

# Dartmouth

## Bible Notes



Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Who is God/Who God Is Lesson 5

Scripture: Rev. 4 etc

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### *The Holy God*

#### **Revelation 4** (ESV)

<sup>1</sup>After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had 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 behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.

<sup>3</sup>And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.

<sup>4</sup>Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.

<sup>5</sup>From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God,

<sup>6</sup>and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind:

<sup>7</sup>the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight.

<sup>8</sup>And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!”

<sup>9</sup>And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever,

<sup>10</sup>the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

<sup>11</sup>“Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”

**Introduction** This pastor, and I will assume every pastor, begins his pursuit of a pulpit message by praying, “Lord, give me Your message for Your people for this week.” He then tries hard to clear his mind, listen to the Lord, search the Scriptures and come up with a talk that is biblically accurate, edifying, interesting and relevant. He may or may not succeed and in review it is hard to know if he did succeed because on the one hand some people give you an F or a D- every week and others will think, and tell him, he is the reincarnation of Charles Haddon Spurgeon every week! This week for me, was no different but the subject today is unusually important.

In the Bible there are only a few occasions where we read about a human being given a clear view into heaven--or some "kiosk" of heaven. They are brief, as far as we know a one-time event for most (John being the exception), and utterly overwhelming to that person. I believe these few occasions were real and completely true. Here are the examples I'm thinking of:

- Elijah – 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 2:1-14
- Isaiah – Isaiah 6:1-7
- Peter, James and John – Matthew 17:1-8
- Paul - 2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 12:1-4
- John again in our passage today, Revelation 4.

Conversely I'm fairly certain that I *DO NOT* believe the books and speakers in our times who tell us *THEY* have been to, or, seen into heaven. The exception to this skepticism of mine is the story of Don Piper, who died in his car January 18<sup>th</sup>, 1989 in Texas—according to him, spent (in earth-time) ninety minutes in heaven—and then was sent back to Texas. When several of us (here in DBC) read Piper's subsequent book<sup>1</sup> about a dozen years ago, we were all inclined to believe it. I think we all were touched with Piper's strong desire to *not* stay here and his *anger* at being sent back here, with all the pain and suffering of recovery of which he was, despite being briefly in heaven, *not* exempted from back in this world. In short, if you read Piper's book you will be encouraged—mainly because we are so inundated today with all kinds of alternative-reality scenes about death with no Jesus, with no biblical backdrop which is suggesting that the traditional Christian and biblical concept of heaven is so outdated, improbable and frankly, slated only for people who believe in Jesus—which seems too intolerant in the world of 2017! That being as it may, when we read these few occasions in the Bible of men who saw heaven, briefly, and perhaps indulge the story of Don Piper it warms our hearts. We are *told* there is a heaven. We *want* there to be a heaven. We *press on* with our lives in hope and courage because we *believe* there is a heaven.

But this message today, is not about heaven. It is about God, He Who is the King of heaven. It is about *one particular aspect* of who God is, a single thing which paints the walls, paves the streets, fills the sky and permeates the air of heaven: HIS HOLINESS. Here is an aspect of God before which we should, and will, all fall down.

When we turn our minds to try to think about THE HOLINESS OF GOD, we must first admit that we know virtually nothing about it—not really—or very little about it. We can say the words, spell the words perhaps even define the words. But it is a thing so utterly alien to us—so deeply sin has darkened our perspective—that we can hardly relate. But people still try to capture a sense of it:

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<sup>1</sup> Don Piper, *90 Minutes in Heaven*, Revell/Baker 2004.

- Church architects over the centuries have vainly (in my view) sought to reach for the holiness of God somehow, in their design of cathedrals and church buildings.
- Christian musicians have striven to write songs and hymns and instrumental music that somehow captures the sense of holiness.
- Believers have struggled to somehow achieve some small experience of being separated unto the Lord, denying the world and the devil and *mortifying* the flesh.

In the chart of the attributes of God by Tim Challies, he describes “Holiness” as follows: GOD IS SEPARATED FROM SIN AND HE IS COMMITTED TO SEEKING HIS OWN HONOR.<sup>2</sup>

- ❖ Where God is, because of Who God is, is completely clean, totally unique and blazingly glorious and bright.
- ❖ There, there is no sin, no doubt, no resentment and no pollution.
- ❖ There, there is no argument or misunderstanding.
- ❖ God’s holiness in Himself, jives perfectly with His knowing all things and being the sovereign King. His own glory is part of His holiness.
- ❖ With Him there is no degenerative downward path.

But in seeking to see a bit of His holiness it certainly ISN’T JUST WHAT THERE ISN’T. The holiness of God isn’t just about what He is not. To think of the holiness of God as a long list of NOTs is to miss it completely. His holiness is not defined by the lack of being trapped by the little dark things of this world.

Positively He is pure—morally, ethically, economically, politically and any other category you can think of...

His thoughts are uniquely brilliant and all-wise.

His passions are all good.

His wishes are all completely thought-through and informed and all His decisions are totally perversion-free. No decree possesses any defect.

Despite the existence of evil and wickedness in His creation that is matched by awesome patience and restraint on His part.

If you read the accounts of Elijah, Isaiah and the apostles and what they saw of heaven their experience of God or God’s proximity was consistently overwhelming.

God’s separateness from all dark and wicked and broken things, both draws us and mows us down at the same time!

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<sup>2</sup> Tim Challies, chart on the *Attributes of God*, from *Visual Theology*, 2017.

These days when I see an old person I am increasingly drawn to wonder (and sometimes I will even ask a person)

what was he like when he was young?

When she was young, was she beautiful, was she bright and quick witted. Did she laugh a lot?

Was he strong and athletic? Did he dazzle you with his quick thinking and yet his careful analysis of a thing?

Was she stunning and even glow with her purity?

Aging diminishes those things tragically and I am sad of what I have lost from my youth. Is God forever young? I *want* to say YES but then I am quick to remember that young also often means rash and impulsive and foolhardy. Young can mean just plain dumb risk-taking. It can mean being lust-driven and self-focused. While unaging, God is certainly NONE of those things, in His holiness.

When I try to imagine the holiness of God, I am amazed at Bible passages like Job 1:6 ***Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them.*** That Satan could even approach God and say something to Him, quietly testifies to God's restraint and indulgence.

I am really transfixed by a scene like Moses wrote down in Exodus 3:2-5 ***And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.***

When I think of human history with all our wars and jealousy and hatred between races and countries, of our divorces and our abortions in the millions, and our indulgence of slavery, our lusts and our creation of, and then support of the porn industry and human trafficking and then telling each other nationally that this is perfectly acceptable behavior, even within our civil rights—I am ashamed and not in a self-righteous way. I'm just saddened--NOT just at the injustice between people but at the fundamental offense to a holy God who caters to NONE of it and will ultimately let NONE of it slide.

I'm saddened at the root-level brokenness to see just in creation itself. I see a dead bird and I think "this is a violation of God's holiness." I hear a whimpering, stray cat and it says to me—"this isn't what God intended." I see pictures of an oil slick and oil soaked ducks and it strikes me, "this is NOT SUPPOSED TO BE!" Because even the downgrades in the environment

are an offense to the holy God of heaven! To me, the philosophical wishful-thinking of evolution is just a sad and silly fantasy that doesn't at all explain the entropies of the real world!

It was from within God's holiness that the Father and the Son covenanted and were joined in agreement by the Holy Spirit, to craft a plan to redeem a people—not all people but A people--from their profound UNholiness. They devised a plan by which the Son would be *made* the sin of people (ὕπερ ἡμῶν ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησεν), in order that those people would actually *become* the righteousness of God! 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:21 **For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

So this is one of God's COMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES. He can and wishes to infuse us first with the perfect holiness of Jesus, with which we and anyone and everyone who would join us, are authorized to enter heaven. It is our induction.

AND then to grow *within us* a real separateness from the sin and darkness of this world. This is the practical "becoming-like-God" work of the Spirit of God (who is the HOLY Spirit). In heaven there will be no

Fascination with the dark and intoxication with the macabre.

Being drawn into lust and selfishness.

Concern for self-esteem and personal empowerment.

Demands of civil rights and equalizing of status between all creatures.

"One-upmanship".

Halloween.

Walking Dead.

Gambling or wagering.

Screamo death metal.

Because in heaven it will be a perfect place.

So let's bring it together—what is God's holiness?

It is His complete moral purity.

It is His complete detachment from any evil or darkness or defect at all.

He is a "cut above" and in a class by Himself. (Deffinbaugh, quoting Sproul).

It is His nature to be holy; it is His blazing consistency in this—so much so that the seraphim that Isaiah saw and the four living creatures that John saw cried out three times **Holy, holy, holy**. It will be His champion attribute and all will love Him.

The splendor of the King  
Clothed in majesty  
Let all the earth rejoice,  
all the earth rejoice  
He wraps Himself in light,  
And darkness tries to hide and  
trembles at His voice,  
trembles at His voice...

How great is our God  
Sing with me  
How great is our God  
And all will see  
How great, how great is our God

## **2 Kings 2:1–14 (ESV)**

Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. <sup>2</sup> And Elijah said to Elisha, “Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel.” But Elisha said, “As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they went down to Bethel. <sup>3</sup> And the sons of the prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, “Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?” And he said, “Yes, I know it; keep quiet.”

<sup>4</sup> Elijah said to him, “Elisha, please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to Jericho.” But he said, “As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they came to Jericho. <sup>5</sup> The sons of the prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha and said to him, “Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?” And he answered, “Yes, I know it; keep quiet.”

<sup>6</sup> Then Elijah said to him, “Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan.” But he said, “As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So the two of them went on. <sup>7</sup> Fifty men of the sons of the prophets also went and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. <sup>8</sup> Then Elijah took his cloak and rolled it up and struck the water, and the water was parted to the one side and to the other, till the two of them could go over on dry ground.

<sup>9</sup> When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you.” And Elisha said, “Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me.” <sup>10</sup> And he said, “You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you, but if you do not see me, it shall not be so.” <sup>11</sup> And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. <sup>12</sup> And Elisha saw it and he cried, “My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” And he saw him no more.

Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. <sup>13</sup> And he took up the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. <sup>14</sup> Then he took the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and struck the water, saying, “Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?” And when he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.

## **Isaiah 6:1–7 (ESV)**

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. <sup>3</sup> And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory!”

<sup>4</sup> And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup> And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

<sup>6</sup> Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup> And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

## **Matthew 17:1–8 (ESV)**

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. <sup>2</sup> And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. <sup>3</sup> And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. <sup>4</sup> And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” <sup>5</sup> He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well

pleased; listen to him.”<sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified.<sup>7</sup> But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “**Rise, and have no fear.**”<sup>8</sup> And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

**2 Corinthians 12:1–4 (ESV)**

I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.<sup>2</sup> I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows.<sup>3</sup> And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—<sup>4</sup> and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.