

Continuing our series in Revelation today. Last week we saw Babylon come to complete destruction. Babylon is quite the popular location getting close to 300 mentions in Scripture – only Jerusalem gets more mentions. In third place is Jericho with less than 70. Write that down – it's on the quiz. The point is Babylon dominates – pun intended – across the story of the Bible. Babylon is a place, an empire, and becomes a metaphor. Last week Pastor Phil pointed out that in Revelation Babylon comes to represent several things.

Babylon is: the woman, the city, the empire, the system In Revelation when we talk about Babylon we mean all of the above. Cities get feminine pronouns so we always refer to places as her or she – and this is most unfortunate because Babylon is a terrible place so it's not just represented as a woman – her sins were many – meaning the place – but the city comes to be seen in Revelation as a prostitute. But, Babylon, in the Old Testament, was a real place. It was the empire that came and took Israel into exile and then burned the temple, the palace, the walls, and the homes and pillaged what was left of Jerusalem. God had told His people they would be punished if they failed to obey Him, the prophets made clear they had disobeyed, and punishment was coming in the form of captivity by Babylon – then exile to Babylon happens just as He said. The glory of God departs the temple as the people are banished from Jerusalem. But then God reminds His people He has not forgotten them, and He promises to bring them back and restore them. The prophets say God will punish Babylon for her (see, places they get feminine pronouns – but in the Bible wisdom is also personified as a woman – so we just have to take the good with the bad). Ok, back to this. Babylon will be punished for her treatment of Israel. In fact, Isaiah 13 and 14 says similar things to Revelation 17 and 18 – Isaiah says – Babylon will be overthrown by God, she will never be inhabited again, He'll choose Israel and resettle her but Babylon will be cut off with no survivors, no offspring, no descendants. So, now in Revelation John's readers know all about Babylon – how she represented all that would come against God's people, try to destroy them, how Babylon had been the place that separated God's people from God's presence – how for 70 years no sacrifices for sins could be made because the people of Israel were removed from the temple. Babylon was exile and separation from God. Babylon was idolatry and adultery – hence the prostitute as a mascot. Babylon was sin and persecution. Babylon was evil and bent on destruction of everything that God's people stood for and everything God had given His people. But, the

people in John's day knew the real Babylon had fallen just as God had said. Which gave them faith to believe that God would deliver His people once more and once more all that had threatened to hurt God's people, had tried to lure His people to worship the beast, and tried desperately to separate men and women from God – would be thrown down once and for all.

And, it was. **“In one hour she has been brought to ruin! Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you. Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again.” Revelation 18:20-21** The music of Babylon will never again be heard, no one will ever work or trade there again, the light of a lamp will never shine there again, no one will ever get married or raise a family or have anyone to inherit the land. It was all gone. The people of God could rejoice – they'll never be separated again. The apostles could rejoice – she'll never lead anyone astray again. The prophets of old could rejoice – it happened again just as it was in our day – and the prophets like John could rejoice in advance – it will happen again just as God has said. **“In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth.” Revelation 18:24** The blood of the martyrs who would not worship the beast was found in Babylon – she ate them. In chapter 17:6 – the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. Those saints are the ones who we first met under the altar in chapter 6. **“I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.” Revelation 6:9-11**

Now, what John sees in chapter 18 is that it's been completed. The wait is over. Babylon has fallen. Then John says, **“After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: Hallelujah!” Revelation 19:1** It's the only place in the New Testament where we read this Hebrew word meaning praise God – and it's on repeat.

It's a chorus of Hallelujah's. The great multitude – which we now know each time we read is made up of every nation, tribe, people, language and color – they're singing praises to the Lamb. Michael Gorman said, **“It is not accidental that Revelation, as a book of worship, is filled with songs, or that so many Christians through the centuries have composed hymns and songs based on Revelation. Those who follow the Lamb are a singing people. Our praise is joyful, but also serious, because singing something like ‘Worthy is the Lamb’ is a political act, and the political power of the act is greater because it is sung, for others can join the chorus and fix it in aural memory.”** – Michael Gorman

We're a singing people – it is a political act – we show allegiance to our King, Jesus. It is our weapon – we sing as a means of fighting against the enemy. And, it is our victory celebration – we sing in response to the victory the Lamb has won for us.

So, what are the hallelujah songs the multitude sings in chapter 19?

1. Hallelujah! God is faithful

“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.” Revelation 19:1-2

Ok, this song admittedly is probably not going to be the text for the next great worship song in 2023. But, still. This song exalts the Lord who has been true to His word. How long, was the question in Revelation 6 and it's now been asked and answered. God did what He said He would do. He brought salvation. He was glorified. It was His power and His alone that brought about this victory over evil and sin and its long reign. When we look around us and see the difficulties that rise up against us – when we look and see that evil seems to be winning – or when it seems like we've been cast out or abandoned – when it feels like God is distant or has not heard our cries for relief, for deliverance, for help – we can stand with the multitude and sing hallelujah – God has been faithful, God will be faithful again, God is still faithful today.

2. Hallelujah! We are forever united with Christ

“And again they shouted: Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.” Revelation 19:3

This is also an odd song – but catchy. Easy words. Just the one line. But when we realize what it implies – it makes it one of my favorites. Isaiah had seen the smoke that would rise

up hundreds of years before. He too prophesied of coming judgment on the nations. **“For the Lord has a day of vengeance, a year of retribution, to uphold Zion’s cause...It will not be quenched night and day; its smoke will rise forever. From generation to generation it will lie desolate; no one will ever pass through it again.” Isaiah 34:8,10**

Never again will we be exiled or driven from God’s presence. The chance for exile, the threat of separation from God, it will all go up in smoke forever and ever. Because instead we’ll be dwelling forever and ever with our God. The song is telling us: Exile is over. The reign of darkness has ended. Isaiah then saw God’s people returning and that’s when he writes, **“The ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.” Isaiah 35:10** No one except God’s people will be living in the promised land of Heaven. The smoke goes up for ever and ever – it’s not returning. It’s over. It’s done. Sin had its moment – but God has won the day and ransomed His people forever. So we enter Heaven singing – Hallelujah!

3. Hallelujah! God is worthy of our praise

“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!’” Revelation 19:4-5

This song is the praise break. The third song is all praise. We’ve entered into Zion with singing and gladness is now overtaking us. They began to worship the Lord because they realized what it meant for them to now and forever be in God’s presence. The people of God are joining in with all of heaven – the 24 elders representing all of God’s people – the 4 creatures representing all of creation – they’re always there before the throne and that’s where we are again. In the throne room where constant praise is heard. Praise the Lord all you servants – every one of you. Small, big, important, always behind the scenes, the ones who got the glory the ones no one ever knew about. Great and small, servants all of them, God-fearing men and women – that’s who begins to lift their voice in praise. They’d been redeemed so they were all recruited to be part of the choir – part of the multitude that is always worshipping the One who sits on the Throne and the Lamb. Because as I say quite

often – either God’s worthy or He’s not. And if He’s worthy of our praise then let’s praise. So the people did.

4. Hallelujah! The wedding has begun

“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 to her to wear.’ (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)”

Revelation 19:6-8

The sounds of heaven fill the space – rushing water, thunder – all an indication that God’s glory is arriving. The praise has already begun around the throne. Everyone is praising God because He’s worthy. He reigns! They’re rejoicing. Giving God all the glory because He’s been faithful – He’s been true to His word. His dealings with His people have been just. He’s banished evil – no more exile ever again. And, then someone says the wedding is about to start and the multitude realizes all of this has just been the opening act.

Then, in the Sarah version, not the NIV, someone yells, Let’s get this party started. The bride’s here and the groom has been waiting a long time.

Look at this bride. She’s the opposite of the woman in Babylon. The prostitute of Babylon was clothed in fine linen of purple and scarlet – she was glittery – I’ve always secretly believed glitter is from the devil and there it was in Revelation 18 all along. But the bride is dressed in linen that is bright and clean. She stands in stark contrast. The prostitute arrives on a scarlet beast covered in blasphemous names that had seven heads and 10 horns. But the bride has arrived to the sound of a multitude of voices raised in song, accompanied by thunder and rushing water and she is there to meet the Lamb – the real Lamb who died for her. The beast, we’re told in chapter 17:8 once was, now is not, and yet will come. But, the Lamb well, He was, and Is, and Is to come. He is the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Before the beast – there was the Lamb, and after the beast – the Lamb will still be standing. The prostitute is dressed up to hide her filth. The bride was given her clothes by the Lamb and her clothes didn’t just cover over her sin they washed it. She’s dressed in white made so by the blood of the Lamb. The prostitute’s sins are piled up to heaven and God has remembered her crimes. But the Lamb was slain to

purchase the bride from sin and the bride's sins have been removed and remembered no more.

Truly, there is no comparison between the prostitute of Babylon and her beast and the bride of Christ and her Lamb.

All of history, from the Garden of Eden, to the people rescued out of Egypt, through the exile to the first Babylon, through the waiting for the Messiah, and all the way until now and our current moment of longing for Christ's second appearing – we've all been waiting for this wedding. It's truly the wedding of all time. It's the moment where all of our hopes are realized, our joys are made complete, and our real life begins.

The bride was given her wedding clothes by the Lamb but she made herself ready by keeping herself pure for this moment, by living according to the word of God, by keeping her eyes on the Lamb and not getting distracted by all that Babylon tried to offer.

Who is this bride? We are – the church is – we have to make sure we're ready. This morning 7 people said – we're gonna make sure we're ready. We're committing to love Jesus for our whole lives. We've been baptized into His family – we've been washed clean and given new clothes to wear. We've been forgiven and made righteous not because of what we have done but by the work of Jesus, but we still have to live in such a way that we prepare ourselves for that final moment.

And, then, not only are we, the church, the bride at the wedding, but we're also the guests.

“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.’” Revelation

19:9 We've been invited to the greatest wedding of all time. There's never been a wedding like this before and there will never be one like it again.

There's **Two things you need to know about the wedding:**

1. You have to RSVP.

You have to accept the invitation to attend by letting Jesus cleanse you of your sins.

If you haven't done that you can do it today. Or maybe you've prayed that before and you let Him give you those clean robes to wear but you've not been making yourself ready. You need to get some things right. You can do that today.

2. You're the wedding singer.

We'll be singing a chorus of Hallelujahs! So, let's raise a Hallelujah this morning as a warm up. Would you stand with me? These CAGY students are going to lead us in a moment of worship as we close.