice of false prophet, performs signs, where power does come from?
and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived.

(Revelation 13:14 ESV)

- note carefully those words: "it is allowed"; continues in next verse
And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.

(Revelation 13:15 ESV)

- God is not causing this great evil, but through His sovereign rule & plan, He allows it
- remember this: God does not directly will evil, but evil doesn't exist apart from God's will
- evil is not some independent complex or entity or force
- it is never unleashed upon world as if God doesn't exercise control over wickedness
- God is sovereign over evil; does not commit evil, yet permits the evil that takes place

3. Eternally existing before and over all things

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

(Revelation 1:4, 8 ESV)

- here is an OT allusion to God telling Moses that He is "I AM WHO I AM."
- God is all-sufficient, needing nothing or no one for Him to exist
- He is completely independent, relying upon no other
- and again, He is entirely sovereign
- this is a great comfort and strength to us who believe
- no matter what our circumstances may be, He is Almighty God, in them, over them all
- God is the One who was: He simply was before anything at all came into existence
- God is the One who will be: He simply will be for all eternity; never a time when He isn't

4. Alpha & Omega

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

(Revelation 1:8 ESV)

And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end."

(Revelation 21:6 ESV)

- God is before the beginning and after the end: He is the God of all history
- nothing in history prior, present, or future is without God's presence and knowledge
- He began all things, rules over all things, and will consummate all things in His reign over all
- our God is the pantokrator — the Almighty, used eight more times

5. King of the ages

- oh what a tremendous blessing to know that a suffering church has God as our King

- He is ruler over all, thus evil cannot and will not triumph...ever!
- sadly, too many Christians downplay God's sovereignty when they suffer
- they think He must not know or care or be able to do anything about it
- this couldn't be further from the truth
- we don't need to protect God from the evil that occurs in the world, in our lives
- He knows of it, perhaps is allowing it for our best good and His glory
- what comfort is it if we think of God standing helplessly by, wringing His hands in worry
- no, instead the Lord reigns and rules over all that takes place in the world
- no suffering can come to you apart from the will of God
- if you are His, He will always deliver you in it or through it
- this is our God; this is the God of Revelation

God is sovereign upon His throne; now, let's see that...

II. His holiness is beautiful

- let's return to God's throne room in heaven

And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.

(Revelation 4:3 ESV)

- there are many symbols in this picture, much like in Ezekiel 1

And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance. And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him.

Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

(Ezekiel 1:26–28 ESV)

- many have tried to explain all the exact details given in both these passages
- there is no need to; John simply intends his reads to be strongly affected by impact of beauty
- John, a human author, has to use imagery to describe the indescribable
- in doing so, we're captured by the beauty and glory
- we shouldn't get lost in the individual pieces or gemstones or anything else

1. In indirect vision of God

- Moses was told by God Himself he couldn't see Him fully

Moses said, "Please show me your glory." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."

(Exodus 33:18–20 ESV)

- neither can John, so he is given images and symbols to attempt to describe God

2. The whole picture

- when we read Revelation 4, we see something grand and glorious
- beyond these gems and rainbow are the 24 elders with their thrones
- there is terrible lightning and thunderings—very reminiscent of Mt Sinai w/ God & Moses
- the heavenly scene continues had should have us quietly standing in awe
- rather than speculating what each image must mean to us, we are to do what they did
- worship Him in splendor and holiness

3. Holiness is wholly other

- God is not like us, nor are we like God
- He is distinct from us, separate from all His creation
- He is holy because He is the Almighty One, Creator of all things, ruler of all
- like Isaiah in Isaiah 6, entering the temple, the pure holiness of God is frightening
- He is, as Hebrews reminds us, “a consuming fire”

4. But this provokes wonder and worship

- in midst of this, we read in Revelation 5.13

And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

“Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

(Revelation 7:12 ESV)

- in God’s new creation, this is what we’ll do continuously: worship God
- this is the reason for which we were created: to glorify God & enjoy Him forever

Seeing His holiness reminds us clearly that...

III. His judgments will come

- God is utterly holy, filled with absolute goodness
- He cannot tolerate evil

For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you.

The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers.

You destroy those who speak lies; the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

(Psalm 5:4–6 ESV)

- so, God must judge, and this is a serious theme in Revelation
- something to note as we consider this: words of judgment not written to unbelievers
- written for believers, helping us see God’s glorious justice
- not words of vengeance hurled at unbelievers: “Ha! Now you’re gonna get yours!”
- what John writes for us is to remind us that God is just
- He will set everything right in the end
- evil will not triumph
- all these words, then, of judgment, help us to patiently endure, living lives of worship to God
- from the seals to the trumpets to the bowls...
- from Babylon herself being judged and cast down...
- and all the way to the final judgments brought about from Revelation 19 onward...
- all those who spurn God, reject His offer of peace through His Son Jesus...
- all who worship the beast and fall in love with this world, the great whore Babylon...
- they will be tormented by God in the presence of angels and the Lamb

he also will drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.”

(Revelation 14:10–11 ESV)

- in hearing all this about judgment, we who believe must be reminded of salvation
 - salvation is from the Lord
- and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”*

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,

(Revelation 7:10; 12:10; 19:1 ESV)

Conclusion – Hear...and be saved!

- this is why this book has been given to us:
- so we'd hear the truth about who God is and what He does
- He is sovereign and holy, therefore, He judges sin as the Almighty God
- when we suffer, especially bearing reproach for His name, we must know He is reigning
- we must have our eyes fixed heavenward, where Christ is, seeing beauty of His holiness
- we are to be comforted even in God's judgments
- we will not come under them because Christ has already born ours upon the cross
- but we will be preserved through them upon the wicked of this world
- and our rejoicing at the end will be because God is vindicated, His holiness upheld
- God spoke and all things came into being
- God, in holiness, righteousness, justice and goodness, will have the final say
- and this is our God!