

REVELATION FOR TODAY:
SINGING WITH THE SAINTS OF GLORY

Revelation 5:11-14

Dr. J. Howard Olds

April 25, 2004

Sing with all the saints of glory,
Sing the resurrection song.
Death and sorrow, earth's dark story,
To the former days belong.
All around the clouds are breaking,
Soon the storms of time shall cease.
In God's likeness we awaking,
Know the everlasting peace.

Easter people have a song in their hearts that the world never gave. They have a peace it cannot take away. At least that's the way the Apostle John perceived it as he unveils a glimpse of heaven for all to see. Come, let us take a closer look.

WE HAVE A SONG TO SING

Verse 11—Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang. Verse 13—Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them singing.

I was awakened the other morning to the sounds of birds singing at my window. As I lay there enjoying my private concert, I began to wonder—why is it birds sing? Even in the rain, birds sing. Birds don't have an easy life. We sometimes long to be free as a bird, but do we really want to rebuild our house every year, be exposed to the weather, and live from hand to mouth? It seems to me that birds have their problems. Yet it is the nature of birds to sing. It is just inside of them. They don't even have to have an audience because it is their nature to sing praises to God. Come to think of it, all nature sings and round me rings the music of the spheres.

- Trees clap their leaves in praise to God
- Waves beat on the shore endlessly
- Even bullfrogs chug their tunes at night.

The hills are alive with the sound of music. God put a song in the heart of every creature on earth. When you think about it, it's astounding. Here as John catches a glimpse of worship on the other side, of what it is going to be like in heaven, he says all creatures in heaven and on earth and below the earth and under the sea join in this chorus, this mighty choir, this outstanding anthem sung in praise and thanksgiving to God.

The saints will be there and they will be singing too. St. Francis is saying “all creatures of our God and King, lift up your voice and with us sing.” Charles Wesley is rejoicing for there are now more than “a thousand tongues to sing his great Redeemer’s praise.” Isaac Watts is proclaiming that “his days of praise shall n’er be past while life and thought and being last, or immortality endures.” Fanny Crosby, having found blessed assurance, is “praising her Savior all the day long.” Joseph Scriven has “found a friend in Jesus, all his sins and griefs to bear.”

If some of us seem reluctant to let go of traditional hymnody it’s not because we are opposed to change, it’s because the hymns connect us with the saints of history. When we sing their songs there is sweet communion between heaven and earth. When we sing their words they join us in worship even as we share today. So what has life done to your song? Is there still a tune that you can hum along?

Singing is not for singers. Singing is for believers. The relevant question is not do you have a voice, but do you have a song? While I love great music, I also find kinship with the three-year-old kid who sang, “I love you Lord and I lift my noise in praise to you. O, my soul rejoices.”

Real religion does not make us somber, sullen and sad. Real religion makes us confident, happy and glad. Faith is a place of gladness as well as a place of goodness. The gospel is glad tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. Jesus said, “I have said these things that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” What has life done to your song?

So I must warn you. If you have a problem with people getting too happy and expressive in church then you are going to be miserable in heaven. Maybe you want to reconsider going. How are you going to feel when everybody is singing and you have a frown on your face? In heaven the rejoicing is out of this world. Over there the applause is heavenly. Up yonder there will be no tears to hinder our joy. When we all see Jesus, we’ll sing and shout the victory.

Mark Twain once said if heaven is one endless choir rehearsal, he didn’t think he would bother to try out for it. So John gives us a fair warning. In heaven there’s a whole lot of singing going on. So it might behoove us here on earth to try to get ready to enjoy heaven.

If my lips could sing as many songs as there are waves in the sea,
If my tongue could sing as many hymns as there are ocean billows,
If my mouth filled the whole firmament with praise
That would not be enough to pay you fitting tribute,
O Lord, my God.

We have a song to sing. Let us sing it in the church.

WE HAVE A SAVIOR TO PROCLAIM

In a loud voice they sang, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain. To Him be praise and honor and glory and power, forever and ever Amen!”

I suggested last week that John wrote the Book of Revelation in an apocalyptic code. The church was suffering great persecution from Rome. The blood of martyrs was becoming the seed of the Church. So John wrote of things only Christians could understand. Such is this reference to the Lamb of God. It would not make sense to the Romans.

You would have to know Jewish history to understand what John is saying here in this passage. Worthy is the Lamb who is slain from the foundation of the world.

Can you remember your Disciple Bible Study a little bit this morning? When the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, they slaughtered a lamb and smeared its blood on their doorposts as a signal for the plague of death to pass over them. The Paschal lamb became a sign of protection. “When I see the blood, I will pass, I will pass over you” says the old song.

When the Israelites were wandering the wilderness, they developed an elaborate sacrificial system as a remedy for sin. *So the Lord said to Moses, “This is what you are to offer on the altar regularly each day, two lambs a year old. Offer one in the morning and the other at twilight”* (Exodus 29:38-39). In so doing, the sins of the people could be forgiven.

When the prophet Isaiah envisioned the Savior of the world, he portrayed Him as *a lamb led to the slaughter. As a sheep before his shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth* (Isaiah 53:7).

When John the Baptist announced the coming out party for Jesus, he said *Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world* (John 1:29).

Here in Revelation this resurrected victorious Lamb of God is determined to be the only one worthy to open the scroll revealing the purposes of God. So the saints sing, “Worthy is the Lamb.”

Whatever you do with the sacrificial nature of salvation, let us never ever forget a few things:

- That sin is serious,
- That the remedy is radical,
- That the Lamb is worthy.

As our Catholic friends say, “O Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us. O Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, grant us

your peace.”

A teenager leaving the Passion of Christ movie came up to me and said, “For the first time, I understand the meaning of Holy Communion.” The Body of Christ broken for me. The blood of Christ shed for me.

Twila Paris sings:

Your only Son, no sin to hide
But you have sent Him from your side
To walk upon this guilty sod
And to become the Lamb of God.

We have a song to sing. If you have trouble singing you’re going to have trouble in heaven. We have a Savior to proclaim. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He can be your Savior too.

WE HAVE A CHURCH TO SERVE

In church we have an outpost of heaven. In worship we get a foretaste of glory divine. The local Church is God’s best hope for humanity.

Sometimes in my moments of devotion I am prone to exclaim “This is bigger than all of us.” Surrounded by the saints of glory, we behold the Lamb of God and try to tell the wondrous story so we can make heaven our home.

Peter put it this way: “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received God’s mercy. So live such good lives among the pagans, that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God (I Peter 2:9-10).”

I don’t know about you, but I’m delighted to be part of the family of God. It’s a privilege to serve an outpost of heaven. Go all the way in, you explorers of the faith. Tell us the roots of our religion. Climb the ladder, you ecclesiastical achievers. Order our ways in wise administration. But as for me, I’ll take my old accustomed place, near the door of a local church. I want to be near enough to God to know him and know that he is there, but not so far away from people as not to know them and realize they are there too, searching for the latch that unlocks the door that leads to God. I stand by the door.

We have a song to sing, we have a savior to proclaim, we have a church to serve. I believe that with all my heart.
So let me stop preaching and start meddling.

Here are some facts you need to know:

- You are doing a fabulous job supporting your church. The general fund is in the black and the 9.2 million pledged in this capital campaign is coming in on schedule. You are being faithful. Please remember however that the campaign fell one million dollars short of the stated need.
- The new property has been paid off and the new building is on budget including \$250,000 designated for furnishings.
- Extensive renovations on the current buildings are scheduled to begin this summer. Only a portion of this renovation was included in the Fulfill the Vision Campaign.

So we are extending to you an invitation to make a second mile gift toward the furnishing of this new building. The furnishings booklet you received in the mail contains basic items and suggested accessory items. The accessory items will not be purchased if not specifically donated by individuals.

Now let me ask a second question. Why should I consider a gift at this time? There are four reasons.

1. You were not present for the Fulfill the Vision Campaign and you want to be a part of this exciting future.
2. You are able to do more than you originally planned.
3. You would like to honor or memorialize a friend or loved one with a lasting gift that will serve generations to come.
4. Funds raised now will lessen any indebtedness to be incurred with renovations.

So what on earth are we going to do for heaven's sake? The local Church is God's best hope for humanity. At this outpost of heaven, it's a foretaste of glory divine. To God be the glory for the things he has done.

In a moment we are going to sing a hymn. During this time I urge you to come to these altars and offer a prayer for your church. Even if you are not making a gift at this time, come here to pray. If you are prepared to give, let your intentions be known on the cards provided.

I can think of no place on earth I would rather be than to be in this pulpit with all of you. This is a wonderful home and God has already done more than I could ever imagine or think or dream. When we gather here on Sunday it's just a little bit of heaven for me. I want to be faithful on my watch.

Let us pray. O Lord in this place, we come before You. What an honor and privilege we have to worship. We thank You from the bottom of our hearts. And now, O Lord, help us to do what you called us to do, help us to reach far beyond

what we can do on our own. Continue to give us a vision of what this congregation might become when we lay our all on the altar before You. We thank You for the song that You give us to sing, for the Savior we have to proclaim. We thank You today for this church where we are called together to serve. Amen.

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