

Sermon for Easter 3 (Series C)

Text: Revelation 5:11-14

Preached on 04-22-2007

Introduction:

For those of you who have had some background in music, I'm sure that the name *George Frederick Handel* sounds familiar. He was a famous composer. Today he is most well known for a musical piece called "*Messiah*." That musical score is based on the words of our text. A listener doesn't need to possess a great amount of musical knowledge to be moved by the performance of that piece. It is truly inspiring. When hearing it, I can't help but be reminded of the eternal hymn of praise that God allowed the Apostle John to witness while in exile on the island of Patmos. After hearing the greatest musical score ever composed, John no doubt sang his Alleluias to the Lord. Still today...

Series Theme: We Sing Our Alleluias to the Resurrected Lord!

Today we sing our Alleluias because...

Theme: The Resurrected Lord is Worthy of our Praise!

Part I: Now on earth

Part II: Forever in Heaven

Background:

As we learned last week, the early Christian Church suffered intense persecution. In order to encourage these troubled Christians to keep on praising God, the Apostle John was allowed to view God's throne-room in Heaven. As he stood there, on the glassy sea of Heaven's floor, John witnessed and heard the most powerful song ever sung, much more explosive and moving than Handel's "*Messiah*" could ever be. It wasn't just the quality of the music that made this song so great. The occasion which inspired it is really what made this the most dramatic music ever heard by human ears. What was the occasion that inspired all of Heaven and earth to erupt into jubilant song? The Resurrection of Jesus Christ!

Part I: Now on earth

Think of how hard it must have been for the believers in John's day to praise God at all. These people had it rough. Their property was confiscated. They were exiled (or kicked out) from their homes. Many of them were put to death in unspeakable ways. They underwent tremendous hardships. Their enemies appeared to have the upper hand. With all this persecution going on, why would anyone want to praise the Resurrected Lord?

When at their lowest possible point, the believers in Asia Minor received the words to the greatest musical score ever composed. They weren't just any words either. They were the divinely inspired words of God Himself.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle John wrote, **“WORTHY is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise” (v. 12)!** How could a bunch of persecuted believers find these words so comforting? Because they were sung by the persecuted believers of the past: heroes of faith like Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and the Apostle Paul just to name a few. All these people were martyred (or killed) for their faith in Christ. But look where they are now! They are in God’s eternal presence, singing their Alleluias to the Resurrected Lord.

Recognizing who made up this heavenly choir caused John, as well as the persecuted believers in Asia Minor, to breathe a sigh of relief. No matter how bad things got; no matter how much they suffered, nothing in all the world would take away their place in that heavenly choir. Even though they weren’t in it yet, they knew that Jesus shed His blood and gave His life to pay their way. His resurrection from the dead proved it. The only appropriate response to this Good News was for them to praise the Resurrected Lord while still in the world.

Application:

We too are persecuted believers. Oh, we may not be stranded on an island the way John was or kicked out of our homes the way many early Christians were, but we do suffer in other ways. We endure colds with sore throat pain and head and chest congestion for weeks-on-end. We worry our way through academic, financial, and other challenges. We’re plagued by the shame and guilt that our sins bring to our hearts. We’re constantly tempted by the devil to sin more. We’re called narrow minded, foolish bigots for accepting the Bible as God’s infallible Word and confessing Jesus Christ as the God-Man, rose from the dead. In the face of our persecution, however, do we always respond with song to the Risen Lord? Do we always give Jesus the glory and praise He is worthy of? Sadly, “No”, we do not.

Never forget that it was because of our disobedience and disloyalty to God that Jesus came down from Heaven to begin with. He didn’t have to go to the cross. He could have left us Hell-deep in sin. BUT He didn’t! He paid the penalty for our deadly sins with His holy, precious blood. This awesome sacrifice made all the difference in the world for ALL the world. Because the Lamb of God was slain for us, we are now At-One with God. That’s why we gather here for worship and sing our Alleluias week after week. We will continue gathering and singing for the rest of our lives because *The Resurrected Lord is Worthy of our Praise* now on earth.

Transition:

The Resurrected Lord permitting John to see the Saints in Heaven singing their Alleluias moved him to sing some Alleluias of his own. In addition to praising the Resurrected Lord now on earth, John also knew that he would one day praise Him...

Part II: Forever in Heaven

What John saw and experienced on the island of Patmos can only be described as breathtaking and magnificent. Before he could even absorb the significance of this vision (or Revelation), however, we're told, **"I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand"** (v. 11). What were these thousands upon thousands of angels doing? They were praising the Resurrected Lord.

Anyone who has attended a really good choir concert can tell you how beautiful it is to listen to. Whenever a number of talented sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses come together for the sole purpose of lifting their voices in song, it is quite overpowering. Now imagine attending the concert that John was at. In this heavenly choir there were a number of different voices that came together. These voices were more than just talented. They were perfect in every way. There were all the believers of both the Old and New Testaments. There were the multitudes of angels. As if those weren't already enough voices, they were then accompanied by all of creation. John tells us, **"I heard every creature in Heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing"** (v. 13). WOW! How awesome it must have been to be the sole guest at this majestic concert, where all of creation joined in praising the Resurrected Lord.

Don't you wish you could have been on that island, to see this incredible concert for yourself; to actually hear the sound of all Heaven and earth erupting in song? Well, the Apostle John was there. He was a one-man audience. How thankful we can be that he did not keep this spectacular vision all to himself. He sent it on to those seven churches experiencing fierce persecution in Asia Minor. Upon receiving this letter, the spirits of all those troubled Christians were uplifted. Their fears and worries were replaced with hope, comfort, joy, and peace. Despite all their relocations, hardships, and cruelty, they knew that Jesus was alive and well. Knowing Jesus to be alive and ruling over all things for their eternal good (**Romans 8:28**), they were confident that one day they too would be a part of that

heavenly choir, praising the Resurrected Lord forever in Heaven.

Application:

We are reminded of the terrible reality and darkness of our sin every time we give the LORD imperfect worship and praise here on earth. As sinners, we often come to God's house reluctantly, if we come at all. When we are here, our thoughts frequently drift elsewhere. We easily think about all the other things we have to do. We anxiously check our watches because deep down we can't wait to get on with our day. We are quick to give the God THAT SAVED US mere lip-service, rushing through the liturgy and failing to reflect on the words that are either spoken or sung. We fail to prepare our hearts to receive the Sacrament the way Jesus instructed us to. We forget to set aside our first-fruits and end up giving God whatever is leftover at the end of the week. Yes, there are many ways and countless times when our worship comes up short (**Romans 3:23**), failing to give Jesus the kind of praise He is worthy of.

This vision from the Apostle John, however, assures us that a day is approaching when we will all experience flawless worship, when our voices will blend together in perfect harmony and pitch with the Saints and angels in Heaven. This heavenly worship awaits each one of us, not because of anything we have done, but solely and entirely because of what Jesus HAS DONE for us! The empty tomb stands as our proof! Jesus Himself said, "**Because I live, you also will live**" (**John 14:19**). Because of this promise, we WILL one day enter the Holy City and take our place in that majestic choir, praising the Resurrected Lord forever in Heaven.

Conclusion:

If you've ever wondered why we use a liturgical style of worship that includes responsive readings and musical settings, know it is because worship is primarily a dialogue (or conversation) between God and people. Here's how it works: God comes to us in Word and Sacrament (The Means of Grace) to give us forgiveness, which builds us up in faith. We then respond by giving Him the song and praise He Alone is worthy of. Even though our song and praise will never be perfect this side of Heaven, our place in Heaven's Choir IS reserved. Our names ARE written there (**Revelation 21:27**)! That means the Resurrected Lord is to be praised both (1) now on earth and (2) forever in Heaven. Either way, *The Resurrected Lord is Worthy of our Praise!* Now that is something to celebrate! That gives us something to sing about! ***We Sing Our Alleluias to the Resurrected Lord!*** Amen!