

Read Psalm 148 to get into the service....

*There's no place like home*

Revelation 4

## **'A throne was standing in heaven'**

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[Biblical text at the end of sermon for those online.

Previous sermons in this series available on the website

See: [www.jewsforjesus.org.au/sermons.html](http://www.jewsforjesus.org.au/sermons.html)]

### **Introduction**

At the end of a hard day at the office, what is the one place you want to go? Where do you want to eventually put your feet up and relax? They say the George Clooney movie "O Brother where art thou?" is a remake of the Greek classic, "The Odyssey." In that book by Homer, the anti-hero Odysseus experiences many mis-adventures and then along with his mates makes it back home from Troy to Ithaca. That's it; the end of a man's longing is to get home. A couple weeks ago our family watched the movie "E.T." again. The little alien who could make the flowers gain strength and bloom, who could touch the hearts of children and adults alike had one goal in his time on earth. And that was to leave it. He wanted to at least phone home, but as we see at the end, his greatest desire was to be home and with those who also called that same home, home.

Yasir Arafat died this week, to almost no Jewish chagrin. His burial was cause for much public discussion. The government of Israel allowed him to be buried in the West Bank.

Arafat's body was flown Thursday to Cairo to lie in state before a military funeral on Friday to be attended by Arab leaders, many of whom would not or could not visit Ramallah, still under Israeli occupation.

After the ceremonies, Palestinian officials said Mr. Arafat's coffin was to be flown to Ramallah on Friday, for burial under a half-dozen dusty pine trees that stand in the Muqata, the ruined compound in which Israel contained him for his last years.

Palestinian leaders called the gravesite a temporary step forced on them by Israel, which forbade burial in Jerusalem. In a symbol of the tenacity of their national ambition, Palestinian officials placed soil taken from Jerusalem under Mr. Arafat's black-and-white marble tomb. They built hooks into the tomb so that, they said, it can be raised easily for the eventual trip 10 miles south to Jerusalem and the holy site that Muslims call the Noble Sanctuary and we Jews call the Temple Mount.

Even in his death, Arafat wanted to make a political statement, but to be gracious; we could say he wanted to go home.

What is it about home that is so captivating, and so demanding? What is the nature of home?

Today's lesson from Revelation chapter 4 gives us insight into a believer's desire to go home. After two fairly grim chapters of dire warnings and troubles from Rome and from inside the community of faith, John is going to give us highlights of the high place. He is viewing heaven in its unveiled majesty and he wants us in on it. And we should say it's just in time. What gives our burdened soul hope is a glimpse of what truly lies ahead. All you see, friends in Chatswood, all you see, friends in Sardis and Philadelphia and Smyrna and Ephesus, is not what is. There is something greater than the woes and the worries and the disdain and the turmoil. There is a hope and a future for you, people of God, and it's not found in Thyatira or in Laodicea. The hope for the people of God is the coming of Y'shua from his highest place in heaven. No word describes the comfort that brings than the word 'home.' So John gets to glimpse it, and he shares it with us in this lesson today, perhaps properly entitled, "There's no place like home."

Turn with me to verse one and listen to the heartbeat of the home-thinking apostle John sitting in despair and exile in the island Patmos, dreaming of home and being comforted by the God who dwells there.

"The chief purpose of life, for any one of us," JRR Tolkien said, "is to increase according to our capacity our knowledge of God by all the means we have, and to be moved by it to praise and thanks."

And I remember the poet who said, "All animals, except man, know that the principle business of life is to enjoy it." [Samuel Butler (1835-1902), British author. *The Way of All Flesh*, ch. 19 (1903).]

With that as a backdrop and the apostle's vision before us, let's keep reading, so that we can enjoy true life and find home at last.

### **Older Testament references**

John popped his head above the clouds and saw that voice, the same one from chapter one. This time, though, the voice was not behind him, but rather above him, calling, beckoning to John. So up he came. And the first and most awesome thing to which he was attracted was the throne of God. And the One who sat on it whom no one has seen. But did you hear the language? It sounds an awful lot like Moses and the 70 elders and the older sons of Aaron (Exodus 24.9-11) who saw "the God of Israel and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself."

There are more Older Testament references in this chapter. The four living creatures sound like Ezekiel's dream of chapter one, 10 and 14. Micaiah is reported to have said in 1 Kings 22.19 "I saw the LORD sitting

on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right and on His left.”

One of the clearest quotes in today’s lesson is found in the famous vision of Isaiah. After the state funeral of his king, Uzziah, which would have been given as much press coverage as Arafat, Isaiah was sad. And in his despondency God spoke to him. He saw a vision and “saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.” (Isa. 6.1-2)

### **The door of hope was opened**

I’m still stuck though in verse one. Did you hear the creaking sound of the door? Did you peek through it? Did you enter it? John says “a door standing open in heaven.” I like that it is open and remaining open. I like that the invitation of chapter 3 is not a momentary thing but that for those who heed the call and listen to God and come to him, then there remains a door visible and even open to us. Ezekiel had said that in the beginning of his prophecy (1.1) where he saw the ‘heavens were opened’ and he ‘saw the visions of God.’

God wants to give each of us a door of hope [Hos. 2.15 “Then I will give her her vineyards from there, And the valley of Achor as a door of hope. And she will sing there as in the days of her youth, As in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt. ]

Hope is not a bigger house with more goodies in it. Hope is not the accumulation of stuff or the energy enervating of endless nightclubbing. Hope is found in the future in the person of Y’shua and in present relation to him in these troubled times.

The language of Revelation is human, but John is seeking to unpack heavenly realities. Thus we have to cut him some slack. We have to get caught up in the moment with him. We cannot sit back and deride him, saying, “emeralds and glassy seas. Ha! What nonsense is that! Why does heaven seem like a royal imperial British or Roman governmental palace?” Be careful with allegory and the human/divine divide. What other images did John have at his disposal save thrones and sea of glass, like crystal, and thunders and seven lamps of fire? All images, yes, and each one not to be taken literally. This is a painted scene; it’s not the scene itself. It’s the divine sifted through the impressions of the aged John.

### **Who is in heaven?**

The question should be asked, ‘who is in the heavenly realm?’ Why should this be asked? After the last 2 weeks sermons, where the communities of faith are so seriously in view and in question, it’s right to ask. Who will make it to heaven? Who will be the ‘overcomers?’ And John gives us many answers.

First there is the throne of God. Fantastic... this is the highlight. This is the reason we arrive. He is the One who ever was and who ever will be. And the One who invites us into his presence.

Then there are 24 accompanying elders. Since 12 is the number of the kingdom, then two times 12 makes great sense, the numbers of the tribes of Israel and the number of the apostles. These 24 represent all redeemed humanity. They are dressed in white and wearing crowns. (v. 4) This is another picture of royalty and priesthood. The elders are not governmental pawns, but they are saints who have prayed along with the people of God over the centuries. Never see rulers in the Bible as governmental only. These are not secular rulers, but rather those who 'serve and not lord it over them.'

And also in heaven are four living creatures. These strange beings are so reflective of Ezekiel's vision that you would think it's merely a bad rehearsal of the chapter by a forgetful John. The four are repeats of ox, man, eagle and lion. In Ezekiel they are four-winged, here they have 6. In Ezekiel the creatures have four faces, here they each have one. So it could just be forgetfulness. Or it could be as I see it, another reflection that is not a mirror, but a greater sea, a greater ocean.

Paul Barnett says of these four that the lion is the noblest creature, the ox is the strongest. The human is the wisest and the fastest is the eagle. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes says the lion represents wild beasts and is the king of the jungle, the calf from the domesticated animals of which the ox is king, the eagle, the flying birds of the air and is the king, and the man, who stands for the king of all animate nature to whom dominion over the earth was entrusted.

Whatever way you see it, it's clear that Butler's poetry is properly remembered, that all the animals of earth know that God is to be adored and worshiped and remembered and praised. We should be caught up in that praise ourselves. Amen?

### **The triad formula, worship naturally follows**

Again at the end of our lesson today we hear the triad formula, which is rife in the book. The sounds of Isaiah's praise song, his doxology of "holy holy holy" rings in the ears of John and in our ears as well. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are clearly in view here. Who was, who is and who is to come. The eternal sovereign, the One who sits on the throne and who rules even now, even when things in Smyrna and Ephesus are shocking and terror filled. Look up and live, oh Israel. Look up to the vision of John and be encouraged. There is a day coming when the Almighty who rules in the clouds will rule in our hearts and in our sight.

### **Summary**

So: What should you learn/hear today as a result of reading this text? Or what lessons do we learn from today's teaching?

- 1) Be blessed by reading this book regularly
- 2) True life is found in relationship with God
- 3) Winning in life is found by falling on the floor before God, casting your crowns of victory at his much-more-victorious feet
- 4) Get caught up in God

### **Invitation**

So... let me ask you if you think there's no place like this home we describe today. Does it cry out to you and you want to go home too? We want to give a choice to you. Maybe you have been an opponent of the Messiah. Maybe you have worshipped wrong. Maybe you have rejected what God said, but today you want to turn and agree with God about Y'shua. If you would like to be delivered from your sin by the blood of Y'shua, then pray this prayer and receive His love and grace. Father, forgive me in the name of Y'shua for all my sins. He was the Saviour and the fulfilment of all prophecies about Messiah. He is the one and the only one who can save me from my selfishness, from my sin. I acknowledge Y'shua as that one who wants to free me, and who alone can free me. I repent of my sin and accept Y'shua as my deliverer. By faith I am now born again by the Holy Spirit. Amen.

If you prayed that prayer, please talk to me after the service is over, **[or email me if you are reading this online]** so we can talk about growing in this knowledge and this relationship with God.

**Actual text**

**Rev. 4.1** ¶ After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things."

**Rev. 4.2** Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.

**Rev. 4.3** And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.

**Rev. 4.4** And around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.

**Rev. 4.5** And from the throne proceed flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God;

Rev. 4.6 and before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.

Rev. 4.7 And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle.

Rev. 4.8 And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come."

Rev. 4.9 And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever,

Rev. 4.10 the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

Rev. 4.11 "Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created."

### **Bibliography for Revelation studies:**

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Notes not used in sermon:

Attending the funeral of Arafat were; the foreign ministers of Germany, France and Britain; and the presidents of Indonesia, South Africa and Algeria. William Burns, the assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, will represent the United States.

The scene in chapter 4 appears in direct reflection to the giving of Torah at Sinai. Thunders and lightning and trumpets (cf. Heb 12)