

Lesson #3: See through Heaven's Door!

Seven Lessons of Revelation

Genesis 28:10-17; Revelation 4:1-11

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In 1969 Elizabeth Kubler Ross shared her research in a book entitled *On Death and Dying*. Ross not only popularized the stages of grief for those experiencing loss; she also opened a discussion of near death experiences and their meaning. As technology advanced and resuscitation became more common, many people described mystical experiences accompanying their death and resuscitation. Some described seeing Jesus, some a light, some a relative. Others had dark, terrifying experiences. Some believed they had gone to hell. Subsequent studies found dramatic changes in attitude and lifestyle of these people. All of this raised questions as to what is beyond heaven's door.

In the Bible Jacob had an experience where he believed he was sleeping at heaven's door. During the night as he slept, he dreamed of a stairway stretching all the way from earth to heaven. In his dreams he saw angels going up and down that stairway. He also heard God from the doorway offer him a promise. It was a pivotal moment for Jacob when he became God's partner on earth. He called the place Bethel, the house of God, and believed it to be the doorway to heaven.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul spoke of a vision where he was "*caught up to the third heaven*" and "*heard inexpressible things*". Although Paul had what he called '*surpassingly*

great revelations,’ he never shared their content in his letters. One can only guess why Paul was given these experiences. Certainly he suffered much, and those visions could have helped him see beyond his circumstances, beyond his turmoil and pain. Whatever the case, our first prolonged glimpse beyond heaven’s door is in the book of Revelation; and there is a reason for it.

This summer we are learning seven lessons from Revelation. *Lesson one is to see Jesus, the awesome ruler, who walks among us. Lesson two is to hear his call to the churches.* It is three-fold: reconnect with him in intimacy, have courage in hardship and don’t compromise or tolerate compromise to gain the acceptance or approval of your culture. Today we consider a third lesson that Jesus teaches in the book of Revelation. Jesus wants you to *look beyond heaven’s door.*

The voice that got John to turn and see Jesus in his awesome rule called again:

Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this. (Revelation 4:1, NIV)

John said that he was immediately in the spirit, through that door and seeing a throne. In the insert, you can read its description. First, the throne was occupied by a person who had the appearance of both jasper, a green gleaming quartz, and carnelian, a flesh or reddish color gem. In other words, John saw a figure with an incredibly beautiful green and red gem-like radiance occupying this throne. Second, the throne was encircled by a rainbow that resembled in brilliant color and purity an emerald. Third, flashes of lightening, rumblings, and peals of thunder came from the throne.

As John’s moved about, he saw 24 more thrones surrounding the one great throne. Elders dressed in white and wearing gold crowns sat on the thrones. Obviously, God delegates authority

and influence. John saw seven blazing lamps that represent seven spirits of God. Are those spirits synonymous with the angels over the seven churches of Asia? Are they angels over the seven continents of the world? We're not told. Instead, we are just shown such things. Before the throne is what looks like a sea of glass. Its function and meaning are not discussed. Finally, four living creatures, each distinct from the other, each having six wings and covered with eyes constantly declare God's praise.

John notes that night and day these creatures speak of God's holiness and eternity, and as they do, all 24 elders leave their thrones, fall before the great throne, lay their crowns aside and declare God's praise.

Although John offers little comment on what he sees, he recognizes that all this awesome beauty seen in the gleaming gems and rainbow, all this frightful power with peals of thunder and flashing lightning, all this amazing authority pictured in a central throne and 24 more thrones with robed elders wearing gold crowns, and all these other things, blazing lamps, a sea of glass, four living- eye-covered creatures, suggest that what happens in this throne room controls the fate of our planet and the destiny of all its inhabitants. The health of our aquatic life, fishing industries and tourism is not decided by the ingenuity of BP engineers in the gulf. Our peace is not decided by Islamic Jihadists or the American intelligence community. Our healthcare and economic prosperity are not decided by politicians, bankers and regulators. What is beyond heaven's door determines our future. This assembly of thrones matter. Moreover, those living creatures with eyes to see, have nothing but praise for our ruler. Ironically, as John lived in forced exile from his people and the churches he led, he found that creatures with eyes to see unceasingly sang and praised our ruling God.

There was more beyond heaven's door. In the right hand of God, the hand of action, the hand that determines our experience, is a scroll. In chapter 5 of Revelation, John describes a scroll that has writing on both sides, and that can't be unrolled because of seven locks. John doesn't tell us what's written in that scroll, but we have a good idea.

First, the scroll requires someone worthy to unlock and open it. Someone has to acquire the right to open it. Second, no creature of any kind can be found. John dissolves into tears, and they won't stop. There's an angel that is pure and never has rebelled, yet they have not acquired the right. Third, a ruling elder comforts John pointing to the Jewish Messiah, saying the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David has triumphed and is able to open the scroll and unlock the seals. We are now talking about a human being, given dominion over the earth who has won a victory and acquired the right. Fourth, John sees the Messiah standing in the center of the throne, looking like a lamb that has been slain, encircled by the living creatures and ruling elders and receiving the scroll. The creatures and elders immediately fall before the lamb; and holding harps and golden bowls filled with the prayers of the saints, they sing:

You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth. (Revelation 5:9-10, NIV)

It is so clear from what is done, said and sung that the scroll is our right of redemption. When the scroll is unrolled, humanity will be free from death and all loss caused by our sin.

Beyond heaven's door is a great and loving God holding in his right hand our redemption. He has mobilized heaven on our behalf; and our songs and prayers like incense dominate the atmosphere and mood of heaven.

I tell you that not a single prayer of yours is wasted, even if you believe God said “no.” The cry of your heart behind the prayer is still smelled and tasted in the place where decisions are made and redemption is worked. Don’t ever give up praying... because until the scroll is unrolled the prayers burn like incense before God. They are not lost. They dominate heaven and will soon dominate earth. Prayers are not only are motivational incense in heaven, they affirm God’s power and love and so they are also acts of worship.

As the elders worship and sing to the lamb, holding our prayers, John saw hundreds of thousands of angels join the chorus. He soon heard every living thing in the universe praise Christ and the Father almighty. The four eye-covered creatures cried “Amen” and the royal elders fell again in worship of Christ. This is what must take place as the voice bid John to pass through heaven’s door.

The fourth and fifth chapters of Revelation offer us a lesson. Beyond heaven’s door a plan is unfolding. It is great, awesome and rooted in mercy. One day all creation will sing its praise, but for now we have a glimpse of that plan and can begin the song, and we have the call to believe in the Lamb and act accordingly.

The throne room of the universe has our redemption in mind, and the one worthy to redeem us is unlocking the seals of our victory. Keep that in mind. Never let go of it.