

3. How do the stories of Estonia's Singing Revolution and the civil rights movement encourage you to sing and act in faith?

Closing Prayer

Eternal God, we praise you for your gift of the coming kingdom and the promise of the salvation of all creation. Inspire us to sing and serve in the face of oppression and evil, trusting your transforming power in our lives and our world. Amen.

Further Study

Psalm 2; Romans 8:18-25

Daily Readings

M. Psalm 47

F. Revelation 11:3-10

T. Daniel 4:34-37

S. Psalm 93

W. Jude 20-25

S. Revelation 11:11-19

T. Psalm 10:12-18

Memorization

Revelation 11:15

The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever.

Rejoicing in Heaven

Revelation 19:1-8

¹ After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying,

“Hallelujah!

Salvation and glory and power to our God,

² for his judgments are true and just;

he has judged the great whore

who corrupted the earth with her fornication,

and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”

³ Once more they said,

“Hallelujah!

The smoke goes up from her forever and ever.”

⁴ And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who is seated on the throne, saying,

“Amen. Hallelujah!”

⁵ And from the throne came a voice saying,

“Praise our God,

all you his servants,

and all who fear him,

small and great.”

⁶ Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying out,

“Hallelujah!

For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.

⁷ Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,

for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready;

⁸ to her it has been granted to be clothed
with fine linen, bright and pure"—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

Theme Statement

Heaven and earth rejoice! God has triumphed over Rome and over evil itself. God has judged the unrepentant idolaters and rescued creation. God's people are clothed, safely united in Christ under God's universal reign. Amen! Hallelujah!

Exploring the Word

The chorus praising God's victory over the evil city of Babylon (Rome) is a vision of heaven itself. In Revelation 18 Rome is pictured as a wealthy, self-indulgent, and brutal city. It was guilty of violence, idolatry, and decadence. The poor were neglected and exploited, and Christians were oppressed and murdered. Because this is contrary to God's will for creation, the city will be destroyed one day (Revelation 18:9-19). Rome's corruption and evil have been its own undoing.

Revelation 19:1-8 is the ecstatic response to the just destruction of Rome. God has rescued and vindicated the oppressed, poor, and faithful. "Hallelujah!" signals God's triumph over evil and the defeat of the "great whore" for her "fornication." Rome's "fornication" is its idolatry. It has rejected the one true God and God's good purposes for all creation. Rome's fall symbolizes God's victory and life-giving eternal reign.

Revelation 19:1-4 A great multitude rejoices

The hosts of heaven and those who died in the faith rejoice. We have heard such praise before in sessions 10 and 11. The writer John keeps circling back to God's victory and the rejoicing it brings. We have also heard "Hallelujah," which means "Praise the Lord," before in our study, when we focused on the five psalms of praise that end the Psalter.

Now God's victory, power, and glory are celebrated fully (v. 1). Also, verse 2 announces God's just judgment on the harlot Rome and the vindication of God's faithful people. The praise belongs to God alone because Caesar cannot and does not bring justice or salvation. Instead, he has trampled it to death. Now the twenty-four elders and four living creatures fall on their faces in worship. Such worship is at the heart of John's letter. Worship of God and the Lamb is the goal for all creation.

Revelation 19:5 A call to the churches on earth

A voice from the heavenly throne calls God's servants on earth to join the heavenly chorus. "Our" signals that such praise is a unifying experience not only for the earthly servants but also for those already in heaven. Heaven and earth unite in worship of God. The "small and great" servants are an inclusive group. They are the faithful members of the church on earth, servants without distinction or status, and those who have come to glorify God even at the last minute (11:13).

Revelation 19:6-8 A new beginning

The multitude sounds like "many waters" and "thunder-peals" because so many different voices and languages blend together in praise. Heaven and earth together make a thunderous chorus. Rejoicing in God's victorious reign unites the creation that was divided by its idolatry and selfishness.

The coming of the “marriage of the Lamb” heralds a new beginning for God’s creation. It is united with Christ in his glory and *clothed* (given the wedding garment) in “fine linen, bright and pure.” This is a *gift* of God’s grace. The symbol of marriage means that the reign of God and the Lamb is understood in terms of a marriage relationship: forgiveness, love, care, joy, and faithfulness. This is the nature of God’s reign between God and God’s whole creation.

Finally, what is the meaning of the last eleven words of verse 8? Is it about the believer’s good deeds or God’s good deeds toward the saints? First, “fine linen” is God’s *gift* to the church. Use of the passive “to be clothed” emphasizes that God has done this *for* believers. God has clothed the faithful and the forgiven in Christ’s love and purity, redeeming and accepting them. God judges rightly (“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” Romans 3:23) but judges in order to make new in Christ. Based on all of this, the “fine linen” is God’s righteous deeds toward the saints. It is not something believers have made for themselves through good works. Of course Christians do good works, but they *flow from* God clothing them in fine linen (Christ).

The Word Today

I was in the university arboretum in deep November, eager to breathe fresh air during the COVID pandemic. Trees were bare. Snow sparkled in the sunlight. As I hiked, I realized how far I could see through the thick woods! In the summer the trees obscured my view. Then I did not see the red barn of the distant farmstead or the pond settled in the middle of the maple grove. Now I did. My walk gave me a new vision, a different view of an area I thought I knew well. Spending time in the natural world took me

outside myself and brought a note of beauty and joy to the entire day.

Nature is central to the poetic form haiku. An ancient Japanese practice, it consists of three short and unrhymed lines and uses concrete imagery to express the poet’s close observation of nature. It draws the poet and reader out of the self and into the world. No word is wasted; the first line is only five syllables; the second line, seven; and the third line, five. Below is a haiku that expresses the clarity and joy in Revelation 19:1-8.

*Bright, cold dancing air;
a pure crystal tone in the
space between branches.*

I invite you to consider the meaning of this haiku and even write one yourself. Ponder how John’s vision of heaven brings brightness, light, and clarity. Think about how John’s vision gives *you* a new vision for your own life and the future of the world.

John’s vision in Revelation applies to our own struggles. As in prosperous Rome, there now exists a large divide between rich and poor. A few have so much while many others lack the basics needed for a healthy, stable life. Idolatry exists today, and it must be resisted. We have few graven images, but we are tempted to place our trust in such things as money, status, and glamorous looks and living (like the Romans did long ago). Such idolatry comes at a cost to us because selfish living draws us away from God and each other, leading to emptiness and despair. There is also a great cost to the human spirit in the despair and anger that comes from poverty when life is unjust, difficult, and seemingly hopeless. People despair about life improving, about the planet’s health, and about any chance for true justice.

More than ever, we need John's vision, which comes as a warning to trust only in God and to do compassion and justice. We also need John's hopeful vision of God's power and grace and of the glorious reign of God forever.

Questions for Discussion

Beginnings

1. Describe a wedding you have attended and share what made it meaningful and memorable. Do you remember the spoken vows?

Exploring the Word

1. Read Revelation 19:1-2. Who and what are praised in these verses?
2. Read Revelation 18:9-17a and 19:1-4. List contrasts between the two passages. How is the wicked city of Rome the opposite of God's kingdom, the harlot Babylon the opposite of Christ?
3. Who are the "small and great" in Revelation 19:5? How does Romans 3:21-24 expand your understanding of this?
4. Read Revelation 19:6-7. Describe the unity and the focus of such rejoicing.
5. Read Revelation 19:8. What is God's gift to God's people? How does Romans 5:1-8 add to this good news?

The Word Today

1. What does the vision in the haiku call you to pay attention to, and how does it affect you? If you wrote a haiku, consider sharing it.

2. Mark whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: More than ever, we need John's vision of heaven as both a warning and a comfort.

Agree

Disagree

Closing Prayer

Praise be to you, God, for your glory, power, and salvation and for clothing us in Christ in our baptism and remaining faithful until the end of the age. May John's vision of your eternal reign give us courage, strength, and hope in our lives. Amen! Hallelujah!

Further Study

Isaiah 55:1—56:1-8; Revelation 17-18

Daily Readings

M. Isaiah 6:1-8

F. Revelation 19:17-21

T. 1 Chronicles 16:23-24

S. Zephaniah 3:14-20

W. Hebrews 1:5-14

S. Revelation 19:1-8

T. Revelation 19:9-16

Memorization

Revelation 19:7

Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.