

**Revelation 4: 4 and 5: "The Elders and the Seven Lamps of Fire"**  
**Sermon # 31 in the series- "The Faithful and True Witness,**  
**Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on September 10th, 2006,**  
**In the Afternoon Worship Service.**

We are looking at the second vision of the Book of Revelation. It is the scene in heaven during the church age. Last week we studied what the Throne meant that John saw when he was caught up into heaven. A throne is used in this vision to represent the Sovereign rule of God in heaven and earth, and especially in the Church which is called God's throne in Jeremiah 3: 17 and 17: 12. We also saw, to our surprise, that the One seated on the throne is not the Lord Jesus Christ, but rather God the Father. He is compared to a jasper stone and a sardius stone, which stones represent the brightness, the glory, and the majesty of God, and also show forth the fact that He is a God of judgment to all His enemies. There is a rainbow around His throne which signifies that God is favorable to those who have come into covenant with Him through faith in Jesus Christ. He will forgive their sins and be propitious toward them, so that they may approach Him, and pray to Him, and know that He shall never change in His Holy purposes to do them good and give them peace when they go through their trials and face the oppositions of evil men whom Satan is using to stop the forward progress of Christ's kingdom. We were unable to get beyond this point last week and so now we will take up the consideration of who was around the Throne and before the Throne.

We must remember that John is having a vision. And although it is a vision of heaven, it is so in the context of symbolic representation. These are not symbols given to us who are reading this book, in order that we might understand what we will see there in heaven after we die. These are symbolic representations given to us who live and are reading this book so that we might understand what are the matters of greatest importance to God in relation to Christ's Church as she seeks to be a good witness for Him. It is very important that you and I understand what is important to God right now, as He is in heaven. We may catch some glimpses here of what it will be like for us after we die, and before the resurrection from the dead, as we read these verses. All that is fine. But it is more important that we understand what is on God's mind and heart now, all during this church age, so that He might be glorified in us and through us.

It is evident from the symbolism of the Elders and the Living Creatures given to us here, that we are being presented with the idea of what the worship and ministry of the Church of Jesus Christ should look like; what kind of worship and ministry will be received by God during the whole of the Church age. If worship is taking place in heaven in a vision with symbolic representations, we must ask what the symbolic representations mean in the context of what will occur next in the prophecies of this book. This vision sets the stage for those prophecies which will give us an overview of the entire church age and beyond. God is giving us a vision of Himself and what is foremost on His mind during this church age. It is, that we and all true Christian churches would worship and serve Him with all of our heart. What should the worship and ministry of the Church of Jesus Christ look like during the whole church age? What kind of worship and ministry will honor God? What kind of worship and ministry will He receive during the whole church age? I think that we can see 4 things from our text that the Church should remember, about what is going on in God's mind. We will look at 2 of those things this afternoon and two next week.

## **1st- The Church should remember that she is presently reigning with Christ.**

(Verse 4)

This is the symbolic representation found in verse 4. "Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads." It has been generally accepted by commentators that the number of these elders who are sitting on the thrones, being 24, is representative of Christ's church in both the Old and New Testament dispensations. I agree with this analysis. There were 12 tribes in Israel and there were 12 apostles who Jesus Christ chose to do the foundation work in building His New Testament church. Christ has made all those who believe, both Old Testament and New into one church by His work. It says in Ephesians 2: 14 and following that He has, "broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity." "And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near." "For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father." "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."

The word "elders" here in Revelation 4: 4 is presbuteroi in the Greek. It is the word which we could translate presbytery or presbyters. These elders are not identified individually by the names of the apostles and the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. That is not what is to be understood by this picture. It is rather that it should be understood that these elders are those who are wise and discerning and holy men who have been faithful to God. They are those whose worship God receives. They are described as "sitting clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads." This is the picture of the purity and holiness of those that had already overcome and are reigning presently in heaven. But it is also the picture of encouragement to those who would be faithful, holy, and wise in their lives and witness to the grace of their Savior in future generations after John's as well. In chapter 5, verse 10 they are found saying that Christ had redeemed them to God by His blood, out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and He has made them kings and priests to their God; and they shall reign on the earth." Both aspects of truth are set forth for us here. They are reigning presently in heaven and they shall yet reign upon the earth. Job 36: 7 says, "God does not withdraw His eyes from the righteous; but they are on the throne with kings, For He has seated them forever and they are exalted." We need very much to receive this truth today into our hearts, that we are presently reigning with Jesus Christ in the heavenly places. Our worship and service presently are accepted by God through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is His finished work of redemption applied to our hearts and lives that makes our worship and service acceptable in the Father's sight.

We are presently not only kings, "seated in the heavenly places in Christ," (Ephesians 2: 6) but we are also priests serving our God, offering up spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ who is our High Priest. 1 Peter 2: 4 says, "Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through

Jesus Christ." The ancient priesthood of Israel was divided into 24 courses, or groups, in the time of David. (1 Chronicles 24: 1, 4, 18). And there were 24 stations of the Levites who John Gill says, "in turn attended the service of the temple daily, and represented the whole body of the people of Israel, in putting their hands upon the sacrifices, and praying for them." "Add to this," he says, "that in twenty four places the priests and Levites kept watch in the temple; so these twenty four elders before the throne of God, in his temple, represent the Israel of God, all the members of the Gospel church-state, from the first to the last of it." Every believer in Jesus Christ when they come to church is coming into the presence of their God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In their spirit they are ministering spiritual sacrifices of praise and a heart to receive His Word, if their heart is right. We are a kingdom of priests. Christ has fulfilled all the ordinances of the Old Testament law that pertain to these ceremonial things in order that we might have great maturity and wisdom and power in our ministries here upon the earth. In the midst of great oppositions we can find the wisdom from above, and we can, in the face of our enemies be "wise as serpents and innocent as doves." The reason for this advance from Old Testament to New is because we are reigning presently with Jesus Christ. The crowns are on the heads of these elders. Worship and our service to God in all of Christ's churches is received and the Church in each generation shall be built according to God's great purposes because Christ has overcome as we shall see in Chapter 5. We must not think that we need to argue over how we should worship and serve our God. That has been given to us in the Scriptures. Instead we must seek to be as the elders around the Throne; wise, holy and reverent. Worship is not entertainment. Worship is to be conducted in Christ's churches with joy and gladness remembering what Christ has done and is doing for us. But worship should also be conducted with solemnity and a thoughtfulness about what God would have from us, not what we would have for ourselves. God will receive this kind of worship. But that which is entertainment oriented, He will not receive. A person or a church may call certain things worship which are not worship. When we go to church we are not going to the theatre. When we go to church we are not going to a music concert. We are coming into the very presence of God to give to Him the glory due His name and to hear His revealed word preached. If we forget this God does not receive our worship.

**2ndly- The Church should remember God's holiness and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in her midst.**(Verse 5)

"And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices." "Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God." If you will recall the scene at Mt. Sinai, in the giving of the law to Moses in Exodus 19: 16, there were, "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." This is the same kind of imagery which pictures what was proceeding from the throne here in the book of Revelation. Along with this were the seven lamps of fire which were burning before the throne; that is, the seven spirits of God. I have already spoken on them before in Chapter 1, verse 4. God would remind those who approach near unto Him that He is holy; so very holy. And His holiness has been personified in Jesus Christ, and through the finished work of Jesus Christ, and His resurrection, and His ascension, the Holy Spirit is not only before the throne of God, but He is in the hearts of all His people. There is a fullness of the ministry of the Holy Spirit to the church and to the people that will treat God as holy in all their worship and service of Him. This includes the way that we choose to live our lives outside of the formal worship of the church. "Our God is a consuming fire"

in His holiness it says in Hebrews 12: 29. Verse 28 before it says, "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." Why is this so important? It is because often in our day, people are not treating God as holy in their worship of Him, either in the church or in the way that they live their personal lives. God is often not being honored on the Sabbath Day. "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy." It is a moral command. Sometimes, what is given to people by the preacher of the Word is not being thought upon or improved upon after the services of worship are conducted. Instead people are going after their own pleasures for the remainder of the day. But Isaiah 58: 13 and 14 say, "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father." "The mouth of the Lord has spoken."

Then during the week, sometimes devotion to God in private and in the family is not remembered or conducted. Instead it is a mad flurry of activities. And we must ask ourselves if God is consciously being brought into those activities. Are we becoming men and women and young people of prayer? And what are we praying for? Are we praying for the interests of God or our own selfish and worldly interests alone? God cannot receive this kind of worship and service with approval. It is really quite wearisome to Him. But, when there is reverence and holiness in worship, when there is prayer and the pursuit of holiness in the way that we live during the week; when this is pursued by the church, then it is that great and lasting things are accomplished for the building of Christ's kingdom and God's glory. The Holy Spirit comes and gives gifts and graces and the fiery spiritual passion to accomplish many good things in the building of the church and the advancement of Christ's kingdom. In Zechariah 4, the passage that I turned you to before, when I spoke about the seven spirits of God, when I preached to you about this from Revelation 1: 4, we looked at verse 10 which describes the 7 eyes of the Lord which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth. We compared this with what is said in Revelation 5: 5 where Christ in the midst of the throne is described as having seven eyes and seven horns which are the seven spirits of God. And I hope that you see the connection. The verses in Zechariah 4 describe Zerubbabel building the 2nd temple for the Lord in Jerusalem. He did not know how it could be accomplished. But in the 6th verse it says, "This is the word to Zerubbabel: Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts." It is the work of the Spirit to stir up men to build the temple of the Lord, both the literal physical temple in Jerusalem in Old testament days, and the Church of Jesus Christ in the New. You and I must covenant together to pray for this kind of spiritual power. I believe that it will come more and more as we pray and as we learn to give God the kind of worship that He is looking for. In 2 Chronicles 16: 9 says, "For the eyes of the Lord (the seven spirits which are before the Throne of God) run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him." Our loyalty to the Lord is shown in how we worship Him and how we live our lives. Let us remember that we are presently reigning with Christ and remember also the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our midst, He who is looking and searching to see if our hearts are loyal.