

Sermon – 20/04/2008 pm

The Lord God Almighty Reigns

Study Text: Revelation 19:1–6

Is the book of Revelation just about judgment, death and destruction? It is about the final judgment, about the Lord God judging his enemies. The great prostitute, otherwise known as Babylon, has been consigned to the flames – or to bottom of the sea in a different image. Kings and merchants are weeping and wailing over her destruction. But the judgment of the great prostitute and her followers brings relief and rejoicing in heaven.

Halleluiah is the cry that John heard coming from heaven after being told of the fall of Babylon. The scene returns to the throne room in heaven which John looked into in chapters 4 and 5. A great multitude is shouting in unison *Halleluiah* – which means praise to Yahweh. This word occurs four times in this passage – and it is the only passage in the New Testament where this word occurs.

Halleluiah for Righteous Judgment

In the first Halleluiah the Lord is praised for true and righteous judgments. He has judged the great prostitute who seduced millions with her adulteries. She had corrupted the whole earth; princes and paupers fell for her promise of wealth and luxury, pleasure and fun. Turning to her means turning away from God; the God who created all human beings and demands their worship.

As people become enamoured with the great prostitute and get drawn into an intimate relationship with her, so they become enemies of God. *Adulterers! Do you not know that the friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God* (James 4:4). Those who are enemies of God are under the wrath of God and will face divine judgment – that is the reality. God is holy. God is a jealous God and tolerates no rivals.

God is also just. Destruction of the great prostitute is a demonstration of divine justice. She had shed the blood of God's servants. In collusion with world rulers, including religious leaders, she made many martyrs of Jesus. They are pictured under the altar in heaven crying out for justice, for their blood to be avenged (6:10).

The cry of the martyrs in 6:10 is actually answered here in 19:2. God told them at the time to wait a little while. God is patient. He is longsuffering and *not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance* (II Peter 3:9). But this does not mean God will acquit the guilty. He will exact just retribution on all who persecute his people and shed innocent blood.

God is praised by this heavenly chorus for his salvation, glory, honour and power. It is those who are saved, those who are in heaven who are praising him. They suffered while on this earth, but now they are saved and see the glory of God. They are in his glorious presence. They honour and praise him for his great power, the power by which he has destroyed their persecutors and power by which he raised them from the dead to join Jesus Christ in heaven.

Halleluiah for Final Judgment

The heavenly chorus shouts *Halleluiah* yet again. They rejoice that God has finally judged the great prostitute just as he said he would. She will never rise again. *Her smoke rises up forever and ever* (19:3). She is in the lake of fire and there will be no phoenix rising from the ashes. Babylon's influence has been obliterated. God's people will never again have to fear her. No wonder the cry *Halleluiah* echoes through heaven.

We often hear the word Halleluiah in songs today. Those who sing may know that it means praise the Lord, but are they aware of the context in which this word occurs in Scripture. Praise the Lord for his justice and power – power to destroy the oppressors of God's people and all who are the enemies of God.

Salvation and judgment are two sides of the same coin. God does not save his chosen and ignore the rest. The rest who refuse to believe in Jesus remain under the wrath of God and will suffer God's judgment. When Jesus comes again he will be coming in judgment, and the opportunity to repent will be gone.

Halleluiah in God Centred Worship

The third Halleluiah comes from the four living creatures and the 24 elders around the throne in heaven. We find ourselves back in the throne room of heaven described in chapters 4 and 5. John was taken up in the Spirit to witness heavenly worship and see things that must shortly take place. Much has now taken place and there is rejoicing in heaven.

The four living creatures or cherubim are closest to the throne; behind them are the 24 elders representing the people of God from the Old Testament (12 tribes of Israel) and New Testament (12 apostles). They fell down and worshipped God who sat on the throne saying *Amen! Halleluiah!* (19:4). They give their voice of approval to the praise being offered up by the great multitude behind them.

The shouts of Halleluiah to the One seated on the throne brings a response from the throne itself. Is this the voice of Christ? Some say that Christ would not be identifying himself so closely with other creatures by saying praise **our** God (19:5). Is it the voice of an archangel? We cannot be certain. But clearly the praise and worship being offered up by the elders is accepted by the one seated on the throne.

All the servants of God, all who fear God, are exhorted to praise our God. From the lowest to the highest, angels and men, all are called to glorify God, the God who not only saves his people but judges their enemies, who are by definition his enemies also.

This scene of worship by the elders in heaven parallels the scene found in chapter 11. When the seventh angel sounded his trumpet divine judgment was announced. God's wrath came upon the nations, nations under the power of the great prostitute. The servants of God, *those who fear your name, small and great* were rewarded (11:18).

Halleluiah the Almighty Reigns

The final Halleluiah John heard comes from the great multitude once again. It sounds like many waters and mighty thunder (19:6). He had heard such a voice from heaven previously – the voice of the 144,000 singing a new song to the Lord (14:2). These were the ones redeemed from the earth.

Last Sunday evening we had very good sound effects to accompany the sermon. A mighty storm broke overhead as we were worshipping. Lightning flashed and thunder cracked above us. The rain on the roof was deafening. Some people are afraid of storms. They go into a room and pull the blinds, and even crawl under the bed. Others are not so afraid, and some are so foolish as to keep on with their game of golf.

Actually there is no lightning here in this scene for it is the heavenly choir singing praises to the Lamb on the throne. There is a mighty noise but there is no danger. It is the noise of rejoicing, the noise of Halleluiah. Lightning does accompany the judgment coming from heaven. Lightning, noises, thunder, earthquakes and hail mark the outpouring of divine judgment on the earth (11:19). It is lightning, earthquakes and hail, which have the power to kill.

When the seventh trumpet was sounded there were loud voices in heaven (11:15). They proclaimed *the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign forever and ever*. So it is that in this scene they are singing *Halleluiah! for the Lord God Almighty reigns* (19:6). God has revealed his almighty power. He has begun to judge his enemies, the enemies who ruled over the kingdoms of this world. Babylon is fallen. The beast and the false prophet will soon fall also (2:20).

Can we join with this heavenly choir in singing ‘the Lord God Almighty reigns’ or do we have to wait and see who will be victorious in the end? Some look forward to a great end-time battle with trepidation. We see people going into bunkers and storing mountains of food. What do they expect to find after the great battle?

Jesus never denied that he was king when he walked on this earth. The kingdoms of this world felt threatened even when Jesus walked as a man. The Jews charged him for making claims to kingship – *he says he is Christ a king* (Luke 23:2). Pilate asked Jesus if he was a king. Jesus said he was, but that his kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). He is the king of kings, the ruler of heaven and earth.

There is no doubt as to who will conquer and who will rule. Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who gave himself as the sacrifice for sin is now the Lamb upon the throne in heaven. He has already won the victory over sin, over death and the devil. He tells us to watch and pray, and be ready for his return, to be ready for the new heaven and new earth.

Those who think they will survive his coming by going into the desert, or hiding in a bunker, are completely mistaken. If you want to prepare for the coming of Jesus then draw near to him today. Live to please him today, worship him today, praise him today, sing Halleluiah *for the Lord God almighty reigns*.

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