

# Revelation 19:1-8

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Date: 20 October 2013

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[ 0 : 00 ] As we start, let me read you the first eight verses of Revelation 19. John says, Amen. Hallelujah.

And from the throne came a voice saying, Praise our God, all you his saints, you who fear him small and great. And I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters, and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, Hallelujah, for the Lord our God, the Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and exult, and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made us up ready. It was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

Well, what you've got there is the famous Hallelujah chorus, isn't it? You've heard it, you've heard the Messiah at all. It's the only place in the New Testament where the word Hallelujah is to be found, I think.

In the Old Testament, there's a lot of Halleluias, but I think it's the only place in the New Testament. And we will come back next week. But they help us see the contrast with what Graham read in chapter 18.

[ 1 : 34 ] Did you notice the alases in chapter 18? You know another version. I think they're rightly translated woes. But look at verse 10 of chapter 18.

Alas, alas. Verse 16. Alas, alas. Verse 19. Alas, alas. It's a lament. It's woe. Babylon the great is fallen.

But in chapter 19, it's completely different, isn't it? It means praise the Lord, Hallelujah. So here you've got these two chapters side by side. They go together. As I've said, the word Hallelujah means to praise the Lord.

So that's what chapter 19 is about. What is all this shouting and singing about in these two chapters? What is the Hallelujah chorus about? Well, it's about a wedding and a funeral.

That's what you've got. The funeral of the world in chapter 18. And you've got the wedding of the Lamb in chapter 19. And that is what we look at. And they happen simultaneously.

[ 2 : 36 ] Matthew Henry was the one who said, The church will survive the world and be in bliss when the world is in ruins. The church will survive the world and be in bliss when the world is in ruins.

And that is what you see here. You can picture it, can't you? Try and use your imagination and see what's happening. Look to the distance. Look to the horizon of what you see. There's smoke on the far horizon.

Chapter 19, verse 3. Hallelujah. The smoke from her goes up forever and ever. And it's not the smoke of industry.

This place in South Wales, you drive around the M4, you come around the corner after the end, and you see poor Talbot. Poor Talbot is this industrial armpit of the earth, really. And there's always a haze there.

Have you ever been there? There's always the smoke of industry. It's not the smoke of one of our great cities. It's not the smoke of life. No.

[ 3 : 37 ] Verse 3 of chapter 19, it is the smoke of a funeral pile. It is the smoke of destruction and ruin. Babylon the Great is fallen.

She's collapsed. It's the end of the world as we know it. This world's great city, in which and for which people have lived and died. And it's now nothing more than a smouldering heap of ruins on the farthest horizon.

That is the picture. There's nothing left of her. Once she dominated the landscape, but no more. In fact, one of the things, I don't know whether you picked it up, green, red it so well, didn't you?

Chapter 18. There's six times in the last four verses, you find the phrase, no more, no more, no more, no more.

Or never again. Never again. Never again. Have you ever had the experience, maybe you've been bumped up on an airplane, or you've gone for a higher car and you've managed to get an upgrade, and you say to yourself, don't you, I can get used to this.

I can get used to this. Well, I think what this chapter is telling you, chapter 18, is don't bother to get used to it, because it's not going to last. There's not much point in getting used to it. Because the world is passing away, and everything in it.

[ 4 : 52 ] So in the foreground, the centrepiece of what we're seeing, is that there's a wedding going on. There's a wedding of the Lamb. According to verse 6-8 of chapter 19.

But on the far distance, in the background of the wedding, there's a funeral, and that's where we're going to go through tonight. The funeral of the world. And if I was to ask you, where would you rather go, to a funeral or a wedding?

Well, the answer's obvious. Have you ever wondered, where is this world going? Where is history going? Where is it all going to end up? Well, the answer is here. Human history is going to end up going down the aisle, to the wedding of the Lamb.

This is the day that the whole of creation has been waiting for. It's craning its neck. Do you remember how Paul puts it? Like the inanimate creation. It's sort of standing on tiptoes, craning its neck.

You know, people do that at weddings, don't they? They wait outside, don't they? Those who are not invited. They wait outside, the big crown, so they see the bride getting out of the car, and they crane their neck. They look for the bride.

[ 5 : 56 ] What's she going to look like? And Paul pictures all of creation like that, craning its neck, standing on tiptoe. What is she going to look like? This is the day that Eve was made for.

It's the day that Adam was made for. It's the day which is going to be the culmination of all of history. It's the wedding of the Lamb. But while the church has its wedding, the world has its funeral. The Lamb has its wedding, but the world has its funeral. And that is what these chapters are here for. It's pretty simple, actually. There's a lot of details that are difficult to understand. But the main idea is very simple.

Chapter 18, a funeral. Chapter 19, a wedding. And so you and I are either going to a funeral or a wedding. And we'd better sort out which it's going to be. Am I going to be part of the wedding of the Lamb?

I hope so. Or will I be part of the funeral of the world? All we've got time for tonight is the funeral. I'm a little bit unhappy about. Kind of cutting the symbol in half.

[ 6 : 57 ] I don't really like leaving it with the negative. I want to try and get to, if we can, get to the positive. And chapter 19 is so gloriously positive. I'll try and inject some of that into the sermon.

So let's see the funeral of the world. And you notice it is announced to us with loud voices. John here announces the end of the world. Look at verse 1 of chapter 18.

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright in his glory, and it crawled out with a mighty voice. Fallen, fallen. It's Babylon the Great. I don't know if you've ever wondered about the end of the world. How will it happen? What will it be like? Yesterday got really dark in the middle of the day, didn't it?

Always makes me think, oh, is this going to be the end of the world? You know when it gets that dark, all thunder and lightning. How will it happen? What will it be like? There was a time when the only people who ever talked about the end of the world, they were kind of fringe lunatics, weren't they?

[ 8 : 00 ] So you know the cartoon, the cartoon of a man with kind of longish hair, and wild eyes, with a sandwich board, which says, on one side the end is nigh, and on the other side it says, prepare to meet thy God.

That's the kind of person that talks about the end of the world. But actually now, it's quite respectable, isn't it, to be a prophet of doom. Al Gore, do you remember him? The man who invented the internet.

He was the American vice president, and he wrote a book to do, Inconvenient Truth. You can be a politician and be a prophet of doom. You can be a scientist, an economist, an environmentalist, a TV commentator and be a prophet of doom.

You can predict the end of the earth. It's no longer the province of oddballs, preaching cranks and lunatics. People talk about it. What's it going to be like? Well, C.S. Eliot, in his poem, The Hollow Man, he imagines it like this.

This is how the world ends, he says. This is how the world ends, not with a bang, but with a whimper. And he's right, you know. That is how the world is going to end.

[ 9 : 12 ] Let's look at this chapter, and let's listen to these voices, these loud voices, and that's in the end of the world. John hears four voices. Verses one to three is the voice of condemnation.

The voice of condemnation. And he called out with a mighty voice, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great. She's become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.

For all nations have drunk the wine of a passion about sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with him. And the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of a luxurious living.

Notice, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great. That is what the language experts tell us is the prophetic past tense. The prophetic past tense.

So it's so certain that God speaks of it as though it's already happened. So do you remember in Romans 8, Paul says, those whom he has justified, he sanctifies.

[ 10 : 16 ] And those whom he sanctifies, he also glorifies. As if it's already happened. But it hasn't happened to us already yet, does it? We're not glorified. But it's so certain that Paul speaks about it as if it's already happened.

The prophetic past tense. And that is what you've got here. Babylon. We're living in Babylon. It's very real and intimidating. It looks so permanent. But as far as God is concerned, it is God.

It is so certain, he speaks about it like it's already happened. Four of them is Babylon the great. And of course, it's an illusion, isn't it?

It's making you think back to the Old Testament. To the history of God's people. We've said again and again, to understand Revelation, you've got to read the Old Testament. All the clues, all the symbolism, all the imagery are there for the Old Testament.

And this is an illusion to the history of God's people. Because once God's people were taken out of Israel into exile in Babylon. They'd been taken into Babylon, into exile because of their sins, because of their own ideology.

[ 11 : 23 ] And God warned them. God warned them about what happened and they didn't listen to the prophets. And God took them away from the promised land and into a strange land, into exile, into Babylon.

Babylon is equivalent in the US today. It's the dominant world power. Nebuchadnezzar was the most powerful man in the world. And God's people were brought into captivity, into exile.

And so it must have seemed, didn't it, like an eternity for God's people. So long that some of God's people actually settled down in Babylon and they forgot entirely about Jerusalem.

So that eventually, when it became possible for God's people to return back to God's land, lots of them didn't want to return. Because they'd done pretty well for themselves in Babylon. So they stayed in Babylon.

And yet overnight, you remember what happened, God turned the captivity of his people around. And overnight, Babylon became a ruin, a house of jackals, a horde of wild animals.

[ 12 : 27 ] And Babylon became a smouldering ruin, never to be rebuilt. And the same will happen to New York, to London, to Paris, to Beijing, to Tokyo.

Every city in our modern world when the writing is on the wall. We know, don't we, I think, in the last 10 to 15 years how civilization is a very, very fragile thing indeed.

Collective strike or a power blackout and the whole veneer of our civilization will begin to crash and to crack. Do you remember 9-11?

The plates hit those twin towers, great symbols of man's strength. And within an hour they were just smoking rubble where they had dust. In Manhattan, in New York, civilization is very, very fragile.

Nowhere are we very, very far from what you read in these verses. Babylon, this symbol of crazed, power crazed, worldliness is doomed for destruction. That's the first voice and it's a voice of

condemnation.

[13:38] Here's the second voice in verses 4 and 5 which is a voice of warning. Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues.

For her sins are he ties to heaven and God has remembered her iniquities. It's a voice of warning. A voice of condemnation, a voice of warning. To us, God's people and it is warning you and I to come out of Babylon.

Now how do you do that? How are God's people to come out of the world? And that is something which is not easy, something which has perplexed the church down through the centuries and as you look at the history of the church it veers from one side to the other very often.

And people have come up with all sorts of strange answers to that question. So what does it mean to come out of the world, to come out of Babylon? Charles Dutton was a successful Broadway star. I don't know if you know him, I knew him until I found this interesting. He starred in a number of Broadway musicals and he had numerous soap opera parts in the US and a few films. But at the age of 17, Charles Dutton killed someone.

[14:47] He was committed to prison for manslaughter and a lengthy sentence. He spent many years in prison. And when somebody asked him later in an interview in life, how did you manage to make the remarkable transition from jailbird to songbird?

This is what he said. Unlike the other prisoners, I never decorated my cell. Unlike the other prisoners, I never decorated my cell.

Think about that for a minute. Unlike the other prisoners, I never decorated my cell. What is he saying by saying that? He's saying that he resolved to never regard that cell as home.

It was where he was. It was where he deserved to be because of his crime. No, he's not clearing that. It was where he lived for many years of his life, but it wasn't where he belonged.

You see, and that is what this voice from heaven is saying to us. That is what it's calling us to do.

That is what it means to come out of Babylon, to come out of the world in one sense. Of course, you can't possibly do that, can you, in one sense?

[15:51] This world is where we are. You've got to learn a cross. If you haven't retired or made your fortune, you've got to go Monday to Friday, earn a living. You can't come out of the world in that sense.

The world is where we live. Just as Babylon was where Daniel lived, but it's not where we belong. So don't decorate the walls. That was the message of the prophets in exile at Babylon.

Babylon might be where you are, but it's not where you belong. And that is what Daniel was saying when he made that remarkable statement on Adairius the meet. Remember, Adairius has proclaimed that everyone had to worship the emperor.

They put us on a statue or a pole, and when the trumpet sounded, they all had to bow down and worship the emperor. What did Daniel do? Well, Daniel went to his house there on the main street, and he opened his windows onto the street, and three times a day he prayed towards Jerusalem. What was he doing? Parading his piety? I don't think so. He was drawing a line in the sand, wasn't he? He was making a public statement. I may be in Babylon, but I belong in Jerusalem.

[17:01] You see, the inner core of Daniel's being was dictated to not by the valleys of Babylon, but by the valleys of the city of God. And that is what John is teaching you in this passage.

You and I, we are in this world. No escaping that, but we are not of this world. We are looking for a better world. We are looking for a better country. We are looking for a heavenly country.

The writer says in the Hebrews, we are looking for a city with foundations whose builder and maker is God. Not this fly-by city we live in now. Not this fly-by-night civilization that if we, well, if we huff and we puff, we can blow it down.

At least God can if he wants to. It's just a house of cards, isn't it? And John is saying we are looking for a city with foundations. We are looking for a society, for a civilization that will not last for a couple of decades, not even for a couple of hundred years, but forever.

That's what we are looking for. Who can build a city like that? Who can bring about a civilization like that? Which will last forever. Well, only God can do that, can't he?

[18:14] And that is what we are looking for. We might live here, but we don't belong here. We are looking for a city whose builder and maker is God. A city of foundation. And that is where the book of Revelation is heading, isn't it?

We will gather before Christmas, Revelation 21 and 22. It is where it is the exciting climax of Revelation. When this city comes down from heaven, from God the heavenly Jerusalem. The third voice that John hears is the voice of lamentation. The voice of lamentation, lamenting. It is what you would expect at a funeral. But I want you to notice who the principal mourners are at this funeral.

Look at verse 9, it is the kings of the earth. Do you see them there? Look at verse 11, it is the merchants of the earth. Verse 17, the travelers of the earth.

The jet setters of their age, the globetrotters, verse 17. They are all there at this funeral. Listen to them. The kings of the earth, verse 9 and 10, the power brokers, the gatekeepers, those in power who have often abused that power to feather their own nests, to further their own ends.

[ 19 : 24 ] Listen to them now in verses 9 and 10. And the kings of the earth who have committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning. They will stand the fire off in fear of her children and say, alas, alas, you great city, you mighty city, Babylon, for in a single hour your judgment has come.

Then there are the merchants out there, verse 11, and the traders and the business community, the city, the entrepreneurs who have plundered the earth's resources, who have exploited the world's population in pursuit of wealth and pleasure.

Look at verse 13. They're all there. Verse 13, you've just described commerce and trade. There's nothing wrong with those things at all, necessarily.

But look at the end of verse 13. Do you see who these people trade in? So at the start, they trade in cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle, sheep, horses, chariots, slaves.

That is human souls. The bodies and souls of men. How relevant is that? How contemporary is that?

[ 20 : 39 ] Quite often when I'm speaking or preaching, someone's phone goes off. Does it? Oh, I was only going to have last Sunday. Sometimes it's my phone that goes off. But it's an eloquent reminder, isn't it, of the ball and chain that we carry in our pockets.

That we're the beck and core of these wretched mobile phones. Or our boss, or whoever it is at the end of the mobile phone. People become the property, don't they, of the company, if you're friends like that.

The company owns them, dictates to them how they're going to spend their time and spend their holidays. Listen to these merchants who've traded in the bodies and souls of human beings. Listen to them at this funeral in verse 15.

The merchants of these wares who've gained wealth from her will stand afar off in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud. Alas, alas, for the great city that was clothed in fine linen in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels and with pearls.

For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste. Now there are the jet setters, aren't there? The world travellers, the globetrotters, verse 17 and following.

[ 21 : 45 ] Those for whom the world has become a kind of global village. And all shipmasters, second after verse 17, and seafaring men, sailors, and all those who were traders on the seas stood far off and they cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning.

What city was like that of the great city? The thief dressed on their heads, they wept and they mourned crying out, alas, alas, for the great city where all the ships at sea grew rich by her wealth for in a single hour she's been laid waste.

They are sorry. All of these people are sorry. They are sorry. But they're not sorry for the world, they're sorry for themselves.

They're sorry to see it go. It's crocodile tears. These are not tears of repentance in Revelation 18. If they were tears of repentance there would be some hope.

In this chapter these are not tears of repentance. These people are not sorry for the world, they're just sorry it's over. They're not sorry for their sins, they're just sorry they don't have the chance to go on sinning any longer.

[ 22 : 49 ] It's over. And in one hour they've lost it all, they've lost everything. Power, influence, the luxurious lifestyle, wealth, status, position and pleasure, it's all gone.

It's all gone. Muhammad Ali, three times heavyweight champion in the world, floated like a butterfly, stung like a bee, I'm the greatest, Muhammad Ali.

His face was on the cover of well his face has been on the cover of Sports Illustrated more than any other sportsman. He was really well and the greatest wasn't he? If not the greatest.

Now of course he's got Parkinson's, they bring him out don't they on special occasions. Gary Smith is a sports writer and he visited a few years back and Ali showed him where he lives or on the farm where he lives and the bar next to the farmhouse used to be Ali's gym and Ali showed him around and they went into the bar and on the floor against the wall were mementos of Ali in his prime. Photos, portraits of the champ, shadow boxing, punching the air, dancing, the way he used to dance, his sculpted body punching the air, the championship belt held in triumph after a fight, captions like the thriller in Manila, all these sorts of things.

[ 24 : 13 ] But as they were there standing at the gym or the shed, the reporter Gary Smith noticed that all those pictures had white streaks over them. Bird droppers.

And as they looked up into the rafters of Ali's former gym, there were pigeons. He didn't use the gym for many years. Ali shuffled across the floor and did something very unusual.

He went round and he walked over to the row of pictures and one by one he turned them all to face the wall. And then he walked to the door and as he went to the door he mumbled something which at first the reporter didn't quite pick up and he asked him to repeat himself which he did.

Ali said, I had the world but it was nothing. Look now. Look now. I had the world but it was nothing. Look now.

Look now. So if you're tempted to envy someone like that or if you lie awake thinking, if only I had a better chance in life or if only I had made that mistake, don't do it because it's not worth it.

[ 25 : 20 ] It's going. It'll all be gone. And all those glittering prizes that people sell their souls for, it's only for a moment and then it's gone.

A voice of condemnation, a voice of warning, a voice of lamentation and then fourthly, a voice of celebration. Look at verse 20. Look at verse 20.

Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets for God has given judgment for you against her.

While the world is weeping, the church is whooping it out. And that takes us into chapter 19 next week. Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets for God has given judgment for you against her.

It's not that we're being encouraged to rejoice in some kind of vindictive way. It's not that we're being encouraged to gloat over the demise of men and women and institutions.

[ 26 : 26 ] That is not the point. The point is simply this. We are to rejoice. It's almost like a sigh of relief because in the end justice will be done. And that is something to rejoice about.

Don't you long for the day when justice will be done in your workplace? Some of your work lists are a nightmare. All the politics of the office, the frustration, the backbiting, the dysfunctional relationships, when a day will come when the Babylon will fall and there will be a new creation. And you won't have to struggle with this world order anymore. And this world's way of thinking, this world in rebellion against God will be over. Don't you long for that? It's not that the cosmos is going to be finished.

It's not that there's going to be an end to singing and to art and to music and to beauty. All those things will be there. They are good things from God. I think you will still be able to enjoy the opera. I don't enjoy it now, but I hope I'll enjoy it then. There'll still be opera, but there will not be any prima donnas. Isn't that a wonderful thing? Because a prima donna is that classic example of Babylon.

[ 27 : 38 ] The world revolves around me and my talents, and my will make everybody else's life a misery if they don't recognize me, the prima donna. Well, in the new creation you will have opera without any prima donnas.

Don't be long for that. There'll be no more. And this will really be God's world, and people will relate as they were meant to relate, as they did in Eden, in paradise.

When paradise was restored, that is where the book of Revelation is taking you. Suddenly the roles are reversed, and this great city, which is so dominant in everybody's lives, is gone.

Just see it in verse 21 to 24. Verse 21 at the end will be found no more. Verse 22, in the middle of the verse, will be heard in you no more.

The bottom of the column will be found in you no more. The end of verse 22 will be found in you no more. Verse 23 will shine in you no more.

[ 28 : 42 ] Will be heard in you no more. No more, no more, no more. Let me finish with a story I think I've told you before. Somerset Maughan was probably one of the best known, most famous authors of the 20th century.

Somerset Maughan, he died when he was in his 90s, and just before he died, his nephew Robin Maughan wrote an article in the Times, describing a visit to his uncle's house on the Riviera in France.

Let me read it to you. I looked around the drawing room at the immensely valuable furniture and pictures and objects that Willie's success had enabled him to acquire. I remembered that villa itself and the wonderful garden I could see through the windows, a valuable setting on the edge of the Riviera worth millions, which had only cost him 7,000 pounds to buy.

Willie had 11 servants including his cook Annette, who was the envy of all the other millionaires on the Riviera. He died on silver plates weighted on by Marius, his butler, and Henri, his footman, but it no longer meant anything to him.

The following afternoon I found Willie reclining on a sofa, peering through his spectacles of the Bible, which had very large print. He looked horribly wizened, and his face was gripped. I'd been reading the Bible you gave me, and I'd come across a very interesting verse.

[ 30 : 00 ] What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and lose his own soul? Let me tell you, Robin, that verse used to hang on my bedroom wall when I was a child. Of course, it's a load of bunk, but the thought is quite interesting.

That evening in the drawing of Willie flung himself down on the sofa. Oh, Robin, I'm so tired. He gave a gulp and buried his head in his hands. I'd been a failure all the way through my life. I'd made mistake after mistake.

I'd made a hash of everything. I tried to comfort him. You're the most famous writer alive. Surely that must mean something. I wish I'd never written a single word. It's brought me nothing but misery.

Everyone who's got to know me well has ended up hating me. My whole life has been a failure and now it's too late to change anything. It's too late. Then he looked up apparently and his grip strengthened and he stared towards the floor and his face was contorted with fear and he trembled violently as he stared in horror ahead of him and suddenly he began to shriek, go away, go away, I'm not ready, I'm not dead yet, I'm not dead yet, I tell you.

His high-pitched terrorist voice seemed to echo from wall to wall, I looked around but the room was empty. As before, there is no one's year, will he? There is no one's year. He began to gasp hysterically, that is how the end of the world happened for Somerset morning.

[ 31 : 19 ] When we think of the end of the world, we think of some global catastrophe, don't we? And indeed it will be a global catastrophe on a scale that we can't imagine, but it's also a personal tragedy.

Imagine coming to the end of your life and realising it's too late. It fits with this morning's sermon, doesn't it? What a terrible thing. If you live for this world, as Somerset morning did, you will perish for this world.

That is what this chapter is telling us. Somebody has very wisely said, if you have him to whom all things belong, you have all things.

But if you don't have him, what have you got? Nothing. Nothing that lasts. If you have him, to whom all things belong, you have all things.

But if you don't have him, what have you got? Nothing. Nothing that lasts. Let's pray.