

**“Heavenly Worship”**  
**Revelation 19:1-10**  
**October 25, 2015**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

We are continuing for a second week to look at our core value of worship. Remember that a core value is a biblical command that drives our ministry. It is not something to which we aspire, but something we recognize that God has given to our church. So we see our core values as the unique strengths or personality God has given to us. We believe that one of those is worship, and we want to look further into this area by considering the worship of heaven as portrayed in this passage at the end of the Bible.

Let me point out as we get into this passage that John is describing for us what he sees and hears in a vision that was given to him. He tells us that he **“heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out”** (v. 1). This multitude is the redeemed children of God, not some group of angels. If you belong to God, this describes what you will be doing in the next life, and what you will be doing is worshipping God. Is that good news to you, or bad news? Perhaps you were hoping for something else, something more akin to a permanent vacation in a five star hotel in some corner of paradise. Maybe you envisioned a place where you could pursue your hobby to your heart’s content and without any of the hassles that may be associated with that hobby currently. So you might imagine the best golf courses if that happens to be your hobby, the best restaurants if such dining is what you prefer, or the best shops if shopping is your thing. But the heaven the Bible describes is filled with God and his worship.

It would seem that those present in heaven in this passage are not thinking of golf courses or fine dining or shopping. Notice this verb that is used repeatedly of their worship. They are *crying* out. It doesn’t say that they are singing or speaking, but crying. To cry out means to shout with great passion. It is almost an involuntary response to something that stirs you so deeply that you cannot be silent. When do you cry out? Your favorite football team is playing in the big game and driving for the go ahead touchdown at the end of the game. With only a few seconds left, the next play will be the last one, and your team scores to win the game. Such an event requires crying out in joy. Or imagine you have a son fighting in WWII, and you hear the news on the radio that the enemy has surrendered and the war is over. The worship of heaven involves just this kind of full, heart-felt response. It is anything but boring. These verses from Revelation 19 focus on two reasons we worship God.

**I. Worshipping God for His Judgment – v. 1-5**

It is ironic that our first vision of worship in this chapter features people who are worshipping God for the very thing that many today say prevents them from worshipping God. I was talking with someone just this week who mentioned a friend who said he had a hard time believing in a God who would send people to eternal condemnation. Yet the worshipers in these first verses of the chapter worship God for precisely that. They joyfully shout out, **“his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants”** (v. 2). They even celebrate the fact that this judgment is eternal, that **“the smoke from her goes up forever and ever”** (v. 3).

It is important that we understand first of all who this “great prostitute” is that is being judged. We learn back in chapter 17 that she is Babylon. She has a name on her forehead that says **“Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations”** (17:5). Babylon is a metaphor for the kingdoms of this world that do not trust God. Babylon gets its name from the Tower of Babel way back in Genesis 11, a tower whose expressed purpose was to make a great name for mankind. So Babylon represents the effort to find greatness by one’s own efforts, apart from God. This is what God judges. To say it differently, he judges the pride of living life without God. And since you can’t judge an institution or an idea, the judgment of Revelation 19 is a judgment of people, of those who have made themselves citizens of Babylon. The book of Revelation, together with the rest of the Bible, knows only two kingdoms. They are represented by the city of Babylon or the New Jerusalem. Everyone who has ever lived on the earth is a citizen of one or the other of these two kingdoms. It is the citizens of Babylon who are judged in this passage.

We can see that God is justified in judging the citizens of Babylon in two phrases that appear in verse 2. The first one is that Babylon or the great prostitute has “corrupted the earth with her immorality.” She has brought great harm to the earth that God created and pronounced good. The harm was inadvertent, not intentional. Babylon didn’t set out to corrupt the earth, but did so through her mutiny against God. The earth is now in bondage to sin because of the sin of those created to rule the earth, all the sons of Adam. That’s always the way it is when we rebel against God, isn’t it? We don’t set out to do harm to our families and friends and all that is good around us. But we do in fact bring harm to many when we rebel against God by going our own way. Harm has been brought to the earth by sinful rebellion. Without this rebellion, there would be no cancer or any other disease. God will bring deliverance from all such corruptions of his plans for the goodness of the earth when he brings this judgment. That is why his people praise him for judgment.

Dan Allender speaks of a phone conversation he had with his father after his father had returned from a chemotherapy treatment.

He was weak and frail. He had a portable phone and was talking to me as he walked to the upstairs bathroom. He said he was feeling ill and may need to hang up quickly. When he got to the doorway he stumbled, and I heard him crash to the floor. The phone fell out of his hands and slid out of his reach. He began vomiting. For the next twenty minutes I listened helplessly as he purged the poison out of his system.

I was powerless. I could do nothing. At first I wanted to hang up so I did not have to hear his retching nor feel my rage and battle with my urge to withdraw. Instead, I stayed on the phone and prayed for him and dreamt of the day when I would be able to put my foot on the neck of evil and make the evil one pay for my father's agony (*The Healing Path*, p. 142).

The second phrase in verse 2 that justifies God's judgment is that he **"has avenged on her the blood of his servants."** These two kingdoms of Babylon and Jerusalem are incapable of peaceful coexistence. The animosity arises not from Jerusalem, but from Babylon. For a time, God allows the martyrdom of his beloved children, but only in order to give time to others to repent. But delayed judgment is very different from canceled judgment, and on this occasion of Revelation 19 the judgment comes. God's people are expressly forbidden from taking vengeance against our enemies, even if they kill us. God alone is authorized to do so, and he will certainly do it. When he does, he will be right in doing so.

What about this statement that **"the smoke from her goes up forever and ever"** (v. 3)? We will worship God for this because it means that the demise of evil and all the suffering that goes with it will be permanent. We will receive constant reassurance of this in heaven. If you've ever been really hurt by evil, you know that it is easy to get a little gun-shy about it. If the phone has ever awakened you at night with bad news on the other end, your response every time the phone awakens you at night is a momentary fear of more bad news. But in heaven, there will be a constant reminder that the Lord reigns, and in his reign he has done away with evil forever. His children will never be troubled by it again.

We must not miss the fact that the Bible says here and elsewhere that the judgment of hell is never-ending. In his famous sermon on the wrath of God, Jonathan Edwards expressed it like this.

It would be dreadful to suffer this fierceness and wrath of Almighty God one moment; but you must suffer it to all eternity. There will be end to this exquisite horrible misery. When you look forward, you shall see a long forever, a boundless duration before you, which will swallow up your thoughts and amaze your soul. And you will absolutely despair of ever having any deliverance, any end, any mitigation, any rest at all. You will know certainly that you must wear out long ages, millions of millions of ages, in wrestling and conflicting with this almighty

merciless vengeance. And then when you have done so, when so many ages have actually been spent by you in this manner, you will know that all is but a point to what remains.

## II. **Worshiping God for His Faithful Love – v. 6-10**

When we consider the dreadful nature of God’s judgment, it is no surprise that the worship of God’s people intensifies when they come to consider his love. That intensification can be seen in the description of their praises in verse 6, likening it to **“the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder.”** All of these worshipers, now citizens of the new Jerusalem, were by nature citizens of Babylon. But now through the mighty and gracious reign of God, they have been joined to Jesus as a bride is joined to the bridegroom. They rejoice because **“the marriage of the Lamb has come”** (v. 7).

Throughout the Bible, especially the New Testament, God’s relationship to his people is described in terms of marriage. John the Baptist referred to himself as “the friend of the bridegroom” (John 3:29), or we would say the “Best Man.” Jesus, then, is the Bridegroom. Just one chapter later, in John 4, Jesus meets the woman at the well. There are several well stories in the Bible, where a man goes looking for his bride at a well. The woman Jesus meets at the well in Samaria, a woman who has had five husbands and is now living with a man to whom she is not married, is being sought by her true husband.

In the days of the Bible, there were three steps to marriage: engagement, preparation for the wedding and the wedding supper itself. It all started with the engagement when the groom would negotiate with the bride’s family the bride price. The idea was that this woman would now become part of a new family, thus depriving her family of origin of her services. A price was negotiated for that. Upon agreement of a bride price, the arrangement would be sealed by drinking a cup of wine, accompanied by the words familiar to us, “This cup is the new covenant.” Then the groom would go away for about 12 months, during which time he would prepare a room for his bride in his father’s house. During this same period of time, the bride would prepare herself, including her wedding dress, for her wedding day. Then the groom would return to collect his bride and take her to the wedding feast, which typically lasted between seven and fourteen days.

The price has already been paid for Jesus’ bride. He paid with his life to purchase a bride. Now Jesus is preparing our home. He said as much to his disciples. **“In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I**

**am you may be also”** (John 14:2-3). And we are now preparing ourselves for our wedding day. Did you notice the tension in these verses concerning how we as Christ’s bride prepare ourselves for our wedding day? The text says first that **“his bride has made herself ready”** (v. 7). And then in the very next verse we read, **“It was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure.”** Which is it? Do we prepare our own wedding dress or do we accept the one Jesus gives to us? It is both, of course. We make ourselves ready by receiving all that Jesus gives us with his righteousness. We are clothed in the very righteousness of Jesus, being given credit for the righteous deeds he has done. As we trust God in that at a daily level, we too begin to be characterized more and more by righteous deeds. To say it differently, we must keep the order of receiving and then achieving. We receive the dress of Jesus’ righteousness, after which we actually begin to achieve righteous deeds of our own. If we reverse that order and feel like we achieve first and then receive, we become legalistic and will fail.

The wedding feast itself comes next. But the feast described here doesn’t last seven or fourteen days, but forever. Imagine the power of this image of a feast to those living in a situation where adequate food is never assured. One thing I’ve noticed about hunger is that it comes around about every six hours, unless you’re 14 years old, in which case it comes about every two hours. A feast is a place where there is an abundance of food available immediately. As soon as the first inkling of hunger arrives, it can be immediately satisfied. A husband has a natural desire to give his wife that which will please her. On our honeymoon, Wendy couldn’t admire something in a store without me wanting to buy it for her. But my limited bank account quickly put a stop to that. Our heavenly bridegroom has no limits to his bank account, and he will gloriously satisfy all our desires.

## **CONCLUSION:**

This chapter contrasts two options: citizenship in Babylon or in heaven. The motto of Babylon is “I can do it myself.” The motto of heaven is “The Lamb has done it for me.” We are all by nature citizens of Babylon, but Jesus has come looking for us and has found us. If you are here today and wondering if your eternity will be spent in the eternal judgment with the citizens of Babylon or in the eternal heavenly feast as the bride of the Lamb, let me say to you that the Lamb is seeking you. By putting your faith in him you can become a citizen of heaven and join this chorus of eternal, joyful worship.