

REVELATION: WEEK 2

STEVE WATSON | DAILY BIBLE GUIDE | 2018



Monday, February 26

Revelation 3:14-22

¹⁴“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God’s creation:

¹⁵“I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. ¹⁶So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷For you say, ‘I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.’ You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. ¹⁸Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to

keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. ¹⁹I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. ²⁰Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. ²¹To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. ²²Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”

Points of Interest

- “Laodicea” — So wealthy it once refused Roman aid after an earthquake, this city was also known for its century’s version of banking, wool, and ophthalmology industries, which John plays on in vs. 18.
- “words of the Amen” – this whole line emphasizes Jesus’ **dependability** and **faithfulness** and creative capacity.
- “because you are lukewarm” — There were hot springs six miles from Laodicea. By the time those waters reached the city, they were lukewarm and diseased – you got sick if you drank them. In the first century, “lukewarm” was **not a metaphor for indifference**; this is a picture of being **unhealthy**, not vital.
- “I am rich” – These folks appear to be healthy and well and have all they need. People have commented that the 21st century developed world receives Revelation as Laodiceans. We are historically healthy, wealthy, and self-sufficient.

- “poor, blind, and naked” – These people are spiritually and psychologically impoverished. Their interior condition is vulnerable and empty. Various scripture passages and psychological theories have language for inner health and vitality. The New Testament author Paul speaks to the fruit of the Spirit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The modern Internal Family Systems Model, a psychotherapy approach, describes people who have calmness, clarity, compassion, confidence, courage, and connectedness. Those of us who are materially wealthy often lack many of these things.
- “buy from me gold” – Jesus says this inner wealth and rightness, or purity and sight is available from **connection with him**.
- “I am standing at the door, knocking” – Jesus is available but will not force entry. **God is gentle**, does not insist on God’s own way.
- “what the Spirit is saying to the churches” – Michael Gorman summarizes the message of the seven letters as this: “listen for the Spirit of God identifying our own church’s peculiar unholy spirit and offering us the presence and grace of Christ to transform us into a more faithful people of God... whole-hearted, characterized by ... faithfulness and fearlessness, devotion to Jesus but not to the state, and a preference for the poor rather than the rich.” (Gorman, 99-100)

Spiritual Exercise

This week we have the image of Jesus knocking at our door and of Jesus – pictured as **a strong lion** and also as a vulnerable, slaughtered **lamb** – being our picture of the nature of God and sitting at the center of our worship. So this week we invite you to welcome Jesus to knock on your door, to center your life, and to shape your vision of God. Consider the image of Jesus knocking, asking you to have Jesus in for a meal. Picture this in your imagination. Will you open the door or not? Why is that? What inner vitality and wealth are you lacking? What would Jesus like to grow in you?

A Direction for Prayer

Pray that in an age of material prosperity and spiritual poverty, that your church will be deeply responsive to the voice of Jesus, known for people who have wealth of spirit, beautiful and unusual goodness, and clear sight.

Tuesday, February 27

Revelation 4:1-6a

⁴After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! 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.” ²At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne! ³And the one seated there looks like jasper and carnelian, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an

emerald. ⁴Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads. ⁵Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God; ⁶and in front of the throne there is something like a sea of glass, like crystal.

Points of Interest

- “a door stood open” — Heaven in the New Testament isn’t a particular place or time, certainly not just some realm in the skies where dead people go. It’s the sphere of reality **where God lives and rules**, both outside of space and time as we know it and yet accessible in our space and time as well. Mysterious, but accessible – the door is open.
- “in the Spirit” – Chapter four begins the first of seven visions which make up most of the rest of Revelation. John’s vision is described metaphorically as a journey he takes into heaven – God’s realm – to see what’s going on with God behind the scenes of what we see on earth.
- “there in heaven stood a throne” – This throne-room scene feels like a mash-up of two places familiar to John: the center of a temple and the center of a palace. From the Jewish temple in Jerusalem and the imperial cult of the Roman Empire, these centers of beauty and power and mystery were familiar to John. The Old Testament often pictures God living in a temple or ruling from a throne. Each time, the writers go overboard with the imagery to communicate that God is more powerful and more beautiful than anything they have yet seen. At least one goal of this imagery is to re-center us. No president or boss is the center of power on earth – **God is**. And no celebrity or marketing prop most radiates beauty – **God does**.
- “jasper and carnelian” – God’s looking pretty fly. Jasper is a stone that, when clear, sparkles and flashes, and carnelian is a deep red. What this evokes for me is that God is stunning and beautiful, on the one hand absolutely transparent with nothing to hide, and on the other hand, possessing the depth and power and light of fire.

- “a rainbow” – Above everything that is powerful and mysterious and fierce around this throne is a beautiful, green-hued rainbow. Dating back to the ancient flood story in Genesis, this has been an image of the kindness and mercy and promise of God.
- “around the throne are ... twenty-four elders” – God isn’t ever alone in this temple or throne imagery. There are always loads of messengers and worshippers and helpers. Here God’s council or cabinet is two groups of twelve – perhaps representing the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 first apprentices of Jesus, representing Jesus’ whole Jewish heritage and the worldwide church of Jesus.
- “lightning... thunder... torches... sea of glass” – The throne of God also is never a dull place. It’s electric with power and **busy with God’s Spirit going out**, symbolized by messengers or angels or flashes of lightning. And yet it’s somehow still peaceful. The ocean for Jews was a place of terror. Here it is replaced by a sea of crystal glass – still and beautiful.

Spiritual Exercise

This week we have the image of Jesus knocking at our door and of Jesus – pictured as a strong lion and also as a vulnerable, slaughtered lamb – being our picture of the nature of God and sitting at the center of our worship. So this week we invite you to welcome Jesus to knock on your door, to center your life, and to shape your vision of God. Imagine for a moment that Jesus is taking you to see what God looks like. Center your imagination on one of today’s images of God’s beauty or power. Hold that picture for a few moments. Notice if anything changes in your mind or body or feelings.

A Direction for Prayer

Pray for your six, that however close or distant God has seemed to them, they would come to see that **God’s door is open**. Pray that their greatest ever experience of power or beauty would become an image of part of what God is to them.

Wednesday, February 28

Revelation 4:6b-11

Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: ⁷the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. ⁸And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside. Day and night without ceasing they sing,

“Holy, holy, holy,
the Lord God the Almighty,
who was and is and is to come.”

⁹And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing,

¹¹“You are worthy, 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.”

Points of Interest

- “Around the throne...” We’re returning to the palace image from yesterday. In this week’s guide, we’re slowing down the pace to let our minds and imaginations soak in Chapter 4 and 5’s images of God and calls to worship. Revelation gets pretty weird in our material over the next three weeks, but before we go there, we’re trying to do the same thing Jesus did for John – center our minds in God’s beautiful and powerful being.
- “four living creatures, full of eyes” – John reworks a strange image from the first chapter of the Bible’s book of Ezekiel. This tradition of God having other non-human sidekicks may be part of the evolution of faith from polytheistic to monotheistic. Early in the Bible, God is presented as the most supreme of all the gods, the only god worthy of allegiance and the only god able to love and help and rescue. Over time, Jews and then followers of Jesus came to understand that there is only **one true god at all**. The writers, though, continue to picture God as surrounded by other beings that worship God or do what God needs done.
- “full of eyes... lion, ox, human, eagle” – John’s imagery and metaphors aren’t visually literal but symbolically and imaginatively evocative. Whoever these creatures literally are or aren’t, we’re to imagine, with their slew of eyes everywhere, that **they are watchful**. God’s people see everything, they don’t miss a beat. They are also noble and strong and wise and fast.

- “Holy, holy, holy” – Anyone and anything that’s near God can’t help but keep talking about how **awesome God is**. “Holy” means other or separate, but in a good sense. God is more beautiful and powerful and perfect than any other known reference point – arrestingly different.
- “who was and is and is to come” – God is before and after all time and found in the present within time and in eternity beyond time. This is part of God’s wow factor. I’m hesitant to try to explain this, but for instance: Can we pray for something that **already happened?** Can we trust that God **will be good in the future?** Can we hope to find God in **this moment**, whatever this moment brings? Perhaps a yes to all of that and more.
- “they cast their crowns before the throne” – There’s a drama playing out around God. The human representatives maybe stand for all of us that stick with Jesus until we achieve victory in life (the conquering all the letters to the churches talk about). And everyone’s got a crown. Everyone has power and leadership and responsibility and honor. But when the four MCs start singing, everybody throws their crowns to the ground. They all forget about themselves again and love and respect God. This cycle of God loving and empowering us and doing good work, and us losing ourselves in wonder and love and worship seems to be the nature of human destiny as John understands it.
- “You are worthy” – In a time and place when all of John’s audience and John himself were subject to a Roman emperor and a whole pyramid of power and class structures underneath that, Revelation’s God is radically counter-imperial. **Only God is worth allegiance**. Only God has ultimate power. There’s an implicit invitation to all people who read Revelation to ask who and what we follow and lead, who and what promises our security, and to re-center our worship and trust and allegiance on God.

Spiritual Exercise

This week we invite you to welcome Jesus to knock on your door, to **center your life**, and to shape your vision of God. Imagine for a moment that Jesus has invited you to a sing-along. In a beautiful room, creatures of all types are singing about God’s beauty and power. What about God would you find arresting? What song would you sing?

A Direction for Prayer

Pray that your church’s worship life would be **vigorous and joyful**, that you and others would have your imaginations captured by the beauty and power of God.

Thursday, March 1

Revelation 5:1-6

Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals; ²and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” ³And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it. ⁴And I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. ⁵Then one of the elders

said to me, “Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”

⁶Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

Points of Interest

- “a scroll” – Kings would write decrees and plans on scrolls. God’s got an important one here. Tradition has it that this scroll represents something far more comprehensive than usual – like **all God’s plans** to judge and save the world and otherwise reckon with human history.
- “sealed with seven seals” – Royal scrolls were closed with a single wax seal, as marks of royal authority and disincentive for the wrong person to open it. Security on this one is tight. In John’s world of sevens, perfectly tight. None of us mortals should claim to know God’s plans.
- “I began to weep bitterly” – But John really, really wants to know, and he really wants God’s plans to proceed, good as they must be.
- “The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David” – Good news. God’s warrior, God’s human ruler is in town to do the job. These titles evoke royal strength – the king of the jungle and Israel’s greatest king. They also were recognizable Messianic images – Messiah being the promised ruler of God on earth.
- “a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered” – Well, that is unexpected. The Messiah, the scroll-breaker, the conqueror with the victory wreath was called a king and a lion. When John sees him in the heart of the throne room, though, he looks more like a **lamb soaked in its own blood**. In Jesus, God is radically reframing what power and strength look like. The whole point of power in the Roman imperial system and pretty much any other human system is to stay at the top of the pyramid – to avoid suffering for yourself, and subject others to it as needed for your own security and wealth or for the supposed greater good. Jesus embraces suffering and is unashamed to continue to be marked by

vulnerability and gentleness. As the Lamb is a central image for John, we'll have more opportunities to reflect on it. For now, consider how this image might reframe your conception of God, or of power, or of leadership, or of masculinity, or of any number of things.

- “having seven horns and seven eyes” — Seven is John’s number of completion or perfection, and horns in his tradition symbolize strength. Though he is a lamb, in this vision the poetic symbolism indicates Jesus also has complete power and perspective, seeing and knowing all things. He sees and knows all things — not just in this throne room, but by the Spirit of God, everywhere, in all the earth.

Spiritual Exercise

This week we invite you to welcome Jesus to **knock on your door**, to center your life, and to shape your vision of God. Imagine the risen Jesus telling you that he wants to show you what God is like. I’m not sure that the bloody lamb image works as well in our century. Perhaps you could imagine Jesus appearing to you as a hunger-weakened refugee or a prisoner of war. How does being with Jesus the victim of violence shape your image of God? Is it easy or hard to picture Jesus like this?

A Direction for Prayer

Many of our views of God are influenced by our experiences of our parents and other leaders. Pray for your six, for healing from any abusive, controlling, or power-hungry leadership they have seen or experienced in their lives. Pray that Jesus’ spirit sent out into all the earth would **encourage and nourish** them today.

Friday, March 2

Revelation 5:7-14

⁷ He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne. ⁸ When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ They sing a new song:

“You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slaughtered and by your blood you
ransomed for God
saints from every tribe and language and
people and nation;
¹⁰ you have made them to be a kingdom and
priests serving our God,
and they will reign on earth.”

¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many
angels surrounding the throne and the living

creatures and the elders; they numbered
myriads of myriads and thousands of
thousands, ¹² singing with full voice,

“Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and
might
and honor and glory and blessing!”

¹³ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on
earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all
that is in them, singing,

“To the one seated on the throne and to the
Lamb
be blessing and honor and glory and might
forever and ever!”

¹⁴ And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And
the elders fell down and worshiped.

Points of Interest

- “the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb” – The Lamb gets the same worship as Creator God did in the last chapter. In many ways, Chapter 5 is a parallel to, or a recapitulation of Chapter 4. Stories are told about this Lamb, songs are sung, just as with God. This is part of the first century Jesus community’s working out what it means that Jesus and Creator God are two persons that share the same nature and identity. It’s also part of their working out that Jesus is the deepest, clearest, most accurate picture the world has yet seen of the nature and character of God. Want to know what God looks like? **Look at Jesus.**
- “the prayers of the saints” – Our worship and prayer on earth reaches God and are both beautiful and valuable to God.
- “You are worthy... for you were slaughtered” – Jesus can see and reveal God’s plans for history because Jesus endured suffering on all humanity’s behalf. Conquering comes through self-giving, vulnerable suffering, not through violence. This would have shattered the Roman ideal of redemptive violence that peace is secured through war, that military

conquest brings glory. The myth of redemptive violence is also an obsession of contemporary American entertainment and nationalism. We see and hear that through violence, heroic victories are won, national freedoms are protected, and justice is secured. But God doesn't use violence as a tool or a means to an end. Jesus is worthy for using sacrificial love and powerful vulnerability as a means to redemption.

- “and by your blood you ransomed for God saints” – Ransom is an old metaphor for the meaning of Jesus' crucifixion. People were enslaved to our own foolishness and addiction and the power of evil. Jesus can free us, and his blood is the ransom payment. It's metaphor. No one is necessarily being paid off, but God pays the full cost of our freedom, not us.
- “from every tribe and language and people and nation” – Jesus is drawing people to God from every conceivable human demographic across the globe.
- “to be a kingdom and priests serving our God” – The destiny for God's children isn't just freedom but authority. Keep in mind that many of the first century believers were slaves. What good news this is that all people, regardless of how much they have been diminished, are made to be co-rulers with God on earth.
- “to receive power and wealth... - A second worship song, sung by millions in full voice, to the slaughtered Lamb. It's a stunning scene of **hope and victory**. Jesus has the right to all the things the most powerful emperor could ever dream of having. His victory is total. For people who suffer or make counter-cultural choices to align with Jesus, this is a scene of great hope for them as well. Team Jesus wins, but not at any one else's expense.

Spiritual Exercise

This week we invite you to welcome Jesus to knock on your door, to center your life, and to **shape your vision of God**. Imagine yourself among the millions singing around this throne. Are you comfortable there or not? What victory do you hope Jesus has achieved for humanity?

A Direction for Prayer

Pray for your city: that people and churches and media and arts would learn to tell stories of redemptive suffering rather than redemptive violence.