

# Longing for God's Triumphant Reign

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Date: 12 May 2019

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[0:00] Good morning. My name is Billy Nye. I'm one of the associate pastors here at Christ the King. And I would like to welcome you to open your Bible if you have one. If you don't, there's one in the pew in front of you.

And open to the very end of the book, the very end of the Bible, the book of Revelation. And we are toward the end, only a couple chapters away, chapter 19.

Chapter 19 in the book of Revelation. Longing. Longing is a powerful force.

Our lives tend to be governed by longing. People will do some pretty astounding things and will endure some very difficult things because they are longing for something.

It doesn't matter whether you are very young or very old. You have longing. An infant longs for her mother's milk and lets everybody within a one mile radius know that she is longing for her mother's milk.

[1:16] A five-year-old yearns for his next Lego set. At least five-year-olds in our household do.

A teenager longs for her driver's license and the independence to make choices on her own. A young man desires to meet and to be with the love of his life.

A young married couple longs for financial stability or for children. And if God grants those children, those longings change.

Then they long for a nap or a quiet evening on the couch. And once you hit middle age, your longings start becoming more for retirement.

A rest from your labors. Our longing is never over, is it? And whether those longings are fulfilled with good gifts that God does give, or whether those longings end in disappointment and they linger, we continue to long.

[2:29] We are a longing people. But it is very important that we make sure that our greatest longings, our strongest longings are good ones.

Because our longings shape our living. If you're joining us for the first time this morning, we've been journeying through this book of Revelation.

And Revelation has a way of shaping our longings. Two weeks ago, Pastor Mike showed us from chapter 17 in Revelation, this very nasty lady named Babylon.

She is a prostitute. And the prostitute Babylon stands for the whole system of the world that is set up in opposition to God and opposition to God's people.

She sells pleasure and possessions, but at a high price. She costs something.

[3:33] Your allegiance. Your allegiance to her master, the beast, and his master, the dragon. And we are told not to marvel at this world system, this cultural and social force that seduces us with her pleasure and possessions.

We are told not to long for her trinkets. And last week, Pastor Matt helped us see from Revelation 18 the reason why. Because Babylon is going to meet a soon and sudden end.

So, we need to set our affection not on the allure of this world's pleasures and possessions, but we are to hate everything that Babylon stands for.

And to come out of her. And to live in this world as exiles with longing. Not for this world. But longing, hungering for our true home to be with Jesus.

And this morning, our longing is going to be sharpened and nourished. You might be saying, Billy, I listened pretty carefully to what Caleb read just a few minutes ago.

[4:51] I didn't hear the word longing. Can you show that to me in Revelation 19 somewhere? Yes, I can. You did not hear longing. You heard celebration.

Did you hear all those hallelujahs? All that praise? Four times. It shows up. A lot of intense joy in God. Do you know why?

Because longing is about to be satisfied. Heaven's longing is about to be fulfilled. And if heaven longs for it, then we, as heaven citizens who are in exile in the world still, we must long for it too. And we must live for it. But what is it? What is this it that we should be longing for and living for? What is this it that heaven is celebrating the fulfillment of?

It's this. Look at verse 1. Hallelujah. Salvation and glory and power belong to our God. Look at verse 6. The end of verse 6.

[5:58] Hallelujah. For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Verse 6 summarizes it beautifully. What are we supposed to be longing for?

What has heaven been longing for for so long? And now it's about to come about. And heaven's going crazy because of it. It's this. It's God's full and unchallenged rule over all things.

His triumphant reign over his victory. Over his enemies. And it's near. It's very close. That's what heaven's been longing for. In fact, that's what the whole Bible has been longing for.

That's what history has been longing for. Before sin entered the world, before humans embraced Satan's rule, Satan's authority, the universe was enjoying God's good and unchallenged rule.

No one questioned the creator's authority and his goodness. But then mankind said, no. We want to be kings ourselves.

[7:02] And by doing so, all of creation has been subjected to chaos and disorder, to death, to decay, to corruption and evil. And we feel it right now.

We feel the ick of it. But now, in Revelation 19, we get a delightful picture that God's great victory, his full and unchallenged rule over all things, is close.

It's very near. And heaven's longing is about to be fulfilled. And we, now, here, must long for it and live for it now. In fact, if we were to squish what this passage means for us into one sentence, it would be this.

If we long and live for God's triumphant reign now, we will not be disappointed then. If we long and live for God's triumphant reign now, we will not be disappointed then.

So, let's proceed into the details of this text together with this big, huge truth in the back of our minds. And we're going to see two reasons in the two sections of this text, verses 1 to 5 and then verses 6 to 10.

[8:17] Two reasons why we should long and live for God's triumphant reign now. Here's the first. First, God's unchallenged rule means our future relief and vindication.

God's unchallenged rule means something very special. Our future relief and vindication. Look at verse 1.

After this, or literally after these things. That's pointing right back to Revelation 18. Right on the heels of Babylon's predicted doom, John hears a sound.

I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven crying out. Apparently, at a 1992 game against the University of Nebraska football team, the cheers at Husky Stadium at the University of Washington reached an ear-splitting 133.6 decibels.

That is 13 decibels louder than a thunderclap. Now imagine the sounds. Not of 100,000 people, but hundreds of hundreds of hundreds of thousands.

[9:41] The redeemed, combined with rank upon rank of angels. The entire population of heaven is saying, Yes! They're raising this resounding shout of praise because God's going to get victory.

Our human ears would just be done. And forget about it. There is so much joy and festivity going on with God at the very center of it all in heaven.

Hallelujah! Four times. Verse 1, and verse 3, and verse 4, and in verse 6. We hear this big command to praise God. That Hebrew word, hallelujah, we're used to hearing it in lots of different songs, but it means hallelujah, y'all praise Yah, Yahweh.

Y'all praise Yahweh. You praise Yahweh. It's a command. Praise Yahweh, everybody. Yahweh is God's covenant name, his personal covenant name that is known to his people.

And this word, hallelujah, it's the only place in the New Testament that it shows up, it's right here in this chapter. It shows up in the Old Testament in Hebrew, but it's the first time it shows up in Greek, and the last time it shows up in the Greek New Testament.

[10:52] We should get the sense of, wow, what is going on in this passage? What is going on that four times hallelujah is bam, bam, bam, bam? Well, heaven's rejoicing because God's great victory is very near.

God is going to win the day and save his people forever. Salvation and glory and power belong to our God. We've heard something similar back in chapter 7 when God's saints are gathered together, and they say, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. So the gathered body of redeemed sinners in heaven, probably a bunch of angels all are rejoicing over this, but this praise is not just from them. Look at verse 4. The 24 elders and the four living creatures, they fall down and they worship God who is sitting on the throne saying, Amen, hallelujah.

And then comes this throne, this voice that's from the throne itself, probably an angelic messenger sent on God's behalf says, Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great. Man, it's just this, heaven is resounding with praise. Verse 4, verse 2. For his judgments are true and just.

[12:05] For he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality and has advantaged on her the blood of his servants. God is going to put Babylon down and heaven is going nuts.

And it's jolting because we've just heard from chapter 18, this mourning, this sadness, this loss, the kings of the earth, the merchants, the sailors, they're all saying, Oh, the source of our selfish gain and profit is gone.

What are we going to do now that Babylon has fallen? And then all of a sudden, heaven's like, Yeah! It's just jolting, the change of tone. It might be a cause for sadness if your intimacy is with the world, knowing that the world is going down.

It is cause for great joy and celebration for those whose hearts are set on heaven. And as you notice verse 3, this victory is permanent.

It's going to last forever. The smoke of her burning goes up forever and ever. Babylon's not going to come back. Okay, so it's evident.

[13:23] Heaven has been longing for this victory and now is celebrating it. And this is why. Babylon's doom is our relief and vindication.

In verse 2, it's very clear. It's right for God to judge Babylon, the great prostitute. Because she corrupted the earth, she shed the blood of God's servants.

Church, while we still live and breathe, we are in exile. The church has never been at home while still in this world. In fact, the moments when she feels most at home in the world is when she is least at home in heaven.

We live in Babylon by necessity. We live here. We can't get away from it. We live in a social and cultural system that is fundamentally opposed to God.

And because it's opposed to God, it's opposed to us, his people. And it has been this way for 20 centuries. It was this way when John dipped his pen in ink to write down this vision.

[14:28] It is this way now, and it will continue to be this way until God puts Babylon down. And it's helpful to keep in mind how the people receiving this book, originally, the seven churches of Asia, how they would have felt about hearing this great joy over God's full and unchallenged reign coming and Babylon being put down.

Lots of these churches were suffering intense persecution. Keep a finger in this passage. Flip back to chapter 6. Revelation chapter 6.

Look at verse 9 of Revelation 6. And then they were told, God's people have been and are and will be persecuted.

And when his people are persecuted, God doesn't just shrug his shoulders and say, oh man, not again. There is a limit to how much he will allow.

And when his saints ask how long, he says, just a little while longer. And I will avenge you. I will vindicate you. And when his vindication comes, it will be sudden and terrible, as we saw back in chapter 18.

[16:18] You don't mess with God's people and get away with it. But he will vindicate his people. He will be seen to be right. Relief and vindication is coming for those of us who live in Babylon.

Imagine how the members of the church in Smyrna, one of the seven churches of Asia, imagine how they would have felt when they heard this. Jesus had just told them in chapter 2, he said, be faithful unto death.

And it's going to be that way for a couple of you. How do you think they would have heard this? They'd be thinking, I might have Roman soldiers kicking down my door any minute, but Babylon ain't going to last.

I might have to be faithful unto death, but my God will triumph over my enemies, and he will vindicate me in the end. I just need to hold on so that I can overcome. Imagine today how our brothers and sisters in Pakistan woke up this morning.

They didn't know if this Lord's Day today, May 12th, would bring for them from their Muslim countrymen hate, persecution, or fellow saints in Iran, or those who had just experienced the bombings in Sri Lanka.

[17:30] It's not going to be that way forever. There will be relief, and there will be vindication. God is going to rule triumphantly over his enemies. Now, we can hear that, and we're like, okay, good.

That's good for them. I don't really feel that myself right now, though. We don't really feel that opposition in our corner of the world at the moment. But there is more to the world's opposition to us than violent persecution.

There are endless attempts to seduce us away into her corruption. Do you see that in verse 2? Who corrupted the earth with her immorality? As Matt encouraged us last week, we must see through the seductive advances of the world to make us long for what she can offer, what the prostitute can offer.

Instead, we've got to hate all that Babylon stands for, which is the worship of self. We must hate it. We must long for a greater object of our affection.

And that fight, that longing, that struggle, it takes energy. It's hard. The struggle against sin is real.

[18:44] Many of us in the room are feeling that right now. But here's the beautiful news of God's great victory. It ain't gonna last. Relief is coming.

Your struggle against sin is just for a while. Your struggle against whatever temptation Satan is throwing your way is going to be temporary.

So hold on. Hold on. We need to long and live for God's unchallenged rule. It's coming. And when it does, we will not be disappointed.

Here's the second thing. Let's look at the second section of our text this morning. The second reason that we are to long and live for God's triumphant reign is found in verses 6 through 10. It's this. God's unchallenged rule means our forever union with Jesus. God's unchallenged rule means our forever union with Jesus.

[19:53] If you thought the sound of great praise in verse 1 was spectacular, it's tripled in verse 6. Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peels of thunder crying out.

Not just a great crowd. Not just a stadium full of people but Niagara Falls combined with a raging thunderstorm. It just staggers the imagination to try to conceive of a massive thunderstorm raging over Niagara Falls in the middle of a football stadium of millions of people.

But that's the effect that John's trying to get across. Major noise. Basically, the roof of heaven stadium just got blown off by the roar of its citizens going absolutely wild.

I thought the joy was really evident in verse 1 in this hallelujah chorus but now, whoa! Look at the last half of verse 6.

Hallelujah! for the Lord God, the Almighty reigns. This is heaven sounding a similar triumphant note as verse 1 but it's just amplified.

[21:04] At last! Finally! God's rule and reign is coming fully and finally and His enemies are going to be vanquished. But it's not just that His enemies are vanquished.

Take a second to think of your favorite epic movie. They tend to star Russell Crowe or Mel Gibson but whichever one you've got in your mind just think of epic movie, okay?

When do you as the viewer experience the greatest sense of relief and satisfaction when you watch movies like that? It's when the good guy finally beats the bad guy, right?

it? Well, yes but there's something else. It's not just that, is it? It's not just vindication. It's not just triumph.

It's when the good guy beats the bad guy so the good guy can have his girl. Right? The story ain't over until the bad guy dies and the good guy and his girl are finally together forever.

[22:12] Well, heaven is not just celebrating because God's enemies are going down. Heaven is celebrating because God's going to finally get his girl.

Look at verse seven. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory for why so much joy? For the marriage of the Lamb has come.

God's triumphant reign doesn't just mean that he vindicates his people. It means that he also is going to have his people. He's going to marry his people. Back in biblical times, the whole marriage process looked something like this.

The prospective groom would head from his father's house to the prospective bride's father's house and negotiate a betrothal with him. He would have to pay a price for the bride and then the groom and the bride would legally be declared married after the price was paid.

After the payment happened, the couple would then drink a cup of wine together to seal and ratify the fact that this was a legit union. This marriage was going to be a new covenant of these two people together.

[23:31] But then, that wouldn't be it. They would be legally married, but they would not consummate the union. They would not be physically intimate for about a year.

The groom would go home to his father's house and he would begin preparing a place for his bride and preparing the wedding feast. This could take a while, about a year.

While he was away working on her behalf, she would be waiting faithfully for him, but not just twiddling her thumbs. She would be waiting faithfully, not making any commitment with any others, but also preparing herself.

A lot of work that goes into being, not just the wedding, but creating a new life with her future husband. So she began preparing herself actively for this wedding day.

Then he would come suddenly, usually in the middle of the night, and that was part of the fun, didn't know when he was going to come, and then the wedding feast would begin. It would be joy.

[24:37] Throughout the Bible, the relationship between God and his people has often been compared to a marriage. God is the groom. He's the initiator in the relationship.

He comes to his people, and he desires to bring her into a healthy, exclusive, protected, intimate relationship with himself. And God makes all the arrangements.

He does all the work. First, he saves her from the bad guy way back in Exodus. Remember that? He delivers her from slavery to Pharaoh, but not just that.

He brings her into a promised land, a place where she is going to be with him forever. But the very sad part of this story, the tragedy of it, is that God chose a very unfaithful bride.

Right away, before they even got to the promised land, she started turning away to other lovers.

Remember the golden calf? She started falling to seductions of false worship, the old Babylon, and she was turning away from her faithful bridegroom.

[25:44] The Old Testament prophets would often compare Israel to an unfaithful wife, panting after lovers, running headlong away from her husband. It's in Ezekiel 16 and Jeremiah 2.

The whole book of Hosea is all about this. But then we come to Isaiah 54. And God, he does discipline his people. He sends his wife away.

He briefly abandons her to her own self-worshiping devices. But then he makes the most profound promise. For the Lord has called you like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God.

For a brief moment I deserted you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you.

And then about 700 years later, breathing the air of planet earth as God made flesh, Jesus Christ spoke these words. Can the wedding guest feast when the bridegroom is here?

[26:53] He began pointing to himself. He's saying, I'm here. The bridegroom is back. And he didn't just show up just to hang out. He showed up to do what he promised to do in Isaiah 54.

To gather his bride back to himself in great compassion and everlasting love and to win her heart back to him from her faithlessness. In essence, he came back to re-betroth her to himself.

To pay the price, to drink the cup, and to betroth her to himself in love. So, he's having his last meal with his disciples in John 13 through 16. He drinks the cup of the new covenant of betrothal and points to the price he was about to pay, the shedding of his own blood.

And he also promised that he was going to go away for a period of time to prepare a place for his bride and his father's house. And he gave his bride instructions of how to be faithful in the meantime until he comes back.

because he's going to return soon and suddenly to take her home to be with him forever. And here. Revelation 19, verse 7.

[28:04] Heaven is trembling with anticipation. God's great unchallenged rule is not only going to trounce the bad guy.

God's unchallenged rule is also going to bring about the wedding feast. God is going to get his girl. Church, do you know something that's ridiculously amazing?

We are the girl. We are the bride. We are the objects of our bridegroom's great affection.

And he's coming back for us. Sinful, weak, foolish, faithless, stumbling us. Just let that sink in for a minute, people of God.

We are the bride of the Lamb. Why would he want to be with me forever? Why would he love me?

[29:10] Why would he pay a price for me? Why would he go to prepare a place for me? We, fellow sinners, this truth should melt our hearts and convince us of our God's immense love for corrupt and faithless people like us.

The God of endless days died to betroth himself to you forever. And he has gone away to prepare a place in his father's house for us and he will come soon and suddenly take us to the joyful wedding feast.

It doesn't mean that we're anything lovely in ourselves. I know that about me. I think you know that about you. He doesn't love us because of something in us. He loves us because he loves us.

And it is his love for us that makes us lovely. Speaking of lovely, look at the last part of verse 7. And his bride has made herself ready. It was granted to her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

Church, listen carefully to what God's word is telling us. While we live here in Babylon, our primary occupation must be preparing ourselves for the wedding feast.

[30:33] Let's pretend a young couple get engaged to be married. They are officially betrothed, rings and all. The wedding date is set and the groom-to-be is busy.

He's finding an apartment for them to live in. He's arranging the wedding venue. He's securing an officiant. He's visiting caterers. He's making plans for the honeymoon, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. All the while, the bride spends the months of her engagements, going out with friends, taking a couple vacations by herself, sitting on the couch, watching Netflix the rest of the time.

And the day of the wedding arrives. And her phone goes off. Beep, beep, beep, beep, beep.

Wedding today. She gasps. She doesn't have a dress.

She doesn't have shoes. She doesn't have jewelry. She doesn't have bridesmaids' dresses. She doesn't have a hair appointment. Nothing. She just shows up at the wedding, sheepish, in sweats and a t-shirt, completely unprepared.

Let that not be us, church. Let that not be us. Our greatest longing and our greatest goal in living now is to prepare ourselves for the wedding day then.

[31:54] To be with Jesus forever. How are we going to do that? Notice the end of verse 8. The beautiful wedding dress that she has on is the fine linen of righteous deeds of the saints.

Bright and pure. Now what are those righteous deeds? And how do we clothe ourselves with those righteous deeds? It's all about living a life of faith in response to this grace of being betrothed to our bridegroom.

It means longing for our true husband and living in a way that's pleasing to him. It means setting our affection on him alone. Not giving away to the seductions of Babylon's false worship of self.

It means laying our lives down in love for each other. In all of our relationships. Marriage, children, friends, family, everything. It means laying our lives down.

It means walking in humility. It means avoiding moral compromise at work. It means caring for outsiders in our community. It means guarding our mouths against speaking gossip and disciplining ourselves to speak the truth even if it hurts us.

[33:09] It means refusing to complain or grumble by resolving to trust God in every situation. It means putting all of our energy into learning and loving our God's commands in his word.

It means confessing our sin and turning from it daily. Taking up our cross and following the lamb wherever he goes. And you might be thinking that sounds really hard.

Look at that beautiful phrase in verse 8. It was granted. In other words all those righteous deeds that we are to walk in are enabled.

Do you hear that granted language? It's grace language. It's enabled by the grace that purchased us as his bride in the first place. It's like this. We aren't his bride because we've put on the righteous deeds.

We put on the righteous deeds because we are his bride. And there's one more way that we can prepare ourselves for that day. Look at verses 9 and 10.

[34:11] It's by pondering the joy of being at that feast. There's this final reminder of the goodness and the privilege that we currently have as those who are invited to the great wedding feast.

The angel tells John write this down. It's always good to pay attention when an angel tells you to write something down. So let's listen. Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the lamb.

It doesn't say blessed are they when they get there. It says blessed now are those who are invited now. It's zeroing in on the present blessing of trusting the promise of that future hope.

This is the fourth time that word blessed has shown up in the book of Revelation. It's kind of woven in and out of the book of Revelation and it's meant to communicate to us if we listen to these words in the book of Revelation now and we savor what they mean and we ponder it and we seek to bring that into the soil of our hearts, it's going to bring present joy and blessing now.

So if you've trusted in Jesus Christ you are his forever. You are called to the feast. You are invited to the greatest joy ever known around God's table at the wedding of Jesus and his bride.

[35:30] In fact the promise is so staggering in verse 10 John bows down to worship the one who speaks it to him. The trustworthiness of the word and the glory of what he was experiencing this promise it was so much for him.

It was too much for him and so he was tempted to worship the angel who just relayed the message but the angel says don't worship me I'm just a fellow servant. The promise of the wedding feast is meant to bring present blessing for those of us who hold to the testimony of Jesus now.

It's a little morsel of goodness that's meant to nourish your soul with longing so that your living might be that of a bride who is preparing herself and waiting for her groom waiting for the day when he comes to take her to himself and if you take a little peek at the very next verse in verse 11 you'll see that he's coming riding on a white horse see that next week he's coming church he's coming for you his triumphant reign is coming long for it live for it and you will not be disappointed when he comes by way of response let me just ask you a few questions to consider do you share heaven's joy at the thought of God's forever rule do you share heaven's joy do you also long for God's

unrivaled kingdom if you do continue to set your heart on that blessed reminder that you are personally invited and that you yourself are a member of that bride that was purchased at the price of the lamb's blood if you don't if that does not strike joy at least a little bit in your heart or if that joy is fuzzy then consider this second question what does bring you joy what do you celebrate and rejoice in if the objects of your affection are only things that don't last things of Babylon then chances are your heart belongs not to the bridegroom but to the prostitute to allegiance not to the true king but to the beast come out there's no joy there there's no lasting fulfillment there revelation does not give us the option of neither rejoicing in Satan's rule nor in God's rule there's no third way we either delight in the fact that God is our king or we delight in the fact that we are our own kings or queens and if that is the truth then we are in league with the beast and the prostitute there's no third way don't try to ride the middle it's either one or the other if you do share in the joy of heaven though at least a little bit there's that there it's a seed it's planted it's bearing fruit in your life then you're in the fight against Babylon you're struggling against setting your heart on the things of this world then if that's you consider this final question is Jesus your bridegroom calling you to prepare yourself in a particular way today is there a sinful habit that he has made you aware of this week that you know you need to put off you know you need his grace to put off to put away to come out of or is there a habit of righteousness that you know that he is calling you to put on how can you make effort today grace enabled effort to prepare yourself actively today this week for the wedding feast may God give us the grace that we need to faithfully respond to this word let's pray to that end father you have sent your son to betroth himself to a bride forever and your unchallenged rule is soon coming when you will vanquish your enemies and you will bring the wedding feast about

God would you please change our longing from anything that's said on this world to your unchallenged rule help us to long for that day to long for the wedding feast to long to be with you in our union with you forever give us grace God to put aside to put off that which does not bring ultimate and lasting fulfillment give grace now minister to each one of us by your spirit we pray in Christ's name amen