

**8/14/22 “Heaven’s Hallelujah Chorus”
Revelation 19:1-10**

Welcome...

In 1741 George Frideric Handel wrote The Messiah. No one would question that the most famous part of Handel’s Messiah is the “Hallelujah Chorus.” It is a tradition around the world that when the Hallelujah Chorus begins the congregation stands and remains standing until its completion.

In heaven, however, they respond quite differently. In our text today in Heaven’s Hallelujah Chorus we will see the citizens of heaven fall down and worship “the God who is seated on the throne” because He has judged “the great harlot Babylon who was corrupting the earth with her immorality” (verse 2); God has rescued the Bride, the Church, for the marriage supper of the Lamb (verses 6-8); and directed all of heaven and earth to keep their attention and worship on Jesus Christ(verses 9-10).

Praise God, hallelujah, good news, great news, has arrived. The response of those who love and follow the Lamb is nothing less than unabated, unhindered, enthusiastic praise and worship. This is a day we have all longed for and it is finally here!

Let’s read Revelation 19:1-10...

When Babylon fell on the earth, the command was given in heaven in Revelation 18:20, “Rejoice over her!” and what we read in this section is heaven’s response to that command. The Greek word alleluia is the transliteration of a Hebrew phrase comprised of the verb halal (“to praise”) and the noun Yah (“God”).

So, hallelujah, means “praise the Lord.” Our text this morning is heaven’s “Hallelujah Chorus.”

Main point: Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! For in His sovereign Kingly rule, God has destroyed the great harlot of Babylon, and has rescued His bride, the church, and made her ready for her eternal marriage to Christ!

The four stanzas in heaven’s hallelujah chorus reveal four reasons for eternal praise.

What God provides - salvation in verse 1

What God settles-justice, God’s Judgments are Righteous and True in verses 2-3

What God occupies – His sovereignty, He reigns verses 4-6

What God fulfills -The Wedding Feast, the Marriage of the Lamb Has Come in verses 7-10

As believers we don’t need to wait until the events of Revelation come to pass. We can join with that heavenly chorus today in anticipation of what God will do in the future. The citizens of Heaven celebrate with mighty voices. Nothing is done halfway in Heaven or with any hesitation. And we should praise God with all our hearts for salvation, justice, His sovereignty and the coming celebration of the wedding supper of the Lamb.

The first “Hallelujah!” is sung for what God provides.

I. What God Provides - Salvation

The word Hallelujah appears only four times in the New Testament, and all four are in our text, in verses 1, 3, 4, and 6. Hallelujah expresses praise for God’s judgment on Babylon who tried to seduce and oppress the people of God. In chapter 18 we heard the loud laments of the rulers and merchants over Babylon’s destruction, but those

fade into silence, loud hallelujahs ring out in heaven for the victory belongs to God. Notice with me from verse 1 and verse 6 just how loud the saints worship God...

We have the opportunity to do the same when we gather in the name of our great God. Our worship together is the declaration in the midst of Babylon that we will not be seduced by the world, because we have found in God the true satisfaction of our souls. As Psalm 16:11 says, "In His presence is fullness of joy and at his right hand are pleasures forevermore."

Though we may live in the world, we will not be captive to the world's ways. And we will celebrate with all our might the awesome truth that we are free from that which will be destroyed. As 1 John 2:17 says, "The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever."

In Revelation 19:1 why are they singing hallelujah? Verse 1 tells us, "Salvation and glory and power belong to our God." The word "salvation" indicates that the redeemed in Heaven know they were saved out of Babylon. They were part of the world system known as Babylon, but we were saved by God. Salvation belongs to our God, and the glory belongs to our God, and the power belongs to our God because He saves us from the world. The fact is, we cannot change our own hearts in our own strength.

Jeremiah 13:23 says, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil." We can try to reform our sinful habits, but what we need is a transformed heart. None of us can say on our own, "I do not like the world – the lust of the flesh and boastful pride of life. I will come over to the kingdom of Heaven." In our own strength, we are controlled by the mind of the flesh. It is impossible for us to change ourselves.

But God takes out our hearts of stone and gives us hearts of flesh. He saves us by His power. We will know it in Heaven even more than we do now. Titus 3:3-6 tells us, "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior."

Ephesians 2:1-9 describes how we were at one time part of Babylon the Great. Look at it with me...

It takes the power of God to save you. When Paula and I lived in Florida we visited Cape Canaveral and saw the Saturn V rocket that blasted astronauts to the moon, on their historic Apollo missions from 1967 to 1972. The Saturn V rocket is 363 feet tall, that is 60 feet taller than the Statue of Liberty! It holds the record as the heaviest, most powerful rocket that man ever designed. It generated 7.6 million pounds of thrust at launch. It required so much thrust because of the earth's gravitational pull.

Babylon the Great pulls on us like earth's gravity, back into self-interest, self-gratification, self-glory, selfishness and sin. It takes infinite power to save us from that pull. That is why "Salvation and glory and power belong to our God!"

The power of God is also displayed in Babylon's crushing defeat. The final Babylon, the world system of the Antichrist, will be more powerful than Nazi Germany or the Iron Curtain ever was. Incredible power will be required to defeat the vast system of wickedness with Satan behind it. But such power is nothing to God; as we will see next week, the battle will not be difficult for Jesus. His might and power and omnipotence will be on display at the doom of the Antichrist.

Hallelujah! God provides salvation. Second, we sing Hallelujah for what God settles.

II. What God Settles - Justice

Look at verses 2-3 ...

Babylon either enticed and allured Christians to sin, or she crushed and incarcerated them and seized their possessions and freedom and tortured and killed them. It is true that she deserves to die; it is right that she will burn. True and righteous are God's judgments. Therefore, the inhabitants of Heaven show no reluctance to sing Hallelujah. They do not shrink back or hesitate to celebrate; there is no pity in Heaven for Babylon the Great.

The destruction of the last and most powerful empire in human history marks the end of man's day. The rebellion that began long ago in the Garden of Eden is finally ended (apart from a futile, short-lived revolt at the end of the Millennium; 20:7–10). With Babylon's destruction will be no more false religion, worldly philosophy, injustice, unrighteousness; no more temptation, all the results of human depravity, all the evil will be vanquished.

The angels shout in verse 3, "Hallelujah! The smoke from her judgment rises up forever and ever." This may trouble some of us. Why would the angels and saints in Heaven celebrate the eternal torment of human beings? Imagine if you heard that a person or a group of people would suffer eternal torment in hell, and some responded, "Praise the Lord!" Something would seem wrong with that perspective.

But our hesitation to celebrate like those in Revelation 19 shows how much we underestimate the damage of the wickedness of Babylon the Great to us and to our brothers and sisters. These heavenly worshippers are not self-righteous, arrogant, haughty and smug. They know the redeemed are saved only by grace through faith.

Any reservation, reluctance, or reticence on our part toward understanding and joining the heavenly celebration of God's wrath against Babylon comes in part from the fact that we are now still a bit hung over by the cup in the hand of the great harlot. We have drunk from that cup in this world, and we are still overcome by a haze in our minds and our souls. When we get to Heaven, that will be cleared up, and we will understand. In heaven we will be sober-minded, and we will see clearly and realize and celebrate God's justice with the angels and the redeemed.

But friends, we are not there yet. We are in the church age and the day of salvation now, and we yearn for individuals, for unsaved family, friends, and coworkers to come out of Babylon, to repent and turn from self to faith in Jesus Christ. It is reasonable for us to weep as Jesus wept over Jerusalem and to have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in our hearts like Paul said he had for unbelieving Jews in Romans 9.

Why doesn't God just save everyone? Paul gives a clear answer in Romans 9:22-24: "What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles."

"Even us." It was so that we would know how much grace was shown to us, so we would be saved in such a way that we would be humbled forever by it. By contrast, we will know what we deserved because we can see it. But in Heaven, Revelation 21:4 says there will be no mourning or crying or pain - no grief at all.

We have seen What God provides - salvation v. 1. Second, we have seen what God settles-justice, God's Judgments are Righteous and True (verses 2-3). Third, we sing Hallelujah for:

III. What God occupies – His sovereignty, He reigns

Look at verses 4-6...

The twenty-four elders are best seen as representatives of the church. The four living creatures are cherubim, a high-ranking order of angels. Falling on their faces before God's throne the heavenly chorus cried out, "Amen. Hallelujah!" That phrase comes from Psalm 106:48 and indicates their solemn agreement with the heavenly rejoicing over Babylon's downfall.

The text does not identify the owner of the voice from the throne, but it is likely an angel, since he refers to God as "our God." The voice authoritatively calls another group to join in the praise, saying, "Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great." The all-inclusive phrase "the small and the great" transcends all human categories to embrace everyone. All the redeemed are called to praise God.

When the redeemed obeyed the command from the heavenly voice and added their voices to the heavenly chorus, verse 6 says John "heard something like the voice of a great multitude." The loud chorus of praise rose to a deafening level. The apostle likened it to "the sound of many waters and ... the sound of mighty peals of thunder."

Have you been to Niagara Falls? Our family went to Niagara Falls in 2004 and went on the Maid of the Mist boat that took us right in front of the falls. You get a little bit wet from the mist, the sight is amazing, and the sound of the waters is incredibly loud. Revelation 19 is describing this mighty waterfall of praise, like Niagara Falls, saying, Hallelujah! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!

Revelation 19 is where the text of the Hallelujah Chorus in Handel's Messiah came from. The chorus in Handel's Messiah goes, "Hallelujah: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." Revelation 19:6; "The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever." Revelation 11:15.

In 1741, when Handel was writing Messiah, a friend came in and found him weeping over sheets of music strewn all over the room. Handel said, "Whether I was in the body or out of the body as I wrote it, I know not. God knows. But I think I did see all Heaven opened before me and the Great God Himself."

That was Handel's reaction as God gave him just a foretaste of this Heavenly celebration. They are celebrating the reign of the omnipotent God, the God who has all power in Heaven, earth, and under the earth. No one can hold back His hand, no one can resist Him, no one can stop Him.

And our great God knows the very number of hairs upon your head, He knows the trials and temptations you are facing, and in His sovereignty, He has designed all things for His glory and your good. Romans 8:28...

Our Almighty, omnipotent God reigns as a King over all things. Hallelujah! And this brings us to the fourth stanza of Heaven's Hallelujah Chorus.

IV. What God fulfills -The Wedding Feast, the Marriage of the Lamb Has Come

Look at verse 6b-7...

The previous "Hallelujahs" (verses 1, 3, 4) pointed back to the destruction of Babylon in chapter 18. The fourth "Hallelujah" at the end of verse 6 points forward in anticipation of the coming wedding of the Lamb.

A wedding was the single greatest celebration and social event of the biblical world, and it still is today. Weddings are a joyous occasion as husband and wife are joined together. And we can see the cause for rejoicing here as the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the groom and His beloved church is the bride.

The image of marriage symbolizing the relationship of God and His people appears several times in the Scriptures. 2 Corinthians 11:2 mentions the betrothal of the church to Christ. Paul wrote, “For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.” In biblical times parents would sign a contract of the children to be married, sometimes when the children were really young. The church’s betrothal contract was signed in eternity past when the Father promised the Son a redeemed people and wrote their names in the Book of Life.

The apostle Paul described the church’s presentation in Ephesians 5:25–27: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.”

In Revelation 19 we can read and sense this tone of overpowering joy and celebration of what God has done: the destruction of Babylon was to make ready for the bride of Christ and her wedding day to come.

The harlot of Babylon in Revelation 17 stands in contrast to the beautiful bride of Christ, the church, in Revelation 19 and following. She will be radiant, and she will be ready. Great joy comes from the triumph and the power, and God deserves all glory for it. The time of the wedding banquet, the marriage supper of the Lamb has come, which is a great strong metaphor for the celebration we will all enjoy in Heaven as the bride groom, Jesus, and the bride, His church, are joined together forever.

In preparation for her marriage to the Lamb, verse 7b-8 says...

In other words, there is both the gift of Christ’s righteousness in our wedding gowns, as well as the responsibility of the Christian to live righteously which will evidently be apparent to everyone else. There is both a corporate sense to this wedding ceremony and a personal, individual sense to it as well.

This is the full picture of Ephesians 2:8-10. “For by grace are you saved through faith . . . not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” Since good works do not get a person into heaven, many have wondered “what difference good works will make in the future kingdom?”

Revelation 19:8 gives the answer: She is clothed in the “righteous acts of the saints.”

Let’s think about the timeline of what is happening. In Revelation 20 we will read about the Great White Throne Judgement of unbelievers, of non-Christians. Is there a judgment of believers, of Christians? Yes, there is. It is called the Bema seat judgment that Paul wrote about in 1 Corinthians 3 and 2 Corinthians 5 when the people of God come before the judgment seat of Christ and are rewarded for their faithful, good works. This is not to determine if we will be in the bridal party – everyone at the Bema is a believer – but believers will receive rewards for their faithfulness to Christ. Elders will have special crowns for having faithfully shepherded the sheep; martyrs for Christ will also wear unique crowns for their testimony; those who persevered under severe trials will be uniquely rewarded; those who pursued a holy lifestyle will also be uniquely marked.

When will this Bema seat judgement take place? Many evangelical scholars place the Bema seat judgment after the rapture of the church, and during the seven-year Tribulation.

And as 1 Corinthians 3:15 says, all that detracted from church’s glory, all that detracted from her beauty will be burned up, and only her magnificent beauty remains and her purity. And son in Revelation 19:8 we see the glorious church made perfect. This is the glory that was promised in 1 John 3 when it says when we see Jesus, we will be

like Him, the glory promised in Romans 8 when it said it doesn't yet appear what we'll be like, but the glorious manifestation of the children of God will make it known.

One author wrote, "How true it is, we weave on earth what we wear in heaven. Sometimes the reality of that has not sunk in, that how we use the gifts God gave us on earth will determine the way we are presented with the Bridegroom when He comes. This is a challenging thought. It reminds me of the familiar lines, "Only one life, 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last."

Now we are not told whether the wedding ceremony takes place in heaven after the rapture of the church and the subsequent Bema seat or the ceremony takes place on earth as the Millennial Kingdom begins. John's vision in Revelation 19 seems to indicate that the wedding ceremony has just taken place in heaven. This is because of the fact that when Christ returns to earth and the bride with Him, we are already dressed in our wedding garments.

It is interesting that the church has not been mentioned since Revelation chapter 6 when the Tribulation began. And now that Christ is returning from heaven, guess what? The church is clearly mentioned again – and she is with Christ in His return.

All this marriage imagery is to center our attention on the final all-glorious union of Jesus Christ with His beloved church, and friends this is what we live for today. This is the great climax of our lives.

When the wedding ceremony begins, we normally all rise to look at the beautiful bride (and the church will be beautiful and radiant), but in this case the focus will be on the groom, Jesus Christ in His power, glory and perfection.

And you normally do not have a wedding without a wedding reception – a wedding feast. And in order to prepare for the right amount of food and beverages, there must be a guest list.

John tells us about the guest list and writes a special blessing to all those invited to participate in the wedding feast – a celebration that will last for a thousand years of Christ's Kingdom on earth.

Notice verse 9 says, "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb."

Who are these who have RSVP'd for the wedding reception? It cannot be the bride – the bride is not invited to her own wedding reception. The wedding banquet guests include: Old Testament believers – Matthew chapter 8 and Luke chapter 13 both refer to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as being in the kingdom. The wedding guests include all the heroes of the faith mentioned in Hebrews 11, as will John the Baptist who describes himself as a friend of the bridegroom in John 3:29. And all the tribulation saints, glorified and still alive on earth and entering the millennial kingdom, will be guests.

The idea of the church being the bride of Christ can raise questions. But it must be remembered that the wedding imagery is just that; imagery that is not reality, but pictures God's close union with His people and the joy of us spending eternity with Him.

Some may question why the church-age believers should be granted the honor of being the bride, while believers from other ages are merely guests. But one may equally ask why God singled out Israel to be the covenant people. The only answer to both questions is that God sovereignly purposed that it be so (Deuteronomy 7:7–8).

The blessed truth that God will be in personal fellowship forever with all the redeemed saints of all the ages is so significant that the angel solemnly affirmed to John at the end of verse 9, "These are true words of God."

Notice how John responds in verse 10a, “Then I fell at his feet to worship him.”

John was so overwhelmed by the angel’s message that he fell at his feet to worship him – which is a practice forbidden in Scripture. Colossians 2:18 says “Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of angels.”

So, the angel told John to stop in verse 10b...

One proof of the deity of Jesus Christ is that He did accept worship. People fell at His feet to worship Him as God and He did not stop them. When Jesus appeared to the disciples after His resurrection, Thomas said, “My Lord and my God”, and Jesus said, “Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed (that I am God and you should fall down and worship me.)”

But the angel would not accept worship, because it was idolatry to worship anyone in place of God. His statement at the end of verse 10 that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” means that throughout the Old Testament, through all of the prophets, the spirit of prophecy was testifying to Jesus.

Friends, we have heard Heaven’s Hallelujah Chorus. God lets John hear the celebration of heaven so that in his exile on the island Patmos and in John’s isolation and suffering he might join in and worship God. And John wrote it down in a book so that we might listen to the worship of heaven and join in. Will you join in?

First, you must accept God’s gracious invitation. You are invited to repent and flee Babylon and come in faith to Jesus and join His wedding banquet now. What are you waiting for? What more gracious invitation could come? All of your sins will be forgiven by the atoning blood of Jesus.

And if you are a Christian, our mission is to know Christ and make Him known. Our job is given to us in 1 Peter 2:9, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

We are the messengers of worship, proclaiming the excellencies of God and helping others to cross over from death to life so that they too may join Heaven’s Hallelujah Chorus and sing with all of their hearts, Hallelujah, Praise the Lord for salvation, for God’s justice, for He reigns and we will reign with Him forever at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Let’s pray...