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REVELATION 11: 15 – 19

GOD COMES TO JUDGE AS GLORIOUS KING

Although most nations in the world have an elected president as head-of-state, some countries are still under the headship of a king or queen. Monarchies are often very old institutions. And many people in countries that do not have a monarchy see it as an outdated and irrelevant anomaly in today's modern, democratic society.

Even in countries with a king or a queen as head-of-state there is often a small, but vocal, group of republicans that wants to get rid of the monarchy.

And yet, when a crown-prince gets married, a royal baby is born, or a new king is crowned, something remarkable happens.

In nations as liberal, morally diverse, politically divided and individualized as Great Britain and The Netherlands, those occasions bring people together around their king in a remarkable unity that crosses all party boundaries.

Despite the nasty comments of hard-core republicans, for a short time at least you see the kind of harmony an elected president, as a political figure, can never achieve.

Well, if this is what a king can do who has no real power whatsoever, and whose function is mainly ceremonial and symbolic, imagine what a king can accomplish who has all the power and authority in the world, and is going to use this power for the benefit of his people.

For many Christians Ascension Day is an often forgotten feast-day. However, many faithful church celebrate Ascension Day and remember that the risen Saviour Jesus Christ ascended into heaven and was seated at God the Father's right hand to govern with him from his heavenly throne.

Christ went up to assume his royal power, his kingship over the world, over all the nations, to bring about new harmony; to unite people from all over the world in the glorious kingdom of his Father.

Indeed, our God is a glorious King. He is also a victorious King. And we need to remember how encouraging AND how warning this is, as our journey continues towards the day of his final judgment.

L I S T E N

In the big picture of Revelation, we are still in the second cycle of God's judgments. The first series unfolded when the seven seals were opened. The second series unfolded when the seven angels sounded the seven trumpets. However, that is not complete yet. We are still waiting for the seventh trumpet!

After the sixth trumpet, at the end of Rev. 9, the progress in John's vision slowed down. It was interrupted by what the apostle describes in Rev. 10 and the first part of Rev. 11. But now, after the visions of 'the angel with the scroll' and 'the two witnesses', it seems we are picking up speed again when the seventh angel sounds the final trumpet (v.15).

It completes the series that began in Rev. 8:6, and at the same time it activates the last series of seven judgments. Although, we will not get there before Rev. 15 and 16.

But remember that in the story of Revelation this seventh trumpet blast marks a significant moment. In Rev. 10:7 we have heard the oath of the

mighty angel with the scroll in his hand: *There will be no more delay! In the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel the mystery of God will be fulfilled.*

This is what is happening here. The mystery of God is going to be fulfilled. That means that now God's plan with this world will be completed. Our God is coming to reclaim his full royal authority over all the earth. This seventh trumpet blast announces the great day of the fulfilment of all God's promises.

It declares that now the hour of God's final judgment is near, at hand.

Well, in the light of Rev. 10:7 you would expect John to describe Jesus' glorious return when he hears the sound of the seventh trumpet.

But he does not. Not yet! That will come much later in the dramatic developments that are unfolding in the book of Revelation. Think of the last chapters.

Oh, the end is coming. The sound of the seventh trumpet keeps us on the edge of our seat. It is close. It is very, very close! But before that, John is going to tell us many more things to help us understand what is going on in our world, the world in which we live.

Those things are all coming in Rev. 12 – 14. We need to be reminded that the time of the last days is going to be a rough time for the church of Jesus Christ.

And then we find in Rev. 15 how the seventh trumpet triggers the seven last plagues wreaking havoc in this world.

Well then, within this framework of persecution, hardships, and judgments, we have a surprise in the passage we are listening to in the second half of Rev. 11.

Terrible things are going on. We saw it in Rev. 9 and in the first part of Rev. 11. And we will see more of it. The hatred, the hostility toward God, toward Christ and his church is fierce. This is the world in which you and I live. This is the world in which we live as church. That can be exhausting, frustrating

and disappointing. And sometimes you wonder what the world is coming to.

But here we come to see what is behind all this. Here is your peace of mind. Yes, the Almighty God is coming to judge. But in the end all that is left is the great victory of our glorious King and of his Son, the exalted Christ. It is the view from above that shows us today already the awesome reality of God's royal power.

Horrible woes are coming when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet. There is no doubt about it. But the first thing to note is that John hears something. He hears singing! The trumpet blast triggers loud voices. So, let's listen.

There were loud voices in heaven, John says. First we hear a loud song of victory and praise, coming from within the throne-room of the Holy and Almighty God. But then we also hear other voices. And they respond to the first ones. We hear a responsive, an antiphonal victory song. It goes back and forth.

Now this second choir is formed by the twenty-four elders who are worshipping God. That is what it says in v.16. We have met them before, in Rev. 4, 5 and 7.

But to whom do the loud voices of the first choir belong, in v.15? It does not say, and so, as we have seen at other occasions, the scholars have different opinions and speculate about it.

Some think that John hears choirs of angels. That is not impossible, of course. We have heard those in Rev. 5 and 7. But another possibility makes more sense.

Remember what we have seen in Revelation 4 and 5. In chapter 4 we heard singing in a similar antiphonal fashion (v.9–10) where the twenty-four elders fall down and worship God after and in response to the song of praise by the four living creatures surrounding God's throne in heaven.

Well, since this is how the voices alternate in Rev. 4 it makes sense to see the same thing in this passage: the loud voices from heaven (v.15) belong to the four living creatures, God's awesome heavenly throne-attendants.

You may also remember that these four creatures represent all of God's creation. So - this is what is happening. Listen! At the piercing sound of the seventh trumpet all of God's creation bursts out in this loud victorious song of praise, this triumphant proclamation that the Almighty God has assumed his kingship:

The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.

"Kingdom" then means dominion, rule, sovereignty. You could say "kingship".

This is encouraging news. In v.14, just before this passage, it said: *the second woe has passed, the third woe is soon to come*. But this is not the third woe. As a matter of fact, the third one of the three woes, announced in Rev.8:19, is never mentioned as being passed. But regardless – what we have here is not a 'woe', but a joyful celebration of the transfer of dominion, the rule of this world to the Almighty God and his Anointed.

To be sure, that does not mean that God was not king before. No, we know that our God is the eternal King. He always reigns with sovereign majesty. Think of many psalms in the Old Testament that honour and glorify God as King.

And yet, we also know that God's power and authority are not always apparent in this world. Through our fall into sin the world fell into the enemy's hands. It became 'occupied territory'. Quite often Satan seems to be the supreme ruler, who dominates 'the kingdom of this world'. And we all experience the results. As Paul puts it in Romans 8: the creation is groaning under the consequences of sin and under God's judgments.

But here is the good news: This is coming to an end! When the first six trumpets sounded, one-third of the world was destroyed, and the rest of mankind did not repent (Rev. 9:18,20). The resistance remains strong. That is frightening. But do not worry. All hostile opposition will be abolished, and the Kingdom will be fully restored to its rightful owner and ruler. That is the glorious victory these heavenly voices sing about. That is what you and I may look forward to with joy and excitement.

Although it does not look like it from where we are here on earth, from where they are, from heaven they see already a cleansed and renewed world, a world that is fit to receive the Holy and Almighty God as its eternal King; a world that is fit to be *the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ*. That is a breath-taking reality.

As mentioned before, God always had the power to reign. But now the wonderful effect of his active rule will come to light in this world.

Notice that those who exercise this ruling-power are mentioned in one breath: *the Lord and his Christ*, his Anointed. Jesus is 'God's Christ', God's Anointed One, to be installed as King. He arose from the dead and ascended into heaven, to be seated at God's right hand. This means that he shares in God's government.

When we listen to these voices from heaven, we hear them praise God for the day of Jesus' ascension into heaven. The day that God Almighty gave him his seat in heaven, *far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come* (Ephesians 1:20, 21).

When Paul writes this, he tells us that today already, you and I may know that through Jesus the Christ God governs everything, everything in this world and everything in your life. And that he will reign for ever and ever.

Again, in our experiences here below we often don't see it, do we? The bad news can be too much. The powers of evil seem so strong. But here is your comfort, here is your encouragement: when Paul talks in Romans 8 about our world as a world groaning in pain, he says these are the "pains of childbirth", the pains that lead to the birth of a renewed and cleansed world. That will be a world in which God's reign, God's dominion will never be challenged or disputed.

Do not be distracted by all the loud noises that come from this world. Listen to the voices from heaven and be encouraged. Our world is getting ready. The Day of the Lord is coming and will reveal the full royal splendour of his sovereign power. He will reign for ever and ever, and every eye will see him.

But as we noted already, there is more to listen to. John hears a second choir.

The twenty-four elders, sitting on their thrones before God – you may remember this picture from John’s vision in Rev.4 – fall down on their faces to worship and glorify God, filled with deep and humble respect. And they also sing!

With abundant joy they respond to the great news, the heavenly proclamation of God’s victorious kingship. They echo the jubilant declaration of the four living creatures. These twenty-four elders represent God’s church in the Old and the New Testament. This is such a marvellous perspective. Filled with thanks, praise, and awe God’s holy, catholic, church joins all of God’s creation in unified glorification of the ruling power of Jesus Christ, ascended into heaven as the glorious King.

In wonderful harmony they reinforce for us the royal majesty of the Lord God Almighty. And as we listen to their song, we hear them acknowledge the arrival of the ascended Christ in heaven. *You have taken your great power and begun to reign.* For in him and through him the mystery of the Almighty God will be fulfilled.

You can be so absolutely sure of this, that these elders can characterize the Almighty God as *the One who is and who was*. You will remember that Rev. 1:8 and 4:8 talk about him as the God *who was, and is, and is to come*. Now this third tense is no longer needed. It can be taken out, because here we learn to celebrate that God has come. *The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ* (v. 15). Christ has taken his great power and has begun to reign.

Listen carefully and hear heaven sing from this perspective. Listen carefully in the midst of trouble, misery, and persecution. Listen carefully in a world where devilish powers seem to have the last word: the glorious King has come in his great and awesome power, and he has begun to reign.

Yes, the story of our broken lives continues. The story of our dark world continues. The festive end is not there yet. But it is coming. And today you may already know that no evil power can stop your King. That is the marvellous reality of his power and majesty, as well as the power and majesty of the ascended Jesus Christ.

Oh, Satan and his evil henchmen have tried, and they will continue to try. *The nations raged*, they have rebelled against the Lord. They have attacked, conquered and killed his church, pictured in the death of the ‘Two Witnesses’ (Rev. 11:7,8).

But that was not the end of it, on the contrary, *your wrath came*. And so *the time has come for the dead to be judged*. In fact, the hatred and resistance against God, and the persecution of his church, is paving the way for God’s judgment. Indeed, God is coming to judge as our glorious King. The time has come.

This means two things. First, it is time *for rewarding God’s servants and for destroying God’s enemies*. In the next chapters we will hear a lot more about how God is going to do this. But rejoice today. The Lord is King! Serve him, revere his name, praise and worship him, obey him, talk about him, all of you – “both small and great”. It does not matter how important or how insignificant you are. God does not care. Believe in him and you will be rewarded with his gifts of grace when you enter the joy of your Lord.

Others will also be rewarded when our glorious King comes to judge. It is also time *for destroying the destroyers of the earth*. If you turn against the Almighty King, if you corrupt and pollute our human world with sin, evil, hatred, violence and immorality, you will not survive God’s cleansing-operation to refit this world to be his kingdom.

WATCH

John does not only hear something, he also sees something when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet. This is the second effect. “God comes to judge as our glorious King”. The day of his judgement is close, extremely close. It is closer than ever. So, let us watch what is happening.

John tells us that right before his astonished eyes *God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within this temple*.

This must have been so amazing! We know from the Old Testament the descriptions of the temple. We also know that this earthly sanctuary was modelled after the one in heaven. As a result, when John tells us what he

sees in his vision, we understand the meaning, because of what we know from the Old Testament.

The 'ark' was the most holy thing in the temple. That is why it was hidden in the 'most holy place'. No one was allowed to see it. It was called "the ark of the covenant", because God had put the 'constitution' of his covenant in it – the two stone tablets with the Law, also called "The Testimony". The cover on top of the ark was called "the atonement cover" or "mercy seat". We read about all these things in Exodus 25.

All this made the ark a powerful sign of God's covenant relationship, his real, intimate, and perfect fellowship with his people. The ark guaranteed God's active and gracious presence with people who trust and obey his Word. If people did not trust and obey the Holy God, they would find out that the ark, as sign of God's active presence, could also be a dangerous thing.

The problem was that in the Old Testament the 'most holy place' was always closed. No one had free access to God. Sacrifices went a long way, but you could not appear in God's holy presence, just like that. Only the High Priest could, once per year. And only after he had performed various rituals to protect himself.

Watch carefully and be amazed when you recognize what is happening here. You see the temple open. You see the most holy place open, and everyone can see the Ark of the Covenant, this secret and holy sign.

That means that because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God has now fully revealed his glory for everyone to see. In Jesus Christ God now dwells with his people as never before. At the same time, if you reject Jesus' sacrifice, Jesus' atonement for your sins, God's presence will be more dangerous than ever before.

When the risen Christ ascended into heaven, he re-connected heaven and earth. He gives us here on earth free and direct access to God the Father in heaven. And the covenant of God's grace is no longer written on stone and hidden in an object that is a sign of this relationship. But by the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit God's covenant of grace is realized in the hearts and lives of God's children.

O children of God's love, this is the astounding reality of the last days of our history. In the darkness and brokenness, the King of glory dwells with you, to have fellowship with you. His holy presence guards you and protects you. His holy presence guarantees the marvellous renewal of all things. He acts for your benefit. He fulfils what the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders were singing.

But here is also our struggle in the final phase of our history. As time goes on we sometimes wonder about our glorious King. We do not see the mystery of God being fulfilled. And the persecution continues, first here, then there. Throughout our human history, also throughout our personal histories, the truth that God rules is often hidden for us. *The time has come to judge.* Are you sure?

Oh, yes, we do believe that God's risen Son Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, that he rules on his Father's throne and that in one way or another he is there for our benefit, our well-being. After all, through him you do have free access to the Holy God, your Father in heaven.

But from here, from below, we do not always see it. So often it is as if Satan rules, as if the powers of destruction are in control. But that is not true!

"Come here," says John, "and look carefully. Watch the vision of God's open temple. Watch the powerful sign of God's presence. Nothing remains hidden or concealed. Your Saviour rules on the throne in heaven. In him your God comes so close. In him your God is approachable, always!"

And the day is coming that everyone will see it and hear it. The day is coming that the loud voices in heaven will not sound in a vision only, but all over the world, for everyone to hear.

Then God's children will no longer doubt that God is the glorious King. They will share in the wonderful salvation for his people, as they enter the joy that never ends.

And then God's enemies can no longer deny that God is the glorious King. Frightening terror will seize those who are hostile towards the holy God and his church, as they face eternal punishment.

God's royal majesty is gracious and full of compassion. But it is also awe-inspiring. For the wicked the Ark of the Covenant, as sign of God's presence, indicates that now also God's wrath is about to be fully revealed. That is why it appears with the evidence of God's awesome power.

There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and heavy hail. Such dramatic phenomena accompanied the appearance of the Holy and Almighty God at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19). His glorious power and majesty were terrifying and dreadful. And he is the same today.

This is the third time we hear this, but take a close look at the slight differences.

In Rev. 4:5 we hear about *flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder* – a threefold manifestation of God's frightful power.

Then, in Rev. 8:5 it was lengthened to include *an earthquake* – God's judgments reach the earth to realize his purpose.

And now here, in Rev. 11:19 it is lengthened again to include *a great hail-storm* – God's judgments unleash destructive powers.

Do you see it? The list gets longer and longer. As we come closer to the end, God's judgments intensify and become more frightening all the time. And it will get worse when the world comes to its very end. That's in chapter 16:18–21. The tension is mounting to have us prepared for the grand finale to come.

Because the question becomes more and more urgent: What side will you be on, when the seventh trumpet will unfold this grand finale? You do not know when it will be here.

But be prepared. Acknowledge and worship the Holy and Almighty God as your glorious King. If you do not, you will face his royal wrath.

No, you can never do this on your own, in the midst of all the frightening powers that are still so strong in this world.

But believe in your Saviour Jesus. He ascended into heaven. And even before the current ruler of the world has been thrown out completely, he has already established the glorious Kingdom that will never end.

Now, that is encouraging!

names mentioned? Why are these names significant for the future of the church?

3. Read Revelation 11:13. In what way is this verse encouraging for the believers not to give up doing what.....?
4. The Christian church is a community of 'witnesses'. What does it mean to be a 'witness'? What is characteristic for 'witnessing' in the New Testament?

Chapter 18 – Revelation 11:15-19

1. In verse 18 we read about the effect of the fact that God Almighty, with the Glorified Christ, rules as King, and that the time has come for rewards and for judgments. How does (or how should) this affect your life today?
2. Is fact that Almighty God governs the whole world and everything that happens, including the things that are going on in our lives, comforting for you, or encouraging, or unsettling, or scary, or upsetting? Discuss God's sovereignty.
3. As Christians we have a deep desire for others to be saved by turning to Jesus Christ. At the same time there is also a strong longing for justice, for evil to be punished. How does the Book of Revelation help us to hold on to both?
4. When we reach out to people outside the church, do we make it clear that the Christian message is not only the good and happy news of salvation, but do we also share that it includes that the judgment of unrepentant wicked and evildoers is unavoidable?

Chapter 19 – Revelation 12

1. After Jesus' ascension into heaven (verse 5b) and the war mentioned in v. 7 and 8, it says in verse 8 that *there was no longer any place for them* [meaning: Satan and his angels] *in heaven*. Can you find indications in the Old Testament that this was still the case before this moment?
2. How do believers become conquerors of the power of Satan, as mentioned in verse 11? Look at the three ways given, and discuss how we can apply these in our lives as Christians.