

“REJOICING IN HEAVEN.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

October 25, 2015, 6:00PM

Scripture Texts: Revelation 19:1-10

Introduction.

For three chapters we have been assaulted with John’s vision of the great wrath and judgment of God against sin and wickedness and ungodliness in the world. The whore of Babylon and the great beast have waged war and have finally been defeated and destroyed.

Revelation 17:1 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters.

Revelation 17:18 And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth.

Revelation 18:20 Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!

Now in chapter 19 we are lifted to heaven to hear the response of heaven. This joyful response can leave us a little uneasy. We are conditioned by our world to not like judgment in general and the great Judgment Day in particular. The world tries to ignore such a reality and it looks down on Christians for promoting such things.

It seems mean-spirited and unloving to suggest that God is the kind of God that will crush His enemies and banish people to hell forever. Judgment is not an act worthy of a good and kind and loving God. This is clearly not politically correct and certainly shouldn’t be talked about in polite company. Christians shouldn’t believe it or if they do they should keep it to themselves.

So it is adding insult to injury to read that everyone in heaven will be jumping up and down in joyful celebration singing hallelujah and worshiping God for His judgments. This is more than finite ungodly humans can appreciate or understand.

Hallelujah! God saves through judgment, vss. 1-5.

The great multitude is all the inhabitants of heaven, human and angelic, every living being in the heavenlies. What are they saying?

They are crying out hallelujah. Four times this words rings from heaven. I was surprised to learn these four times are the only times hallelujah is recorded in the NT. In Hebrew it literally means praise Yah or praise God. This is highest praise. And what are they praising God for?

“*Hallelujah!* Salvation and glory and power belong to our God.”

To worship God as they worshiped, we must see what they saw. They saw three things, God’s salvation and glory and power. Where do they see that?

First, they see it in God’s just and fair and righteous judgment on Babylon and all she stands for.

If heaven rejoices over the salvation of one soul, who can imagine the rejoicing over the defeat of all sin and wickedness and evil.

Those who truly know God will hate what God hates, they will hate all that is opposed to God and they will desire to see justice done, by removing all that stands in opposition to God.

There is no shame in this celebration, no holding back of their absolute delight in God being God and in God doing what He has warned all along that He would do.

This isn’t unsportsmanlike conduct, this isn’t unbecoming of holy beings in heaven. God’s judgments are just and fair and right, they are altogether righteous.

This is a profoundly heartfelt and deeply satisfying outburst of spontaneous praise and worship. The plaintive prayers of “how long, oh Lord” are answered.

How can it not be a great rejoicing? For how many thousands of years has Satan been lying and deceiving? How long has the thief been stealing and killing and destroying (John 10:10)? How long has the father of lies been spreading his vile slander and blasphemy and hate? How long as the great tempter been tempting with those words, “look it is good, a delight to the eyes, something to be desired to make one wise” (Genesis 3:6)?

How long has he been destroying every good gift God made, relationships, sex, work, truth? How long has he been corrupting minds and souls?

How long has he been doing his work through human institutions and systems, human governments, leaders, nations, cultures, through Babylon in all her manifestations on earth? How long has he sought to destroy the earth and the church on earth?

They see the salvation, glory and power of God in the final vindication of all the saints, in hearing and answering the cry of all the shed blood.

Heaven worships God for His truth and justice, for His righteous wrath pour out in perfect purity. Sin and evil and wickedness and iniquity and corruption and pride and lust will be burned up for ever and ever and will be no more. The smoke of God’s eternal judgment rises forever as a symbol of His eternal justice and righteousness.

They praise God that His judgments are just and true and right, and that His justice and righteousness have prevailed. He has finally judged the harlot.

Hallelujah! God reigns and the marriage of the Lamb, vss. 6-10

The rejoicing reaches a crescendo like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder. Myriads and multitudes of all the heavenly hosts giving glory to God and rejoicing in His victory and salvation and glory and power and authority and justice.

Second, God is worshiped for His salvation and glory and power displayed in His sovereign rule over Babylon, over all nations and peoples, over all principalities and powers and authorities.

God reigns over every power in heaven and on earth and under the earth. Over earthquakes and volcanos and tsunamis and hailstorms, over sea creatures and the beasts of the earth from smallest to greatest; over the tyrants and terrorist, over the worst of all the wicked rulers, over the oppressors and persecutors, over the desperate wickedness and perversions of every human heart.

Never was such defeat imagined and never was such a victory celebrated with such true worship.

The wedding and marriage supper of the Lamb.

And then though it would seem impossible, the worship swells to an even higher level. The worship shifts from God's judgment to rejoicing over the marriage of the Son of God. All of redemptive history has been waiting for this glorious day. Jesus has slain the dragon and now He comes to get His girl. The time has come for the marriage of the Lamb and the marriage supper.

This scene in John's vision take us beyond the end of human history. The bride is now ready. The long awaited marriage between Christ and His people, His Bride, the church, has come.

What a contrast, after the harlot, Babylon is replaced by a Bride. The starkness of the contrast is meant to make us want to wait for the bride and not fall for the harlot. It should be so obvious that the church is better than the world, yet so many charmed by the world.

Notice the stark contrast in dress. For two distasteful chapters we have heard in detail about the opulent, decadent, seductive attire of the whore, purple and scarlet, gold and jewels.

The bride's dress is described simply as fine linen, bright and pure. She is dressed in the imputed righteousness of Christ.

Ephesians 5:26-27 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Stop and think about all the possible images and metaphors that could have been used to describe heaven and the end of time and the beginning of eternity.

God chooses the image of a marriage feast to picture the relationship between the Lamb and His people. What does it convey? What does a wedding evoke? Joy, celebration, extravagance, beauty, commitment, trust, lifelong love, intimacy and oneness.

As many of you have experienced, so we recently experience a wonderful wedding and wedding feast. When I do a wedding as I did Kent and Becky's before the bride enters I say to all the guests:

Jesus Christ is the bridegroom of His bride, the church. He loved her and gave Himself for her that He might present her to Himself as a bride adorned for her husband. The events of this hour speak to us of a day when Christ will return for His bride. She will be clothed in His glory and holiness, without spot or blemish, washed in the blood of the Lamb.

On this occasion it's good to remember the Word of our God, "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb."

We rejoice, and give glory to Jesus Christ, for the marriage of Kent and Becky has come. The groom has come for his bride. The bride is radiant and beautiful and ready. Let her join us here, for all things are now ready.

Every wedding is meant to be an earthly reminder of a heavenly and spiritual reality that awaits us all. It is a special thing to be a part of, to have not just an invitation but a seat at a special reserved table and to be an honored guest.

And I fell down to worship him.

Why would John bow down to an angel? Especially after all he has seen and heard.

There are ***three*** possible explanations.

First, John maybe be overwhelmed by all of this. No doubt this vision surpasses all the others in glory and magnificence and pure splendor. And the angel is one with great brilliance, power and authority (18:1). Perhaps he forgets himself and responds by bowing down.

It must be overwhelming to John to have seen so much evil, to see so much power and hate spewing forth in all the earth, to feel like there is no equal to these wicked forces playing out

over all the world, and then to see all of Satan's activity turned upside down, to see in the words of Martin Luther, "one little word shall fell him."

What an emotional, euphoric experience. To see such a seemingly invincible monster killed, the relief, the joy, the awe.

Second, it may be the impact of the words of the angel, the beatitude and that declarations these are the very words of the Almighty God. The overwhelming truth and significance of those words should affect us.

Third, there may be an implicit warning here of how easy it is to fall into idolatry. If one such as John could fall into this temptation, how much more must we be alert. Idolatry and worshiping the wrong things has been the focus of the past couple of chapters and all of this judgment. Obviously countless millions have fallen into this sin. It is folly on our part if we don't know that our hearts are easy targets of Satan's deception.

Implications and Applications.

Let me summarize what we have seen and heard.

The God we worship is the God of salvation and glory and power.

He is the God whose judgments are just and true and all together righteous.

He's the God who vindicates His servants and avenges their blood, He's faithful to His promises.

He is the God of all, great and small, even the least and the lowly.

He alone is the God who rules and reigns over all nations and all the earth, the Lord God Almighty reigns.

He is the God who from before the foundations of the earth, from eternity past as arranged for the marriage of His Son to His Church, a countless host of saved sinners, washed and redeemed, purified by the blood of the Lamb.

At the beginning of the vision John's hears all of heaven engulfed in worship. At the end of the vision John is so overwhelmed that he falls down to worship the angel.

The point of all of this is that the goal of history is worship. And everyone will worship something. Don't worship Babylon, don't worship anything in Babylon or about Babylon.

Don't fall into the ever-present temptation to worship or bow down to or make an idol of secular business or secular education or secular entertainment or secular media or secular arts or secular sports.

The dragon, the beast and the false prophet are defeated. Babylon is no more. It truly is cause for worship.

John wrote down for us from his lonely exile on the island of Patmos this vision of the end of history and the goal of history that we would know what is coming, what will happen to this world when God comes in total triumph.

I long for and look forward to the day when I will be delivered from all my sin, when I will be free for all my besetting and indwelling sin. I look forward to when all my thoughts and words and actions will be pure and faithful and true. I welcome the day when I will never sin again, when I will only and always do the perfect and pure will of God.

I can't wait for a new heaven and a new earth, when the groaning will be over and creation will be set free and perfect and pure and good as it was created to be.

I can't wait to join my voice with angels and archangels, with living creatures and myriads of saints singing, "*Hallelujah!* Salvation and glory and power belong to our God."