

Text: Revelation 19:1-9. Saints Triumphant Sunday. **November 16, 2014.**

God's grace is given to you. You are his triumphant saints. Amen.

What do you think heaven will be like? Maybe a better question would be, "Do you even think about heaven?" I wake up and my first thought is, "Already? I didn't sleep enough." My next thought is, "I'm late. Never going to make the bus on time. You can't find your shoes again? Hope I hit the lights on green." Then my thoughts are, "Another long meeting. Another boring class. Why is everyone so backstabbing? Why do they laugh at me? Well, glad that's over. Now I can relax, well, after taking the kids to soccer and after making supper and after taking care of a few emails and after. It's what time already? That will have to wait until tomorrow." Whew! Who has time to think about heaven?

But wouldn't life have more meaning if we thought about heaven more often? What if you woke up and said, "This is the day the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad in it"? Because in heaven, I'm going to be rejoicing every day, why not start now? What if you saw your job as a way to work hard on earth for the God you are going to serve forever in heaven? What if you saw those friends, even the mean ones, as precious souls for whom our Savior Jesus died, precious souls who need to hear about Jesus, precious souls who just might be spending eternity with you in heaven? What if your children were not a bunch of lazy leeches who just need a chauffeur and a checkbook, but who need you to show them the love of Jesus, who will show us perfect love forever in heaven? I realize that's a lofty and possibly unrealistic view of things in life, but wouldn't your life be better? Wouldn't life have more meaning if you connected every day with heaven, connected every person in your life to heaven? And finally stopped to think more often, "What will heaven be like?"

We get an amazing, awesome, Wow! Big picture of heaven. Try to see it with me. A great multitude. Hear it with me. A roar. A shout. Rushing waters. Loud peals of thunder. Shouting. Praising. Rejoicing. Hallelujah! Amen! Hallelujah! Praise our God. Hallelujah! Our Lord God almighty reigns! Let us rejoice and be glad! Hallelujah! If you've ever heard the Hallelujah chorus sung, by trained singers, in a huge group, maybe you can picture a little of what heaven is like. Maybe you are hearing that song now even as I'm talking. Hallelujah comes from the Hebrew language. It means, "Praise the Lord." Same word as Alleluia. This is the only place this word is used in the whole New Testament. The only place, a word of praise reserved for heaven we get to sing on earth! Singing hallelujah is awesome! Heaven will be awesome! The singing will be out of this world. This praise will be directed to God. Salvation and glory and power. Three times praise for Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is seated on a throne. He sits because his work is done. Sin is forgiven. The devil is defeated. He has a place fit for a king. He reigns. Kings have absolute power. There are no checks and balances. You don't vote for kings. The king's word goes. That's God. He's almighty. He reigns. That's what heaven will be like. Wow!

But now look at the details. Did you notice what this great multitude, in heaven, is praising God for? His judgments! His judgments? He has condemned the great prostitute. This is called Babylon in an earlier chapter and stands for those governments that oppose God and his word. The government at the time was the Roman government that threw Christians to the lions just for fun, and just because they were Christians. The Roman government also burned down the capitol city and blamed it on the Christians. Maybe our government isn't so bad in comparison. But stop and notice! They, the great crowd in heaven, is praising God for his judgments, his condemnations, his revenge, the eternal smoke and fire that rises from hell, the real place to which God has assigned his enemies their eternal judgment of eternal fire.

Wait! That's why they are praising God? Wait! That's not my God! My God doesn't send people to hell. My God takes good people to heaven. My God doesn't condemn. My God saves. My God doesn't hate. My God loves. When I get to heaven, I'm going to praise God for his love, not his judgments. Is that really what you think? Then maybe you had better think again! Maybe you had better realize that hell is real. God sends real people there. Real people who oppose God will be in a real hell. And real people in heaven will be praising God for sending God's enemies to hell.

We will be praising God because God has defeated his enemies. God nailed sin to his cross. And forgave it. God beat the devil down with an empty tomb. That empty tomb praises God. That empty tomb says, "Salvation, rescue from our sins, belongs to God! Glory belongs to God because he saved us from that terrible hell and brought us to this awesome heaven! Power belongs to God, because only he can spare us from the fires and bring us into fellowship with the Son he loves." God has defeated his enemies. That's what heaven is like! You are a winner! That's what heaven is like. You are a triumphant, holy person. That's what heaven is like. You win! You get to be with God. That's what heaven is like!

This is really a difficult topic to have taken on. To try to describe what heaven is like, the glory, the grandeur, the perfection, the crowds, the praise, being with God. There aren't words to describe it. Try thinking about it too long and your head starts to hurt and your mind pushes back, "I can't imagine perfection. I can't picture holiness." I know all words fail and all comparisons limp. But God gives us more details to help us, to aid us, to try to get us thinking about and picturing, "What will heaven be like?"

Imagine 24 elders bowing down in worship. This is repeated several times in Revelation. Have to explain a little about the numbers in Revelation. They aren't literal, but symbolic. 12 is the number for the Church, those people who believe in Jesus. So 24 is double that number, probably to refer to 12 tribes of Israel in the Old Testament and 12 apostles in the New Testament, so all God's people of all time, fall down in worship to God. How often have you fallen down in worship? Been on your knees, on purpose? Maybe it would be good if we did that more often, to remember what heaven will be like. There are four living creatures. Four is the number of the earth. Notice these are living creatures, not people, so these four don't stand for people but for all living creatures, all things on earth, all creation. Not saying that all gorillas and dogs and trees will be in heaven, but all God's creation was created holy and good and all of it suffers the effects of sin and all of God's creation will be freed from that suffering. I know it's a lot to take in, but that's what heaven will be like.

Then a voice comes from the throne, where God himself is seated. At first I thought this is the voice of God. That would be cool. But later on, John, the man to whom these revelations were given, tries to worship the one who speaks. And he is quickly warned, "Don't worship me! Worship God!" So the voice is not God or Jesus. The voice is one of God's messengers, one of God's angels. And this voice says, "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him or believe in him, both great and small!" What would it be like to hear the voice of an angel, coming from God's throne? That's what heaven will be like.

Let's also take note of all that is given, given, to us in heaven, ok? Heaven is not based on our works, but on God's gifts. There are some phrases that could be misleading here. His bride has made herself ready. Righteous acts of the saints. Those who are invited. Each of these phrases emphasizes God's grace, God's giving. The bride's works are not the focus here. Fine linen was given to her. Given. Given. It's the first word in the sentence of the original language. Given receives the most emphasis. The bride is given the wedding gown. It's a free gift. What bride wouldn't like that? Well, the whole thing is given freely, without cost, but we'll get to that. The fine linen is given. That helps us understand what fine linen stands for. Most translations say, "The righteous acts of the saints." Ok. We could understand that correctly. That God gives us a righteous standing with him and we respond by doing good works out of love for God. But that's not how this word is usually used. That's not usually the picture with fine linen and bright and clean clothing. Our righteous acts are filthy rags, not fine linen. Bright and clean clothing is a gift from God, not our works for him. It's better to understand the fine linen as the verdict of righteousness God's holy people receive. Fine linen stands for the not guilty verdicts pronounced on the saints. You are not guilty. And you are not guilty. And you are not guilty. That's your fine linen. That's how God made you ready.

You see, the bride's making herself ready is not the focus here in heaven. The groom's love is. The wedding of the Lamb has come. The lamb is Jesus. The groom is Jesus. The wedding feast is hosted by Jesus. And this wedding ain't no potluck. The best of meats and finest of wines. Meat without money. Wine without cost. Weddings at that time lasted a week, a free week of eating and drinking, totally at the host's expense. If you received an invitation to a wedding, it was totally rude to check the box, "Sorry, but we can't attend." You just didn't do that. And who would do that? Who would turn down a week long banquet of free food and drink and fun? Well, maybe I can't afford the time off. And maybe it's too far to travel and maybe I don't know them all that well, so who am I going to talk to and it's just going to be a boring week of sitting around with people I really don't know. No one thought that. The invitation was a gift of grace. Blessed are those who are invited. That's an invitation of grace. That's us. We are the blessed ones. We are the ones invited. We don't take credit for accepting the invitation. We praise God for giving the invitation. We praise God for giving his grace. That's what heaven will be like.

And maybe that all sounds too good to be true. A free party, forever? Free new clothes, forever? Hearing heavenly Hallelujahs, forever? Being declared not guilty, forever? That's why God made sure to say, "Write this! These are the true words of God." It's not too good to be true. It's true. So when you wake up, don't think how tired you are. Think of perfect rest in heaven. That's what heaven will be like. When you are losing your job and losing your friends and feel lost in a new place, remember you are a winner. These are the true words of God. When you feel all alone because your spouse has died, you are older than everyone else, no one will hang out with you at school. Remember Jesus is always with you. Being with Jesus! That's what heaven will be like. Amen.