

General Assembly
Rev. George M. Schwab, Ph.D.
June 13, 2016

Rev 4:4

(NA 27th ed.)

(NASB)

καὶ κυκλόθεν τοῦ θρόνου θρόνοι εἴκοσι καὶ τέσσαρες·
καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς θρόνους εἶδον τοὺς εἴκοσι καὶ τέσσαρας
πρεσβυτέρους καθημένους,
περιβεβλημένους ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς,
καὶ ἔσχον ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτῶν στεφάνους χρυσοῦς.

Around the throne were twenty-four thrones;
and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four
elders sitting,
clothed in white garments,
and golden crowns on their heads.

English will help with vocabulary here. In line 1, see “cycle” in *kuklo-*, and of course “throne” in *thronos*. Twenty-four is “twenty and four.” You may recognize “tesseract” in *tessares*. In line 4, see *leukos* (“white”) in “leukemia.” In line 5, *kephalē* is English cephalo-, the combining form that relates to a head, as in cephalopod. The name Stephen is in *stephanos*, “crown.” *Krusos* is in chrysanthemum, “golden flower.” But the most interesting word in the verse to me is in line 3, “elder,” *presbuteros*, from which comes the curious word, “Presbyterian.”

I teach a mixed bag of students from various denominational backgrounds. In addition to various stripes of Presbyterians, I have Baptists, Methodists, AMEs, some Assembly of God people, once in a while a few Episcopalians, and so on. I like pointing out to them that the Presbyterians are God’s inner circle in heaven, sitting on the 24 thrones. John doesn’t say anything about where the Baptists or Methodists are. (I am sure the Presbyterians there are all EPC. See how happy they are. And their worship seems downright charismatic!)

This is part of a much larger vision that John had on the Isle of Patmos. The scope of the vision is the entirety of creation. All creation is part of a grand General Assembly, with God and the Lamb at the center. “And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them” sing of Christ’s worthiness and glory (Rev 5:13).

The whole Bible presents believers with this picture of the world. Everything is God-centered. All things are organized around the great and glorious God and his redemptive purposes, as accomplished by the Son. This beatific vision of the world should be in the backdrop of the attitude of every Christian, all the time. It is a vision of where we are headed. It is a perspective on the way things are now. It is in this context that we live and move and have our being.

Over and over, the book of Revelation makes the point that the pictures of the world it presents are intended to give the believer hope to carry on. John himself had to patiently endure (1:9). The churches have patiently endured (2:2, 19). After a particularly dark picture, John adds, “Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints” (13:10). He repeats this in 14:12. The Apocalypse was written so that when events seem out of control, when things go from bad to worse, we may patiently endure, holding on to the glorious picture of our final vindication. Apocalyptic gives perspective to sufferers.

Our identity is in heaven; we are card-carrying citizens. The Spirit ensures that we never completely lose sight of this. We need to be careful not to lose our identity in the things of this world. But where does your mind go when you suffer physical pain, or setbacks, or obstacles? What does it take to get you

off your game? How do you handle criticism? When we are challenged, when tempted, when distracted, we sometimes forget that all things are centered on Jesus and his throne—including your own little life.

Remember that you are numbered with the Presbyterians in heaven. You have a throne and crown, and live before the face of the living God. Knowing this sets us apart as a people. For example, when faced with death, we do grieve, “but not as those who have no hope” (1 Thess 4:13). “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair” (2 Cor 4:8). Being a Christian with our perspective of ultimate reality really does make a difference, despite our weakness and waywardness.

When Jesus returns for us, our faith will be sight. On that Day the heavens will be opened and the beatific vision will be all we experience, forever. It is in hope of that glorious Assembly that we Presbyterians meet together and patiently endure now. Amen, Come Lord Jesus!