

# Grace Community Church, PCA

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#52 “The Security of a Righteous Judge”

Revelation 19:1-3

\*\*\*\*\*This PDF is the working manuscript that I preached from. It most likely has typos and grammatical errors since I did not write this for publication. I am posting this since I failed to turn on my microphone that morning.\*\*\*\*\*

[Call to Worship] Revelation 7:15-17 – This is what we experience in part now!

[Scripture Introduction]

I did a quick word study this week on the word worship. This surprised me, but perhaps it shouldn't have, but the word worship is used more in the book of Revelation than any other book in the Bible. Why should this not have surprised me? Revelation does present for us a picture of where all of history is moving. What is eternity future going to look like? Revelation deals with that a lot. And the picture of what lays ahead for Christians is eternal worship.

But why? Why worship Jesus? There seems to be a couple of headings for why we worship.

1) As creatures, we worship our Creator. In Revelation 4:11 we worship because God created all things, and by His will they existed.” We worship our Creator.

2) As sinners, we worship our Savior. In 11:17 we see that Jesus has taken his power and is now reigning. He has saved His people from the enemy. We worship our Savior.

3) As saints we worship our Judge. Beginning in chapter 14 we begin to see our Savior judge His enemies. And so this is the vein of worship in which we find ourselves this morning. Babylon has fallen and now God is being praised for judging her. We worship the righteous Judge.

[Scripture Reading] I read to you the whole passage a before our hymn of preparation. But let me read to you our four verses so that your attention might focus in on our specific text. Verses 1-4.

[Prayer for illumination]

[Sermon Introduction]

In Acts chapter 5, we find the story of Ananias and Sapphira. Let me give you their story in an abbreviated and modernized way.

The church in Jerusalem was a brand new church. On Pentecost, some 3000 people responded in faith to Peter's message. These people who believed were people who had travelled to Jerusalem for the Harvest Festival from all around the world. They came to celebrate the festival, heard the message of Peter, and said, "We need more teaching. We need to know more of our Jesus!" So these people stayed in Jerusalem. But the longer these people stayed, the more they began to run out of money. So the church began accepting money in order to help these new believers learn of Christ.

In this context of Christians aiding their brothers and sisters in the Lord, we have Ananias and Sapphira. They see the praise that others are getting for selling their land, and they get jealous. They want the praise of men, yet they don't want to pay for it. So they sell some of their land, give a portion of the proceeds to the apostles, and then tell the apostles, "We have given you ever penny we got from the land." The two of them made this claim to the apostles at different times. Ananias went first in the morning. He lied, died and was buried. Three hours later his wife came to the apostles and said the same thing. And she too lied, died and was buried. This event sent shockwaves through the early church.

Ananias and Sapphira were most likely upper-class, wealthy supporters of the apostles. They had made a good life for themselves, but now they were making a good name for themselves. They were infatuated by the seductions of Babylon. Money was their god, and glory was their game. And God struck them down.

Our culture has a lot in common with the culture in the days of the early church, primarily because both cultures desire to see God as we want Him to be. It's not easy to see God as a God of judgment and wrath, especially not in a culture like America where man is for the most part good and could achieve utopia if people just worked a little harder. So a God that is a God of judgment is difficult for us to talk about in America. That God doesn't fit in well here.

This is why people like to separate the God of the Old Testament from the God of the New. In the Old Testament we read about God sending in the Israelites to carry out his sentence of execution on entire populations; men, women, children, and even animals. And our culture finds this repulsive and difficult to deal with because it sees man as basically good. So the picture of a God wiping out people who are viewed as innocent (though they really aren't) is incomprehensible. It offends us. It offends our sense of justice. So people separate the God of the OT from the God of the NT.

Because in the NT we read verses like John 3:16 which teach us that God is love. "God so loved the world." And it is often told to us Jesus came to show us God's love. So the God of the NT seems to be at odds with the God of the OT. But, this story of Ananias and Sapphira throws a wrench in the whole argument that there is a different God in the OT and the NT. This story in Acts 5 shows that the same God of wrath and judgment in the OT is the same in the NT.

What appears to be just a little white lie or a little inaccuracy was a capital offense before God. Our culture has trouble with this. Our culture has trouble understanding why a good God would strike down two people who had lied about the sale price of a piece of land even though they gave some of the money to Him. Our culture wants to argue that God should overlook their lie and look at their intentions.

But isn't that the very thing that God has done? Didn't He peer into their hearts and see what their motivation was? And when God looked inside, didn't He see that their intentions were to glorify themselves? And had they been successful in glorifying themselves, they would have also been successful in stealing God's glory.

But Isaiah 42:8 says, "I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other."

We don't know the eternal state of Ananias and Sapphira. We don't know if they were true Christians or just counterfeits. We don't know much about them other than what I have just shared. But, we know this. Their attempt to glorify themselves was an attack against Christ and against His bride, the church.

What was going on was that the essence of the woman Babylon, this seductive anti-Christian culture, which was alive and well in this husband and wife, was trying to gain a foothold in the church from which she good spew her seduction. And God brought down His righteous wrath upon them.

Acts 5:11 said that a "great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things." And do you know why great fear came upon them? Because if God's judgment could fall on Ananias and Sapphira, why couldn't it fall upon them?

Bernard of Clairvaux once told the story of an old man, who, whenever he heard of some professing Christian falling into sin, would say to himself, "It happened to him today, it may happen to me tomorrow."

Paul says this same thing in 1 Corinthians 10:12. "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

When we consider God's judgment there is always an element that should strike fear and reverence into us. This is true of Revelation 19. John was writing to people living on this side of eternity while he was picturing for them life on the other side of eternity.

We look on God's judgment on this side of eternity and we are filled with awe and humility and gratitude and especially trust; trust, faith that God is going to preserve us and that He is going to be faithful to His promises. But when we look at God's judgment from the eternal side, as our passage does this morning, we see where that awe and humility and gratitude leads us. And it leads us to worship.

Here's where some of the application from this passage could be difficult. What our passage is laying out for us is that because God is a just God, because He is a righteous God that punishes sin He is a God worthy of all worship and praise and glory.

The tendency when we look at stories like that of Ananias and Sapphira, is simply to mourn. To weep for those who are lost. And on this side of eternity it is not necessarily a bad thing to weep for the lost, because it keeps us compassionate and hopeful that God will still save more sinners. But what must not be overlooked, is that in the midst of such judgment, God deserves to be worshipped.

Acts 5:11, where the church is filled with the fear of God, is followed by verses 12-14 where we see that more than ever believers were added to the Lord. Even in the midst of judgment, God was worshipped. God deserves worship precisely because He is the righteous judge.

This is why those in Revelation 19 worship God. He is the righteous Judge.

[MP1] Now, who are these people in verses 1-3 that are worshipping God? There are a lot of clues as to who these people are. Let me give you three of them.

First of all, we read that John heard the loud voice of a **great multitude**. This isn't the first time we have come across a great multitude.

The only other time outside of chapter 19 where we find this description is back in 7:9. Right after hearing God give the number of 144000 which is the perfect symbolic number of true Christians, John sees the Christians and he describes them as a great multitude that no one could count. Now in chapter 19, John hears this same great multitude lifting up their unified voice in praise.

Second, they are dressed in white. Next week we will get to verse 5-10 we will look at what it means that this great multitude was clothed in white. But this language we find in verse 8 of being clothed in white we find back in chapter 7 also. The great multitude is clothed in white. And we find the saints clothed in white in several other places.

In 3:5 we find that those who conquer will be dressed in white and that they will never have their names blotted out of the book of life.

In 6:11, we find that the saints under the altar have been given a white robe.

In 7:14, we find those that have come out of the great tribulation are dressed in white.

In 19, 14, we find the armies of Heaven dressed in white.

The third clue is in verse 6. Their voice is like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder. This is the same description we find in chapter 14:1-3.

In chapter 14 we see the 144,000 against standing on Mount Zion with Jesus Christ. They have the Fathers name written on their foreheads. They are singing around the throne of God a new song, a song that only those who have been redeemed from the earth can know.

Do you see who this great multitude is yet? This Great multitude is the full body, the perfect body of Christ. It is every person who has ever been redeemed. It is every person who has been washed clean by the blood of Christ so that they are wearing a white robe. It is every person that has been marked by God with an eternal mark, the name of the Father, and that mark is the sign of ownership. And it is every person who has had their name written in the lamb's book of life from before the foundation of the world where it cannot be blotted out.

[MP2] This great multitude is every Christian from Adam and Eve until the Return of Christ. And together as with one voice, they are worshipping God, Why do they worship? It is not simply because God is their creator, and it is not simply because Jesus is their Savior, but it is because Jesus is the righteous judge.

[sp1] And this is expressed in the first two hallelujahs. The overall context of their praise is God's judgment, but I want you to be clear on what it is about God's judgment they are praising.

Proverbs 24:17 says, "Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles." These hallelujahs are not the result of sinners going to hell.

That is not what they are singing about. If you have had a loved one die who was not a Christian, you are not rejoicing that they are in hell. That is not why the multitude is rejoicing.

They are rejoicing because God has revealed who He is in His judgment. The only way we know about the Character of God is if he reveals it. And the only way God reveals His holiness is in judgment.

Notice what it is that belongs to God. "Salvation, and glory and power belong to our God."

All three of these terms have to do with God's justice and judgment. Why do we need salvation? Because we stand condemned by God's perfect law for being sinners. And how do we sin? Romans 6:23 says we have fallen short of the glory of God. That means we have failed to glorify God as he deserves to be glorified. And power. Only the power of the creator can bring salvation because it is the power of the creator that is punishing the sinner.

So we have in these three terms the sum total of the redemption of the lost. **But**, did you notice that there is a word that isn't here that we would have expected to be here?

The word grace is absent. In fact there isn't a single word in all of this passage that speaks of grace.

Why is that? Because our objective redemption, or the material cause of our redemption is not grace, but justice. We are saved by the justice of God.

See God's justice demands that judgment be poured out. God can't simply overlook sin. That would be unjust. This is why verse 2 speaks of God's judgments being true and just. God is judging Babylon because His justice, His holiness requires it. God cannot let sin go unpunished.

But when it comes to the body of Christ, they do not receive the judgment of God, not because they don't receive it, but because God has already poured out what their sins deserve. This is why Jesus died. He actually not hypothetically or theoretically, and really suffered the full judgment of God for those who belong to Him, and that means there is no more wrath to come.

The worship coming from the body of Christ is in response to this truth – keep in mind that this is in Eternity where this worship is taking place. If God is pouring out his wrath on sinners, and he is not pouring out his wrath on the body of Christ, then God's wrath must have already been satisfied.

This is why the great multitude worships God. God in bringing judgment upon Babylon at the same time confirms that justice has already been paid on their behalf. And so they praise God for His justice.

Hallelujah, God's judgment is just and true.

[sp2] But more than that, Hallelujah because God's judgment is eternal. The imagery on verse 3 comes from the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah back in Genesis chapter 19.

Abraham's nephew Lot lived in the city of Sodom. And so Abraham pleaded with God on the grounds of justice that God would spare the cities. Abraham argued if there is 50, 45, all the way down to 10 righteous people if there were 10 righteous people, Abraham asked God if he would still wipe away the righteous with the unrighteous. And God's answer was of course no. So Abraham went out the next morning after pleading with God to save the cities and saw smoke rising from where the cities had been.

God's perfect justice was carried out and the smoke was the evidence. Now we read in verse 3 that the smoke of Babylon goes up forever and ever. It never stops going up, and because of this the great multitude rejoices.

Why would eternal judgment make God praiseworthy? For this reason, if God's judgment ever fails on Babylon, what assurance is there that His judgment on Christ

won't fail too? If God's judgment on Christ fails, what hope is there for us? But as it is, the smoke of Babylon goes up forever and ever.

[illustration] I took Cortland to the Threshers baseball game Tuesday night. I told the gal at the window that I wanted the best two seats left. (I was using a coupon for buy one get one free.)

I took our tickets and began looking for section 112. And then I saw it. It was right behind home plate. So I looked at our tickets again, sure enough section 112, row 2, seats 1 and 2. So I put the tickets in my pocket and led Cortland to two of the best seats in the stadium. It was great. But the whole first inning that we sat there, I kept thinking to myself, "I wonder if I have the wrong seats?" since the seats had special plaques on them for season ticket holders. I didn't want to take the tickets out of my pocket for fear of the embarrassment of sitting in the wrong place. But I was also dreading the embarrassment of having to change seats because I looked at my tickets wrong.

After the first inning we went and got some drinks. And as we were making our way back, an usher stopped to check our tickets. His job was to make sure only the people sitting in this section were the ones that belonged there. So he looked at my tickets and he made his judgment. He said with a smile on his face, "Enjoy the game." And we did.

This is the same way God's judgment works. Heaven is only for those who have the right ticket. That ticket is perfect righteousness and holiness. You and I both know that if we were to stand before God on our own with only our actions and deeds, we would not qualify. We are not perfect. Isaiah 64:6 says all of our deeds are like filthy rags.

The thoughts in our minds are not perfect. The desires of our hearts are not perfect. The actions we perform are not perfect. We are not perfect. We have fallen short of the glory of God just like Ananias and Sapphira and therefore the wages our sin deserves is eternal separation from God in the fires of hell.

God's holiness requires justice. However, God is more than just righteous Judge. He is also a gracious father who is the Giver of the perfect gift.

Isaiah 53:4-6 tells us that Jesus bore our punishment. "He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows and so He was smitten by God, and afflicted. He was wounded for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned--every one--to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

The bad news for sinners is that God's justice must be satisfied. The good news for those belonging to Christ is that His justice must be satisfied but once only.

God's judgments are true and just and they are Eternal. So the saints in Christ are secured for eternity. This is why they sing Hallelujah.

Do you know what this word Hallelujah means? It's the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word which means "Praise Jehovah." Do you know who Jehovah is? Jehovah is the title in the OT of the covenant keeping God. Jehovah inflicts the curses of the broken covenant on the law breakers and He awards the blessing of the unbroken covenant on the law keepers.

And so we have the Saints in heaven praising Jehovah for His covenant faithfulness; wrath and judgment being poured out on those **and only those** who are not covered by the blood of the covenant keeping Savior Jesus Christ, but upon those who are covered by blood of the covenant keeping Savior, all the blessings of Christ are bestowed upon them.

The God of the OT is the same God of the NT. His judgments are true and just. He never changes. And so all the saints together say, "Hallelujah."