

# Saints Triumphant Sunday

November 19, 2017

**Revelation 19:1-9 (EHV)** – <sup>1</sup>After these things I heard what seemed to be the loud sound of an immense crowd in heaven, saying: Alleluia! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, <sup>2</sup>for his judgments are true and just, because he has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and he has avenged his servants' blood that was shed by her hand. <sup>3</sup>A second time they said, "Alleluia! Her smoke goes up forever and ever." <sup>4</sup>Then the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures bowed down and worshipped God, who sits on the throne, saying, "Amen! Alleluia!" <sup>5</sup>And from the throne came a voice that said, "Praise our God, all you his servants and you who fear him, small and great." <sup>6</sup>And I heard what seemed to be the roar of a large crowd or the roar of many waters or the sound of loud rumblings of thunder, saying: Alleluia! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. <sup>7</sup>Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory, because the wedding of the Lamb has come. His bride has made herself ready, <sup>8</sup>and she was given bright, clean, fine linen to wear. (In fact, the fine linen is the "not guilty" verdicts pronounced on the saints.) <sup>9</sup>The angel said to me, "Write: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb." He also said to me, "These are the true words of God."

## Introduction

Perhaps no biblical topic is pondered more than what heaven's going to be like. What will our glorified, sin-free bodies look / feel / act like? Will we recognize people from our time together here on earth? What will we do up there to pass the timelessness or endless time, whichever the case may be? What about animals? Will we really live in mansions? Will they have bedrooms and will we sleep? Will we eat – and if so, what sort of food? Who's going to prepare it? How much information will we simply know right off the bat? Will Jesus fill in the gaps and answer all our questions?

What language will we speak? Some "old" Lutherans would suggest German. That's the language Adam and Eve and their descendants spoke before the Tower of Babel incident, nicht so? Mary and Joseph sang *Stille Nacht* in the stable on that first Christmas, ya?

## Theme: Hallelujah!

The Apostle John might cast his vote in favor of Hebrew. In his vision of heaven, he heard the original *Hallelujah Chorus* before George Handel got his hands on it. That Hebrew word – Hallelujah – means "praise the Lord." It's used many times in the Old Testament – mostly in the psalms – but only four times in the New Testament – all right here in our text. This morning, we're reminded that **Hallelujah is the Church's song. Hallelujah for the Lamb's victory. Hallelujah for the wedding celebration.**

## Part I: Hallelujah Is the Church's Song.

**"I heard what seemed to be the loud sound of an immense crowd in heaven, saying: 'Alleluia! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God.' Then the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures bowed down and worshipped God, who sits on the throne, saying, 'Amen! Alleluia!' And from the throne came a voice that said, 'Praise our God, all you his servants and you who fear him, small and great.' And I heard what seemed to be the roar of a large crowd or the roar of many waters or the sound of loud rumblings of thunder, saying: 'Alleluia! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory.'"**

In today's Gospel Lesson, we heard about 5 virgins – believers – who followed their Savior into a banquet hall. The door was shut behind them, and we don't hear anything else about what's happening inside. In his vision, John reopens the door so that we can take a comforting – and most delightful – peek.

In heaven, God's seated on his throne, and various groups surround him. The twenty-four elders and four living creatures were mentioned back in Revelation chapter 4. In chapter 7, John also saw an innumerable multitude dressed in white robes – a great white host, as it's sometimes called. However you interpret the numbers and identify the various individuals, this group is the *Church Triumphant* to be sure! Believers, both from the time before Christ and the time after, unite together around the Savior's throne. All of creation bows down before him and sings his praises. The volume of that song is likened to what you might hear at the base of a mighty waterfall cascading hundreds of feet onto the rocks below. It's comparable to the thunderclap that instantly follows a lightning bolt that seems to have struck just outside your living room window.

No unbelievers – no unprepared virgins – are included in this chorus. Only saints are there. Although every knee shall bow before the King of kings, only believers will be able to “**rejoice and be glad.**” Although unbelievers will also fear the Lord, theirs will include a terror of his righteous anger and holy judgment. Believers will offer to him their utmost reverence for who he is and what he's done on their behalf.

Before moving on, is worthwhile to note the size of this heavenly choir. When it sometimes seems that the family of God is dwindling in number, we're reminded of the multitude of those who are blessed to be called saints. We all know some of them. We all look forward to being a part of it.

## Transition

Hallelujah is the Church's song to the Lamb. And why is the Lamb worthy of such a song? Because he's won an amazing victory that will be celebrated for eternity.

## Part II: Hallelujah for the Lambs Victory.

**“Alleluia! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just, because he has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and he has avenged his servants' blood that was shed by her hand.’ A second time they said, ‘Alleluia! Her smoke goes up forever and ever.’”**

The woman in these verses was introduced back in chapter 17. A regally dressed woman adorned with jewels was sitting on a beast with this title written on her forehead: **“Mystery; Babylon the Great; the Mother of Prostitutes and of the Abominations of the Earth.”** Just as with Revelation's use of numbers, there's not enough time in a sermon to explain all the details of this vision. But two things stand out:

First of all, the enemy of Christ and his Church is a seductress. She seeks to lure her victims away from the truth and into the filth of her false teaching. And there are all sorts of false teachings. But the one that Scripture warns against most often is a reliance on good works either in opposition to or in addition to salvation by grace alone through faith alone. Both are horrible lies! In this, she's nothing other than the sum total of all antichristian forces. She makes herself attractive. She tries to resemble the true Church in her God-given, grace-driven radiance. But she's reprehensible in comparison, when her mystery is brought to light. To make one's bed with her is the most fatal of attractions. She's corrupted no small number of partners with her wiles. She's sweet-talked us a time or too as well.

The other thing that we want to note – that of greatest importance – is that she's been defeated and condemned to destruction. Chapter 17 identified her. Chapter 18 foretold her defeat. Now in chapter 19, we hear a mighty Hallelujah of celebration by the saints who are now free from her tyranny.

**“Alleluia! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just.”** God deserves glory because he’s won salvation for his people by his power. In the realm of salvation, you and I bring nothing positive to the table. We come only loaded down with the guilt of our sins. And yet, we were told back in chapter 5 that God, who’s seated on the throne, is also the Lamb. The one who’s true and just in all that he decrees is at the same time the very epitome of grace. In his just judgment, the Father accepted the Lamb as a sacrifice in place of us sinners. And in his almighty power, he made a transfer of the Lamb’s unblemished life to us. That payment and that transfer spelled the defeat of sin, death, Satan, and all the antichristian forces that he can bring to bear against the Lamb and against the Lamb’s Church. The saints of heaven, from Adam and Eve all the way down to the last convert, stand avenged by God’s own working of salvation.

## Transition

In eternity, there will be unending opportunity to look back upon the amazing deliverance God’s won for us. But that won’t distract us from the amazing ongoing wedding celebration that the Lamb’s prepared for us to enjoy forever and ever.

## Part III: Hallelujah for the Wedding Celebration.

**“And from the throne came a voice that said, ‘Praise our God, all you his servants and you who fear him, small and great.’ And I heard what seemed to be the roar of a large crowd or the roar of many waters or the sound of loud rumblings of thunder, saying: ‘Alleluia! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory, because the wedding of the Lamb has come. His bride has made herself ready, and she was given bright, clean, fine linen to wear.’ (In fact, the fine linen is the ‘not guilty’ verdicts pronounced on the saints.) The angel said to me, ‘Write: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.’”**

Like a beautiful kaleidoscope of color, the imagery changes from one glimmering facet to another. In the Gospel Lesson, we saw ourselves as celebrants – prepared, watchful, and waiting for the Bridegroom’s arrival. Here in John’s vision, we see ourselves as the very bride, beautifully adorned and positively radiant. The doors to the banquet hall have been closed, once and for all shutting out that which would cause us harm. We haven’t a care in the world as to what’s outside. Only the celebration occupies our attention now and for eternity. Hallelujah!

And what a celebration it is! The Groom – the one who’s just in judgment, all-glorious, and brilliant in holiness – is the loving husband who bestows that same glory and holiness upon us. The most extravagant weddings of this present age can’t hold a candle to what our eyes will behold at the wedding of the Lamb!

The radiance of our God-given holiness will be whiter than the whitest of whites. The Greek simply says that the white wedding linens are the **“righteousnesses of the saints.”** In keeping with all of Scripture, it’s best to just leave works out of it entirely. Better to understand this as the righteous *verdicts* that have been pronounced upon the saints that now and forever define who we are by God’s gracious doing. Hallelujah!

## Conclusion

I reckon Handel did a more-than-fine job with the biblical texts about the Messiah. I can’t wait to hear it – and join in singing it – the way God always intended from even before the creation of the world! I can’t wait to cross over from the saints militant – the fighting saints – to the saints triumphant who rest from all their labors in the mansions of heaven. I can’t wait to join you and all of God’s saints in a victory celebration, a wedding celebration, the likes of which no one on earth can begin to describe, for **“These are the true words of God!”** Amen.