

## Revelry in Eternity

Revelation 19:1-9

By [Les Newsom](#)

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My parents have a cartoon sitting on their refrigerator that's from the old *Far Side* series. Whatever happened to the *Far Side* and Gary Larson? It's one of my favorite comics because it pictures a little man sitting on a cloud. A brand new resident of heaven, complete, having received his harp and a new set of wings, and as he sits there on the cloud contemplating life, the thought bubble above his head says, "You know, I wish I'd brought a magazine."

When I was a child, I remember asking my own father, contemplating the mysteries of the universe, what it was that we were going to be doing in heaven. I understood that heaven was supposed to be forever and eternity stretched on for a long time in my mind. So, I asked him, "What exactly are we going to do in heaven?" I now realize that my father answered me rightly by saying, "Well son, we will spend an eternity praising God." I paused for a moment to allow my young mind to let that register, to which I promptly looked to him and said, "Anything else?"

The idea of worship fails to grip us, doesn't it? It's such a pleasure to have the opportunity to come and speak to you about the ministry of RUF and from the perspective of an RUF campus minister that I honestly struggle with the approach to take tonight. We could spend time talking about RUF ecclesiology, looking at her through the lens of the doctrine of the Church, one of our most beloved and treasured perspectives. We could look at RUF through the lens of soteriology and spend a discussion on justification and sanctification and what a prominent role they have played in our ministries. I've chosen, though, instead to speak doxologically — that is, and much to the chagrin to my childhood self. In RUF I want to suggest to you that we have the goal of creating worshippers. We wrest with the sole purpose of having college students come and anticipate a destiny at the feet of the God of the universe in worship. All human history, Revelation 19 says, culminates in this one activity, and I simply want to suggest to you tonight that destiny suggests anthropology. That because we are all headed to this primary activity of eternity in worship, that there is something in the human heart that is primary about worship; that in the activity and exercise of worship we find who we really are, the chief activity of the human soul — and therefore, the only worthy preoccupation of campus ministry.

Now, let me tell you what just happened to my students. There are many of them here. At the moment that you mention something like that they immediately check out. For this generation, the idea of worship, the mere word “worship”, causes people to check out because there's a couple of instincts this generation has about it. On the one hand, the idea of worship suggests to many students that moment during a service where things turn different — the lights go dim perhaps, the music turns darkly contemplative, maybe excitedly exuberant, and individuals from the congregation close their eyes and worship. For other people worship is nothing more than a calendar item. They say things like, “Well, we are going to Sunday worship.” And of course it draws no more excitement in them than any other event in one's Day-Timer. But I want to suggest to you this evening that if we are to have a campus ministry that is to be truly doxological, that is creating worshippers, then we have to see two things.

First, we have to understand what worship is. Second, we have to ask the question — “Why would we worship?” What is worship and why would we ever worship? That is, consider first the context of our passage and then look at the content of our passage in Revelation 19.

Question number one: What is worship? I simply want to offer you this evening a simple, useful definition as we dive into the topic. Worship, as we see it in Revelation 19, is nothing other than what happens when you find something that you value. The minute the human heart locks into something that is precious to it, worship happens. A number of years ago I heard a minister use a grand illustration to understand worship. Ladies, imagine that you are in possession of a certain piece of jewelry. It's a valuable piece of jewelry, but nothing that you pay too much attention to. It was a gift to you from a distant but now passed aunt. You look at it every now and then and sometimes you wear it. In fact, some days ago you actually wear it to church as an afterthought. Some time along the service someone walked up to you and said, “That's a beautiful piece of jewelry. You know, you ought to have that thing appraised.” So sometime in your spare time that next week you go to a jeweler and set it in front of him and say “I want to know how much this is really worth.” Suddenly as the jeweler is staring and looking at your piece there, he is becoming more and more frantic, and he pushes himself away from the table and says, “Do you know what it is that you have? Why, this is the long lost ‘something-or-other!’” (laughter) “You have an extraordinarily valuable piece in front of you!”

Now at that moment, what happens to you? I would suggest that a number of changes occur to you. The first one is emotional. In other words, you always thought the piece was pretty, but now you just stare at it. That is, it moves you in a way in which it never did. Secondly though, you're changed socially. You don't walk around terrified anymore that you won't be able to pay your bills. You are on Easy Street. From now on it's so valuable to you. Finally, you're changed in your actions as well. You know, before you used to toss the thing around. Sometimes

you would even lose it. Now, you know exactly where it is at all times — it's under lock and key 24/7. What happened to you is that you began to worship. Something that was mundane to you became precious, and in the finding of something valuable, the human heart experiences worship.

Now, among other things, what that means you can do is you can worship just about anything. Our jobs can be an object of worship, along with our careers. We can worship a family. We can worship an image that other people have of our well-adjusted families. We can worship a spouse. We can worship children that live out our particular desires and dreams for them. We can lock anything in, on, our hearts, and the things that we find attractive, and we give ourselves to in worship. We offer it our time. We offer it our affection. We give it our money. We spend exorbitant amounts of money on it. We spend our daydreams leafing through our imaginations on it. Worship is a fundamental activity of the human heart, and here's the kicker: you're all doing it. Worship is so inherent in the human heart that we have all locked upon something. We are all worshippers "willy-nilly" on anything that we can find that attracts us.

Praise then, is something that you do when you worship. Praise is what comes out of your mouth while you are worshipping. C.S. Lewis, in his wonderful commentary on Psalms, talks about the idea of praise as it occurs to the people in the Scriptures, especially in the psalms. And at one point, Lewis mentions that the reason why we praise is that we really haven't enjoyed the thing until we've praised it. You're not really enjoying something until you've spoken a word of joy about it to someone else.

I know for many of you, the image of the ultimate lazy and worthless college student is the image of a young man slouched in a futon with a controller in his hands playing a video game. I recognize that and that's okay, even though I'm a campus minister. But I can assure you that no matter what you think of that image of that young man sitting in front of that video game, call him whatever you will, he's not apathetic. And I'll tell you why — it's been now about 7 or 8 years since Microsoft released the ultimate first person shooter video game, Halo. I recognize that the game for many of you parents is only referred to under your breath, usually as a curse. But after the advent of that game, you cannot imagine what evangelists these young men became. I could not have a meeting with these men before they sung its' praises. "Les, have you seen this thing? You can imagine the world! You can imagine the game play! I mean you can connect with other players — we've linked up 7 Xboxes in our hall and we're going to play until 5 a.m.!" Call it what you will, but that's not apathy. But notice that they could not enjoy the thing until they had spoken about it.

Golfers, you know what I'm referring to, don't you? A golfer's greatest fear is going out golfing by himself. That's why they call you on the phone, "Do you want to go golf today?" The reason why is because today might be the day. You might actually hit that 7 iron on the right spot and it would role around and drop into the

cup for a hole in one and you might be alone! (laughter) Nothing can happen worse to a golfer. Praise is central to our lives because we love to talk about the thing that delights us.

Okay, having that as the background of Revelation 19, I want to suggest to you that this passage really starts to make more sense. You see the repeating peels of thunderous, loud, and exuberant praise that explodes from the host of heaven. It's coming simply from the result of having looked in the face of something altogether wondrous — namely, the acts of God throughout all human history. And the passage I think invites us to ask the next question: What in the world are the people of heaven so excited about? So we ask the second question: What is it that is worthy of our worship? I think the passage says two things. Two things which I would say to you are immediately relevant to today's college student.

What's worthy of our worship? Number one, this: That we have a God who is our champion. The second word that you get out of the mouths of the people in heaven is “salvation.” They sing over fallen Babylon. In the chapters prior to Revelation 19 the apostle John has embodied all of the worldliness and godlessness and injustice in the universe behind the character of the whore, Babylon. And there, as Babylon receives the judgment of God, the people of God rise in a chorus to sing the joy that they experience in watching her fall. We don't think that we can stomach passage like this very well and I'll get to the reason for that in just a moment. But I simply want to submit to you this evening that there's no way for you to understand this up and coming generation's struggle with Christianity and not feel this point.

I don't know whether you can blame it on perhaps the immediacy of the internet generation. Perhaps you might say the instantaneousness of their world has exposed our young people to a world that is so much larger than the one we grew up in. There is nothing which is not immediately at their fingertips. And for all of that, they have uncovered the darker side of man's rebellion, and because of that, the problem of evil is fresh on the minds of this upcoming generation. How can there be a God when this world has gone so horribly wrong? There are those for whom it is merely an intellectual question, a simple logical struggle. There are others for whom it has become deeply personal — they themselves having been the victims of a personal and hurtful pain. But I want to submit to you that the answers that come from this generation are in short supply, and campus ministers are poised to give a Biblical answer to questions everyone is asking about this.

I would simply submit to you as an illustration what happened on the campus of Virginia Tech just a little over 2 years ago. I had a chance to spend some time with our good friend, J.R. Foster, who's been a faithful campus minister there for years now. In the midst of the massacre, this young man, who's whose name in my opinion doesn't even deserve to be mentioned, after massacring 32 people and wounding 25 others turns the gun on himself and takes his own life. Do you

remember what it was like the evening you watched those reports come in? Do you remember the pit that forms in the stomach when you found that he had taken his own life and there would be no opportunity for us as a nation, for Virginia Tech as a community, for the families of those victims, to see justice done? Do you remember that pit? I sat in a memorial that we had at Ole Miss in our chapel there for the Virginia Tech students. You have to understand that when college massacres happen, college students need to get together to deal with that and we did that in the chapel. At one point, we had some students stand up and light candles for each one of the victims. It was as good a ceremony as a secular institution could put together. Towards the end of the ceremony there was a moment when one of the professors was given the opportunity to come up and speak. I neither knew the professor nor had any acquaintance with him, but he was from Blacksburg and was asked to reflect upon his time there and about the meaningfulness of that place. But at one point during his address he paused for a moment and said, "I know there are many of us who are wanting right now to ask the question, 'Why?', but the truth of the matter is, there's no answer to that question. The man had a mental disease. What are you going to do?" That's it. That's the best the world has to offer this generation as they look and they see the nameless and faceless injustices. They don't only happen every now and then on college campuses when massacres happen, they happen every single day at every single hour at the corners of the earth that you can pull up on YouTube in five seconds. When they face that question, the answer the world gives back to them is, "What are you gonna do?"

My friends, Revelation 19 comes to us and shows us what our God is going to do. He comes to us in this passage in verse 3 that sounds to us to be overly vindictive. And He comes and says "Hallelujah! The smoke from her (that is Babylon) goes up forever and ever." Does it make you uncomfortable to see the people of God in their destiny rejoicing over the fact that justice has been done? If it makes us uncomfortable, then we don't have the mind of the Bible. And most likely we are admitting to the fact that we are too insulated to know exactly how the world struggles with evil. Or perhaps even more terrifyingly, we ourselves are complicit and in league with Babylon. No, the people of God are those that look and say that at the heart of our rejoicing when it's all said and done is a God who will make all wrongs right. Our God is coming to exact justice and He will do so, as David says, until He has placed all His enemies under His feet as a footstool. Behold, the justice of God and the people of God who sing and exalt throughout eternity over the fact that there is long universe and we will all be subject to it.

My friends, I think that you're blind if you don't feel the relief of a promise that we have that our God is our champion. But you are equally blind if you are not also a little bit panicked. Because my friends if the God of the universe is going to come and give relief and justice to all the injustices and inequities of the universe, you and I are going to come under that same scrutiny. The question then becomes not who will make what's right wrong/who will make what's wrong right, but who will deliver *me* when I stand wrong before the God of the universe?

That's a good question and it brings me to the second worthy point of praise. The people of God will sing to God because He is our champion, but secondly, we will sing to Him because lo and behold, He is our Husband. He is our Husband. Simply stated, the people of God will rejoice at the thought that God is not merely to be just Judge but Lover as well. That His intentions with His people are not to consume them with the rest of the world, but because of the blood of the Lamb that was shed, that Chad read for us earlier, because of the blood of His redemption, He comes to bring His people into a richness of intimacy and fellowship that can only be expressed in the eyes of a groom on the day of his wedding watching his bride come down the center aisle. The story of the Bible has matrimony all over it, does it not? I've said numerous times to my students that when God created man He determined that he would not be good while he was alone. Everything created is good, but one thing is not — that man should be alone. Why? Because our God is a Trinity. He exists in a glorious and holy “We,” not merely a “Me.” So if we, in His image, are to live out His image, we have to live in community as well. And so in Genesis chapter 2, we have the very first wedding ceremony where God presents someone suitable for Adam and begins therefore the very first human wedding. Of course the tragedy is you know in Genesis chapter 3 — it's that the couple decides they're not going to live in that particular fellowship and so they, along with the rest of their progeny, decide that they are going to rebel against God. I've often wondered if it's not at least one of the facets which we can see the gem of redemptive history — by seeing all of the Scripture as nothing more than the husband heart of God pursuing His adulterous people through to the end of time.

Well, if that passage is correct, it turns out that our God will win that very quest. In other words, He will not simply have His people serve Him forever, which would be enough, but He looks and says, “I want to marry My people.” And so the Bible begins and ends in a wedding. So there's something there that the people of God look and see that they will not have a casual relationship with this God. We are created in Christ to be adored by Him and there are few sicknesses I see the young people of this generation showing up on the college campus with, than the idea that in Christ, their God is merely tolerating them. You know what I mean? The idea that when I enter into God's presence, I see a vision of a man whose arms are crossed, His foot sort of tapping in impatient frustration at what a poor Christian I've been that week, or that month, or that year. And how remarkably absent it has been in 15 years to have heard from the lips of someone any semblance of an image, rather, of the Lord Jesus with the face of a groom.

That's the reason why I love weddings. I do a lot of weddings. I love doing weddings. It's one of my wife and I's favorite things to do. I got to do one last November — Davidson and Angel, whom I've just happily pointed out here in front of everyone, including Sammy and Sara Tyson. On this very stage I've gotten the chance to do weddings. The reason why I love weddings is because

I've got the best seat in the house. I get to see everything that happens, and I get to see what my wife has taught me is the really great moment of any wedding ceremony — and that's when the doors open. Gentlemen, don't see your brides before the wedding. Wait until that moment because it's a beautiful, power-packed moment. Because at that moment, I believe now after my wife's convincing, that you can tell whether someone's going to be a good or bad husband by that moment, can't you? The doors swing wide open and you look forward and the groom is yawning...bad husband! (laughter)

A number of years ago my wife and I had a chance to go to Trinity Presbyterian Church in Montgomery, Alabama — you get dressed up for those kinds of weddings. A very formal affair this wedding — children running around without shoes — I've never understood that either. We came to this very formal wedding, we were there to watch everything happen, the doors came wide open and we watched the bride as she came down. Big beam from ear to ear, her dress flowing behind her, standing proudly at her father's arm, and her smile was so over stated and giggly that I wondered what she was looking at, until my wife standing beside me nudged me and said, “Look at the front!” I looked forward to see the groom. And the groom at that moment of the doors opening had started to cry. As a matter of fact, he was so taken by the sight of his bride that his knees had sort of buckled a little bit — he almost fell down. And these big, hot tears came streaming down his red face. It was a beautiful sight.

And my students at this moment expect me to say, “Isn't that the way in which we should love Jesus? To feel Him coming down the aisle and to see Him and love Him with our full heart?” But that reverses the image, doesn't it? You see, because in a wedding ceremony, what we see displayed in front of us is the bride coming down to represent the Church. She's dressed in white because of the fine linen, bright and clean that was given for her to wear. That, ladies, is why you dress up on that day. We all played dress up on that day because we anticipate a greater wedding that is yet to come when we see the fulfillment of what we're supposed to see now, which is the doors of eternity opening wide to us in the pages of the book of Revelation, and seeing our groom, the Lord Jesus Christ, not with a foot tapping in frustrated impatience, but with His knees buckling, with red tears coming down His face, so in love with what He has made you to be — happy and holy and with Him. And for that sight, eternity will be too short to utter all His praise.

“I wonder what we'll do in heaven, dad?” We'll spend eternity living in the reality of our great champion, Jesus. We will worship with Him as His enemies are made His footstool, and we will be forever with Him in glorious, beautiful joy — the joy of a new marriage. My friends, we long to create worshippers. Would you pray for Reformed University Ministries, that we would be bold to announce this God to the college campus, and that you would love us enough to pray against us when we stop doing that, and that the gospel would continue to transform hearts on the college campus?

Let's pray.

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