

Rev 25-12-10b

We resume our study now, we're in Revelation chapter four, and we have entered the throne room of God. This is our privilege at all times. We don't get the visual, but we are just as well and truly there when we pray, read Hebrews chapter 10, as John is.

John is giving us the additional dimension of the visual. And it is a reminder, all of these things are not just to tell us, wow, isn't heaven bright and luminous? It communicates to us. There is traction in our application.

When we go to God in prayer, this is who we are talking to. This is the level of his power and his glory. And the Lord Jesus Christ himself invites John and by extension invites us into these heavenly realms.

Old Testament saints didn't have this privilege with rare exceptions. They would have a vision. This is our daily privilege.

We can come with boldness into this realm and bring our requests. It's a very sobering thought and it really makes us stop and think, am I being objective? Have I got scripture to back my praise and my prayer, my intercession and my request? Will God be glad to see me? Have I prepared myself for this experience to come before his presence and to recognize? You think about Psalm 100, make a joyful noise unto the Lord all ye land, serve the Lord with gladness, come before his presence with singing. Don't forget, know ye the Lord, he is God.

It is he that made us, not we ourselves. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving.

Enter his courts with praise. Be thankful to him and bless his name for the Lord is good. His mercy is everlasting and his truth endures unto all generations.

We should always come before God with thankfulness, always have a thanksgiving, always have a recognition of his glory and his power as we make our requests known, as we cast our cares on him because he cares for us. And despite the radiant brilliance of his holiness and his power and his presence, we can walk right in. This is the privilege the Lord Jesus gives us.

You can't think about it too much. You can't be thankful over it too much. So he who sat there is like a Jasper and a Sardius stone, holiness accompanied by the twofold message of the brilliant red stone.

It speaks both of judgment and of redemption. Where there is judgment, there is the possibility claimed by a freewill choice of redemption, reconciliation, propitiation, atonement by the blood of Jesus Christ, the Passover slain for us. And as a result, what surrounds the throne like a rainbow, this brilliant green effect, the color of life, of growth, of productivity, of beneficence, the positive presence of God.

It produces life. Around the throne were 24 thrones. And on the thrones, I saw 24 elders sitting, clothed in white robes with crowns of gold on their heads.

These are not angels. We know this because of what they are going to say. Angels did not have need of redemption.

Angels, nowhere in the Old Testament are said to wear white robes. Nowhere do angels wear crowns. These are human beings.

The number 24 is quite significant. You have the notion that there are 12 apostles and 12 tribes of Israel. You have this reflected later on in the description of the New Jerusalem and where both are mentioned.

And if you add 12 plus 12, you get 24. However, I don't think this is what's going on here. The number 24 is best remembered as reflecting the 24 courses of priests that were commissioned by David to orchestrate and coordinate and accomplish worship in Israel.

So these 24, we'll talk more about them when we get to the fulsome description. But 24 is at first blush a priestly number. It's a priestly number.

They are elders, meaning they are leaders. You have elders mentioned throughout the New Testament in terms of leadership in the church. And they have crowns, which indicate a special kind of accomplishment.

There are different words for crown. You will remember some crowns are worn by kings who rule with kingly authority. Other crowns are the stefanos, the victor's crown in an athletic competition that are earned by striving, that are awarded for overcoming.

That's the kind of crown you have here. These are not kingly crowns. These are accomplishment crowns.

They are earned by diligence and effort. So we'll talk more about these elders a bit further down. From the throne proceed lightnings, thunderings, and sounds or voices.

This is phonay, it's used both for sound and voice. I think here that it is probably sounds that don't communicate with words, at least not yet. Lightnings, thunderings, and sounds or voices.

Lightning and thunder so often accomplishes or accompanies what God accomplishes in Revelation. You remember in the giving of the law in Exodus chapter 19, verse 16 at Mount Sinai, that there is lightning and thunder. This is a way to express the magnitude of divine presence.

Thunder is often thought to be the voice of God and lightning and thunder and voices here are all referencing the audible presence of God, the audible communication of God. It is one thing to see him in the brilliance of light. This light that surrounds the throne and defines the one who sits on the throne is as brilliant a light as humans can perceive.

And these sounds are the biggest thing that we can perceive. Thunder is louder than chariots and horsemen. Thunder and lightning lights up the sky.

The crack of thunder is beyond anything in the ancient day that man could produce. We've got some things now by way of explosives that might exceed it. But in those days, it was the biggest thing there is.

And you will find this again if you flip over to chapter eight in the Revelation, chapter eight, verse five. There is the opening of the seventh seal. There's a golden censer.

The smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints ascends before God from the angel's hand. Then in verse five of chapter eight, the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar and threw it to the earth. And there are noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake.

Flip over a few pages to chapter 11, verse 19. The temple of God was opened in heaven and the Ark of the Covenant was seen in his temple. Lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.

Few pages further in chapter 16, verse 18. The seventh angel pours out his bowl. Notice we had the seventh seal broken and this magnitude 10 sound and thunder and so on is heard.

Now the seventh angel pours out his bowl into the air. A loud voice came out of the temple of heaven from the throne saying, it is done. And there are noises, thunderings, and lightnings, a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as has not occurred since men were on the earth.

And this is the fall of great Babylon. The city is divided into three parts. The cities of the nations fell.

Great Babylon was remembered before God to give her the cup of the wine and the fierceness of his wrath. Every island flees away, mountains are not found. Great hail from heaven falls upon men.

Each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of hail. The plague was exceedingly great.

And as we will see throughout the dispensing of these judgments, there is blasphemy, there is complaint, there is a call to hide from the wrath of the lamb and so on, there's everything except repentance. We talked about this last time. This is the final great challenge to human free will.

What does it take to change your mind? What will change your mind? Is it leading with love and self-sacrifice? Is it forgetting about former sins? Is it the opportunity to be attracted, to leave the darkness and come to the light? Or do you love darkness rather than light? And how much

judgment will it take? Is there enough violent judgment to convince you to turn and to change and to repent and to approach and unveil oneself of God's grace? And we will see in the course of this book that free will is free and it will make its choice and it is not dependent on circumstance. It is not dependent on heredity or environment. It is self-determining and it will make its choice even in the presence of God.

Satan chose against God, chose to rebel. A third of the angels present in heaven, seeing the unfiltered glory of God, chose to leave with Satan. You can't say that babies who die before the age of accountability, quote unquote, are gonna go to heaven and be automatically saved.

Once they get there, they have the same free will choice as every other sentient creature God has ever made. And it's pointless to send them up there and have them reject and be sent right back out. We've talked about this before.

So, from the throne, verse five, chapter four, proceed lightnings, thunderings, and sounds. Lightning and thunder are cause and effect, right? We understand you see the lightning. There's usually a slight delay depending on distance and you will hear the thunder.

There is lightning and thunder, the most powerful forces known to man at the time that these visions were recorded, but then there are other sounds, supernatural sounds, sounds that can't be described in earthly terms. This threefold description of what emanates from the throne is a reminder that some of what God reveals can be comprehended and understood in human terms. And it is at the very upper reaches of our perception and our understanding, but there are things that are beyond.

God's ways are higher than our ways. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. And there are things that go beyond what we can perceive and understand.

And this is where our faith kicks in. We trust in what God has revealed and we leave to Him the things that are beyond our kin, as they used to say. Seven lamps of fire are burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God.

People want to go back to Isaiah and talk about the spirit of the Lord, the spirit of wisdom and understanding and so on. I don't think that's it. These, I believe, are angels.

You have angels that are guardian cherubs of the throne. We're going to see this in more detail with the description of the living creatures, their faces and so on, and harking back to the visions of Ezekiel and Daniel and even Isaiah. But those are not seen to ever leave the throne room.

They have a heavenly mission, a heavenly presence, and a heavenly function. The seven spirits of God are operative. They are agents.

They go forth. They perform and accomplish God's will. So there is the heavenly council.

There is leadership. There is presence in heaven. And then there are those who issue forth.

And the fact that they are lamps of fire, flames of fire, indicates that the action that they perform is largely that of judgment. Fire speaks of judgment. And when God determines that divine intervention needs to take place on the earth, these seven spirits, this means that there is enough of them to accomplish the perfect will of God.

Seven is the number of completeness and perfection. Four plus three, what goes on earth is four. What takes place in heaven is three.

You add them together and you have the perfection of God's plan and purpose accomplished in and on the earth. And these agents of God are holy. And that fire comes forth in purging, in judgment, in accomplishing God's will.

So we saw them back in chapter one. Remember when John issues the greeting and says, grace to you, this is verse four, from him who is, who was, and who is to come and from the seven spirits who are before his throne. How does grace come to us? How does grace and peace actually enter our lives? There is divine agency.

God makes it happen. And these seven spirits are representative of the means that God uses. This is not just a flowery abstraction.

It's not just a happy thought. When God says grace to you and peace, he makes it happen. And there are seven dedicated fiery spirits before his throne that ensure that it does take place and that nothing on earth interferes with the grace of God in our lives.

This is something we can take to the bank in prayer. Father, I thank you that you not only promise me grace and peace, but you make it happen. And there are material means, there are living active agencies that ensure that your promises to me are fulfilled.

And I thank you for that. The Lord Jesus is involved in supervising these angels in effect, reminding them of who he died for, who he has redeemed. And that as we will see in chapters hence, when the judgment of God comes forth, there are those who are marked, who are sealed, who are preserved from judgment.

And judgment benefits them even as it works God's purpose on those who deserve judgment, who refuse to repent and be delivered from judgment. But this is what God reveals to us. There may be all other kinds of activity and agency in heaven.

This has been revealed to John to pass on to us as an encouragement. Look at what God has put in place to take care of us, because we belong to Jesus Christ. All of this is in place to effect God's will and God's purpose on the earth on our behalf.

This is for us. And not to be lightly esteemed, not to be taken casually or well, won't that be something when the tribulation happens. Notice the present tense in these.

This is happening as we speak. It is in the here and now. So, lightnings, thunderings and voices, seven lamps of fire burning before the throne.

I love these seven lamps of fire. Our grace and our peace is created and brought to us through the agency of these seven spirits of God. This is not the Holy Spirit.

Holy Spirit's already with us. This is action from heaven. When we pray and God says, I've heard that prayer and I'm going to answer it.

You can imagine one of these seven spirits is going to make sure it happens. God's power is not just invisibly expressed. God employs agency.

And think about this. God could simply speak and make things happen and all of the angels could be in the stadium seats with popcorn and a Pepsi watching it happen. I believe that God employs and involves the angelic creation in every part of his program for human history, beginning with and including the creation.

When God says, let there be, and there was, we are fond of saying God simply spoke it into existence. But remember when the stars sing at the creation in Job and the sons of God shout for joy, the stars sing. They've got lyrics and music.

The sons of God, they just shout. They're a little further down the chain. We want to shine with glory like the stars.

I don't want to just make a joyful noise. Notice, make a joyful noise unto the Lord all ye lands. The sheep of the pasture have a higher level of communication than the lands.

Don't just shout huzzah, know the words and know the lyrics. We're going to see the song of Moses and the lamb. We are going to see these doxologies coming up.

We've got one coming here in verse eight and again in verse 11, but I'm going to study these and I know some individuals in our group that are with me and we together, you know who you are. We together want to be sure we know these words and we can sing along when we get to the heavenly realms and these songs are celebrated by the white robe throng and sung by the elders and we will know the words and we will know the tune like God's stars that sang together. But I believe these angels of God are involved in every aspect of God's activity with regard to human beings.

We want to be qualified to be agents, to be servants, to be stewards, to be operatives in accomplishing God's work and God's will. God loves to involve his sentient creation in what he's doing. What better way to understand the Father, to understand the Lord Jesus Christ than to be actively involved in the work, to be a part of it.

We can all think of times when with our mother or with our father, we were involved in a project that they could have done by themselves, but we're growing up and they say, here, take this

piece of material, take this tool, take this spoon and stir, take this potato masher and mash, help me make this meal, help me bake this thing, help me accomplish this project. I never had more enjoyable days than helping my father around the property, building fence and fixing things and constructing things. And you get to know your father in a unique way when you pitch in and are used by him and you listen to his instructions and you follow them carefully and you participate and you have the joy and satisfaction of accomplishment with him, not just sitting watching him do things, but being involved.

God does this with his angels. These seven spirits rejoice to go out and accomplish God's purpose. The living creatures rejoice with their proximity to God and their opportunity to proclaim his holiness and his attributes, which we are going to see in the doxologies.

When we meet this coming Sunday, don't miss it. We're going to look at the doxologies of Revelation and it is powerful stuff. The angels proclaim, God doesn't toot his own horn.

God is seated on the throne. It is the angels, it is the elders, it is the living creatures and it will be us who sing songs of celebration of the greatness and the glory and the beauty of our father in heaven and the Lord Jesus Christ, his son, our savior. What an opportunity.

So don't take this lightly. And what sounds to John right now as an apostle being transported to heaven as mere sounds and thunderings, do you remember occasions when some people hear the voice of God and others hear thunder? Little pop quiz, in the New Testament, what's the first occasion you can think of where some hear thunder and others hear a voice? It is the baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ at the Jordan. I'll give you several examples here.

When Moses is on the mountain in Sinai in the Old Testament, Exodus 19, 16, on the third day in the morning, thunderings and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and the sound of the trumpet was very loud so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. If you ever wanna talk about the pre-incarnate Christ, I don't look at the angel of the Lord and put a capital A on it. That's an angel of God.

It's an angel. Jesus is not an angel, never was, never will be. He was God and he becomes man.

He's not the God angel man. And if it's the angel of the Lord, it's not the Lord Jesus. You know where you can find the Lord Jesus in the Old Testament? Exodus 19, 16.

Thunderings and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and the sound of a trumpet is very loud. That's the voice of the glorified Lord Jesus. That's the voice of the second person of the Trinity.

And all the people were in the camp tremble at that voice. Next chapter, Exodus 20, 18 and 19. All the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking.

Once again, why the sound of a trumpet? Isn't thunder and lightning enough and smoke and

fire? There's a sound of a trumpet. They don't understand it. It just sounds like Charlie Brown's teacher to them.

Who is up there understanding and recording the voice of God? It's Moses and Joshua. They are on the mountain. The people see it and hear it.

The mountain is smoking. They tremble and stand afar off. They said to Moses, you speak with us and we will hear, but let not God speak with us lest we die.

God speaks to Moses. Moses speaks to the people. Here in Revelation four, there is speech in heaven that John hears.

He hears the voice of the trumpet, but he understands it and he communicates it to us. Job chapter 37, verses two through five, hear attentively, talking about the Lord God in heaven, hear attentively the thunder of his voice and the rumbling that comes from his mouth. He sends it forth under the whole heaven, his lightning to the ends of the earth.

After it, a voice roars. He thunders with his majestic voice and he does not restrain them when his voice is heard. God thunders marvelously.

God thunders marvelously with his voice. He does great things which we cannot comprehend. The thunder speaks of incomprehension.

God is speaking. Can't quite understand what he's saying. That was Job 37, two through five.

Beautiful poetic passage. Few chapters later, Job 40, verse nine. Do you have an arm like God? Do you have power like God? Can you thunder with a voice like his? This is the almighty God and he is our father.

He is acting on our behalf. He is speaking for our benefit. He is sending forth his angelic minions as ministers who are flames of fire to bless us.

When we meet the conditions, when we are qualified, don't take it lightly, don't forget who we are, don't get busy during the day. Oh, look, I've got to buy groceries. I've got to get someplace.

I've got to do something. Look at who we are and why we are here and who is constantly aware and supervising every detail of our lives, who is waiting for us to come before his throne and communicate in prayer and receive the benefits of that divine connection, that divine life, the emerald light that surrounds his throne benefits us and infuses us with life that partakes of the eternal. That green light, that's eternal life.

The red is the work of Jesus Christ that qualifies us, that enables us to cross the border to that pure white light where God dwells. Psalm 29, verses three through nine, the voice of the Lord is over the waters. Notice, over the troubled waters.

Don't forget those troubled waters. The God of glory thunders. The Lord is over many waters.

The voice of the Lord is powerful. The voice of the Lord is full of majesty. The voice of the Lord splits the flames of fire.

The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness. In his temple, everyone says glory. That was Psalm 29, three through nine.

Psalm 18, 13, the Lord thundered from heaven and the most high uttered his voice, hailstones and coals of fire. Remember the hailstones we saw coming up? That means something. Those hailstones have to land somewhere.

John chapter 12, verses 28 and 29. Jesus says, father, glorify your name. A voice from heaven came saying, I have both glorified it and I will glorify it again.

Therefore, the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said an angel has spoken to him. God speaks, some hear the voice, others hear thunder.

And the same John that wrote this revelation wrote that passage. That was John chapter 12, 28 and 29. Revelation chapter 10, one of the most fascinating, inscrutable passages in all of the revelation.

Revelation 10, three and four. There is this mighty angel with one foot on the sea and one foot on the land. He cries with a loud voice as when a lion roars.

When he cried out, seven thunders uttered their voices. When the seven thunders uttered their voices, John says, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered and do not write them. Not giving away the plan to the enemy.

They spoke, they uttered their voices. That word utter means to speak with words, but John's not allowed to write them down, seal it up. It's interesting to me that he says, seal them up.

He said, he doesn't say forget them. He doesn't say erase them. He says, seal them up and don't write them.

We're going to see this again and again. We see it here in chapter four, verse five. We'll see it in chapter six, verse one.

One of the four living creatures is going to say with a voice like thunder, because he is speaking the words of God, speaking the will of God, come and see. Revelation 14, verse two, I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters and like the voice of loud thunder. There's many other places that we could go to and see this.

I think this is enough. Think I'll give you the final one. Remember Paul on the road to Damascus? He's still Saul at that point.

Acts chapter nine, verses three through seven. As Saul journeys, he comes near Damascus.

Notice the road to Damascus.

He's not in the middle. He's getting pretty close to the city. Apparently you can see it on the horizon there.

As he came near Damascus, suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. A light from heaven. He fell on the ground and he heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? He says, who are you, Lord? The Lord said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a sound, but seeing no one. It says voice, this is phonay. Hearing a voice is the sound.

They don't hear the intelligible speech. This is clarified later in Acts 22, verse nine. Paul recounting this episode says, those who were with me saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of him who spoke to me.

They didn't discern the words. They hear the sound, they don't hear, meaning they don't understand or comprehend the words. So much of what is in scripture, this is application for you and for me.

So many times God speaks in his word and it is in essence thunder to those who are outside. Think of the parables that Jesus spoke. To those who are outside, everything is parables.

They see, but they don't perceive. They hear, but they don't understand. They've got a hard heart.

We don't want the voice of God to be thunder for us. We want to hear the words and hearing them with understanding means turn around and make application. We ought to be different people, different hour by hour, different day by day, conversation by conversation, task by task, attitude by attitude, thought by thought, awareness, just visualize.

The God that John saw is still seated on his throne. We should remember it. Before the throne, verse six, there is something like a sea of glass.

Be sure and put that text note up in your verse six of chapter four of the revelation. Before the throne, there was something like a sea of glass and in the midst of the throne and around the throne, you have the four living creatures. Let me just finish with the something like a sea of glass.

The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, says Isaiah 57, verse 20, to the wicked. It is restless and chaotic.

It is impenetrable. You can't see through it. Mire and dirt are cast up on the shore.

There's turmoil. There is disquietude. It is the opposite of peace.

But what surrounds the throne of God? It is subdued. It is like a sea of glass, perfectly still and perfectly transparent. The presence of God with the seven spirits before his throne bring grace and peace.

There is no chaos in the presence of God. There is no mire and dirt. There is no impingement from the wicked.

It is the opposite of Isaiah 57, 20. It is serene. Everything, like his own presence, is crystal clear and is reflective and transmits the presence and the power, the beauty, and the holiness of our God.

It surrounds his throne. It also indicates that there is a distance. John isn't looking outward from the throne and seeing the sea beyond.

He is on the edge of this glassy sea, if you will, looking in toward the throne. There is a respectful distance, and it is only the holiest of the holy, the four living creatures, the seven spirits who burn like flame that are dwelling among the stones of fire. Remember in Ezekiel, the description of Lucifer, he is one who dwelt among the stones of fire in the very presence of God.

He was the cherub who covers. And that is what he gave up. He left this scene.

He left this presence. And look at where he is now. Look at what he's doing and look at what is going to happen to him.

We want to be the very opposite of the troubled sea. We want to experience and claim the grace and the peace of God that comes from this presence. When God speaks, we want to hear what he has to say and respond in faith, in obedience, in celebration, in gratitude, in thankfulness.

Be thankful unto him and bless his name. The Lord is good. His mercy is everlasting, and his truth endures unto all generations.

Once again, that's Psalm 100. Serve the Lord with gladness. Come before his presence with singing.

Come with singing. We're going to see the song. We're going to begin to see this pattern of songs that characterize revelation from this point forward next time.

We'll see you on Sunday morning. We'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the tremendous privilege of being allowed to see this heavenly vision and be assured and given confidence that you are our Father through the Lord Jesus Christ.

All of your grace and all of your glory is available for us and should motivate us to a life of faith and hope and love. We pray that as we reflect on these truths, God the Holy Spirit will help us to see clearly how they will guide us. As we look through the narrow gate that leads to life, we can

see this scene and be encouraged to stay on the narrow road and to be motivated to be good stewards of the time and opportunities that you give us.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.