

What Christians in Hong Kong Need Most

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[0 : 00] Will you join me as we pray together? If you don't know me, by the way, my name is Kevin, and we're going to pray together as a church, so won't you join me in this time of prayer? Oh great and glorious God, you are the sovereign, all-powerful, uncreated one, and we come to you this morning to worship you.

Sovereign God, your glory knows no ends. Your majesty and your power are supreme. Your holiness and your worth are more than we can imagine. They are beyond description or words, God.

God, we so need you to open the eyes of our hearts to see you, to see your glory. Father, as we come to you this morning and as we come to your word, we pray, God, won't you deliver us from small visions of you, from limited perspectives of your majesty and your beauty.

Father, we confess that so often our lives are shaped by such a meager understanding of who you are and your glory, God. Oh sovereign God, this morning we've come to remind our hearts, to remind one another, to declare that you are worthy of our worship, worthy to receive glory and honor and power.

God, this morning as we look at your word, Holy Spirit, won't you open the eyes of our hearts to see you? We so need you to do that, Lord. Heavenly Fathers, we come to your word now. We desperately want to hear you speaking to us.

[1 : 32] We come to your word because we want to meet with you, God. We want to encounter with you, the living God, this morning. Holy Spirit, we ask you to open our hearts to see you and encounter you in your word.

Give us revelation. Give us fresh perspective. Give us hope. Give us faith. Give us courage. Father, just as this passage of scripture we're going to read would have given faith and courage to your people 2,000 years ago, facing great challenges in life, so we pray it will do the same for us.

Holy Spirit, even now, soften our hearts to hear from you and to meet with you. Every one of us, God, soften our hearts now to receive your word, we pray. Father, we want to pray for our city again this morning and the people of Hong Kong.

Lord, we pray that our city will see you in all its glory. When Oscar prayed for us, we pray for our city. God, come and revive our hearts, we pray. God, we want to pray for ourselves and we pray for our city.

Be merciful to Hong Kong and help us as a city to see your majesty, to see the false gods that are before us, to see that all power structures in every city will one day bow the knee before you.

[2 : 47] God, we pray that you will give our city hope because its hope has been found in you. Father, we pray for the planned protests this afternoon. We pray for peace to prevail.

We pray, God, for protesters to exercise restraint. We pray for police to maintain peace and not antagonize. We pray for rival groups and factions that have different views not to incite violence or aggression.

We pray, God, for whatever protests happen in our city this afternoon, for them to be peaceful.

Father, God, finally we pray for each and every one of us today, as well as those that couldn't make it.

We pray that as we go into our week this week, those of us traveling, those of us staying in Hong Kong, that we will do so walking with you, in awe of you, humbled by your grace and your glory, and yet confident in your love and your mercy.

God, may each day be lived for the praise of your name. Whether we are making a business deal, looking for work, going for interviews, carrying out the most menial of tasks, God, be glorified in our words and our deeds, we pray.

[3 : 56] We pray these things in your sovereign, eternal, holy, and almighty name. Amen. Amen. Victoria's going to come and read Revelation chapter 4 to us.

Let's listen up. The scripture reading comes from Revelation chapter 4. Please follow along in your bulletins or on the screen.

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.

At once I was in the spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. 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.

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.

[5 : 05] 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.

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.

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.

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.

And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him, who was seated on the throne, and worship him, who lives forever and ever.

[6 : 23] They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 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. This is the word of God. Great. Thank you, Victoria.

When you read the newspaper, which these days isn't found on paper, when you read the news, what do you see?

Who's governing the world? Who's holding the power of the world? Who can you trust? And maybe another question is, the story that is our lives, where does that story end?

How does that story end? Today we are looking at Revelation chapter 4, as Victoria read it to us. And over the last two weeks, we've been diving into the book of Revelation, and we've looked at Jesus' letter to the seven churches in Asia Minor province, and we saw that each one of these churches is struggling, either with persecution and oppression, or they are tempted to give in to compromise and becoming just like the cultures around them.

[7 : 47] And what we're going to see from chapter 6 onwards is that the difficulties and the challenges that the churches and the Christians face are not about to come to any sort of end.

They're going to continue. In fact, the series we called is From the Cross to the Throne, and it's kind of a picture of how the entire story of the church, from the time Jesus died and rose again until the time he comes back, this is the book of Revelation.

And the challenges that they face are the challenges that we're going to face. And so Jesus writes this book to these churches because what do they need? These churches that are facing difficulty, they don't just need a prep talk.

They don't just need management advice of what to do, how to manage the churches through difficulty. They don't just need three tips on how to grow your church.

What they need to do is have concrete answers to the biggest and the most pressing questions of life. Who's governing the world? Who can you trust? Who holds the power, and how does it all end?

[8 : 49] And if we think about it, these are actually questions that we in our day and age ask ourselves, especially in difficult times, like our city is facing, in economic trade wars, when our city is going through turmoil and challenges, in political uncertainty, who can we trust?

Who can we hold on to? Who's holding the power? Now, to John's original recipients of this letter, when they read the metaphorical newspapers of their day, the answer was pretty clear.

They saw the pomp and the power of Rome in the Roman Empire, and the answer was clear. Rome holds the power. Rome holds authority. Rome is governing the world, and those aligned with Rome and its agenda are the ones that win in the end.

Throughout the Roman Empire, the early Christians would see the Roman standard, that banner that they would hold up as they go into war, and they would have the emblem of the Roman Empire, which was an eagle with outspread arms on it, kind of like the American seal, I guess.

And everywhere they went, they would see this Roman seal demonstrating its power and its authority. As they walked around the city, they would see these magisterial, these colossal buildings, which were made of marble, which were meant to demonstrate that Rome will stand forever.

[10:15] They're these imposing buildings. Rome's propaganda campaign was a well-oiled machine, reminding the citizens daily who it was that was governing the world, and where their peace and their security and their hope lay.

You know, archaeologists have found recently in the city of Ephesus, on one of the shop houses, there's carved graffiti into one of the stone buildings, and it says this.

It says, Rome, your power will never end. And the question is, who was the custodian of this power? Who was the one that governed it and held it in his hands?

It was the emperor, right? Everybody knew. The emperor was the one who held this power.

Whenever the emperor won some battle, they would march those that they defeated through the streets of the city in a triumphal procession.

And so the emperor would go first if it was near Rome, and then the Roman soldiers would follow, and then the captives, tied up in chains, would follow behind, followed lastly by the spoils of war.

[11:19] And as the emperor entered the streets, the citizens lining the streets would shout out, worthy are you, worthy are you, our Lord and our God.

And so this is what it felt to live, this is what it felt like to live in the Roman Empire. Now for the Christians in these young churches, this meant big questions.

Where did their fate lie? Was it tied up with Rome and the emperor? Did Domitian hold their future in his hands?

What would happen if they rebelled against the all-powerful Roman Empire? Is God really in control when it seems like Rome is the one that's running the world?

Friends, for those of us that are followers of Jesus in this great city of ours, these are questions that we have to grapple with as well. Especially in times of such turmoil and difficulty. Who's controlling our future?

[12:15] How safe is our future? What happens if we go against the tide of our culture and swim upstream? Is our life in danger? How's the story all gonna end?

In the Old Testament, there's this amazing story because the king of Syria wants to attack the nation of Israel. And so he makes these plans with his generals and his leaders.

But the problem is whenever he makes these plans and they decide which way they're gonna attack Israel, God tells the king of Syria's plans to Elisha the prophet.

And Elisha goes and tells the king of Israel. And so Syria kind of get the army together and they want the element of surprise and they say, they go this way and they find Israel's not there anymore.

They've anticipated their attack. And so the next day they'll try something else and Israel's not there because they've anticipated their attack. And so eventually the king of Syria is fed up with this and he says to his generals, one of you's a mole.

[13:15] One of you's telling them our secrets. Who is it? And one guy says, listen, none of us are giving away our secrets, but Elisha is a prophet and God speaks to him.

God gives away our secrets. And so the king says, okay, this is what we're gonna do. Tonight, we're gonna go and circle Elisha's house and threaten him and if he doesn't listen, we're gonna sort him out and then Elisha will be out the way and then we can attack Israel.

And so that night, Syria gets all his armies and his chariots and he goes to the town where Elisha lives and he circles the entire town with horses and chariots. And in the morning, Elisha's servant wakes up, he opens the front door and he gets the fright of his life because the whole town is just surrounded by Syrian chariots and horses.

And so he closes the door, he goes inside and he says, master, master, they've surrounded us. What shall we do? And Elisha says, do not be afraid for those that are with us are more than those that are with them.

Okay? And the servant says, what do you mean? And then Elisha prays and he says, O Lord God, open his eyes that he may see. And the Lord opens the eyes of the servant spiritually and he sees and the Bible says this, he says, he saw and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around.

[14:40] And so God opens his eyes and he sees spiritually that there are angels all around on the hills of the mountains surrounding the town and that actually there are more angels, more warriors with Elisha and his servant than with the enemy.

In Revelation chapter 4, John is wanting to show us, he's wanting us to open our eyes and to behold and to see what's really going on. To behold something means to see something in such a way that it captures your heart and your attention.

And this is what Jesus wants for these young churches in the Roman Empire and this is what he wants for us. He wants the eyes of our hearts to be opened to see what's going on in the spiritual realm so that when the threats and the challenges and the difficulty come our way, when fear and anxiety come knocking at our door, he wants us to behold to see what's really going on so that we can have the correct perspective in life.

And that's what Revelation chapter 4 is all about. John is showing us a different reality. Now that doesn't mean that our current view of the world is wrong. You know, when the servant opened the door and saw the chariots, it wasn't like they weren't there and, you know, seen a mirage or an image.

They really were there but that wasn't the complete picture. That was only half the picture. God opens his eyes to see the full reality of what's going on and that's what Revelation chapter 4 is all about.

[16:03] Jesus wants us to see and to view our world with a fuller picture and he gives these early Christians and he gives us a vision of what's really going on in the world so that we can live our lives as God calls us to rather than being subject to fear and worry.

Okay, does that make sense? Okay, so all that by way of introduction. Let's see what's going on here. So, if you've got your bulletin or your Bible, let's look at Revelation chapter 4.

Look at verse 2 with me. John writes this. It says, I saw this vision and at once I was in the spirit and behold, a throne stood in heaven with one seated on the throne and he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and cornelian.

That's precious jewels and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. Around the throne were also 24 thrones and seated on these thrones were 24 elders.

Okay, we sang about that earlier. Clothed in white garments with golden crowns on their heads and 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 and before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass like crystal.

[17:17] Friends, what is it that the early church in the midst of the Roman Empire and what is it that followers of Jesus today in the midst of an ever-changing, increasingly secular world, what is it that we need to see or need to behold?

Jesus invites John to see a picture of God on the throne and notice that in this vision that John has, God in his reign is the center of everything.

Everything revolves around him. God in his throne is at the center of the image, center of the vision because everything in all of creation revolves around him.

We are not the center of creation. God's church is not the center of creation. God doesn't exist for the praise of our name. God doesn't exist for the praise and the advance of his church.

Everything in all creation, including his church, Christians, everything revolves around and centers around he who is on the throne. And notice how little John describes God.

[18:18] What is the description that he gives of him? He doesn't actually describe him very much. He just says his appearance was like the brilliance of Jasper and the richness of Cornelian, these precious jewels.

And around the throne there's this rainbow, this emerald green rainbow. What John is trying to communicate here is that what he saw took his breath away and that there aren't really words to

describe what he saw.

He just saw something of such brilliance that he doesn't have the words to describe it. I found a picture online of one artist's impression. Let's see something like that, right?

And John also sees what he describes as these flashes of lightnings and rumblings and peals of thunder, which is to say that the throne of God was crackling and snapping with power and authority.

Think of a nuclear power plant that is going into overdrive, about going to meltdown, this kind of crackling, snapping, fizzing with power and authority.

[19 : 25] I think that's kind of what John is trying to describe. There's something fearsome, something extraordinarily awesome and frightening about it, such that when you see this throne and God in the throne, it causes you to fall down on your knees.

And yet, for all its power, for all its authority, for all its snapping, cracking power, there's something distinctively calm about it. Because look at verse 6.

Verse 6 says, Before the throne, there was, as it were, a sea of glass like crystal. In the book of Revelation, the sea is always a picture of chaos and upheaval.

Think of the sea in the midst of a storm. You've got waves crashing all over you. One minute, the waves are coming from this side. The next minute, the waves are coming from the other side. And there's just this chaos and this upheaval.

And you never know where it's going to come from next. Sometimes that feels a little bit like our world. There's something going on there and just when you think you've got your head around it, something emerges on this side and it's just absolute chaos and upheaval, right?

[20 : 31] The sea is always a picture of this chaos in the world. But, and that, but notice what's happening before the throne here. The sea is at the feet of the one who's seated on the throne and it's as still as glass.

Have you ever been on the water, either on the sea or on a lake and it's so still it looks like glass. It's like the, the bank is mirrored on the other side. It looks like a mirror. Have you ever seen that before? It's a picture of absolute serenity and calmness.

What's John saying here? He's saying, before at the feet of the one who sits on the throne, all the chaos, all the upheaval, everything that doesn't make sense and is difficult in our world, suddenly is found calm and peaceful and serene.

And then look at verse 4. It says, around the throne are these 24 smaller thrones upon which are seated 24 elders. Now, what's up with the 24 elders that we sang about earlier?

Well, it's symbolic of these two groups of people. In the Old Testament, who are the 12 most important people? Okay, in the New Testament, it's the 12 disciples, the 12 that become the apostles.

[21 : 42] Ephesians tell us that the church is built on the work of the 12 apostles. In the Old Testament, the 12 most important people are the patriarchs. Remember Judah and Simeon and Levi and Asher and Dan and these are the 12 sons of Israel.

And the 12 patriarchs, they form 12 tribes and they are kind of the forefathers, the foundation of the nation of Israel. And so, in John's vision, there are these 24 elders which are the 12 patriarchs of the Old Testament, the 12 apostles of the New Testament and it's symbolic of the fact that around the throne are all of God's people from all of the ages.

The saints in the Old Testament that loved God and trusted Him and served Him and obeyed Him. The saints in the New Testament, those that loved God and trusted Him and served Him, obeyed Him. The entire realm of God's people in all the ages, those who lived by faith and gave themselves the honor and the glory of God, there they are around God's throne in the heavens.

Okay? But notice John sees something else. Sorry, we're working our way through all this visionary and we're going to get to the implications in a minute. John sees something else. Look at what he says in verse 6b.

He says, John tells us that around the throne are these four living creatures. One of them looks like a lion, one looks like an ox, one looks like a man, one looks like an eagle. Now, what on earth is going on here?

[23 : 12] Alright? This is kind of the interesting, weird part of Revelation. Right? The first two chapters is fine, but this is where we start to get interesting. What on earth is going on here? Well, think about it.

John is drawing on the cultural symbols of power in his day. Think about this. Throughout history, what have empires and kingdoms, what symbols have they drawn on to demonstrate their power and their authority and their might?

often, it's some kind of strong animal, some kind of beast, right? So, think about it. Those of you that are Americans, what is the image on the American coat of arms or the American presidential seal?

Okay? The eagle, the bald eagle arms, wings spread out, right? Those of you that are British, Chris Thornton and one or two others, what is the symbol of England's power and the English Empire? The lion, right? Remember, England's soccer team is called the Three Lions and I think their coat of arms, sorry, you can't see it very clearly, it's a lion and a unicorn but typically, think of the lion of England, right?

[24 : 21] England, the British rugby team, the British Lions, okay? When you think of China, Chinese Empire, what symbol comes to mind?

Sorry? A dragon, right? I think we've got a dragon. Yes, we've got a dragon, okay? Now, why do empires do this? Those that are symbols of their power and their authority typically draw on strong animals and beasts to provoke this imagery of power and authority.

Now, some countries, we must admit, are a little bit lacking in the fear department, okay? South Africa, our coat of arms, we have a blue crane which is kind of like a stalk, okay?

Australia, Australia's got a kangaroo. New Zealand, New Zealand's got a leaf, okay? I know, I know it's a fir tree or something special, it's a leaf, okay?

I think the southern hemisphere, we need to work on our PR campaign, okay? The northern hemisphere, we've got it right here. Now, typically empires, those that are conquering lands and growing the empire, they use these symbols of power and strength to symbolize the authority and their might.

[25 : 39] And the Roman Empire did the same. What was the Roman Empire's seal? It was similar to the American seal. It's an eagle with outspread wings. And if you were to, what is the ultimate capital punishment in the Roman Empire?

It was to be thrown to the emperor's lions, right? And for those in agrarian or farming communities, what was the ultimate symbol of strength and power and economic capital?

It was the ox, right? Symbol of strength. So what's Jesus saying to the churches in the first century here? What's this image, what does John see when he sees this picture of these three animals or these three creatures around the throne?

Everywhere around them, they're being told through symbols and imagery and sometimes direct force that Rome's power is invincible. It's eternal. Remember the graffiti? Rome, your power will never end.

Jesus here is taking the powers and the symbols of authority and power and he's subverting them. He's turning them on his head and he's saying that ultimately they all one day bow down to the one who is on the throne.

[26 : 51] And what will they do? They won't just begrudgingly bow down because they've been conquered. They won't be forced to bow down. One day every single structure of power and authority will willingly and gladly and joyfully bow down before the throne of the one in heaven who rules and reign and will gladly offer their worship saying, Worthy are you our Lord and God to receive glory and honor and power.

The emperor is not worthy. The emperor doesn't hold authority. You God alone carry all authority. Friends, one day every single power authority will bow down to King Jesus.

And what's up with the eyes? Remember they've got eyes all over their bodies all around. It's picture language symbolizing the fact that they never ever ever take their eyes off the one who is on the throne.

No matter where they are their eyes are fixated orientated on the one on the throne. Look at verse 8b. The living creatures are full of eyes all around 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.

And again, verse 11, the elders representing all God's people throughout the ages are heroes in the faith, men and women that we look up to and esteem, those with simple faith in some village in the middle of Africa or Middle Asia that nobody's ever heard of but their trust in the faithfulness of God.

[28 : 26] All people throughout the ages will take off their crowns, their accolades, everything that people esteem and honor them for, symbols of glory and honor. What do they do with them?

They throw them up at the feet of the one who's on the throne and they say, 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.

And friends, this is in fact the climax of the entire passage. The entire point of this passage is that every power structure will be overthrown. And it's not just that Jesus wins in the end, it's that all creation, including the mysteries of creation, those things we don't understand, black holes and creatures at the bottom of the sea, all creation was brought into existence to proclaim the excellencies and the glory and the majesty and the awesomeness of the character of God.

And what is his character? Well, look at what they say, that he is holy. Holy, holy, holy. To be holy means to be set apart, to be distinct from what is ordinary or common.

Friends, there is nothing and no one, no power structure, no emperor, no military or political or cultural or economic leader in all creation that comes close to the authority of the one on the throne.

[29 : 50] He is utterly and entirely in a league of his own. He is holy, set apart from everything and everyone. He is sovereign and almighty.

To be sovereign means that you hold ultimate authority. There is nothing above you. There is nothing and no one that you answer to. Everything exists by his will because he has chosen it to be that way.

I don't know if you remember in the Old Testament in the book of Daniel there is this king called Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar was the king of the Babylonian empire and he was the greatest king of the Babylonian empire and he ruled and he reigned and he was the one that built Babylon's hanging gardens, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

He conquered empires. He was incredible and so towards the end of his life one day he walks out onto the balcony of his palace and he overlooks his empire and this is what he says.

Is not this great Babylon which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty? Okay. Well, God hears that prayer and God decides to teach him that it is not to the glory of Nebuchadnezzar's name that these things came into existence and so God takes him through a season of humbling him and at the end of his life Nebuchadnezzar being humbled by God says this, I praise and honor him whose dominion is an everlasting dominion whose kingdom endures from generation to generation.

[31 : 24] All the inhabitants of the earth are counted as nothing compared to him for he, God, does according to his own will amongst the hosts of heaven and none can stay his hand that means hold back his hand and none can say to him what have you done?

He is the eternal sovereign majestic God. Remember Isaiah 46? Babylon at the height of its power it's sovereign it's the world's superpower its army is just smashing and demolishing everything and God says this, I am God I declare from the end I declare the end from the beginning from ancient times things not yet done what I say says God will happen and my purposes I will accomplish them why?

Because I am God and there is no other I am God and there is none like me friends the angels bow down before God and they say holy, holy, holy the Lord God the sovereign almighty furthermore they say he is the eternal one Rome your power will never end excuse me getting political Xi Jinping your power will never end Vladimir Putin your power will never end USA the great greenback the Renminbi your power will never end friends that's what we are being told there is one authority there is one being one power one source of hope and life whose rule and reign has never ever been threatened from the beginning of time and whose rule and reign will never ever be threatened for all eternity now the truth is it doesn't always feel like that right sometimes it follows Jesus we feel like God what's going on remember Luke 24 Jesus disciples are walking from one place to Emmaus the heads are hanging low and one disciple says to the other man we had really hoped that that Jesus guy he would be the one to deliver and liberate Israel I guess that's not going to happen remember in Egypt in Exodus God's people God brings Moses to come and deliver them and save them Pharaoh encounters Moses and what does he do things go from bad to worse he says double your workload remember God's people sometimes how they're arrested thrown in jail beaten whipped left for dead remember how Christians are being thrown to the lions and for the followers of Jesus in the first century meeting at home sometimes hiding away from the authorities at times it must have felt like God where are you we thought you sovereign what's up with this where are you God we've heard the stories and now you must have met your match

God it's been a good run you've done well but finally Rome has conquered you friends to the angels to us the angels remind us that his kingdom is an eternal one he is the one who is and who was and is to come forever and ever and ever and ever and ever his kingdom is an eternal one and you know what that means it means that all that is not done with eternity in our minds or God's glory in our hearts is eternally irrelevant and insignificant do you get that everything we do without eternity in our minds and God's glory and worship in our hearts is eternally irrelevant and eternally insignificant and because of this because of God's creative power and his sovereign authority and his supreme holiness and his eternal glory what do they say worthy are you oh God to receive glory and honor and power he is simply worthy now next week we're going to find out from Colin Farrell that God is worthy to be worshipped not only for who he is but because of what he's done but here the angels worship him not because he's done a single thing they don't worship him because he delivered them or because he saved them from Egypt or because he died on the cross just simply because of who he is worthy are you our Lord and God to receive glory and honor and praise now what does all of this mean for the people of the early church 2000 years ago and what does it mean for you and I today well thank you for asking that question it means a whole bunch of things but I'm going to give us just four things two sources of encouragement and two things to challenge us okay and then we'll go to communion the first thing it means is this history will not be defined by current circumstances at the time that John is writing this epistle this revelation to the early churches the followers of Jesus it looked as if

[36 : 23] Rome's empire would never end okay it looked as if the church was becoming increasingly insignificant and smaller Rome's power was on the rise and becoming more and more powerful and to many holding on to Jesus' kingdom and the gospel message in the face of Roman power and glory felt like trying to hold on to water and trying to hold on to a stream of water right it's just it's going to run away from you it felt like it's inevitable it's going to disappear but throughout the book of Revelation Rome's empire is constantly compared to Babylon now why is that well 500 years beforehand Babylon remember Nebuchadnezzar was the superpower of the age and to the people of God in that day and age it felt like Babylon's power would never end it felt like Babylon was an eternal kingdom and to the people of God then they felt like God where are you and yet Babylon came to a decisive end and so God shows the people in the first century

Rome is just like Babylon it feels all powerful now but the circumstances which you find yourself now are not the circumstances that are going to define all of history this power authority is coming to an end and Jesus is showing them and he's showing us that it seems like the power structures of our day will never cease it seems like this is just the way the world is going it seems like if you try and resist the way the world is going you're going to be on the wrong side of history and friends Jesus looks us in the eye and says don't you believe it don't you believe it friends this very week tomorrow some of us are going to go to work high schoolers you're going to go to school university students you go to class you write an assignment friends this week every one of us are going to be told every single day that to follow Christ and to live for his glory and to steward our money and our sexuality and our desires for his glory and his kingdom is a waste of time because you're going to be on the wrong side of history friends this week we're going to be told that to obey Jesus and to honor him with our sexuality and our views on gender and our money that you're going to be on the wrong side of history and it's a waste of time and you're going to be irrelevant friends don't you believe it don't you believe it all that is not done with eternity in our minds and God's glory in our heart is going to be eternally irrelevant and insignificant that's the first thing second bit of encouragement is this followers of Jesus do not need to live in fear in our family every now and then typically on Friday nights sometimes Saturday or Sunday nights we have family movie night and what we do is we make dinner together so we make pizza or sushi or something we all get involved and then we'll put on a movie and we'll all watch it together all four of us okay but invariably what happens no matter how simple the movie is okay at some point in the movie the music you know goes no no no no no no no and or the story takes a dramatic turn something goes wrong and our two girls with such tender hearts run out of the room to their bedrooms covering their eyes blocking their ears and are too afraid to watch the movie right and so what do Claire and I have to do we have to go to them and say

I know how the story ends it's okay Ilsa and Anna are going to be friends again okay it's all going to be right Simba is going to go back to Pride Rock and everything's going to be okay at the moment the thing is that Annie and Mr. Socks or whatever his name is what's whatever it is they're going to

get reconciled okay so it's okay I know how the story ends and we have to convince them that it's going to be okay in the end friends in this world you and I are going to have trouble no doubt about it we're going to have trouble and that's partly because we live in a fallen world our world is fallen so there's heartache and there's broken things go wrong it's partly because if you're a follower of Jesus there's a devil that doesn't want you to follow Jesus he wants to destroy you and destroy your faith and it's partly because you and I have got a sinful nature and the sinful nature in our hearts causes us all sorts of trouble the problem is not just out there the problem is in here right and so you and I are going to have trouble and sometimes the fear is so overwhelming that we might just want to run away and block our ears and cover our eyes and just take away their attention and give ourselves to some entertainment or some other thing that will distract us from the troubles in our world friends Jesus says don't you see how it's going to end don't you see who really holds the power don't you see there's a sovereign omnipotent king who really does sit on the throne of all creation and yes you will have trouble in this world but one day every single thing will bow the knee before him and will give him glory and honor and every knee will declare you are God almighty you are worthy to receive power and praise friends that vision will allow us to get through the trouble and the difficulty and the challenges facing our life and this vision of Jesus on the throne is what Hong Kong most needs right now and friends it's what you and I need right now to see God on the throne that he is eternal and he rules and he reigns last two things is this two challenges we can put them in the way of two questions the first one is this in light of revelation 4 friends are you or I are we wasting our lives are we wasting our lives friends in the coming there is a day coming when all the money that we've accumulated all the corporate accolades that we've won and attained are going to be utterly meaningless and the praise of man and the recognition of those around us and the glory and the honor that we've strived for are not only going to be irrelevant but they're going to taste like sand in our mouth before the throne of the one that we were made to worship and adore friends you've only got one life this one and only life that you have what are you going to do with it don't waste your one and only life chasing after things that are going to be utterly meaningless friends how are you going to spend this one and only life

I pray and I have been praying for us this week I pray that each one of us whether you're a businessman whether you're a lawyer whether you're a foreign domestic worker whether you're a teacher whether you stay at home and look after kids that one million years from now the things we give ourselves to this very week will still be bearing fruit because they would have been done for the glory of his name to the praise of the one who created all things friends what are you going to do with your one and only life for some of you young people God may be calling you to full time ministry to serve him as a missionary somewhere to go into ministry don't run from that calling for some of you in business God's calling you to serve him to the praise and the glory of his name in business don't run from that calling serve him to the glory of his name wherever you are and then here's the final application the last challenge is this friends will you be there on that day will you be there one of the most unusual things about the church remember we said the 24 elders are a picture of the church the Old Testament saints the New Testament saints all seated around the throne giving honor and glory to him one of the most unusual things about the church is that it includes a whole bunch of pretty sketchy characters okay you think of the apostles think of the apostle Paul this guy who went around arresting people tormenting people persecuting people sometimes killing people because they followed Jesus you think of the apostle Peter the one who denies

[44 : 28] Jesus in his greatest hour of need you think of the apostles who fall asleep as Jesus about to go to the cross you think of the other disciples some of them are tax collectors Simon's a zealot which means a political terrorist trying to overthrow the Roman Empire you think of the Old Testament saints King David the greatest king in Israel's history he has an affair with someone she falls pregnant and then he tries to kill her husband so that he doesn't get blamed for making her pregnant friends these are the saints that are around the throne worshipping God so what does that tell us it tells us it tells us that the only way that you and I are ever going to be around God's throne one day is by grace and grace and grace alone friends Jesus tells us again and again it's not the most religious it's not the most dedicated they get to be with him no amount of religious dedication or observance can qualify you to be part of the people of God and yet Jesus tells us again that no amount of sin can disqualify us from God because all of us carry more sin in our hearts than we actually realize as Oscar said we're all more broken than we realize you may think

I'm such a sinner that disqualifies you if you only knew what a sinner you were you'd be even more convinced but that doesn't disqualify you from the throne of God friends these people the elders are gathered around the throne clothed in white why are they in white because they're not there in their righteousness alone they're there because they've been given the righteousness of Christ friends the only thing that qualifies us to stand before the throne of the sovereign and holy God is to recognize that you and I are not worthy on our own to come before him how desperately we need a savior how desperately I need a savior friends how desperately you need a savior friends are you desperate enough to cry out to Jesus for his mercy have you come to that place if not you may not be a Christian at all you see a Christian a Christian is someone not those that have got it all together Christians are not the most noble the most religious the most moral Christians are those who recognize that they're sinners and that their only hope is in salvation for salvation is in Christ alone and therefore they come to him and surrender friends have you done that will you be there on that day will you be counted amongst those that are around the throne giving honor and glory to him or friends will you be banished for all eternity because you've trusted in yourself Jesus invites us by the grace of God to come to him and find our hope in him friends here Jesus shows us who is governing the world who you can really trust who is holding the power what happens to the story that is our lives at the end in the end it all culminates with the one on the throne with all creation and all people bringing glory and honor and praise to him saying worthy are you our Lord and God to receive glory and honor and power for you created all things and by your will they all existed and were created let's respond to him now know to start work and set