

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Session 8, Chapter 4 as introduction

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All right. So get this. We're going deep into Revelation chapters four and five specifically.

You sent over some fascinating excerpts from a lecture by this Dr. Dave Mathewson. He's a scholar who seems to have really, I guess you could say, cracked the code on Revelation. He's pretty brilliant.

No, I know. I know what you might be thinking. Oh yeah.

Revelation. Isn't that all about doom and gloom? Yeah. Why should I even care? Right.

But trust me, these chapters are like the control room for the entire book of Revelation. They set the stage for everything that unfolds. I see.

And they're not just for biblical scholars or something. It's about understanding power, worship, and how those themes play out in our lives. Interesting.

Even today. So Dr. Mathewson calls these chapters the fulcrum of Revelation. Okay.

So what does that even mean? Fulcrum? Well, he's saying that chapters four and five are kind of like the theological and thematic center. They're the foundation on which the rest of Revelation's message is built. They establish God's ultimate power and authority, which becomes really important when you think about it.

All the chaos and the upheaval follow. So it's like chapters four and five are setting up this cosmic battle between good and evil. And guess what? What? That battle isn't just some abstract idea in an ancient book.

It's happening. It's happening in our lives every single day. And you think about it.

We're constantly bombarded with messages about who or what deserves our allegiance, our time, our energy, our culture, the media, even our own desires. They're all vying for that top spot for our worship, so to speak. That's a great way to put it.

It's like we're surrounded by all these little thrones all the time, each one demanding our attention and our loyalty. And Revelation forces us to ask who or what sits on the ultimate throne in our lives. That's a powerful question.

And you know, speaking of powerful, these chapters have inspired some of the most well-known hymns and songs. Absolutely. I'm thinking, holy, holy, holy.

Of course. Worthy is the Lamb. Yeah.

Why do you think these chapters in particular have been so musically inspiring? I think it's the vivid imagery and just the raw emotion that John just pours into his writing. You can

practically hear the thunderous voices of the heavenly beings. You can feel the awe and wonder of being in the presence of God.

It's no wonder that these words have resonated with musicians and songwriters for centuries. It's true. And honestly, when you sing those hymns, it's like you're transported to that throne room, even if it's just for a moment.

But here's something I found interesting. Dr. Mathewson points out that chapters four and five are actually one continuous vision. So how do we make sense of these two distinct scenes? Well, it's helpful to think of it as two movements within a larger symphony.

I like that. Both scenes take place in this awe-inspiring throne room, which is key to understanding the power dynamics at play. So chapter four sets the stage.

It introduces us to God on his throne, these incredible four living creatures, and the 24 elders all engaged in continuous worship. Okay. So then chapter five, things get really interesting.

Things definitely heat up. That's where we get the mysterious scroll that no one can open, and then the Lamb appears. But hold on, a lamb.

That feels a little out of place amidst all this heavenly grandeur. Right. But in Revelation, remember, symbols are everything.

And this isn't just any lamb. It's described as having been slain, but is now alive and standing. Okay.

So this is where the symbolism gets really deep. What's the significance of the lamb? The lamb, of course, symbolizes Jesus Christ, who was crucified but is now risen and victorious. So even though he was sacrificed, he's the one with ultimate authority.

Exactly. And the fact that only he is worthy to open the scroll. This scroll that presumably contains God's plan for the future shows that he holds the keys to everything.

This is reminding me of what Dr. Mathewson said about Revelation being about who we worship. Yes. It's not Caesar.

It's not Caesar. Not even the angels. Right.

But the Lamb. Exactly. Okay.

So that throne room scene. Yeah. Really is the heart of it all.

It is. But here's a detail that caught my attention. Okay.

John doesn't actually describe God directly in chapter four. Why is that? It's a common technique in apocalyptic literature. The focus isn't on a physical description of God, but on the effects of his presence.

The awe, the power, the sheer magnitude of the throne room itself. It's like trying to describe the sun. Exactly.

You can talk about its brightness and warmth, but you can't fully capture its essence directly. So it's more about experiencing the divine through feelings and symbols. Precisely.

We don't need a physical description of God to understand his power. Think about how we often experience the divine in our own lives. It's usually through moments of awe, a sense of peace, the impact of events, rather than some direct encounter.

Okay. That makes a lot of sense. Yeah.

But okay, let's talk about the throne itself. Okay. Why is it so central to these chapters? Well, the throne is the ultimate symbol of power and authority.

It represents who's truly in control. Right. And remember, this is Revelation, where symbols carry enormous weight.

This throne isn't just some piece of furniture. It's a cosmic declaration of God's sovereignty. Okay.

And remember, earlier in Revelation, we get a glimpse of Satan's throne. So it really is this cosmic battle for ultimate sovereignty, like who gets to call the shots. And it's interesting how John emphasizes this idea of authority by using the phrase after this so frequently throughout Revelation.

Do you think that means that everything happens in strict chronological order? Not necessarily. A timeline of events. After this is more about the order in which John receives these visions, not a literal timeline of events.

Got it. It's important to remember that Revelation is more about the message and the symbolism, not getting bogged down in creating a step-by-step chronology. So we shouldn't get too caught up in trying to pinpoint the exact timing of everything.

Yeah, you got it. But let's talk about those mysterious 24 elders. Okay.

Who are they? Ah, yes. That's one of the big questions. Yeah.

Scholars debate. Right. Dr. Mathewson dives into several fascinating theories.

One idea is that they represent the church, the body of Christ already in heaven, worshiping God. So instead of just listing off all the theories, we're going to unpack this one a bit further. Let's explore what it would mean if these elders do represent the church.

All right. I'm in. Let's dive in.

So if these elders represent the church, it paints a pretty powerful picture. Oh, yeah. They're not just like passive observers or something.

They're actively involved. Right. In the heavenly worship.

Ah. Right there in the throne room. Yes.

Alongside those incredible four living creatures. That's right. Speaking of which, those creatures sound- Oh, there's something else.

Pretty intense. Intense is an understatement. Really? They're described as being covered in eyes.

Oh, wow. And having appearances like a lion, an ox, a man. What? And a flying eagle.

Wow. Talk about vivid imagery. I know, right? Okay.

Then those descriptions are definitely symbolic. Oh, absolutely. Okay.

Scholars have connected them to various Old Testament passages like Ezekiel 1 and 10 and even Isaiah 6. They represent different aspects of God's nature and creation. So just like with the 24 elders, John is drawing on these familiar biblical images to convey something new. Exactly.

And powerful. And their main function seems to be like the elders worshiping God. Right.

They're constantly declaring God's holiness and power. They're almost like the leaders of the cosmic worship service. That's a cool way to think about it.

Yeah, it is. Now let's move on to chapter five where things really start to heat up. All right.

We have this mysterious scroll- right. That no one can open. No one can open it.

It's almost like a divine treasure chest waiting to be unlocked. It's a scroll sealed with seven seals. Oh, wow.

And it's said to contain God's plan for the future. There's a sense of anticipation and even anxiety- oh, really? Because no one is found worthy to open it. At least not among the powerful figures of heaven.

But then a lamb appears. Wait, a lamb? I know. You'd think in the midst of all this heavenly grandeur, the hero would be grander.

You'd think so, right? Yeah. But remember, this is Revelation, where symbols carry a lot of weight. And this lamb isn't just any lamb.

It's described as having been slain, but is now alive and standing. Okay, so this is where the symbolism gets really deep. It does.

What's the significance of the lamb? The lamb, of course, symbolizes Jesus Christ, who was crucified, but is now risen and victorious. And the fact that only the Lamb is worthy to open the scroll shows that he's the one who holds the keys to God's plan for the future. It's a powerful statement about Jesus' authority and ultimate victory.

It's interesting because even though Jesus was sacrificed, he's the one with the ultimate authority. Exactly. This really drives home what Dr. Mathewson said about the whole point of Revelation being about who we worship.

It's not about earthly power, not even angelic beings. It's about the Lamb. Exactly.

And notice what happens when the Lamb takes the scroll. The 24 elders and the four living creatures, they all fall down and worship him. So they're acknowledging his ultimate authority, the one who is worthy to reveal God's plan.

It's like they're saying, okay, he's the one in charge. He's the one who gets to unfold the future. But what about the content of that scroll? Do we ever find out what's written in it? That's a great question.

The actual content of the scroll isn't directly revealed. Instead, the focus shifts to the seven seals that secure the scroll. So it's like each seal unlocks a new chapter in God's plan.

And these chapters often involve judgment and upheaval. Exactly. And that's what drives the narrative forward for the rest of the book.

We see the consequences of what's contained within that scroll. Think about it. The scroll contains God's plan, right? And only the Lamb is worthy to open it.

It's this really powerful image of Jesus, not just as this gentle sacrificial lamb, but also as the one who ultimately executes God's justice. It's a side of Jesus we don't often talk about. That's a great point.

And it's important to note that these judgments aren't arbitrary acts of wrath, but rather the consequences of humanity's rebellion against God. But let's go back to that throne for a second. Dr. Mathewson mentions that the Lamb ends up on God's throne.

He does. What's the significance of that? It's a crucial detail. It shows that Jesus the Lamb shares in God's authority and power.

They're united in their rule and reign. So it's not just about God the Father being in charge. It's about Jesus the Son being fully divine and sharing in that authority.

It's a powerful affirmation. Of Jesus's divinity and his role in God's plan. And it ties back to that idea of the throne as a symbol of power and authority.

Exactly. The fact that Jesus shares the throne with God emphasizes his ultimate victory and his role in carrying out God's plan. It's incredible how much symbolism is packed into these two chapters.

I know. It's like every detail has a deeper meaning. Absolutely.

And one of the ways that meaning is conveyed is through those incredible hymns of praise. Oh, right. You mentioned those earlier.

Yeah. They're not just pretty poetry or anything. Right.

They actually serve a purpose. Right. They're powerful declarations of God's worthiness and the Lamb's victory.

Right. They're filled with these amazing images. Okay.

Light, thunder, precious stone. The voices of countless heavenly beings. It's like they're painting a sonic picture of this awe-inspiring throne room, allowing us to almost hear and experience it.

And remember, John's original audience would have been familiar with these kinds of hymns from the Old Testament. Right. Especially the Psalms.

So he's tapping into a rich tradition of worship and praise, but now applying it to the risen Christ, the Lamb on the throne. John is showing how the Old Testament hopes and prophecies find their fulfillment in Jesus. It's like he's saying, this is what true worship looks like, acknowledging the Lamb as the ultimate source of power and salvation.

Precisely. And that message is just as relevant for us today as it was for John's original audience. Now, something Dr. Mathewson points out is that despite all this amazing imagery, there are very few verbs that describe actions and movements in chapter four.

Chapter four. Oh, that's interesting. Why do you think that is? Well, Dr. Mathewson suggests that chapter four is intentionally static, providing the setting for the more dynamic action of chapter five.

Okay. So chapter four is all about establishing the scene, the characters, the atmosphere, and then chapter five is where the plot really kicks in. Exactly.

It's a brilliant literary device that heightens the sense of anticipation and drama. And it emphasizes the contrast between God's unchanging eternal nature and the unfolding drama of human history. It's like we're watching a movie, and chapter four is all those establishing shots that set the mood and introduce the characters before the action really starts.

Exactly. And then in chapter five, you get the plot twists and turns. That's a great analogy.

Thanks. But it's important to remember that even though chapter four might seem static, it's actually full of movement and energy. We have the four living creatures constantly moving and worshipping, and the 24 elders casting their crowns before the throne.

It's a scene of dynamic worship and adoration even amidst the stillness. So it sounds like there's a lot more going on in chapter four than meets the eye. It's not just about setting the stage.

It's about revealing the dynamic, living nature of God's presence. Absolutely. But okay, let's get real for a second.

Why should someone listening to this today, you know, someone living in the 21st century, care about these ancient visions of heaven and thrones and scrolls? That's the question, isn't it? Yeah. I mean, I love a good Moloch story as much as the next person. Of course.

But how do we bridge the gap between this ancient text and our modern lives? That's where the real power of these chapters lies. Remember what we talked about earlier, the cosmic battle for sovereignty? It's not just some abstract theological concept. It's playing out in our lives every single day.

So it's not just about who's in charge on a cosmic level. Exactly. It's about who's in charge of our hearts and minds.

Hearts and minds, yeah. And chapters four and five of Revelation are a powerful reminder that there is only one true throne, one ultimate source of power and authority. So it's a call to reevaluate our priorities, to examine where we're placing our trust and our worship, so to speak.

Precisely. It's about recognizing that we are not ultimately in control. We are not the ones holding the scroll.

We're not the ones dictating the future. And that might be a tough pill to swallow in our culture, which emphasizes individual autonomy and self-reliance. I can see how that could be challenging.

Yeah. Surrendering control goes against everything society tells us. But I guess that's part of what faith is all about, right? It is.

It's about... It's about being better than ourselves. That's a great insight. Thanks.

Surrendering to God's sovereignty doesn't mean becoming passive or giving up on our responsibility. It's about finding our true identity and purpose in Him, knowing that He is the one who holds all things together. So it's about aligning our lives with His will, trusting that He has a plan, even when we can't see the whole picture.

Exactly. And that's where those hymns of praise come in. They do? They're not just about expressing our adoration for God.

They're about reminding ourselves of His character, His power. His faithfulness. Yeah.

It's like we're immersing ourselves in the truth of who He is, allowing those truths to shape our thoughts and actions. And when we do that, we find true freedom and peace, even amidst the storms of life. You know, it's amazing how these ancient chapters of Revelation can speak so directly to our modern lives.

They offer a roadmap for navigating the complexities and challenges of our world. And it all starts with recognizing who's truly in control, who sits on the throne of our hearts. Well said.

And remember, this is just the tip of the iceberg. There's so much more to explore in the rest of Revelation. I think we've given our listeners a pretty solid foundation to build on.

We have. If Revelation 4 and 5 are the control room for the whole book, then we've just learned how to operate the main controls. That's a great way to put it.

And who knows? Maybe this deep dive will inspire our listener to explore the rest of Revelation, to delve deeper into these powerful themes of worship, power, and ultimately hope. Absolutely. And hey, maybe they'll even revisit some of those hymns that we talked about.

And listen with fresh ears after this conversation. I hope so. Thanks for joining us on this deep dive into Revelation chapters 4 and 5. It's been great.

It's been an incredible journey.