

## **HALLELUJAH FOR WHAT?**

**Revelation 19:1–10**

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In the New International Version, Revelation 19:1–10 says, “After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: ‘Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.’ And again they shouted: ‘Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.’ The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: ‘Amen, Hallelujah!’ Then a voice came from the throne, saying: ‘Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!’

Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: ‘Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.’ (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

Then the angel said to me, ‘Write: “Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!”’ And he added, ‘These are the true words of God.’

At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.’”

**I. Tuning in Revelation 19 may be akin to turning on the television set, and as it comes on, the picture shows a wildly cheering crowd in a football stadium.**

You know that the crowd is cheering but you don’t know what they’re cheering for. Which side just made the touchdown? What is the big play? As you open Revelation 19 you find a multitude

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of people cheering. As we turn on the set to Revelation 18 and 19 we actually find that there has been an activity in the stadium of light. On the playing field a certain event has happened. John shows us, first of all in Revelation 18, the stadium filled with one group of people who are lamenting. Then when they are ushered out of the stadium John fills the stadium again with persons who are wildly cheering at the event that has happened on the playing field.

Last week we looked at that particular event, the fall of Babylon, the system of this world, which includes not only an end-time civilization but to the early Christians meant Rome. And to us means the style of life that one attempts to build without God, a style of life that attempts to exploit and manipulate other people where human beings are on the bottom of a list of merchandise. When that kind of civilization falls in Revelation 18 the kings and the merchants and the transportation industry which looked to the existence of that civilization to sustain them lament when it is gone. But the saints in Revelation 19 who filled the stands are wildly cheering the fact that God has acted against a civilization that is so alien and opposed to all He stands for in His identity and character.

If we had turned on the television set and had a wildly cheering crowd we would have waited for the replay. I would suggest that Revelation 17, 18, and 19, instead of being a replay, is a pre-play that we are given through the Scripture—an idea of a theme that is yet to happen. By seeing it, it becomes real that we are immediately able to determine which crowd we are going to be in as we look at the text of the Scripture, whether we are going to be in the crowd that laments in Revelation 18, or the crowd that cheers in Revelation 19.

We have in Revelation 19 kind of an advance program copy as to what are going to be the cheers of the multitude of the redeemed in heaven as they join their voice with the angels. It's nice having an advance copy of the program because it gives us time to memorize the hallelujahs in advance.

**II. In Revelation 19:1–8 there are four hallelujahs that dominate the Scripture.**

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The word “hallelujah” which is so very familiar to us and which upon the lips of Christians is so frequent is actually a very rare word in the New Testament. The word “hallelujah” in the New Testament only occurs four times. Those four times all occur here in chapter 19:1–8. The word that is translated the same in every language is a combination of two words from the Hebrew, two words which mean “praise God.” It is the word that in Revelation is not simply a slogan that is spoken. For when the word “hallelujah” is spoken there are reasons for the hallelujah. There ought to be reasons for the hallelujah that comes from our lips and not just some vain repetition as with the heathen. So in Revelation when the word hallelujah is spoken concrete reasons are upon the lips of saints and angels as to why the term is being used.

**A.** The first hallelujah of verses one and two is a hallelujah of affirmation to God. The essence of worship is knowing the character of God, knowing who He is, knowing that He has attributes that are worthy of praise. When you affirm people, you see in them some qualities which are admirable and which you want to commend so that they may continue to be demonstrated. So God in His qualities can be affirmed by His saints and by His angels for His qualities. His attributes are worthy of praise. It would be impossible for me not to know if there were outstanding attributes in relation to myself. So it is impossible for God not to be aware of those qualities in His being which are His and His alone. God is aware of His perfection. He can neither deteriorate, nor can He improve. He is perfect in love and power and purity. Therefore to affirm God or to worship God is to speak about God and to believe about God what God himself confesses himself to be and is. God presents himself to us as one who is our Savior, as One who dwells alone as God, and as one who is omnipotent. Therefore as Savior we have affirmed Him for His salvation, for the fact that He is one, and unique. He is affirmed for His glory, for no one else shares His character or His nature. And He is almighty. Therefore the saints affirm Him for His power. As we think of the qualities that are in God we recognize that they all relate to us. That is why we can say to God, “Hallelujah.” Salvation, glory, and power belong to God.

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When we think of the salvation He has given to us, our worship response becomes one of gratitude, that He has saved such a one as I am. When we think of His glory and the fact that He is unique and alone, that there is no God but Him, it awakens in us a reverence. That is the aspect of glory, which is our response when we think of His power, and we must remember that these words on the lips of first-century Christians were coming to people who were persecuted by the world's power. But when we think of God's power it awakens within us trust. So that we can, in His arms, take what the world dishes out.

God is affirmed for His salvation glory and power, and He is affirmed for His justice. True and just are His judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who has corrupted the earth by her adulteries.

Just as now in this day of salvation, God's people agree with Him in the salvation of sinners. Even as the angels of heaven rejoice over one sinner who repents, and even as we also rejoice when persons follow the Lord in confession of faith, as we have rejoiced with Him in salvation in this day of grace, so in the coming day of judgment, God's people will agree with Him in the judgment of the wicked. Given our standpoint in the day of grace, I'm not sure we can fathom how this is possible. Yet the Scripture says when God judges the world His people will say, "True and just are Your judgments." There will be no argument with God acting in justice. He destroys those whose pleasure is in material things alone such as Babylon, those who use evil power to make an evil world or to further their own ends in life. He judges those who have drunk the blood of saints and persecuted His people.

His judgment is therefore true and righteous because God alone can see in the innermost heart, can see desires and thoughts no one else can see. Therefore, He has access to all information. His judgment is true and just because He alone of all has the power to judge with purity and without prejudice and He has the wisdom to find the right judgment and to apply it. Therefore, He is affirmed for His justice by the saints. He is affirmed again for His faithfulness. He has avenged

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the blood of His servants. In the end, God has remembered His people and has acted consistent with His faithfulness and the fact that He said to His people if they would follow Him on earth they might be given a cross, but with Him in glory they would enjoy a crown.

The story is told of an old and dying Scottish lady who on her deathbed was glorying a great deal in the assurance of her salvation. A young pastor came to call on her. He didn't quite see how anybody could be so confident of salvation. He began querying her whether or not she was really sure that she would meet God. Her response was simply this: "If I should awake in eternity to find myself among the lost, the Lord would lose more than I would. For all that I would lose would be my immortal soul. But He would have lost His good name."

In this Scripture the Lord is affirmed for His faithfulness. He has acted.

**B.** The great multitude again cries "Hallelujah" in verse 3.

**C.** There is with that hallelujah of affirmation, a hallelujah given by the twenty-four elders who can be understood either as angelic hosts or as representatives of the church on earth—the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles. Earlier when we laid the groundwork for Revelation, I indicated my preference was angels. The four living ones are perhaps personifications of beings that represent nature. All of them, now, are praising God. Their introduction in Revelation 4 was praise toward God. Now, the last time these beings are mentioned in Revelation, they are praising God as well. They simply say, "Amen! Hallelujah!" (Revelation 19:4). They are agreeing with the affirmation of the saints about God. Saying, "Yes, we too affirm Him for His salvation, glory and power, for His justice and for His faithfulness." Then there's an exhortation to the readers of Revelation that, inasmuch as the heavenly hosts are affirming and agreeing, we who are His servants, whether we are small or great, are to praise Him.

**D.** The fourth hallelujah is Revelation 19: 6–8. It is a hallelujah of unrestrained joy. It's as though if you would think of Revelation 19 as choirs joining as happened in Revelation 4 and 5, by the time you come to verse 6, all the stops have been pulled out and everybody practically in

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all creation is singing this song of praise: “Hallelujah! Praise God! For our Lord God almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory for the wedding of the Lamb has come.”

There are some striking things about this hallelujah of unrestrained joy that happens here. For one thing, “For our Lord God almighty reigns” is in the original translated this way, “For our Lord God almighty reigned.” Past tense. It doesn’t quite fit well in the English language to put it in the past tense, so the translators put it in the present, “The Lord God reigns.” But there’s a precise idea of John in putting it in the past tense. The saints, when this letter was written, were living in a time when the kingdom of God eternal has not yet come. And this pre-play has not yet happened. We all know that in the age to come the Lord reigns, but what happens is when the song is actually sung in the age to come, rather than the saints in the age to come saying, “He reigns,” they will say, “He reigned.” Meaning when they were living out their earthly existence, when they were going through the struggle, and when the early Christians were going through the iron fist of Caesar crashing in on them, when all that time it didn’t look like God was reigning, He reigned. So the testimony of God’s people is not something that the reign of God is going to happen in the by and by. It’s that He already is ruling and reigning in the world. He hasn’t lost a grip on the situation. He is in control. Even the word that is used here for God the almighty, is simply one who holds all things and everything is in His grip. Everything is guided and empowered by Him.

The word “almighty” occurs only ten times in the New Testament, and nine times it occurs in Revelation. Revelation is the one book that is written when the church is going through the worst amount of trouble. It is that time that the believers experience His power. We might well transpose that to our situation. When we are going through a real shaking and we wonder, “Has God lost His grip?” This word comes to us with great strength: God reigned, God all-powerful, almighty.

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So the saints break out in unrestrained joy because of the reign of God, and also because the great wedding has come. That wedding which has been anticipated and which we will anticipate again today from the words of Jesus that we will sit down in the kingdom and take the bread and cup with Him. The wedding has come so let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory.

These two admonitions, rejoice and be glad, are found together in only one other place in the New Testament: Matthew 5:12 where Jesus talks about persecution. He says, "Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven." The one time that Jesus uses these two words together is when we get the rough end of life, He says "rejoice and be glad." Why? Because great is your reward in heaven.

Linking that now with Matthew 5:12, is Revelation 19:7, the time the Lord has spoken of is actually now come to pass. We can rejoice and be glad and give Him glory for the wedding has come. The wedding of course is the uniting forever of God's people with Him.

In biblical days a marriage involved two major events: the betrothal and the wedding. The betrothal and the wedding were separated by a period of time in which the two were considered as husband and wife although not yet formally married. When the time of betrothal was over and the wedding day had come the wedding began with a procession to the bride's house, followed then by a return to the groom's house for the marriage feast. That provides beautiful picture from culture of what is going on in regard to our betrothal to Christ. Paul in 2 Corinthians talks about betrothing us to Christ as a pure virgin. We see that Christ the bridegroom left His habitation in glory and came to the bride's house, to earth where we were betrothed to Him. Now we are on our way to His house for the consummation of the marriage. In biblical times, the celebration of a marriage was marked by a feast, with all invited to festivities of joy. The bride has made herself ready, not only by virtue of justification, which God provides through Christ Jesus, but the bride herself is dressed in fine and righteous acts.

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After these great hallelujahs or praise to God, there comes a short moment of blessing and warning. Verse 9 speaks of blessing, the fourth such blessing out of seven in the book of Revelation. “Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.” And he added, “These are the true words of God.” Jesus in Luke 13:29 said that people will come from the east and the west and the north and the south and will take their places at the feast of the kingdom of God. Jesus said in Matthew 26:29 “I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until the day when I drink it anew with you in My Father’s kingdom.” Blessed is he who hears the invitation, who hears Christ standing the door knocking, saying, “If any man will open the door I will come in to him and sup with him and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20). The later part of that verse is coming to pass. “He with me.” I’ve come into your house and called you. Now come into Mine.

### **III. The passage for today closes with a warning against false worship.**

John here does something unthinkable. He falls down at the feet of an angel as though to worship. John, as an apostle, knows better. But it may be a deliberate way of showing us in Revelation that those who carry the message of God, when they carry it truly, can come with such splendor and radiance that even the wisest and most spiritually mature can mistake them and see them as someone to worship. What we are reminded of here, through John’s example, is that we must always keep our eyes off the messenger of the word of God, even if he comes in angelic form or human form. We must not make an idol out of any particular person who brings prophetic viewpoint or a message. And we must always keep in mind that God alone deserves our worship.

“The Spirit of Jesus is the testimony of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10). That prophecy bears witness to Jesus. Jesus brings the true words of God. Anything less than that is to violate the spirit of prophecy. We are God’s children who have been won to Christ and brought into the family of God through His efforts, and then He has left us to be about things in His eternal

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kingdom that He wants to do and must do in order to prepare for us. But the witness of Scripture is, He comes. He returns and He'll gather us to himself. And there will be a day when all tears and pain shall be washed away. He will not abandon His children. He will come back to them. Through the eyes of Scripture we can get a pre-play of that great event in which the hallelujahs break forth. We affirm God for His salvation and glory and honor. We affirm Him for His justice. We affirm Him for His faithfulness. And we praise Him with unrestrained joy at what He has brought us to.

### **Closing Prayer**

It is with joy this morning that we can share in this time of communion and anticipate that day when we're gathered to the Lord. Our gracious Father, we praise You today that You are indeed our gracious Father. The one who accepts us as we are at the foot of the cross and forgives all our sins and makes us new. Your sheep know Your voice and they hear Your call. Your word bears witness that when Your sheep have been cut off from the flock and are alone and hungry and hurting You go after them to seek them. In every flock of Yours that gathers there are those sheep who are on the parameter of the flock or who have strayed away. Perhaps momentarily they're back in the flock. Your heart beats for them and is concerned for them as it is for the sheep who are nearest to You. As pastor, I sense some of Your concern for those in your flock who are on the edges of the fold, for whom hallelujahs seem to be very distant thing, for whom the wounds of life seem so very strong and who have found it very difficult if not regarded as an impossibility to praise You in the midst of what is going on in their life and about them. Thank You for giving us Scripture which tells us to move the future victory into the now. That You will not let us be defeated by what comes against us to pick us off. But in our time when strange and bitter winds blow in our life we will instead come closer into You and huddle with the flock of God. We will dare to lift our voice in faith in coliseums and in lions' dens. We will dare to lift our faith and say the Lord God almighty reined and we will praise You. Even with Job we will

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say, "Though You slay me yet will I trust You." We will dare to believe that You are at work when there are not any visible evidences around that You are, other than the evidence of Your nature and Your character given to us through Christ Jesus. We will trust You because it is in your nature to never fail. It is in your nature never to abandon Your own or divorce Your people. It is in Your nature to catch us in Your everlasting arms. We praise You that we have been invited to You and to such a company as this. Let our worship and time of communion today be one of gratitude and hallelujah, through Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.