

The Structure of Reality

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Mankind has searched for a theory of everything for years: gravitational forces, subatomic particles, string theory—with none to be found—but here God unveils *the structure of the reality* through three images: *a throne, a scroll, and a song*.

The Throne

After writing the messages to the seven churches, John has a vision of a door standing open in heaven and hears a voice like a trumpet, “[Come up here](#).” Come up where? One camp takes this phrase, repeated several times in Revelation, to refer to the church’s rapture away from tribulation, but John is never a symbol for the church. That is reserved for lampstands and other images. *John* is called up to *witness*. Accompanied by flashes of lightning, peals of thunder, and a group of elders, to a sapphire space beneath the presence of God. Sound familiar? It’s reminiscent of Mt. Sinai, where Moses went up a mountain, with 70 elders, to receive revelation before the sapphire-like presence of God ([Ex 24:9–10](#)); *John goes up the cosmic mountain for a revelation of the structure of reality*. Next the voice says, *I will show you what must take place after this*. Take place after what? Is God promising to show John the future? That with Revelation he can crack the DaVinci code of the end times? Not exactly, the *things after* aren’t a reference to *future events* but what will happen *after John goes through the heavenly door*. It’s Neo slipping through the mirror, Alice going down the rabbit hole, *where he will witness realities present and future, already and not fully*. See John is in the spiritual, timeless dimension of God’s heavenly throne room, a place difficult to determine time, so read with interpretive humility. God *shows* John, why? because he wants him to *experience* the truth not just *understand* the truth. So it is for us: we must open ourselves up to being *shown* not just *told*. Through the door, John sees a **throne** and one sitting on it who is unlike the enthroned elders 12 flanking either side. 3 observations. First, he has the appearance of jasper, carnelian, and is surrounded by an emerald-like rainbow. What do all these precious stones mean? Similar wording is associated with God’s glory: [having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal](#) (21:11). The *collective impression of the gems is that God is magnificent, gorgeous*. Yesterday on Mopac I saw a rainbow, crispest colors I’ve ever seen, so I pulled out my

phone to capture it, and almost hit the car in front of me. *I couldn't take my eyes off it.* Ask God to make the eyes of your heart entranced with his magnificence. Second, his throne accompanied by the seven torches of the Spirit, and a sea of glass stretches out before him separating him from the world. *God is transcendent*, almost untouchable. Third, he *sits* on his throne; he does not *pace*, anxious about the future. *He is omnipotent*, all powerful. *Magnificent, transcendent, omnipotent.* Have you ever noticed when you're immersed in something great you forget about your worries: a concert at Moody Theatre, a film at Alamo, an Austin FC game. But afterwards, our anxieties resurface don't they? But in the presence of *true* greatness we don't just forget our worries; they shrink down to their appropriate size. Place your worries next to *magnificent, transcendent, omnipotent* one, and they will take their proper size. Drag them before him in prayer, with an eye on his character in Revelation. Keep doing that and one day your fears will turn into a **sea of glass**. What's so great about that? The sea was a threat to the ancient world, a place of chaos and in Revelation where the Beast emerges. So a sea of glass means the chaos of the life-threatening seas will be defeated. What was a fear-inducing threat becomes an awe-inspiring beauty. Trust the Lord and your worries will turn to crystal. Now before we move onto the scroll, a word about the four living creatures covered with eyes and wings. It's a composite image. They represent *creation*, ox, lion, eagle: God is not so transcendent that he is disinterested in his creation; it has representation before him. And *humanity*, one with the face of man. Together they do incessantly what we struggle to do continually—worship, day and night. How? They are always positioned next to his greatness. Your spiritual position matters. Far from God anxious or proud; close to God worship-intoxicated. They symbolize our purpose: *living in view of the glory of God such that all of life is worship.* So they sing: **Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!** They are a picture of our purpose and a pledge of our future reality.

The Scroll

Next John zooms in to an object in God's right hand, a scroll with seven seals. What is it? Who can open it? Why does John cry about it? **What is it?** A double-sided scroll was rare. Typically it would be written upon on the inside and addressed on the outside, but this scroll is two-sided because it is *a complete account of things*. What things? Well, the scroll

appears in Ezekiel where it is handed to the prophet containing “words of lamentation and mourning and woe”—it’s about *judgment* (2:10). But when Christ takes it all declare, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God”—it’s about *redemption* (9). The scroll is God’s reckoning of history in holy judgment and salvation. But who is worthy to unseal it? No one in heaven or on earth or under the earth is a way of saying all are disqualified. But **why does John weep** over the absence of a qualified scroll-opener? Because after being exposed to the utopian realities of God’s glorious presence, he is gutted by the distance between what is and what will be. He is acutely aware that, unlike the living creatures, all creation groans; that unlike the 24 elders, the church struggles to worship; that unlike these songs, we are often more interested in our own glory. So beholding these realities, John longs for someone to unseal the scroll and bring heaven to earth. To right all wrongs (judgment) and redeem repentant (redemption). **Who can do it?!** Imagine the tryouts, like candidates attempting to pull Excalibur from the stone: the strong, the weak, the just, the unjust, the proud, the meek—*none* could open the book. Why? None are worthy, not even John, the second Moses upon the sacred mountain. But then we hear an elder say, Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals. Someone is found. A Lion and Root? Because in the OT these figures refer to someone human enough to represent humanity (Judah, Jesse) yet divine enough to carry out perfect justice (Isa 11:1). Why then does the lion turn into a lamb when John looks at him? Because the worthiness required to open the scroll is not mere humanity and divinity but one who can conquer sin, death, and Satan. **We need a Redeemer not just a royal**, which is why they declare: Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God.” Jesus slainness is his worthiness, an affront to modern sensibilities. Governments today are represented by the bear, Russia, the eagle, America, the lion, Britain *but the symbol of God is a slain lamb.* Why? Mercy for sinners. Have you been anxiety filled? Have you been indifferent to worship? Look to the Lamb. John does he sees it as though it was slain. So was he slain or wasn’t he? That’s the point. He was but he isn’t. He was dead but now he’s alive. He is lamb and he is lion: *scars on his hands and fire in his eyes.* No wonder they worship. Jesus between the throne and the four living creatures and the elders in the middle of

everything: defying the imagination, distributing redemption, demanding worship from all creation.

The Song

Which brings us to the song: *And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.* Jesus takes the scroll and all of heaven lets loose! All fall down. Even the enthroned elders, their crowns clinking across the glass sea. Why so undignified? Because in the presence of true greatness everything bows down. Christian Wiman is an award-winning poet, and for years he was conflicted, finding meaning only in poetry, until one day he met a priest who told him: *Every single thing in you has to bow down.* Upon reflection Wiman concluded his passion had become idol, and that it had to bow down before God. *Every single thing in us must bow down.* What in you needs to bow down? A life passion, a fear, a longing? Put it face down before him. When you do, Wiman says, you discover deeper pleasure. Bowed down, face in the glass, crowns cast, the elders gain something: a harp and a bowl, instruments to experience the glory of God. A *harp* for praise and a bowl for prayers, for worship. In praise, we are transported to God, but in prayer he transports to us. The harp takes us into his throne room and the bowl welcomes him into our hearts. So let everything bow down and take up the instruments of eternal worship. Finally, the song sung by myriads of angels and a multiethnic multitude: people from every tribe, tongue and nation—ethnos—from which we get ethnic. In heaven our ethnicity is eternally validated, part of our worship, but also redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, forever subordinated to God as one diverse, unified kingdom of priests bowed down and lifted up in Christ. Why? To reign on the earth as ministers of his glory. Our work will always be worship. Angels, creatures, humans showing us the *structure of the universe is worship: Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.* Amen.