

## Let's Be Remembered For Our Halleluiahs!

An article recently popped up on my newsfeed that was entitled “**Woman ‘parties’ at her own funeral.**” Of course I had to click on that. The article was about this 53-year-old woman who had passed away, and her family decided to do something unique at her funeral. Instead of placing her body laying down in a casket, they had her sitting up at a table in front of everyone. On the table was a book of crossword puzzles. In her left hand was a cigarette. In her right hand was a glass of red wine, which was right next to a can of Busch beer. And all around her was her living room furniture. What everyone remembered about this woman was that she loved sitting in her living room smoking, drinking, and doing crossword puzzles. So that’s what they wanted everyone to remember at her funeral.

Now that might seem strange and maybe a bit morbid to you, but it’s really not all that surprising. Funerals, these days, are getting very creative. Some funeral homes work with families to provide a central theme for their loved one’s funerals. Usually the question asked is, “How do you want your loved one to be remembered?” Sometimes, it amazes me what people think is important. What people want to be remembered by.

Now, I’m guessing most of you would rather not have your family prop you up at your wake. But I think this is still a legitimate question to ask: What will everyone remember about you most when they set up your funeral? Will it be everything you loved on this earth? Your sports memorabilia, your hobbies, the fact that you were a veteran, your likeable personality, your athletic ability, or simply all the good things you did for your friends and family? Will they remember those things.....or, will they remember without a doubt, that your greatest focus and goal in *this* life, was to sing “Halleluiah’s” in the *next*?

In our Gospel we read this morning, the parable of the 10 virgins, the five virgins who get left outside of the wedding feast knew the groom, knew he was coming, and knew the wedding was about to happen. They just chose to focus on something other than him for a little bit. Thought it would be harmless. And as with all of Jesus’ parables, this story has a heavenly meaning. In other words, some who know Jesus today will get distracted, maybe because they want to be remembered by other things, and won’t end up in heaven because of it. For some, their life on earth really will be the only thing worth celebrating in the end, which is pretty sad when we remember how often life on earth resembles nothing close to heaven. Christians, maybe some of you have lost loved ones like that. But as difficult as that is to think about, it cannot take away from the promise YOU have, described by John this morning.

In the text we just read, you probably heard the word “Halleluiah” a number of times. Do you know what the word “Halleluiah” means? “Praise the Lord.” I would guess that by now most of you have realized that “Hallelujahs” are sometimes pretty rare in this world. But did you know that they’re also rare in the New Testament? The word “Hallelujah” comes up only four times in the entire New Testament. And all four of those times are in the book of Revelation, and all four are in the 9 verses of this text.

For the Apostle John, life was often like ours –so full of struggles that hallelujahs were a rare sound. But that’s why God gave John the vision he wrote down in the book of Revelation. He gave John a glimpse into what’s going on behind the haze of sorrow and pain that so often clouds our vision. In chapter 19, God showed John a glimpse of heaven, a glimpse of those who live in it, and the reasons why the losses and sorrows of this world don’t have to muffle the hallelujahs that come from his children. He starts out like 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,<sup>2</sup> for true and just are his judgments.***

I remember the first professional football game I went to with my dad. It was the Green Bay Packers against the Oakland Raiders. The home team was down by 4 with about two minutes to go. They drove the length of the field and Brett Favre threw a game winning touchdown pass with about 10 seconds on the clock. I still remember the victorious roar of that crowd that sent tingles down your spine as it felt like the whole stadium was shaking. That picture of a victorious roar in a packed stadium is obviously a small sample of the picture John uses to

describe heaven after Jesus has defeated sin death and the devil once and for all. ***“the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting [a victorious] ‘hallelujah! Salvation, glory, power, belong to our God.’”***

I want to just focus for a moment on those three words John attributes to God and what they mean for his saints: **Salvation, glory and power.** ***“Salvation”*** meant these saints were confident it was all going to end well for them. ***“Glory”*** meant that victory was theirs, it was completed, and the shout of ***“power”*** was the shout of someone who believed nothing could stop them because of their God. Confident. Victorious. Powerful. How often do you actually feel all three of those things at the exact same moment during your life? John describes the roar of a halleluiahs we don’t always feel like making on earth. The reason John heard it, is because he was looking at heaven. And right now, we’re not.

When things are going well, when our perception of life is good, it’s pretty easy to say “Praise the Lord,” isn’t it? But what comes out when they aren’t? What happens when the cards *don’t* fall our way? When you lose your job and you have no idea how you’ll support your family, is “Halleluiahs” the first word that comes from your mouth? When a stroke takes your ability to function like everyone else around you, is “Praise God from whom all blessings flow,” the hymn you sing every night as you need help getting into bed? When it seems like you lose and lose and lose some more, God’s judgments don’t seem ***true and just*** do they? In fact they can sometimes seem downright unfair. But Christians, when we only focus on our pain and our losses, we fail to see our God and the victory he *has* won for us.

On the night when Jesus was betrayed, when he knew his disciples would see and feel some of this world’s most profound pain, do you remember the words he used to comfort them? He didn’t focus on their pain, he said ***“Do not let your hearts be troubled. In my Father’s house are many rooms; I am going there to prepare a place for you.”*** He lifted their eyes from the troubles of earth to the beauty of heaven. To the beauty of what was promised, rather than the reality they were about to experience. John is doing the same here in what follows. He’s giving us a reason to say “halleluiahs” despite all our excuses not to. And again, he tells us why. It’s Jesus’ victory!

***He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants. <sup>3</sup> And again they shouted: “Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.”***

In ancient times, when a battle was won, the city of the enemy would often be burned to the ground. The smoke from that city would go up in the air where it could be seen from miles away, announcing the victory to all. In the same sense, the enemies of the gospel, the evil in this world caused by sin, those things which cause tears of sorrow to flow from our eyes, will be defeated once and for all. And on the last day, the smoke from that victory will go up forever and ever for all to see, believers and unbelievers. Jesus’ victory, our victory, will have no end.

But again, what you need to remember about this text, is that John’s vision shows us life in heaven, not the reality of earth. And the reality of earth is that the devil still prowls around your life like a roaring lion looking to devour all the things that God considers most important. And if you were Satan, and you knew that God had prepared for every person who hurts a heaven where the hallelujahs never stop coming; a place where every resident feels powerful, victorious, and confident; and a home where there is no more death or crying or pain, and where every last tear is wiped away, if you were Satan, where would you try to direct our attention? What would you want us to crave and remember more than anything –the eternal satisfaction of heaven, or the temporary things we feel and experience here on this earth?

Do you know why people remember Christians differently than everyone else? It’s the way you respond. It’s the way you look beyond the things of this life, to the next. It’s the perseverance described in James that they see in you when you have to deal with a lifetime of chronic pain. It’s the calm you show in a hospital room when a diagnosis of terminal cancer is given. It’s the hopefulness and joy that could be seen in tear-filled eyes of the four families who’s loved ones went to be with Jesus this past year. Saints whose names we’ll read off after this sermon. It’s the halleluiahs you sing, not because your life on earth is so much more wonderful, comfortable, and painless than everyone else’s. But because you know you are ***“blessed.”***

In verse nine, that's what John calls you. And to be blessed means to be spiritually happy. Notice John didn't say, ***"Blessed are those whose lives on earth are wonderful and enjoyable."*** He said, ***"Blessed are those who have been invited to the wedding."*** And you have. Your little name card was set by your seat in that banquet hall on the day you were forgiven. You were ***"made ready"*** the day you were baptized. Your invitation was a blood-stained cross where the Lamb wore nothing but our sin so that our hearts could this very moment wear what John calls the ***"fine linen"*** of his perfection, the promise from God that every good thing you long for on earth is already waiting for you in heaven. And do you know why you can trust that? Because as John says, ***"These are the true words of God."***

Brothers and sisters, how do you want to be remembered? There may be a lot of good things people will remember you for on this earth. But when that day comes that your children and grandchildren, your brothers and sisters, your fellow believers here, lay your body in its final resting place. May they remember you as someone who through all your pain, all your disappointment, all your heartache and loss, still sang "Halleluiah," for all your life through, you knew how truly blessed you were to be able to confidently sing, ***"Lord when your glory I shall see, and taste your kingdom's pleasure, your blood my royal robe shall be, My joy beyond all measure!"***

What makes you saints triumphant today, tomorrow, and every day until the Lord calls you home, is your ability to say "Halleluiah," through it all. Because you know that one day, and one day very soon, ***you will stand, in joy, beside Him.***