

## **Revelation 19:1-6** Saints Triumphant – Nov.16<sup>th</sup>, 2014

*1 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, 2 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." 3 And again they shouted: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." 4 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!" 5 Then a voice came from the throne, saying: "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!" 6 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.*

Have you been in a 100,000 seat stadium, filled with people? If not, have you ever watched from home? You hear the crowd's shouts throughout the game. Then, have you ever seen this? The cameras, which are picking up the footage, actually begin to shake as the crowd's celebration rises. The crowd knows the victory is in hand. It is theirs! It's electric! You don't just hear the excitement & joy – you feel it!

Maybe the scene I just described brings back memories of the days you cheered your throats raw for your favorite team. Maybe it reminds you of the rivalry that exists between two teams like Ohio State and Michigan. The Packers versus the Vikings, or the Lions. The College Basketball Final Four show downs. The Olympics. Your own win over your greatest rival. The emotions that surge through the winning side are indescribable!

But nothing - nothing - can compare with the scene before us today in Revelation ch.19. It's out of this world. In a rare glimpse of something we're all aching to see, the Holy Spirit allows us just a peak at the ultimate victory party.

This victory is personal. You see, the people in heaven aren't simply a crowd of interested, but otherwise-unaffected, spectators. The rivals were battling for their souls. The opposing sides are on record...

Our Lord God vs. the Great Prostitute. But "who is the 'great prostitute'?", you might be asking after hearing these verses of Revelation ch.19. Chapter 18 describes her as "Babylon." Remember how Revelation uses a lot of symbolism. This isn't the first time in the book of Revelation that "Babylon" is mentioned. Babylon is used repeatedly to picture the enemies of God and God's people (14:8; 16:19; 17:5). What we see being pictured are the combined anti-Christian forces in the world. Especially noted are false churches and false prophets, those masquerading as from God, but who are really enemies. They may even claim the name "Christian," but can be identified by their teachings as enemies to God's message that salvation comes by God's grace alone, through faith in Jesus' alone. Many secular powers – worldly rulers and forces – also line up to oppose God and do much to harm God's people.

Now, in Revelation ch.19, we hear the winner of the battle declared: “He – our God – has condemned the great prostitute... He has avenged ... the blood of his servants... The smoke of her goes up for ever and ever.”

The Holy Spirit opens the door to heaven itself, in order to lift us up with the ultimate scene before God’s throne. The saints triumphant are gathered here.

This is what you are waiting for!

“Hallelujah” flies from the multitude of voices before the throne. Later we hear those shouting described as “the 24 elders.” Again, Revelation uses symbolism. These 24 elders stand for the whole company of believers in heaven. How do we arrive at that? Well, first look for the number 12. God’s Old Testament people in the nation of Israel were divided into 12 tribes. You know about Jesus’ selection of 12 disciples/apostles. You’ll see many places where the number 12 is used as a number to represent the Church, God’s people. And bringing together 12 & 12, you get 24 - a number used in Revelation to represent believers from both the Old Testament period & our New Testament time.

Now the company of believers in heaven is praising the Lord. And we’re told the reason why. “Hallelujah” because... God has brought his salvation to them just as promised. “Hallelujah” because... all their enemies are left in defeat! Here is the outcome. You can leave judgment of all your enemies to God. He proves in the End he will carry out judgment on them fully.

And we’ll enjoy peace then – peace like never before.

“Amen. Hallelujah!” What do you do when you feel joy beyond any joy ever experienced before? Praise the Lord!

Here is the outcome: believers from across time united and reunited with one another – all with God now, in his very presence, in his throne room.

The final “hallelujah” we get to hear – vs.6 – brings the scene to a rousing crescendo. We’ve been hearing the shouts of the great crowd, ever since our arrival to the scene in vs.1. Now the great multitude of saints triumphant is stirred to raise what sounds like an even louder “Praise to the Lord!”

Here is a “Hallelujah” that roars like rushing waters and booms like thunder that shakes its surroundings. See. Hear. Feel the scene.

Hold onto this scene. Treasure it. Return to it... often.

For, my friends, we are still in the midst of what the Bible describes as The Great Tribulation. The Great Prostitute is working feverishly to seduce us, to lure us away from our faith in Jesus, in an attempt to reclaim our souls. The great war rages on here on earth until the End.

There will be those from within Jesus' followers here on earth who will succumb to her ways.

That's why, so often in the Word you'll find linked: 1) how awesome life after this life will be for Christians, and 2) the warning that many will miss out on it – even ones from among those who at one point knew about heaven and about God's grace here (but fell away).

Jesus spoke the parable of the 10 virgins, which we heard earlier (Matthew ch.25), when he was teaching his disciples in private. It wasn't spoken to a mixed group: some followers, some enemies. What does this tell you? He speaks of 5 welcomed in, and 5 left staring at the door from the outside – shut out! That's outside heaven. Jesus' numbers aren't to be taken as a formula for calculating odds. But the scene he paints pleads with us to recognize that the danger is real [thoughts taken from Prof. Gurgel's Grace Notes].

Hearts can grow drowsy. Life gets hard. Complications gunk up days. Trauma... hardships... temptations muddy life here on earth.

Note some of the more common threats to our faith:

1. Humanism. We're hit from multiple angles with the message: just believe in yourself. Above all else, you've got to love yourself.
2. Insidious false teaching. It's all over. It takes so many forms. And our defenses are in danger of being broken down by the notions so often voiced around us: "But those people - they are so nice! Certainly there wouldn't be anything harmful about what they believe!"
3. Peer pressure. "I don't want people to notice that I'm 'different.' I want to fit in; to be accepted. I don't want to be looked at as 'intolerant,' or a 'Jesus freak.'"
4. Getting weighed down by traumas, doubts left to grow, resentment allowed to fester. Plenty of voices in our world will echo Job's wife: "What are you waiting for? Curse God already – be done with a God who would allow this."
5. Neglect of our faith. We put ourselves in danger if we forget the warning how faith can sputter and even be extinguished without an ongoing supply of the oil of His grace.

Truth, healing and strength are poured into us by God through His Word, and in the water of Baptism and through the meal of Holy Communion.

It is truth and strength from God that keep us honest. We acknowledge the ways we've gotten distracted from our God, we've obsessed about things of this life, we've listened to voices of the world, and we've caved to sin.

With eyes of faith kept open by God's truth, we celebrate a perfect Savior. His blood cleanses us. His righteousness robes us. That's the only basis for our confidence that we will join the company of heaven. Hold onto what you have, so that no one will take your crown (Revelation 3).

The Holy Spirit holds open the door to heaven. He shows you the saints triumphant. “Dear child of God, here is what Jesus has won for you. Here is what he has prepared for you!”

John tells us: the crowd shouted, “Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns! Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!” This is what you are waiting for!

Luther – I believe it was Martin Luther – once described: if we can only learn from the way a dog waits for his master to open the door. The dog outside hears his master’s voice inside. That’s where he wants to be, with his master. He knows his master is there. His attention is fixed there. He waits eagerly for the door to be opened, for the moment he will be let in.

Today in Revelation ch.19 the Holy Spirit opens the door to heaven to give us the foretaste of what is waiting for us there. Hold your Bibles open to this sight.

Every time you feel beaten down by the mockery of those who scorn your belief in your precious Savior, Jesus. . . look here. Every time you ask yourself, “Is there *anyone* who holds to God’s truth any longer? Our numbers seem so few!” Look here.

Think: you may enjoy some good thing from God here for 20, 50, maybe even 80 years. Imagine how much joy you’ll have when after a billion years you reflect back on the good things you’ve experienced in Paradise with God. Think: You treasure the 10, 20, or maybe 50 years you’ve grown close with someone here on earth. Imagine the treasure of joy and closeness you’ll experience in 10, 20 or 50 billion years together with the family of believers in Paradise.

Here is a glimpse of what you are waiting for. Here is encouragement to: keep watching and praying for the day you’ll stand among the saints triumphant before the throne! We pray: Until we stand there, Lord, help us be the waiting Church here! Amen.