

[play song] Legend has it that during the opening strains of Handel's Messiah and the Hallelujah chorus, King George II stood because he was struck by its amazing beauty. With the king standing all his subjects were obligated to stand as well. Thus began the custom of people standing when the Hallelujah chorus was played anywhere around the world. Some have even called it the most beautiful piece of music ever written.

Besides the music, what are people standing for? What was Handel writing about in this piece? By the time the second act of the Messiah comes to a close the Christ has ascended his throne. The great chorus cries out as loud as they can Hallelujah. This is the song of victory. It is the song of triumph because the great Lamb of God has won. He has defeated Satan, sin, and death. He rules forever victorious on his throne. And all the angels and all the believers cry out Hallelujah.

Except when you and I look around at the world we live in it doesn't seem like the place to be crying out Hallelujah. In fact our Hallelujahs are muted while we live on earth. With all the pain and problems the world presents we begin to lose sight of any chance of there being a better time. Is this as good as it gets? Maybe it won't get any better. Maybe the wicked will win in the end. In answer to these thoughts John recorded the revelation he received from Christ Jesus in the second lesson about the end. We are...

Waiting and watching for our Hallelujah
Hear now that distant song
We will sing it in heaven

Many new productions of plays and musicals get mixed reviews. Handel's Messiah opened in 1741 to mixed reviews as well. Some liked it immediately, but others were cold to the style of music. In the years since then, the Messiah and its music have grown in popularity. Today the high melody of the Hallelujah Chorus is instantaneously recognizable. Yet if I showed you the music notation for the piece it would likely be unreadable for many. It's not that the words are hard. There is a good deal of repeating. But the four part harmony, like when it sounds the most beautiful, takes a skilled singer who can read the complicated music. The first time I looked at the musical score I could barely follow. At that time for me it was a distant song that was untouchable.

That's the picture of heaven John received and recorded in Revelation, something untouchable. As of right now for you and me it's untouchable and unreachable. It's a distant song we only faintly imagine we hear. It's a heavenly song that sounds far away because we aren't in heaven. Instead we live in this world and I don't have to tell you of the differences. Our lives of sin are like nails on a chalkboard to God. That's not music to his ears. The constant drumbeat of our sins is a violation of his holiness. Our sinfulness separates us from him. Our greed, selfishness, and immorality are so loud they drown out any distant songs. We live in the all too harsh reality of today and its sins and heartaches. We mismanage time, we misplace priorities, and we go after other people to make ourselves feel better.

It was into this noise that God sent his Son Jesus. What love to send a Savior for a world of people that didn't want a Savior? What love that decided to save a world full of rotten dirty sinners? That's exactly who Jesus came for. It was me and you. **"Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God."** This Savior was exactly what we needed to make the distant song grow louder. Jesus became our substitute as he stepped into the large gap that existed between God and us. He hit all the right notes in life, living perfectly. He took our sins upon himself and paid the price for them all. He gave himself willingly into death so he might be raised again. His resurrection is proof that all God promised actually happened. Sins are forgiven. Death is defeated. Heaven is real.

That fact, that heaven is real, and that believers will go there is why John received this vision to record in Revelation. While living so long in our earthly existence our eyes get constantly drawn to the here and now. The distant song is just that, it's distant and faint. But on this day our sights are far beyond our earthly existence. We strain our ears and we hear that distant song. For one day it's close so we not only hear it, but we relish the fact that one day we'll sing that song in heaven. Face to face with God we'll join in perfect pitch. We are saints by God's grace through Christ and soon we'll be singing that beautiful heavenly song.

Hallelujah is all over the Old Testament. God's Old Testament people raised Hallelujahs to their God constantly. The book of Psalms is full of them. But the word that means "praise the Lord" is scarce in the New Testament. Only four times, and you guessed it all are in these verses from Revelation. It draws special attention that such a wonderful word is reserved for this moment; when the saints triumphant will burst into the great victory cheer for Christ. The church triumphant in heaven's glory uses this word to give thanks to God for his complete defeat of the enemy. The song is taken up by the inhabitants of heaven. **"The 24 elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: Amen, Hallelujah!"** Believers from the Old and New Testaments fall down in worship at the foot of the throne of God. In hearty agreement with shouts of praise and thanksgiving God is praised as powerful and deserving of glory. Amen, it is true. God is to be praised for what he has done. The angel bids all the saints to joyous chorus of praise to God. That praise will never end.

Revelation reminds us here that one day, after all this has passed away, after we die or Christ returns, we'll be there. We'll be there with all those believers of Old and New Testament in heaven. We'll be saints triumphant standing at the wedding feast of the Lamb of God. It's what we prepare for. It's what we constantly remind ourselves of. It's what will be forever in heaven. **"Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!"** The great multitude, us included, will with one great voice sing a song of praise to God. Our Hallelujah there will echo like a thunderclap right above your house. Our Hallelujah there will declare God's glory.

Right now God reigns. He has always reigned and will always reign. But at that moment in heaven, we will for the first time see God face to face. We will see him reigning from his throne. We will most clearly see God in control of all things forever. It will give us even more confidence to let our Hallelujahs, our rejoicing, our praise ascend freely.

Even what we'll wear in heaven is all set. **"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."** To be inside this wedding requires different clothes. We can't just wear what we want. We can't bring our own clothes. God provides the specific clothing of heaven. He declares us perfect in Christ. The wedding garments are provided for us. They're the bright, clean, fine linen of heaven. God gives it to us willingly and freely. He has declared us not guilty of our sins. We are declared not guilty before God because of the Lamb of God who takes away our sins.

[play song] Do you see yourself in the picture of Revelation? **"Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb! And he added, These are the true words of God."** You're there, before Christ and because of him, in heaven rejoicing with the other saints of God. God doesn't want you to doubt. He wants you and me to believe that this picture soon will be our reality. This scene will play out for all believers once they're called home to heaven. Then that distant song will become the song we sing for all eternity. The praise and the glory to God will be so wonderful and beautiful that no singing or song here on earth could replicate it or even come close. Nothing will bring us down. Nothing will threaten us again. Nothing will make us sad or feel any kind of loss. We will be totally secure and safe in heaven. We will be free from death, free from sin, and free from fear of any kind.

Not even the majestic Hallelujah chorus can compare with the song the saints of God will sing in heaven. Our brothers and sisters who died in faith are already singing that song. One day soon we will join them. Saints triumphant surrounding the throne of God at the wedding of the Lamb, Christ. You and I will rejoice and be glad. We will praise and give thanks. We will no longer be waiting and watching but rather we will sing our Hallelujah.