

“HALLELUJAH.”

Christmas Day

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

December 25, 2024, 10:00 AM

Scripture Texts: Revelation 11:15; 19:1-6, 15-16

Introduction.

It starts with the with the violins — orderly, stately. The choir rises. The audience rises. And before you know it the room fills with the most triumphant sound of one of the most beloved musical works of all time: Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus.”

Over the next four and a half minutes the choir repeats the word hallelujah 48 times, but the audience and musicians never seem to tire of it. Have you ever thought about how there can be so much power and praise drawn out of the repetition of one word?

48 times. That is more times than hallelujah is in the Bible. It is found 24 times in the Psalms and 4 times in what is called the fourfold hallelujah in Revelation 19, the chapter from which the Hallelujah chorus is actually taken.

The repeated hallelujahs lead to the reason for the hallelujahs, “for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth,” then with trumpets and more hallelujahs from each of the voices/parts the joyful jubilation is heightened, only to soar even more with “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.” Then the deep basses “and He shall reign forever and ever.”

Forever and ever, Hallelujah, Hallelujah. Then a final flurry of Hallelujahs, with basses and sopranos, He shall reign forever and ever. And then that last sustained, drawn out Hallelujah.

When Handel completed “Hallelujah,” he reportedly told his servant, “I did think I did see all Heaven before me, and the great God Himself seated on His throne, with His company of Angels.”

It is almost three centuries old, yet it never gets old. It is a timeless masterpiece. Of Handel’s 25 oratorios, the Messiah is his most famous and,

arguably, the most famous oratorio ever. Messiah remains the most frequently performed and highly regarded oratorio ever written. When it first came to the United States in 1818 it was associated with Christmas and the Hallelujah chorus is pulled from the end of the second part to be the finale of the Advent part of the Messiah.

Hallelujah.

What is this word that translators skip over when they translate all the rest of the words in the Bible?

The word hallelujah is made of two Hebrew words: halal and YHWH. Halal means to “extol the greatness or excellence of a person or event.” It is often just translated “praise.” But praise who or what? YHWH is the covenant name of God. So, to say “hallelujah” is saying “extol the greatness to our covenant-keeping God.” The best translation might be “you all must praise the Lord.”

When should we say it? When your team wins? When you find a parking spot by the front entrance of Costco? When you pass the test or get the job? When a child is born? What about when the news is not so good?

Hallelujah is befitting of both the peaks and valleys of life when we want to cultivate a true heart of worship and a constant acknowledgment of the divine truth that the Lord God omnipotent and almighty reigns over all the circumstances of life, and we are confident He is sovereign and good.

It is a declaration that every moment is an opportunity to praise the Lord—a perpetual invitation to elevate our gaze above the temporal and fix our eyes on the eternal. Praise the Lord. (Mike Leake).

Revelation 19

The Hallelujah Chorus is taken from Revelation 19, which praises the victory over the rebellious kings and nations, over all of Christ’s enemies, and celebrates the marriage feast of the Lamb and the coronation of the Lamb as King.

Handel had written anthems for the coronation ceremonies of King George and Queen Caroline. In four minutes he wrote a coronation masterpiece that gives

the most worthy praise to Jesus who is crowned King of kings and Lord of lords.

The Lamb of God who came and suffered and died to take away the sin of the world, who was raised from the dead and ascended to heaven *is* the King of kings and Lord of lord who will reign forever and ever, world without end.

When Handel wrote the Messiah it wasn't a "hallelujah" time of his life. He was depressed, he was near bankruptcy, his recent works were not received well by audiences.

The first time the Messiah was performed in Dublin, Ireland in 1742 it was a benefit concert to raise money to get people released who were in debtor's prison. The money raised that night was enough to free from debt 142 debtors.

And that is what the Messiah is still doing. Jesus the Messiah said that it was one of the reasons for His coming to earth in the first place.

Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

John 8:36 If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Why the Hallelujah Chorus at Christmas?

The last five psalms in the book of Psalms (146–150) comprise what might be considered a great "Hallelujah Chorus."

Each psalm in this five-psalm group both begins and ends with an exclamatory "Praise the Lord," or "Hallelujah!" The last psalm, Psalm 150 ends with hallelujah and with the great exhortation: "Let everything that has breath [or 'Spirit'] praise the Lord. Praise the Lord" (Psalm 150:6).

Who should we say hallelujah? Let everything that has breath say hallelujah. Does not all nature around us sing and praise the Lord? The thunder and the lightning, the wind and the waves, fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains.

Heaven and the earth praise Him. If we are silent we are the exception in the universe, and we have most cause to. Don't be silent.

When should we say hallelujah?

The best day to give praise to the Lord is today. And by today I don't just mean today because it is Christmas. I mean today as in each and every day. Our praise should be like our pulse, for as long as we have life and breath. Everything that *has* breath, for as long as *we have* breath.

Why should we say hallelujah?

Why do we say hallelujah at Christmas? What cause do we have to say praise be to God on this day, to extol the excellency of Christ and the glories of His incarnation?

We say hallelujah that the Son of the living God has taken on our flesh and become our Messiah in the person of a baby.

We say hallelujah that this Son of God lived a perfect, righteous life on earth to fulfill all the righteous requirements of the law which we could not keep.

We say hallelujah that this perfect, sinless Son of God died the death of crucifixion on the cross and defeating death rose again from the dead, so that all sinners might be resurrected.

We say hallelujah this season that this Son of God ascended to glory and sits on the throne at the right hand of the Father and has been given the title King of kings and Lord of lords, and He shall reign forever and ever.

Philippians 2:9-11 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
Hallelujah!

Isaiah 9:2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.
Hallelujah!

Isaiah 9:6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given;

and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Hallelujah!

Isaiah 9:7 Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. Hallelujah!

Luke 1:32-33 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Hallelujah!

Galatians 4:4-7 When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. Hallelujah!

Luke 2:10-14 And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” Hallelujah!

Matthew 4:17 Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Hallelujah!

Revelation 11:15 The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever. Hallelujah!

Revelation 19:15-16 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. 16 On his robe and

on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.
Hallelujah!

I John 3:8 The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. Hallelujah!

Colossians 2:14-15 [God] canceled the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. Hallelujah!

Galatians 1:3-5 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. Hallelujah!

Hebrews 2:14-15 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. Hallelujah!

The seed of woman has come to crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15).
Hallelujah!

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.
Hallelujah!

Implications and application.

As I love to say on this day every year, now is the time to go to our houses for feasting. Go and enjoy and celebrate your Savior's birth. For all who believe have a right to be very happy, He gave you the right to be the children of God and that is cause for rejoicing. Go and feast. In the words of Solomon, "Go your way, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart."

Let your faith give you great joy, for to us a child has been born, a Son has been given and He is Christ the Lord and we have beheld His glory. Glory to God, hallelujah and Amen.