

## **Sermon: The reality of God's glory (Rev 4-5)**

We are continuing to look at the book of Revelation to see how it reveals the true nature of things. Today, we will learn about the reality of God's glory, or his greatness. I'll use those terms interchangeably. Keep your bibles open to chapters 4 and 5, and there's a sermon outline in the handout where you can make notes and follow along.

This is a Chinese imperial bridal carriage. It's pretty spectacular. This one was made to celebrate close relations between Australia and China, and given as a gift to Sydney in the bicentennial year of 1988. It used to be on display in the Queen Victoria Building, then was moved to the Chinese Garden of Friendship, and is now in the Golden Dragon Museum in Bendigo. 300 tonnes of raw stone (serpentine, a green stone like jade) was carved down into this 2 tonne carriage. Altogether there are 188 dragons, 18 Phoenixes, 36 bats and 155 strands of beads. It is made to represent the greatness of a Chinese royal bride. It is made out of precious stone to be particularly extravagant. When you look at it, you can't help but be impressed.

A person's greatness is not something we can see, so we often use something else, like extravagant objects, to represent the greatness of a person. When we look at chapter 4 of Revelation, John is given a vision. There's a massive throne in heaven. It's surrounded by a rainbow. It has lightning and thunder coming out of it. It's surrounded by 24 other thrones, with 24 kings all with gold crowns. The person sitting on that throne can only be described as looking like precious jewels; like jasper and ruby.

God doesn't sit on a throne made of precious stones - he is the precious stones! What John is seeing, what his vision is depicting for us, is God's greatness. This is how Revelation works: it's not depicting how God really looks; it's using pictures to reveal to us the truth about God. The truth is that God is not just great and powerful, like a human king, who might have extravagant objects to represent their greatness. God is the precious stones - God IS greatness and power.

What's the difference? Think of it like this. This is Elvis Presley. He is often referred to as The King of Rock n Roll, or sometimes just "The King". We might ask the question, "How great a rock n roll star was Elvis?" And people might compare him to John Lennon, or Bruce Springsteen or some other rock n roll singer. Elvis was pretty great rock star. He might even be the greatest rock star. But he's still one rock star among many others.

Now this is an Elvis impersonator. His name's Shawn Klush. The BBC named him the World's Greatest Elvis. He talks the most like Elvis. He sings the most like Elvis. He moves the most like Elvis. He wears the same clothes, the same boots, plays the same guitars. He's the best attempt at Elvis there has ever been.

Now think about this: How is it that Elvis Presley is not the world's greatest Elvis? It's because he's not an impersonator! He's the Elvis! He's not just the standard against which all other Elvises are measured. He's the source of what it means to be Elvis. He didn't have to try to be Elvis - he was naturally Elvis. He's not the best Elvis among many. He is the real Elvis. All the other Elvises are all just imitating.

In this vision in Revelation 4, God is not just the most powerful ruler among a list of other really powerful rulers who jockey for position. God is power itself - he is its source. God is not just the greatest among many. He is greatness itself - he is its source. God doesn't have to try to be powerful or great. All power, all greatness, doesn't just get measured against him - it comes from him.

When we talk about God's glory, that's what we mean. The picture John gives us has the four living

creatures, which represent all created beings, saying to God, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." God is not just holy; he is holy holy holy - he is Holiness. God is not just mighty; he is Lord God almighty - he is mightiness. God doesn't just exist; he always was, he always is now, and he always will be - he is existence. This is why when the four living creatures have said what they say, the 24 kings fall down before God, and they lay down their crowns before him, and they say in chapter 4 verse 11, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." ALL OTHER THINGS rely on God for their very being. There is no little whizzing atom in the universe which does not owe its existence to God. There is no blip of energy to cause any kind of change without God. There is no concept or idea which exists for any other reason than God. No feeling or emotion outside God. Even nothing, so far as nothing is something, cannot be without God. This is what it means for God to be Greatness. This is God's glory.

Now that, to me, is amazing. It truly blows my mind. And yet that's not the end of it. Revelation has still more to tell us about God and his glory. In the next chapter, chapter 5, John sees another heavenly vision; another picture to reveal the truth about God and his glory to us. In chapter 5 we see a scroll, sealed with seven wax seals, like on old documents, used to keep them shut until someone with authority can come and open them and act on the contents. The scroll, we will discover, is God's plan. It's what God has in store for his creation. But it can't be acted on until it's opened, and it can't be opened because no-one can open it! No-one is worthy to bring about the fulfillment of God's plans. No wonder John cries at this: God's plans are always the best, but they cannot be acted on because no-one can be found, not in heaven or in earth or under the earth, who can open this scroll or even look inside.

Let that sink in a moment. No-one can be found to open this scroll. Not under the earth - neither Satan nor any of his demons can crack it open. No-one on earth - no king or president or scientist or magician can even take a peek. Not even in heaven will you find someone to carry out God's plan. No angel, not even God himself will open it. The God we just saw on his throne, source of all power and greatness, of existence itself, will not open this scroll. Something is missing.

Then someone is pointed out to John. They are called God's King - the Lion of Judah, the tribe of kings; and the Root of David, the line of kings. More than that, they are standing on the very centre of God's throne. Not in front of the throne, not around the throne, not beside the throne - this person is in God's very own place. And they are depicted as a lamb - and not just any lamb, but a lamb that has been slaughtered. And this lamb reaches out and takes the scroll of God's plan.

This is the picture given to John to show us the reality. This Lamb is Jesus: God the Son, who was slaughtered - and yet who lives. And it is because of Jesus' death and resurrection that God's plans can come to pass. God's glory - all power, all greatness, all holiness, all creation - hinges on the death and resurrection of Jesus. The saving act that brings an end to sin and death for us, the saving act that opens up a way for humanity to relate to God as Father, and to Jesus as Brother, and to the Holy Spirit as friend, is as central to the very essence of God as his being the creator of all things. God's plans from the beginning, before creation, and into eternity, forever and ever, all hang on what Jesus did on that cross. If the idea that God is Glory - that he is Holiness and Power and Existence - was not mind-blowing enough, then to realise that capital S Salvation is as much a part of God's Glory as these other things just knocks me right out of the park. Our salvation, our relationship with God, is not an afterthought. It's not even just a piece of the puzzle. It is key to God's character and his plans. It is as much his greatness as anything else. He has made us, and a relationship with us, as fundamental as existence itself. What an amazing reality. What an amazing, wonderful God.

According to the book of Revelation, according to God, this is reality. But does our attitude towards

God line up with the reality of God's greatness pictured for us in Revelation? I want to ask you to think about two questions.

Firstly, how do you think about God's greatness? It's quite easy to think of God's greatness as a big pile of stones - as though it is somehow possible to remove stones one at a time, and lessen his greatness, or add stones to increase his greatness. You mightn't say it like that out loud. But if you've ever thought that you can somehow bargain with God and say, "I'll do this to glorify you, and in return I expect a roof over my head, a family, a good job doing something I enjoy," then you've thought that way. Likewise, if you've ever thought, "I am such a shameful sinner and a hypocrite. I really damage God's reputation," then you have thought that way. When God blesses us with wealth, he doesn't get less rich. When he gives us strength, he doesn't get less strong. God's greatness is not a pile of stones to be added to or taken from.

God's greatness is actually more like a story. If I write a story, I am the source of that story. If I tell you the story, I don't lose it - you simply gain it. We share it together. God is the source of all greatness. His greatness is written on our lives through our creation, through our salvation. We tell his story by being created, by being saved. Doesn't that put a different spin on evangelism - the story of God's glory is told to the world simply by him saving us! We don't add to God's story of glory, nor do we take away from it, any more than a character in a book writes the book. Rather, God includes us in his glory. All glorify God, we are told: Christian and non-Christian; angel and demon; living and dead - chapter 5 verse 13 says "every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth" gives praise and honor and glory and power to God and to Jesus. We don't need to worry on that score: God's glory is guaranteed.

Secondly, how do you think about your relationship with God as a Christian? It's quite easy to think of our salvation as just a part of our lives, and just a part of God's plans. And so we compartmentalise our life with God into the time we spend at church, or the time we spend praying, or the time we spend volunteering for things. But it's so much more than that. A relationship with God through Jesus Christ is as vital as existing. It's central to God's glory. It is therefore central to our entire being. There's no part of our life where God should be absent.

In Revelation chapter 4, we see a picture of the 24 kings with 24 golden crowns. A crown represents sovereignty - supreme and independent authority. But Revelation shows us the reality of God's glory - that there is no such thing as authority independent from God. All power and glory and greatness and salvation comes from God. We have to accept that reality. And that means taking off our golden crowns, and laying them down at the foot of God's throne where they belong; giving up our pretend authority and accepting God's actual authority.

Are you still holding on to your authority over your life, your golden crown, hoping you can use it to bargain with God? Are you living as though Christ's death and resurrection is only important on Sundays? Is God's voice just one of a bunch of competing voices demanding your attention? Don't ignore reality! Give your pretend authority over to God. Not because you think it will get you something. Not because you think it will glorify God - everyone does that eventually. Do it because he loves you enough to die for you, and because you love him back. That relationship of love with God, possible because of Jesus, is the most important thing there is. That's reality. Let's live like it.