

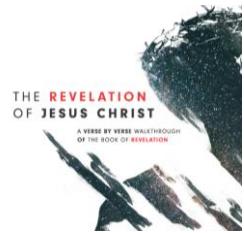
Title: Revelation, Part 12: Turkeys or Eagles?

Speaker: Charles Stone

Passage: Rev. 4:1-11

Big idea: John's vision shows us 3 principles that can prepare us to face future troubles.

Memory verse of the month: Rev. 4:20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.



---

A couple of years ago Sherryl and I had the opportunity to visit The Netherlands, Holland. For most of my life when I've thought of Holland I've thought of tulips, wooden shoes, and windmills. Those certainly are iconic images for the country. But it has a rich history, and a strong legacy of great artists.

I am not an art lover. But as we planned our trip, several people recommended that we visit one of the world's greatest art museums called The Rijksmuseum. Through art, the museum tells the story of the Netherlands from the Middle Ages through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It includes works by famous artists like Rembrandt, Vermeer, and Frans Hals. Now, don't think I'm being a smarty pants to impress by naming those artists. I googled artists from Holland.



This visit to that museum was an amazing experience. They display 8000 objects and paintings from their collection of over 1 million. The most famous painting was a Rembrandt called the Night Watch, a huge, amazing painting.

You've heard it said that a picture is worth a thousand words? Well, it may not be exactly a thousand, it depends on the picture, but a picture in and of itself, packages an incredible amount of information in it would take many more words to explain if you didn't have a picture. God created our brains that way to learn and remember through pictures. Over 50% of our brains are involved in processing the visual and the more your brain works, the more you understand and learn.

An art museum is a helpful way to describe how the book of Revelation is arranged.



Reading and studying Revelation is akin to walking through an art gallery.

We go to an art gallery to experience something special and from that experience we learn stuff.

A museum has an overarching theme. The overarching theme of the Rikes museum is the history of Holland.

Revelation has an overarching theme. Jesus has won and one day when he returns, he will make all things right. In the meantime, Christ followers must be faithful to him as times will get more difficult.

The wings of a museum support that museums' overarching theme. In the Rikes museum the wings are organized by time frame, artists, or something else, with all the art in those wings helping to explain the history of Holland through the visual. Each wing and the art in that wing helps tell the bigger story.

Various scenes in the book of Revelation explain and illustrate its overarching theme. Each scene further explains the bigger story.

We have spent 7 weeks looking at 7 ancient biblical churches this book was written to. Now we move into the part that includes the amazing visions and word pictures. Remember the context was persecution of Christians. John wrote this book under the inspiration of the HS to encourage the Christians to be faithful to Him and that they would be greatly rewarded. But, the message of this book was not just to those Christians but to Christians throughout the ages.

Over the course of the next few months, I will show you a portion of this great animation on the book of Revelation by The Bible Project that gives a bird's eye view to help us organize our mind and thoughts.

Let's take a look. <https://bibleproject.com/learn/revelation/> View 2.51-5.33

Earlier in this book we learn that John had been banished to a penal colony on the Island of Patmos and in a vision, he received what is the book of Revelation.

As we work through these visions, we have to try to understand what they mean, what the chronology is, how John uses frequent OT images, how he interprets them, what is symbolic and what is literal. Good biblical scholars have interpreted these images differently, so we must extend grace to those who may have a different viewpoint from us and realize that we don't have the final word. You may have a different interpretation of the end-times than what I have. We just all must exercise grace to each other.

The next two chapters are a unit. Chapter 4 is about what is called the throne room and chapter 5 is about the Lamb and a scroll that we'll look at next week. These two chapters remind us of the overarching theme of Revelation, Jesus wins. He's coming back. Be faithful. These two chapters provide the foundation for all that follows.

The reality is, the world is going to get more difficult for followers of Jesus before it gets eternally better. Things will deteriorate, from a biblical worldview, before Jesus comes and sets things right.

He even warned us with this.

*John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

Big idea: John's vision shows us 3 principles that can prepare us to face future troubles.

Here's how we are going to approach this passage today. I'm going to read it. In your mind try to picture this vision. It is complicated. I will then show you a picture of this vision that someone created simply to get all the parts in front of you all at once. There are a bunch of different ways artists have pictured these images and no one is perfectly right. But this one will help us organize it in our minds.

I'm going to read Rev 4.1-11

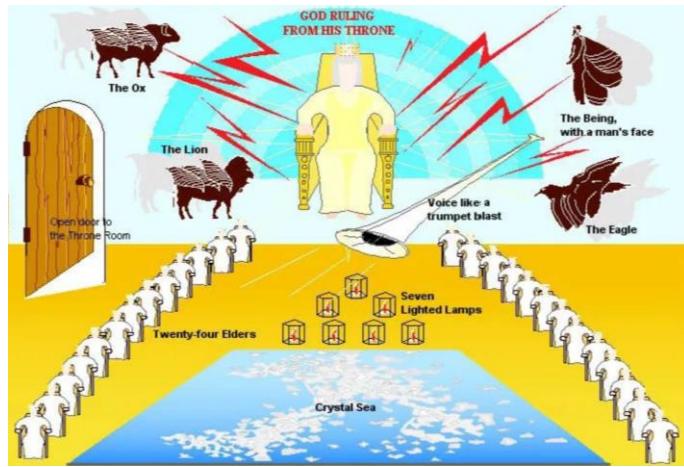
Rev. 4:1 After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." <sup>2</sup> At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. <sup>3</sup> And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. <sup>4</sup> Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. <sup>5</sup> From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. <sup>6</sup> Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. <sup>7</sup> The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. <sup>8</sup> Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." <sup>9</sup> Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the

throne and who lives for ever and ever,<sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:<sup>11</sup> “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.”

So, here are the elements of this vision. I’m going to unveil them one at a time.

#### “Heavens-Throne Room”

- Door
- Trumpet
- Throne
- rainbow
- 24 other thrones
- Lightning
- Lamps
- Sea
- Lion
- Ox
- the being with man’s face
- flying eagle



So, there you go. Obviously, the color and images were much more fantastic than words could describe. These remarkable symbolic descriptions which were meant to cheer the hearts of those to whom the book was first sent, the persecuted Christians. It was also written to cheer the hearts of all believers throughout all ages, with the assurance of the final triumph of the gospel. Remember, Jesus told us we would have trouble but that he would be with us and give us his peace.

Scholars say that John may not have understood what all the images meant just as someone describing the beauty of a rose may not understand horticulture, except that a rose is beautiful. Yet, they did represent truth about spiritual reality and coming things.

When I give my best understanding of what these images mean, I’m not going to qualify what I say each time. But do understand that for some of them, scholars have different views. For the significant images there is much more agreement. So, you might have a bit different take on what some of these images mean and that’s ok.

Remember that John alludes to the OT over 500 times and in chapters 4 and 5 he alludes to images in the OT books of Isaiah and Ezekiel.

#### **Rev. 4:1 After this**

After his means after his first vision in the earlier chapters. John records the visions in the sequential order in which he received them, but not necessarily in the historical order that the events occur.

His vision was real and what he saw, in many ways, is figurative for deeper spiritual truths. However, our caution is to not try to attach a deeper meaning to every detail of every image.

#### **I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven.**

He described this vision of some opening in the sky that he describes as a door that gave him a glimpse into heaven.

**And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”**

The phrase after this means the events between the first and second coming of Jesus. So these visions have a mix of past, present, and future elements and we can't ascribe specific dates to them except what happened in the first century to those churches that we have a historical record of.

**2 At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it.**

This vision is meant to inspire awe in us. He no longer sees with physical but with spiritual eyes. He is given this deep look into future things and true reality.

A throne, which uses 17x in this and the next chapter symbolizes God's majesty, power, and authority.

John is allowed to see the very center of power in the universe. And this gave those early believers confidence that with the word in disarray. They needed to be reminded that God really is in control and a throne pictured that. It should encourage us as well in this world of great disarray.

He doesn't try to describe in detail who is sitting on this throne because Paul writes in 1 Tim that God dwells in 'unapproachable light.' Here John gives enough to evoke awe and sublimity and to leave the impression that the one who sat on the throne was a pure and holy God.

He says it is someone, not just some impersonal Star Wars Force. History is not guided some impersonal cosmic entity or chance or fate or luck, but personality is at the center.

To the Christians in that day who read or heard this read, they got it. They understood where their world placed power, the throne or Roman rule and the emperor that sat on that throne. John is saying they got it wrong. The center of power today is not Ottawa, or Washington DC, or Moscow, or Paris, or Beijing.

He's saying remember this as you face tribulation which you are experiencing and will experience. John and his readers lived in a world where God and his truth was not honored, like today.

He then uses precious stones and a rainbow to further describe God's radiance and splendor.

**4 Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders.**

So, you have these thrones that surround the center throne with elders seated on them. What does that mean? There have been many interpretations of what these thrones meant.

An elder in the OT was a person with authority in the Jewish community who could function as a representative of the community. These 24 elders on these thrones most likely represent the redeemed church in heaven represented by angelic beings. These are heavenly representatives of God's people.

The arrangement is significant because Greek choruses would often sing or dance in circles; amphitheaters surrounded stages; and the Jewish Sanhedrin sat in a semicircle with the high priest in the middle.

These thrones surrounding God on the center throne all enhance the glory of God. So, here it represents the church triumphant worshipping God.

**They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.**

Angels were nearly described in the bible as garbed in white and white symbolized purity.

**5 From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings, and peals of thunder.**

These special effects are symbolic of God's awesome presence.

**Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God.**

Seven spirits is a term for the Holy Spirit and pictures that his work is diverse.

<sup>6</sup> Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

This image adds to the magnificence of the scene suggesting calmness, majesty, peace and a wide dominion. God's rule and reign is a vast as the sea. And God is undisturbed and unruffled by what ruffles us.

In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back.<sup>7</sup> The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle.<sup>8</sup> Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings.

These are not meant to be ominous scary beasts. They are most likely angels of the highest order. The eyes picture God's all- knowing power and his constant watchfulness over us. The wings could denote God's protective care over us as a bird will place its wings over its young.

These images represent the whole of animate creation, centering on the noblest (lion), strongest (ox), wisest (mankind), and swiftest (eagle). These creatures sum up all of God's creation, which joins the angelic beings in worshiping God.<sup>1</sup>

So, the 24 elders and the four creatures are probably angels in heaven worshipping God.

**Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."**

Holy, holy, holy was an expression for the Trinity. It would be the same thing as saying, "Holy is the Father, Holy is the Son, and Holy is the Spirit."<sup>2</sup> And to say holy three times means ultimate holiness, to be totally other.

Then John further describes their worship and writes this about the vision he sees.

**They lay their crowns before the throne and say:**

People who lived in that day understood the significance of casting crowns that we would not because we don't practice it in our western culture. In the ancient world, casting crowns indicated complete submission. When one king surrendered to another, he cast his crown at the victor's feet. Sometimes the Romans carried with them an image of their emperor; and, when they had reduced a monarch to submission, there was a ceremony in which the vanquished one had to cast his crown before the emperor's image.<sup>3</sup>

Casting those crowns means that we owe whoever we are or whatever we have, to God. We must yield all to him.

John finishes with the vision of continued worship of God.

What a powerful vision.

Let's go back to our big idea.

**Big idea: John's vision shows us 3 principles that can prepare us to face future troubles.**

How do we prepare for coming trouble? Think about it. A soldier prepares for battles. An athlete prepares for the competition. The student prepares for the test. A Christian prepares for difficulty that is inevitable.

These are basic principles we must apply to best prepare ourselves for the troubles we will inevitably face. I'm going to give you the three principles:

1. Worship is meant to be a 24/7 experience: Cultivate it.
2. Your view of God impacts everything you do. Clarify it.
3. Perspective determines daily disposition. Choose top down.

---

<sup>1</sup> Osborne, G. R. (2016). *Revelation: Verse by Verse* (p. 103). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

<sup>2</sup> Patterson, P. (2012). *Revelation*. (E. R. Clendenen, Ed.) (Vol. 39, p. 156). Nashville, TN: B&H.

<sup>3</sup> Barclay, W. (2004). *The Revelation of John* (3rd ed. fully rev. and updated, Vol. 1, p. 179). Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press.

## **Worship is meant to be a 24/7 experience: Cultivate it.**

In heaven the angels ceaselessly worship God. We are to mirror what is going on in heaven when we worship here on earth. Does that mean that we're singing 100% of the day and bowing down every few minutes? No.

Worship is doing anything which fulfills the function for which it was created. When you are living out God's purpose through daily obedience and faithfulness in whatever you are doing, working, cleaning house, cooking, doing your job well at work, changing a diaper, worshipping as a group when we gather, praying at home, serving others, showing kindness, you name it, when you are doing what God created you to do, you are praising and worshipping him.

And our chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever; and we carry out that function when we do what God sent us into the world to do.<sup>4</sup>

Paul refers to this 24/7 idea in 1 Thessalonians when he writes about praying without ceasing. It's akin to breathing and our heart beating. God designed our bodies to automatically breathe and our heart to beat without our constant conscious awareness, right?

Sometimes we will draw our attention to our heart rate or breathing like when you put your finger on your wrist or neck or look at your smart watch to monitor your heart rate. You are consciously focused on your heart. You consciously focus on your breathing when you need to calm yourself with slow breathing.

Our hearts beat and our lungs breath whether or not we are conscious. Yet we do sometimes draw specific awareness to them.

In a similar way, to worship 24/7 is to have an ongoing disposition of obedience to and love for Jesus all the time, no matter what you do. And sometimes we consciously focus on worship, prayer, being aware of his presence.

## **Your view of God impacts everything you do. Clarify it.**

We have a conscious and unconscious view of God that has come from our upbringing, life's experiences, from church, from authority figures, and from the Scriptures.

AW Tozer the great pastor and writer in the prior century wrote this.

*"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. ... Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God."* We tend, by a secret law of the soul, to move toward our mental image of God.

The most important concept in your mind is that of God. John is giving us a picture of God in this book. So, continue to clarify a true view of God, remove false views, replace them with correct views of God. And it's both mind and heart. It's not just an intellectual understanding of God. But we understand who he is when we engage his word and spend time alone with him. We engage the heart when we spend time with other believers in corporate worship and when we spend time in smaller settings like groups with people who love him and love you because through such relationships, we experience a lived faith which helps clarify our view of God.

## **Perspective determines daily disposition. Choose top down.**

Part of the pastoral purpose of chapters 4–5 is to assure suffering Christians that God and Jesus are sovereign and that the events which they are facing are part of a sovereign plan which will culminate in their redemption and the vindication of their faith through the punishment of their persecutors.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Barclay, W. (2004). *The Revelation of John* (3rd ed. fully rev. and updated, Vol. 1, p. 174). Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press.

<sup>5</sup> Beale, G. K., & Campbell, D. H. (2015). *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (p. 96). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

John is giving us a top down look through this vision. He shows us how things really were, who is really in charge, and how things will come out. And on earth, if you take its perspective, you're going probably not fare so well when we see all the sin and injustice and unfairness around us.

So, every day we have to choose what perspective we take because that will determine that day's disposition. We can choose the bottom up, oh all these problems, this covid, my life is so hard, wa, wa, wa. Or we can choose with the eyes of faith to see life from God's perspective that he is alive and well and in charge and has a purpose for you and will give you strength to make it through whatever trouble you face.

There's a great story that has had several different versions, but it goes something like this. A Native American Indian found an eagle's egg and put it into the nest of a turkey. The eaglet hatched with the brood of chicks, and he grew up with turkeys.

All his life, the eagle, thought he was a turkey, and he did what turkeys did. They scratched in the dirt for seeds and insects to eat and he did that. They clucked and cackled and flew in a brief thrashing of wings and flurry of feathers no more than a few feet off the ground. And he did that. After all, that's what turkeys did.

Years passed and the eagle grew very old. One day, he saw a magnificent bird far above in the cloudless sky, hanging with graceful majesty on the powerful wind currents, and it soared with scarcely a beat of its strong golden wings.

"What a beautiful bird!" the eagle said to his neighbor turkey. "What is it?"

Ah, "That's an eagle - the chief of the birds," he clucked. "But don't give it a second thought. You could never be like him. You're a turkey."

So, the eagle never gave it a second thought. Throughout his entire life the eagle prided itself as being a turkey and it died never realizing who he really was.

In God's eyes you are not a turkey. You are not designed to see life from the ground, the bottom up, but from the top down. If you are a believer, you are a child of God. God is on his throne, his purposes will prevail, and he has a plan and purpose for you.

Live it. Don't live from a bottom-up perspective. You were meant to soar like an eagle, even in the most difficult of times.

So, what does John teach us about how to [prepare for troubles](#) that will come our way.

1. Worship is meant to be a 24/7 experience: Cultivate it.
2. Your view of God impacts everything you do. Clarify it.
3. Perspective determines daily disposition. Choose top down.

