

**+ Revelation 19:1-9 + What's Coming Is Worth the Wait +
+ 2nd Sunday of End Time: Saints Triumphant + 2 November 2014 +**

“Hey Dad, how many days until Christmas? Can you find out for me right now? Can I put something on my wish list right now too because, you know...Christmas is coming?” It’s November 2 and the anticipation is already building. Halloween has come and gone after a couple weeks of daily being asked, “Daddy, how many days until Halloween?”, but the Christmas questions, well, they’ve been asked since early September. “How many days until Christmas? Can you find out right now? I need to know.” The anticipation has already built so much that we’ve had to designate a day of the week when the kids will find out. So they count down the days until they can find out how many days it is until Christmas. Hopefully, for their sake, what’s coming is worth the wait.

Thirty-nine years ago this month, the mission congregation that eventually became Cross of Christ started meeting. After about six years of meeting in different places and anticipating the completion of a permanent place of their own, our congregation moved into this humble facility. There was always hope to expand this small space, but we had to wait 30 years before that dream became real anticipation as real steps were taken to expand this facility. In the last three years, there’s been a lot of anticipation, a lot of excitement, a lot of eagerness, but we’ve had to wait a little longer. With the rapid pace of the process moving forward in recent months, that anticipation is building again that if the Lord allows, construction will start next spring. Will what’s coming be worth the wait? By God’s grace, I think it will be.

A husband and wife look forward with eager anticipation and a little trepidation to the birth of a child. A man and a woman look forward with eager anticipation to their wedding day. They count the weeks or the days or even the hours, if they can—and the anticipation builds. Although there will be struggles and challenges, what’s coming is surely worth the wait.

As you’ve heard the lessons and the prayers, the responsive readings and the glorious hymns today, does a little eager anticipation well up in your heart too? That’s really what a Sunday like today—Saints Triumphant Sunday—is all about. It really is all about eager anticipation, about blessed assurance, about joyful hope, about the confident excitement that just doesn’t go away because you know what’s coming. So you watch and wait like those virgin bridesmaids in Jesus’ parable. So the hymns and lessons and readings and prayers make you stop and wonder like a child looking ahead to Christmas, “How long, O Lord? Can you tell me right now? How many days, weeks, or years? I can’t wait!” Yet in the back of your mind, there’s always that lurking question, “Is what’s coming really worth the wait?” Why would we ask a question like that? Well, it’s not a new question.

You see, the Apostle John and his beloved readers in the seven churches near the west coast of Turkey were wrestling with that question 1,900 years ago. The Roman emperor had exiled John for teaching God’s Word to an island that was merely a salt mine surrounded by water. The region where he had served for so long was just far enough away that he could see it, but couldn’t go there on his own. His beloved readers were struggling. They were being persecuted by the locals even to the point of death. They were dealing with false teachers in their midst—and several groups failed to remove them. Things looked really bleak for God’s struggling people.

So the Lord in his grace used John to give this encouragement—“Jesus will win.” The entire book of Revelation is wrapped around that theme—“Jesus will win”, and no matter how John describes the hostile attacks against God’s holy people—his saints, victory is always certain in Jesus.

Every time John describes that eternal victory of Jesus for his people over the sinful world or Satan or death or false teachers, the Lord in his grace gives John a glimpse of the victory celebration in heaven when it was all over. That’s what we find in Revelation 19. It’s the final celebration, and all of God’s people made holy in the blood of the Lamb are there—not just John’s readers, but the believers who went before them all the way back to Adam and Eve and the generations that came after them, including you and me, and those who will come after us, if the Lord allows.

I know it’s tough, but try to imagine that—a great multitude of countless people from every nation, every tribe, every language, all celebrating, all rejoicing in Christ’s victory, in their salvation, in their rescue. It’s like John walks into a packed stadium or arena and hears **“what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting...”** This isn’t angry shouting. No one is yelling at the ref. No, this is an amazing shout of pure praise and joy. **“Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!” Hallelujah**—that ancient song of praise from the Old Testament appears for the first time in the New Testament at its very end. Praise to the God who guided all of history to save us!

The song of the Church goes on. ***“Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”*** Huh? How could they praise the Lord for condemning and avenging? In Jesus’ victory, he overcomes the enemies of his people—the secular authorities who shed their blood, the false teachers who led people down the path to hell, the servants of Satan who tried to prevail over God’s holy people and wipe out his holy Church. All of these Jesus overcomes and condemns. For the blood of those who gave their lives and remained faithful unto death, for those who suffered the heat of pressure and persecution for their faith, for those who struggled beneath the crosses of their own sinful natures and the sinful world while following Jesus, for all of these the Lord carries out his holy judgment and rescues his holy people after a lifetime of struggle. So again the multitude roars, ***“Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.”*** Our gracious God is also a holy God who condemns sin and judges those who oppose him and his struggling people, but this celebration is not just about God’s will being done with his just judgment.

You see, God’s just judgment means rescue and salvation for God’s people—even for you and me. If ***“salvation and glory and power belong to our God”***, they belong to him alone. You and I and every one in that multitude are saved because God in his undeserved love rescued us through our Savior Jesus Christ. We were undeserving sinners condemned for hell, but rescued by God’s grace and brought to faith through the working of the Holy Spirit. Surely ***“glory and power”*** and praise belong to our Savior-God!

As we stand there with the entire Holy Christian Church, what else can more appropriately come from our mouths than those familiar words, ***“Amen, hallelujah!”*** The anticipation of the final celebration is building to its greatest crescendo as a voice proclaims from the throne. ***“Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!”*** At the moment, the reality of what is to come sounds forth with a sound that the Apostle struggles to describe. ***“Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters, and like loud peals of thunder, shouting...”***

Centuries of eager anticipation, of joyful hope, of growing excitement burst forth from the lips of every believer who has ever lived and will ever live, the lips of the saints triumphant. ***“Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.”*** The saints triumphant who have been watching and waiting finally can celebrate. The day has come. The Lord almighty reigns! No more persecution. No more suffering. No more tears of grief or sorrow or pain. No more darkness. No more separation and loss. No more weary struggle. No more death. Just victory!

That day is described as ***“the wedding of the Lamb”***. His bride is the Holy Christian Church—God’s holy people with whom he will dwell for all eternity, you and me! That bride was once covered with the filthy rags of sin and guilt and shame, because every one of us is by nature sinful and unclean. Yet Jesus loved his bride, and as the Lamb of God, he ***“gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word (through Baptism!), and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”*** (Ephesians 5:25-27) He declared her “not guilty” and made her holy with his own precious blood. That final wedding day of the Lamb and his Church will come and what a celebration it will be, because you and I will get to enjoy Christ’s eternal victory resting in his loving, everlasting arms.

With the Apostle we leap back to the present day. We’ve seen what is coming, so an angel tells John, ***“Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb! ...These are the true words of God.’*** So here you are—and the struggle for your soul is difficult, painful, even fierce at times. Satan wants to destroy you. Your sinful nature wants to betray you. The sinful world wants to consume you. The pushback and pressure and even persecution ramp up for you and for God’s holy people still struggling through this life. You naturally grow weary. You wonder if what’s coming is really worth it. You feel like giving up and then you see the wedding invitation in your hand—and the anticipation builds. You read in your Bible or listen in worship—and you get excited not because you’re almost done or church is almost over, but because of what’s coming. You look ahead and see more challenges on the horizon, but you feel like a child before Christmas because you have an invitation ***“to the wedding supper of the Lamb”***, and it’s going to be victorious. God’s Word guarantees it.

In 1741, a Lutheran composer by the name of George Friederic Handel struggled to put to music the words of our text, the glimpse of what is to come. In so doing, Handel composed one of the greatest, most famous choral pieces ever written. It’s become known as the “Hallelujah Chorus”. The piece was so thrilling that it

made common people and royalty stand up and still today when it is performed. If you have ever heard the piece performed live or on recording, you know what I mean. If you haven't, I encourage you to find a recording, because it is truly impressive.

For a brief moment, Handel attempts to give us a glimpse of the heaven that awaits, but for all its earthly beauty, it doesn't come close. The triumphant celebration, the wedding supper of the Lamb, the joy of eternity with our Savior Jesus is beyond human comprehension and imagination, but O dear saints, it's worth the wait. ***"Hallelujah!"*** Amen.