

The Song Of The Lamb

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[0 : 00] Revelation 14 and 15. If you are able, will you please stand for the reading of God's word? Milton, I'm feeling that little bit of feedback we talked about.

If you can turn me down just a tad. Thank you. Revelation 14, 1 through 5 and 15, 1 through 4. Then I looked and there before me was the Lamb standing on Mount Zion and with him 144,000 who had his name and his father's name written on their foreheads.

And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like the peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpses playing their harps.

And they sang a new song before the throne and before the living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.

These are those who did not defile themselves with women for they kept themselves pure. They followed the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and women and offered as first fruits to God and the Lamb.

[1 : 12] No lie was found in their mouth. They are blameless. Then at 15, verse 1, I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign, seven angels with the seven last plagues last because with them God's wrath is completed.

And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name.

They held harps given them by God and sang the song of Moses, the servant of God and the song of the Lamb. Great and marvelous are your works, O Lord God Almighty.

Just and true are your ways. You, King of the ages, who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy.

All nations will come and worship before you for your righteous acts have been revealed. This is the word of the Lord.

[2 : 16] You may be seated. Again, dear God.

God, we confess, or at least I confess, that your spirit inspired these words we've just read. And you have inspired them for a purpose.

And I pray in your mercy and grace that these words would fulfill that purpose in us as never before. For we pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. The last book of the Bible turns out to pose the most essential question of our lives. The most essential question for our lives as individuals and as human societies. The revelation of Jesus Christ, that is the book's title, poses the question, whom will we worship?

[3 : 23] We are going to worship. We are the creatures who worship. We cannot help it. We are constituted to worship.

Every human being worships. Every human society worships. And through a kaleidoscope of imagery and symbolism and special effects, the revelation of Jesus Christ, the apocalypse of Jesus Christ, brings us face to face with this most essential issue of our existence.

Whom will we worship? It turns out that everything else hinges on the way we live the answer to that question.

So we are not surprised that in the drama that is the apocalypse of Jesus Christ. In the drama which Jesus put on for John on the prison island of Patmos, we find all kinds of songs and hymns and choruses.

By my counting, there are at least 16 songs, which throughout church history have inspired thousands of other songs, some of which we sang today.

[4 : 39] The songs are the logical response to what is revealed in the drama about who God is and about what God has done, is doing and will do in the world.

When we finally realize what all of God's actions in the world are all about, we humans, along with the whole of the cosmos, cannot but worship with songs.

Now, the songs of the drama have two purposes. The first is to summarize the message of the revelation. To summarize the message of the apocalypse.

As was the case in ancient drama, especially in Greek ancient drama. As the play unfolded, periodically an individual or a choir would step forward and review what had happened and prepare the audience for what is to come.

If, as you read through the revelation of Jesus Christ, you find yourself overwhelmed or confused, simply step back and listen to the songs.

[6 : 01] The songs capture the gospel that is being portrayed in all the imagery, symbolism and special effects. The songs in Revelation recapitulate, if you will, the core message of the whole book.

The second purpose of the songs is to pose that fundamental question. Whom will we worship? All the imagery, symbolism and special effects are designed to get in our face with that question.

Whom will you worship? Or or more to the point, whom are you worshipping? Not just on the Lord's Day during a Sunday worship service, but Monday through Saturday, morning, noon and night.

Who are you worshipping? You will worship someone. Who will it be? Now, since the writing of the revelation of Jesus Christ, the apostle John has been called the seer.

Obviously so. I mean, he was told to write down all that he sees. But John is also called the liturgist. I think it was the great preacher of the fourth century, John Chrysostom, who referred to John this way the most.

[7 : 32] John, the seer is also John, the liturgist. John, the seer, who is John, the evangelist, is also John, the liturgist. Of course. For when John sees what he sees, he worships.

He has to worship. He has to sing songs. And through the songs recorded in his book, 16, by my counting, John, the liturgist, calls us to worship.

Father in heaven, we pray that you would bless those emergency. Workers right now and you'd bless those that they're being sent to serve. We thank you for them in Jesus name.

Now, as John calls us to worship, he helps us realize the pressure we are under to worship anything other than the true God and Savior.

He helps us realize that we are under tremendous pressure. Portrayed in spiritual forces like the dragon and the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth.

[8 : 46] Under tremendous pressure to find our ultimate meaning in powers that have rejected or ignore the living God. As we saw in chapter 13, the dragon, the dragon, the arch enemy of Jesus, manipulates religious powers, the beast from the earth, to induce us to worship political power, the beast from the sea.

We are under constant pressure to worship powers that want nothing to do with the living God. In the verses between the ones we read, Revelation 14, 1 to 5 and 15, 1 to 4, John speaks of those who worship the beast and his image.

And John tells us of this angel who, in the midst of all of this pressure, cries out in a loud voice, 14, 7, fear God and give him the glory.

Worship him who made heaven and earth and the sea. And as John calls us to worship, he is honest with us about the capacity of his own heart to go astray.

In chapters 17 and 21, he speaks of being carried by the spirit through an angel. First, first into the wilderness, where he's being given a vision of Babylon, the harlot, as he calls it.

[10 : 20] And then second, up into a high mountain, where he is given a vision of the new Jerusalem, the bride, as he calls it. And both times, John tells us that after this vision, he fell down at the feet of the angel and worshiped the angel.

John, you're the liturgist. What are you doing on your knees before an angel? And both times, the angel has to say to John, the liturgist, do not do that.

I am a fellow creature. Worship God. Even John's heart could slip into idolatry. As can mine.

As can yours. As does mine. And as does yours. John says he hears, chapter 14, verse 2, a voice from heaven.

The voice, he says, is like the sound of many waters. Think the cascading waters of Niagara Falls. And like the sound of loud thunder.

[11 : 35] Think the boom that rumbles through the canyons of the tall buildings during a storm. And like harpses playing their harps. Think the melodious healing sounds that come when Evie Lowen strums and picks her harp.

To what is John referring here? Is it not what people have called throughout the centuries? The music of the spheres?

The celestial harmony? The Greek thinker, Pythagoras, and the Roman thinker, Cicero, both spoke of the universe being filled with music.

If you have the ears to hear. And for just a moment. In those crummy circumstances. On the prison island of Patmos.

John hears the music of heaven. And then he hears people sing a new song. Chapter 14, verse 3. A song, John says, no one could learn except the 144,000 purchased by the Lamb.

[12 : 50] I'm not sure what he means when he says no one could learn the song except. Is he referring to a song whose words are kept secret until another time?

Who one day the redeemed, which would one day the redeemed would sing? John calls it a new song. And the first time we meet that phrase new song is in chapter 5, where we're introduced to the worship of heaven.

When after the Lamb who is slain takes the scroll from the one who sits on the throne, the four living creatures and the 24 elders cry out, worthy. Or is John referring to the song we do here in chapter 15, verses 3 and 4, the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb?

144,000. Statistic or symbol? Symbol. All the numbers in the last book of the Bible are symbols. We first heard this number in chapter 7, where the Lamb seals his followers to prepare them to remain faithful in times of tribulation.

[14 : 07] 144, 12 times 12. The whole redeemed people of God. 12 representing God's people before the crucifixion of the Lamb. And 12 representing God's people since the crucifixion of the Lamb.

Now, 144 would have been sufficient to make the point. All those redeemed by God. 144 times 10 would have been sufficient.

Because in Scripture, if you multiply a number by 10, it's a way of saying that's a really big number. 144 times 10 times 10. 144 times 10. That would have clearly made the point.

But John gives it as 144 times 10 times 10 times 10 to emphasize that God has a lot of people that he's redeemed. Which is why in Revelation 7, he then says, and I looked and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count.

145. And now in chapter 15, they, the 144,000, sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb.

[15 : 18] John says the 144,000 are chaste. 14. 4. They have not been defiled with women. And he says they're blameless.

14. 5. No lie is found in them. What is John meaning here? Is he saying that the redeemed people of God have never had sex and have never, ever told a lie? No.

John is saying that the 144,000 have remained loyal under pressure. They had not succumbed to the alluring temptation of Babylon the harlot.

They had not given into the pressure to worship the beast. Dragon manipulated political power.

They had not lied when they were told not to deny that Jesus is Lord.

When push comes to shove, they spoke the truth and they named the name of the lover of their souls. And then accompanied by the music of the spheres, they sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb.

[16 : 24] The redeemed see. And therefore, sing. When you see, you sing. Now, before listening more carefully to their song, I want to step back.

And I want to hear it in a larger context. Not only of the whole of the last book of the Bible, but in the whole of the New Testament.

We find songs just about everywhere in the New Testament. Someone has said that the New Testament is a veritable symphony of salvation.

So for a few moments, probably about 10, I'm going to invite you to listen to other parts of the symphony of salvation.

The one hundred and forty four thousand have joined. As I like to point out during the Christmas season in the Christmas story, at every major turning point, someone steps forward to sing.

[17:35] Mary, after her encounter with Elizabeth, sings her Magnificat. Luke one forty six to fifty five. My soul magnifies the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God, my savior, and goes on to sing of the radical reversal the birth of her son will affect in the world.

Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, when John is born, is filled with the spirit and sings his Benedictus. Luke one sixty seven to seventy nine. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel and goes on to sing about God visiting his people out of mercy and bringing light into the darkness.

On Christmas Eve, a host of angels sing their Gloria in Excelsis Deo. Luke two fourteen. Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth.

The angels, by the way, are singing what we could call the infrastructure for the possibility of world peace. Glory to God in the highest peace on earth. Glory to God.

Peace on earth. No glory to God. No peace on earth. As we will see in Revelation 16 to 19, the text we look at next week.

[18:43] Then a few days later, after Jesus is born, Simeon, the priest holding the infant Jesus, sings his nunc dimittis. Luke two twenty nine to thirty two. Now, Lord, let your servant depart in peace for my eyes have seen your salvation.

When you see, you sing. So in the exposition of the gospel in the rest of the New Testament, the gospel is summarized in song.

Ephesians five fourteen. Awake sleeper arrives from the dead and Christ. And Christ will shine on you. This song was likely sung at baptism services as the candidate came out of the water.

It's not a bad song to sing every Sunday morning before worship. Awake sleeper rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you. One Timothy one seventeen. Now unto the king, eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, the honor and glory forever and ever.

Amen. One Timothy three sixteen. He who was revealed in the flesh was vindicated in the spirit, beheld by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed in the world, taken up in glory.

[19:54] This is a confession of faith of the early church put into a song. What Paul calls the mystery of godliness. Romans eleven thirty three to thirty five. After developing the gospel of God's grace in these eleven densely packed chapters, the apostle Paul burst out in a song.

Oh, the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments, unfathomable his ways for from him and through him and to him are all things to him be the glory forever.

Amen. Amen. Indeed, Paul. Philippians two five to eleven. Have this mind in you, which was in Christ Jesus, who, because he was in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to take advantage of.

And goes on to sing of Jesus emptying himself, taking on the form of a servant and being obedient to the father's call to go to the cross. And as a consequence, he's given the name Lord to the glory of God, the father.

Colossians one fifteen to twenty. Oh, what a song. This is the song that grabbed hold of me while studying physics in university and change the trajectory of my life.

[21:09] He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation for by him. All things were made both in the heavens and the earth, visible and invisible, where their thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities.

All things have been created by him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together. He's also the head of the body, the church. He's the beginning.

He's the firstborn from the dead so that he himself might come to have first place in everything. And goes on to sing of the whole cosmos being reconciled by the blood of Jesus Christ. I wish we knew the tune to which the Colossians sang that song.

Someday, I hope I'm going to be able to actually preach that whole song for you. More songs. Hebrews one, three elegant poetry in Greek.

And he, the son of God, is the radiance of God's glory. The exact representation of his nature, upholding all things by the word of his power. John one, one to 18.

[22:12] The prologue to John's gospel. The word before the word is likely him. In the beginning was the word. The word was with God and the word was God. All things came into being by him.

In him was life. And the life was the light of men and women. And the light shines in the darkness. And the darkness does not overcome it. And the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

What a song. Ephesians one, three to 14. I wish we knew this tune because this is a song which, if we sang every morning, would change the way the day goes.

Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. And then goes on to sing the benefit of our salvation, election, adoption, forgiveness of sin, hope, and the indwelling of the spirit.

And then the songs of the apocalypse of Jesus Christ. 16, by my counting. Here we go. Revelation 4, 8. The four living creatures around the throne say day and night.

[23 : 14] Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come. Over and over and over and over again. They never get tired of repeating the song because as they repeat it, holiness goes deeper into their being with each repetition.

Revelation 4, 11. The 24 elders around the throne cast their crowns before the throne and they sing. Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power.

For you created all things and because of your will they exist. You created them. How the world would change if we could sing that one song.

As I have pointed out over the past months, John is stealing thunder from Caesar, so to speak. Caesar is being hailed as Lord and God. When Caesar entered the Senate, all in attendance were to rise and stand and say, worthy are you to receive glory and honor and power and wisdom and might and blessing.

All in attendance were to say to Caesar, holy one. They were to say, righteous are your judgments. They were to say, salvation belongs to you. Yours is the victory.

[24 : 30] To sing worthy are you to the God and father of the Lord Jesus Christ was and is a powerful political critique. No political power has that place in the universe.

Revelation 5, 9 through 11. The four living creatures and the 24 elders sing to the lamb. Worthy are you to take the scroll and break its seals for you were slain.

And with your blood, you purchase people from all over the world. Revelation 5, 12. Thousands and thousands of angels sing. Worthy is the lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.

Revelation 5, 13. All of creation breaks out in song to him who sits on the throne and to the lamb be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever. That's one of the clearest statements of the divinity of Jesus Christ.

For the lamb is on the same side of the divine human divide as God. Same side as God. To God and to the lamb.

[25 : 35] Revelation 7, 10. The innumerable redeemed people say salvation. Victory to our God who sits on the throne and to the lamb. Stealing the thunder again.

Victory to the lamb. Not victory to Caesar. Revelation 7, 12. All the angels around the throne and the 24 living creatures and the elders. They all fall down on their faces and worship God singing. Amen. Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be unto our God forever and ever. Amen. And all God's people said. Awake, O sleeper.

Arise from the dead and Christ will shine on you. Revelation 11, 15. Loud voice from heaven. The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign forever and ever.

Revelation 11, 17 to 18. The 24 elders fall on their faces, worshiping, singing. We give you thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who is and was because you've taken your great power and have begun to reign.

[26 : 43] Now, before the end, you've begun to reign. And that's why we sing, reign in us, O Lord. Revelation 12, 10 to 12. A loud voice from heaven sings.

Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ has come for the accuser of the brethren has been thrown down. The great sniper has been thrown down.

Revelation 16, 5 to 7. An angel sings. Righteous are you who is and was, O Holy One, because you judge these things. All these things in your way, you judge them.

Revelation 19, 1 to 12. In the text we'll consider next Sunday. John hears a loud voice with a great multitude saying, Hallelujah.

You realize, by the way, this is the only time Hallelujah occurs in the New Testament. Hallelujah is used throughout the Old Testament. This is the only time we hear it in the New Testament.

Hallelujah. Salvation, victory, glory and power belong to our God because your judgments are true and righteous.

[27 : 45] For you have judged the great harlot. Revelation 19, 3, a second time the multitudes say, Hallelujah. Her smoke rises up forever and ever. Revelation 9, 15. A voice from heaven says, Give praise to God.

All you bondservants, you who fear him, you who fear him, great and small. Revelation 19, 6 to 8.

John says he hears the voice of a huge multitude. The sound of many waters.

Many peals of thunder saying, Hallelujah. For the Lord our God reigns forever. Let us rejoice and be glad. Give him glory for the marriage of the supper of the Lamb has come and the bride has made herself ready.

We did that in 12 minutes. Symphony of salvation. And then Revelation 5, 15, 3 to 4. What John calls the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb.

Undergirding all the other songs. And gathering up so much of the theology of the other psalms.

Great and marvelous are your works, O Lord God, the Almighty.

[28 : 51] Righteous and true are your ways. You, the king of the nations or the king of the ages, who will not fear you, O Lord, and glorify your name. Now, why does John call this song of the 144,000 the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb?

Because he's tying together two of God's greatest acts of salvation. God redeeming Israel from Egypt through the leadership of Moses.

And God redeeming the world through the blood of Jesus Christ. The song of Moses is found in Exodus 15. And many of the verses of that song are sung in other parts of the Old Testament.

Moses and the people sang this song after being led out of Egypt through the waters. They sang it after they had crossed over the waters.

And those who had been chasing them are behind them being swallowed up in the waters. Exodus 15. I will sing to the Lord, to Yahweh, for he is highly exalted.

[29 : 58] The horse and its rider, Pharaoh and his army, he is hurled into the sea. Yahweh is my strength and song. He has become my salvation. Yahweh is my warrior. Who is like you among the gods, O Yahweh?

Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in praise, working wonders? Yahweh shall reign forever and ever. Now, in Revelation 15, John does not directly quote Exodus 15.

Instead, he quotes Old Testament texts that were inspired by Exodus 15. Like, for instance, Psalm 98.1. This is the psalm that inspired Isaac Watts to write Joy to the World.

Oh, sing to Yahweh a new song, for he has done wonderful things. His right hand and his holy arm have gained the victory for him. Why, then, if John does not directly quote from the Song of Moses, why does John then call this new song the Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb?

Because God's victory over Pharaoh and his armies is a picture of God's victory in Jesus the Lamb.

[31 : 14] The Exodus event, liberating Israel from Egypt, in that event, God overcame. God overcame Pharaoh and his army. But that was the surface victory.

The media would have gotten that. The real victory was the victory over the gods of Egypt. The gods that held Pharaoh captive.

Which is to say, Pharaoh was not the real enemy. Spiritual powers embodied in the human-made gods of Egypt were the real enemy. The ten plagues that God sent upon Egypt to rescue his people are aimed, if you will, not at the people.

They're aimed at the gods of Egypt. Each of the ten plagues is aimed at a different god of Egypt that was holding Egypt captive. Israel needed to be redeemed, but so did Egypt.

So did Pharaoh. Thus, the revelation of Jesus Christ. The first century church was facing opposition, pressure, persecution.

[32 : 24] And on the surface level, the level that the media would have gotten, the enemy was Caesar, especially in Caligula and Nero and Domitian, all claiming absolute power.

But they were not the real enemy. The real enemy was the arch enemy of God who hates Jesus, the dragon, the devil, the Satan. The same power that had gotten a hold of Pharaoh had gotten a hold of Nero and Domitian.

And in the death of Jesus, in this apparently weak and foolish surrender to all those powers on the cross, God overcame the dragon and his beast. And that's why John uses two titles for the song sung by the 144,000.

They are singing this greater victory in the Lamb. God has won a victory over all the powers that oppose him. God has won the victory over all that keeps his people from entering fullness of life in the Lamb.

Now, like the song of Moses, the song of the Lamb focuses on who God is. The subject of this song is God, not humans.

[33 : 36] As I showed you, the subject of all the songs in the New Testament is God, not us. Oh, Lord God, the Almighty. In the Bible, it simply means sovereign of sovereign.

Thus, you king of the nations, all nations. He's king of all nations. The nations do not have to know it. They do not have to believe it. It is a fact. He's king of all the nations.

And you are holy. And your ways are just. Well, that's important for this song to sing in light of what we're going to see next week. In God's mercy and grace, God judges.

God works to realign the moral and economic order. But all his judgments are just, says this song. And like the song of Moses, the song of the Lamb then celebrates God's acts, not our acts.

As Andrew was emphasizing earlier, it's God who saves, not we who save. And all the songs keep the focus there. Great and marvelous are your works. Oh, Lord God, the Almighty.

[34 : 38] Now, in the context of the revelation of Jesus Christ, these great works refer to the full scope of God's work in the life of Jesus Christ.

Great and marvelous is God's work in the incarnation. God becomes one of us and moves them in our neighborhood. Great and marvelous is God's work in the earthly ministry of Jesus.

God is healing broken bodies and freeing people from addiction and freeing them from everything that keeps them bound up. Great and marvelous is God's work in the crucifixion where God is tearing down all that keeps us from his presence, bringing us into the holy of holies, satisfying his own wrath against sin, overcoming the power of death.

Great and marvelous is God's work in the resurrection, calling out of the nothingness of the grave this whole new order of existence. Great and marvelous is God's work in the ascension, lifting up the lowly carpenter and putting him on the throne of the universe.

And great and marvelous is God's work in Pentecost, where God, having rescued his son, now gives him his spirit and the son then pours his spirit upon his people.

[35 : 52] Great and marvelous is God's victory over all that stands in his way. That's what they're singing. Great and marvelous is God's victory over all that keeps his people from entering into fullness of life.

Thank you. Yes. So. Rightly do the one hundred and forty four thousand ask in their song.

Who would not fear you? Oh, God. Yes. You can render that word reverent. Or stand in awe of or be astonished by.

But fear is exactly the right word. Who will not fear missing out on your purposes?

Who will not fear being out of sync with your ways? I like how philosopher Dallas Willard expresses it.

[36 : 58] The fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom. The fear of the Lord. Listen to this. Is the fear of being crosswise of God. Out of sync with God.

The fear of God is the fear of being crosswise of God. Fear of not doing what he wants and not being as he requires. We all fear someone or something.

We all fear being crosswise of someone or something. Who will we fear? Willard continues. Listen to this.

The intelligent person recognizes that his or her well-being lies in harmony with God and what he is doing in the kingdom. God is not mean.

But God is dangerous. One who does not, in a certain sense, worry about God simply isn't smart.

[38 : 01] The songs in the drama in the last book of the Bible summarize the message of the book. They summarize the good news of the book.

So live in the songs. Live in the imagery, symbolism, and special effects. But especially live in the songs. May I suggest a discipline for you for this Lent.

Take one of these songs in the Revelation or somewhere in the New Testament. Memorize it.

Repeat it over and over again. Recite it daily.

Until it penetrates your soul to the degree that you experience the reality of the victory the song sings. What has a hold on you right now that is keeping you back from entering into the fullness of life in Christ?

Name it. And offer it up to this glorious, victorious God. And watch him overcome it.

[39 : 13] And set your heart free. Free to worship. The holy lover of your soul. Who alone can set us free.

Amen. Dear God. Thank you that you know each of us. You know what each of us is facing. Lord. Lord, I can see. As I stand here, I can see it in a lot of faces. But you see it more clearly. You see right through our faces. You see right into our souls.

And I pray in your mercy and grace that you would put a new song in each of our souls. A song that sets us free. In Jesus' name.

And for his glory. Amen.