

REVELATION.

CHAP. IV.

In this chapter the prophetical scene opens; and, as the epistolary part opened with a vision of Christ (*ch. i.*), so this part is introduced with a glorious appearance of the great God, whose throne is in heaven, compassed about with the heavenly host. This discovery was made to John, and in this chapter he, I. Records the heavenly sight he saw, *ver. 1-7*. And then, II. The heavenly songs he heard, *ver. 8, to the end*.

The Vision of Heaven. (a. d. 95.)

1 After this I looked, and, behold, a door *was* opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard *was* as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter. 2 And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and *one* sat on the throne. 3 And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and *there was* a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. 4 And round about the throne *were* four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. 5 And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and *there were* seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. 6 And before the throne *there was* a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, *were* four beasts full of eyes before and behind. 7 And the first beast *was* like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast *was* like a flying eagle. 8 And the four beasts had each of them six wings about *him*; and *they were* full of eyes within—

We have here an account of a second vision with which the apostle John was favoured: *After this*, that is, not only "after I had seen the vision of Christ walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks," but "after I had taken his messages from his mouth, and written and sent them to the several churches, according to his command, after this I had another vision." Those who well improve the discoveries they have had of God already are prepared thereby for more, and may expect them. Observe,

I. The preparation made for the apostle's having this vision.

1. *A door was opened in heaven*. Hence we learn, (1.) Whatever is transacted on earth is first designed and settled in heaven; there is the model of all the works of God; all of them are therefore before his eye, and he lets the inhabitants of heaven see as much of them as is fit for them. (2.) We can know nothing of future events but what God is pleased to discover to us; they are within the veil, till God opens the door. But, (3.) So far as God reveals his designs to us we may and ought to receive them, and not pretend to be wise above what is revealed.

2. To prepare John for the vision, a trumpet was sounded, and he was called up into heaven, to have a sight there of the things which were to be hereafter. He was called into the third heavens. (1.) There is a way opened into the holiest of all, into which the sons of God may enter by faith and holy affections now, in their spirits when they die, and in their whole persons at the last day. (2.) We must not intrude into the secret of God's presence, but stay till we are called up to it.

3. To prepare for this vision, *the apostle was in the Spirit*. He was in a rapture, as before (*ch. i. 10*), whether in the body or out of the body we cannot tell; perhaps he himself could not; however all bodily actions and sensations were for a time suspended, and his spirit was possessed with the spirit of prophecy, and wholly under a divine influence. The more we abstract ourselves from all corporeal things the more fit we are for communion with God; the body is a veil, a cloud, and clog to the mind in its transactions with God. We should as it were forget it when we go in before the Lord in duty, and be willing to drop it, that we may go up to him in heaven. This was the *apparatus* to the vision. Now observe,

II. The vision itself. It begins with the strange sights that the apostle saw, and they were such as these:— 1. He saw *a throne set in heaven*, the seat of honour, and authority, and judgment. Heaven is the throne of God; there he resides in glory, and thence he gives laws to the church and to the whole world, and all earthly thrones are under the jurisdiction of this throne that is set in heaven. 2. He saw a glorious one upon the throne. This throne was not empty; there was one in it who filled it, and that was God, who is here described by those things that are most pleasant and precious in our world: *His countenance was like a jasper and a sardine-stone*; he is not described by any human features, so as to be represented by an image, but only by his transcendent brightness. This jasper is a transparent stone, which yet offers to the eye a variety of the most vivid colours, signifying the glorious perfections of God; the sardine-stone is red, signifying the justice of God, that essential attribute of which he never divests himself in favour of any, but gloriously exerts it in the government of the world, and especially of the church, through our Lord Jesus Christ. This attribute is displayed in pardoning as well as in punishing, in saving as well as in destroying sinners. 3. He saw *a rainbow about the throne, like unto an emerald*, *v. 3*. The rainbow was the seal and token of the covenant of the providence that God made with Noah and his posterity with him, and is a fit emblem of that covenant of promise that God has made with Christ as the head of the church, and all his people in him, which covenant is as the waters of Noah unto God, an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure. This rainbow looked like *the emerald*; the most prevailing colour was a pleasant green, to show the reviving and refreshing nature of the new covenant. 4. He saw *four-and-twenty seats* round about the throne, not empty, but filled with *four-and-twenty elders*, presbyters, representing, very probably, the whole church of God, both in the Old-Testament and in the New-Testament state; not the ministers of the church, but rather the representatives of the people. Their sitting denotes

their honour, rest, and satisfaction; their sitting about the throne signifies their relation to God, their nearness to him, the sight and enjoyment they have of him. *They are clothed in white raiment*, the righteousness of the saints, both imputed and inherent; *they had on their heads crowns of gold*, signifying the honour and authority given them of God, and the glory they have with him. All these may in a lower sense be applied to the gospel church on earth, in its worshipping assemblies; and, in the higher sense, to the church triumphant in heaven. 5. He perceived lightnings and voices proceeding out of the throne; that is, the awful declarations that God makes to his church of his sovereign will and pleasure. Thus he gave forth the law on mount Sinai; and the gospel has not less glory and authority than the law, though it be of a more spiritual nature. 6. He saw *seven lamps of fire burning before the throne*, which are explained to be *the seven Spirits of God* (v. 5), the various gifts, graces, and operations of the Spirit of God in the churches of Christ; these are all dispensed according to the will and pleasure of him who sits upon the throne. 7. He saw *before the throne a sea of glass, like unto crystal*. As in the temple there was a great vessel of brass filled with water, in which the priests were to wash when they went to minister before the Lord (and this was called a *sea*), so in the gospel church the sea or laver for purification is the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, who cleanses from all sin, even from sanctuary-sins. In this all those must be washed that are admitted into the gracious presence of God on earth or his glorious presence in heaven. 8. He saw *four animals*, living creatures, between the throne and the circle of elders (as seems most probable), standing between God and the people; these seem to signify the ministers of the gospel, not only because of this their situation nearer to God, and between him and the elders or representatives of the Christian people, and because fewer in number than the people, but as they are here described, (1.) By their many eyes, denoting sagacity, vigilance, and circumspection. (2.) By their lion-like courage, their great labour and diligence (in which they resemble the ox), their prudence and discretion becoming men, and their sublime affections and speculations, by which they mount up *with wings like eagles towards heaven* (v. 7), and these wings full of eyes within, to show that in all their meditations and ministrations they are to act with knowledge, and especially should be well acquainted with themselves and the state of their own souls, and see their own concern in the great doctrines and duties of religion, watching over their own souls as well as the souls of the people. (3.) By their continual employment, and that is, praising God, and not ceasing to do so night and day. The elders sit and are ministered unto; these stand and minister: they rest not night nor day. This now leads to the other part of the representation.

The Vision of Heaven. (a. d. 95.)

—8 And they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. 9 And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, 10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and

cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

We have considered the sights that the apostle saw in heaven: now let us observe the songs that he heard, for there is in heaven not only that to be seen which will highly please a sanctified eye, but there is that to be heard which will greatly delight a sanctified ear. This is true concerning the church of Christ here, which is a heaven upon earth, and it will be eminently so in the church made perfect in the heaven of heavens.

I. He heard the song of the four living creatures, of the ministers of the church, which refers to the prophet Isaiah's vision, [ch. vi](#). And here, 1. They adore one God, and one only, *the Lord God Almighty*, unchangeable and everlasting. 2. They adore three holies in this one God, the Holy Father, the Holy Son, and the Holy Spirit; and these are one infinitely holy and eternal Being, who sits upon the throne, *and lives for ever and ever*. In this glory the prophet saw Christ, and spoke of him.

II. He heard the adorations of the *four-and-twenty elders*, that is, of the Christian people represented by them; the ministers led, and the people followed, in the praises of God, [v. 10, 11](#). Here observe,

1. The object of their worship, the same with that which the ministers adored: *Him that sat on the throne*, the eternal everliving God. The true church of God has one and the same object of worship. Two different objects of worship, either co-ordinate or sub-ordinate, would confound the worship and divide the worshippers. It is unlawful to join in divine worship with those who either mistake or multiply the object. There is but one God, and he alone, as God, is worshipped by the church on earth and in heaven.

2. The acts of adoration. (1.) They *fell down before him that sat on the throne*; they discovered the most profound humility, reverence, and godly fear. (2.) They *cast their crowns before the throne*; they gave God the glory of the holiness wherewith he had crowned their souls on earth and the honour and happiness with which he crowns them in heaven. They owe all their graces and all their glories to him, and acknowledge that his crown is infinitely more glorious than theirs, and that it is their glory to be glorifying God.

3. The words of adoration: they said, *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power*, [v. 11](#). Observe, (1.) They do not say, *We give thee glory, and honour, and power*; for what can any creature pretend to give unto God? But they say, *thou art worthy to receive glory*. (2.) In this they tacitly acknowledge that God is exalted far above all blessing and praise. He was worthy to receive glory, but they were not worthy to praise, nor able to do it according to his infinite excellences.

4. We have the ground and reason of their adoration, which is threefold:—(1.) He is the Creator of all things, the first cause; and none but the Creator of all things should be adored; no made thing can be the object of religious worship. (2.) He is the preserver of all things,

and his preservation is a continual creation; they are created still by the sustaining power of God. All beings but God are dependent upon the will and power of God, and no dependent being must be set up as an object of religious worship. It is the part of the best dependent beings to be worshippers, not to be worshipped. (3.) He is the final cause of all things: *For thy pleasure they are and were created*. It was his will and pleasure to create all things; he was not put upon it by the will of another; there is no such thing as a subordinate creator, that acts under and by the will and power of another; and, if there were, he ought not to be worshipped. As God made all things at his pleasure, so he made them for his pleasure, to deal with them as he pleases and to glorify himself by them one way or other. Though he delights not in the death of sinners, but rather that they should turn and live, *yet he hath made all things for himself*, [Prov. xvi. 4](#). Now if these be true and sufficient grounds for religious worship, as they are proper to God alone, Christ must needs be God, one with the Father and Spirit, and be worshipped as such; for we find the same causality ascribed to him. [Col. i. 16, 17](#), *All things were created by him and for him, and he is before all things, and by him all things consist*.

REVELATION.

CHAP. V.

In the foregoing chapter the prophetical scene was opened, in the sight and hearing of the apostle, and he had a sight of God the Creator and ruler of the world, and the great King of the church. He saw God on the throne of glory and government, surrounded with his holy ones, and receiving their adorations. Now the counsels and decrees of God are set before the apostle, as in a book, which God held in his right hand; and this book is represented, I. As sealed in the hand of God, [ver. 1-9](#). II. As taken into the hand of Christ the Redeemer, to be unsealed and opened, [ver. 6, to the end](#).

The Sealed Book. (a. d. 95.)

1 And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. 2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? 3 And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. 4 And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon. 5 And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

Hitherto the apostle had seen only the great God, the governor of all things, now,

I. He is favoured with a sight of the model and methods of his government, as they are all written down in a book which he holds in his hand; and this we are now to consider as shut up and sealed in the hand of God. Observe, 1. The designs and methods of divine Providence towards the church and the world are stated and fixed; they are resolved upon and agreed to, as that which is written in a book. The great design is laid, every part adjusted, all determined, and every thing passed into decree and made a matter of record. The original and first draught of this book is the book of God's decrees, laid up in his own cabinet, in his eternal mind: but there is a transcript of so much as was necessary to be known in the book of the scriptures in general, in the prophetical part of the scripture especially, and in this prophecy in particular. 2. God holds this book in his right hand, to declare the authority of the book, and his readiness and resolution to execute all the contents thereof, all the counsels and purposes therein recorded. 3. This book in the hand of God is shut up and sealed; it is known to none but himself, till he allows it to be opened. *Known unto God*, and to him alone, *are all his works, from the beginning of the world*; but it is his glory to conceal the matter as he pleases. The times and seasons, and their great events, he hath kept in his own hand and power. 4. It is *sealed with seven seals*. This tells us with what inscrutable secrecy the counsels of God are laid, how impenetrable by the eye and intellect of the creature; and also points us to seven several parts of this book of God's counsels. Each part seems to have

its particular seal, and, when opened, discovers its proper events; these seven parts are not unsealed and opened at once, but successively, one scene of Providence introducing another, and explaining it, till the whole mystery of God's counsel and conduct be finished in the world.

II. He heard a proclamation made concerning this sealed book. 1. The crier was *a strong angel*; not that there are any weak ones among the angels in heaven, though there are many among the angels of the churches. This angel seems to come out, not only as a crier, but as a champion, with a challenge to any or all the creatures to try the strength of their wisdom in opening the counsels of God; and, as a champion, he cried with a loud voice, that every creature might hear. 2. The cry or challenge proclaimed was, "*Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?*" *v. 2*. If there be any creature who thinks himself sufficient either to explain or execute the counsels of God, let him stand forth, and make the attempt." 3. None in heaven or earth could accept the challenge and undertake the task: none *in heaven*, none of the glorious holy angels, though before the throne of God, and the ministers of his providence; they with all their wisdom cannot dive into the decrees of God: none *on earth*, no man, the wisest or the best of men, none of the magicians and soothsayers, none of the prophets of God, any further than he reveals his mind to them: *none under the earth*, none of the fallen angels, none of the spirits of men departed, though they should return to our world, can open this book. Satan himself, with all his subtlety, cannot do it; the creatures cannot open it, nor look on it; they cannot read it. God only can do it.

III. He felt a great concern in himself about this matter: the apostle *wept much*; it was a great disappointment to him. By what he had seen in him who sat upon the throne, he was very desirous to see and know more of his mind and will: this desire, when not presently gratified, filled him with sorrow, and fetched many tears from his eyes. Here observe, 1. Those who have seen most of God in this world are most desirous to see more; and those who have seen his glory desire to know his will. 2. Good men may be too eager and too hasty to look into the mysteries of divine conduct. 3. Such desires, not presently answered, turn to grief and sorrow. *Hope deferred makes the heart sick*.

IV. The apostle was comforted and encouraged to hope this sealed book would yet be opened. Here observe, 1. Who it was that gave John the hint: *One of the elders*. God had revealed it to his church. If angels do not refuse to learn from the church, ministers should not disdain to do it. God can make his people to instruct and inform their teachers when he pleases. 2. Who it was that would do the thing—the Lord Jesus Christ, called *the lion of the tribe of Judah*, according to his human nature, alluding to Jacob's prophecy ([Gen. xlix. 10](#)), and *the root of David* according to his divine nature, though a branch of David according to the flesh. He who is a middle person, God and man, and bears the office of Mediator between God and man, is fit and worthy to open and execute all the counsels of God towards men. And this he does in his mediatorial state and capacity, *as the root of David and the*

offspring of Judah, and as the King and head of the Israel of God; and he will do it, to the consolation and joy of all his people.

The Sealed Book. (a. d. 95.)

6 And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. 7 And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. 8 And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four *and* twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. 9 And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; 10 And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. 11 And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; 12 Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. 13 And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, *be* unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. 14 And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four *and* twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.

Here, I. The apostle beholds this book taken into the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ, in order to its being unsealed and opened by him. Here Christ is described, 1. By his place and station: *In the midst of the throne, and of the four beasts, and of the elders*. He was on the same throne with the Father; he was nearer to him than either the elders or ministers of the churches. Christ, as man and Mediator, is subordinate to God the Father, but is nearer to him than all the creatures; *for in him all the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily*. The ministers stand between God and the people. Christ stands as the Mediator between God and both ministers and people. 2. The form in which he appeared. Before he is called *a lion*; here he appears *as a lamb slain*. He is a lion to conquer Satan, a lamb to satisfy the justice of God. He appears with the marks of his sufferings upon him, to show that he interceded in heaven in the virtue of his satisfaction. He appears as a *lamb, having seven horns and seven eyes*, perfect power to execute all the will of God and perfect wisdom to understand it all and to do it in the most effectual manner; *for he hath the seven Spirits of God*, he has received the Holy Spirit without measure, in all perfection of light, and life, and power, by which he is able to teach and rule all parts of the earth. 3. He is described by his act and deed: *He came, and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat on the throne* (v. 7), not by violence, nor by fraud, but he prevailed to do it (as v. 5), he prevailed by his merit and worthiness, he

did it by authority and by the Father's appointment. God very willingly and justly put the book of his eternal counsels into the hand of Christ, and Christ as readily and gladly took it into his hand; for he delights to reveal and to do the will of his Father.

II. The apostle observes the universal joy and thanksgiving that filled heaven and earth upon this transaction. No sooner had Christ received this book out of the Father's hand than he received the applauses and adorations of angels and men, yea, of *every creature*. And, indeed, it is just matter of joy to all the world to see that God does not deal with men in a way of absolute power and strict justice, but in a way of grace and mercy through the Redeemer. He governs the world, not merely as a Creator and Lawgiver, but as our God and Saviour. All the world has reason to rejoice in this. The song of praise that was offered up to the Lamb on this occasion consists of three parts, one part sung by the church, another by the church and the angels, the third by every creature.

1. The church begins the doxology, as being more immediately concerned in it ([v. 8](#)), the four living creatures, and *the four-and-twenty elders*, the Christian people, under their minister, lead up the chorus. Here observe, (1.) The object of their worship—the *Lamb*, the Lord Jesus Christ; it is the declared will of God that all men *should honour the Son as they honour the Father*; for he has the same nature. (2.) Their posture: They *fell down before him*, gave him not an inferior sort of worship, but the most profound adoration. (3.) The instruments used in their adorations—*harps and vials*; the harps were the instruments of praise, the vials were full of odours or incense, which signify *the prayers of the saints*: prayer and praise should always go together. (4.) The matter of their song: it was suited to the new state of the church, the gospel-state introduced by the Son of God. In this new song, [1.] They acknowledge the infinite fitness and worthiness of the Lord Jesus for this great work of opening and executing the counsel and purposes of God ([v. 9](#)): *Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof*, every way sufficient for the work and deserving the honour. [2.] They mention the grounds and reasons of this worthiness; and though they do not exclude the dignity of his person as God, without which he had not been sufficient for it, yet they chiefly insist upon the merit of his sufferings, which he had endured for them; these more sensibly struck their souls with thankfulness and joy. Here, *First*, They mention his suffering: "*Thou wast slain*, slain as a sacrifice, thy blood was shed." *Secondly*, The fruits of his sufferings. 1. Redemption to God; Christ has redeemed his people from the bondage of sin, guilt, and Satan, redeemed them to God, set them at liberty to serve him and to enjoy him. 2. High exaltation: Thou *hast made us to our God kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth*, [v. 10](#). Every ransomed slave is not immediately preferred to honour; he thinks it a great favour to be restored to liberty. But when the elect of God were made slaves by sin and Satan, in every nation of the world, Christ not only purchased their liberty for them, but the highest honour and preferment, *made them kings and priests*—kings, to rule over their own spirits, and to overcome the world, and the evil one; and he has made them priests,

given them access to himself, and liberty to offer up spiritual sacrifices, and *they shall reign on the earth*; they shall with him judge the world at the great day.

2. The doxology, thus begun by the church, is carried on by the angels; they take the second part, in conjunction with the church, [v. 11](#). They are said to be *innumerable*, and to be the attendants on the throne of God and guardians to the church; though they did not need a Saviour themselves, yet they rejoice in the redemption and salvation of sinners, and they agree with the church in acknowledging the infinite merits of the Lord Jesus as dying for sinners, that he is *worthy to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing*. (1.) He is worthy of that office and that authority which require the greatest power and wisdom, the greatest fund, all excellency, to discharge them aright; and, (2.) He is worthy of all honour, and glory, and blessing, because he is sufficient for the office and faithful in it.

3. This doxology, thus begun by the church, and carried on by the angels, is resounded and echoed by the whole creation, [v. 13](#). Heaven and earth ring with the high praises of the Redeemer. The whole creation fares the better for Christ. *By him all things consist*; and all the creatures, had they sense and language, would adore that great Redeemer who delivers the creature from that bondage under which it groans, through the corruption of men, and the just curse denounced by the great God upon the fall; that part which (by a prosopopoeia) is made for the whole creation is a song of *blessing, and honour, and glory, and power*, (1.) *To him that sits on the throne*, to God as God, or to God the Father, as the first person in the Trinity and the first in the economy of our salvation; and, (2.) *To the Lamb*, as the second person in the Godhead and the Mediator of the new covenant. Not that the worship paid to the Lamb is of another nature, an inferior worship, for the very same honour and glory are in the same words ascribed *to the Lamb and to him that sits on the throne*, their essence being the same; but, their parts in the work of our salvation being distinct they are distinctly adored. We worship and glorify one and the same God for our creation and for our redemption.

We see how the church that began the heavenly anthem, finding heaven and earth join in the concert, closes all with their *Amen*, and end as they began, with a low prostration before the eternal and everlasting God. Thus we have seen this sealed book passing with great solemnity from the hand of the Creator into the hand of the Redeemer.