

# The Powerful Songs of Revelation

Revelation 1-22A

By Phil Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2018-11-04

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Last week we finished chapter 22 of Revelation. But I want to end this series with three bird's eye views of the book. And today's overview will be looking at it through the lens of the songs of Revelation. I'm only going to read one of those songs this morning. We will read all of chapter 15 and continue to the results of that song in chapter 16:1. But the sermon is not going to stick here; it is going to traipse all over the book.

## Text

15:1 And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues—in them the fury of God is completed. 2 And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who prevailed over the Beast and over his image and over the number of his name, standing on the glassy sea, having harps of God. 3 They sing the song of Moses, the slave of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: “Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the nations! 4 Who could not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? Because You alone are holy, because all the nations will come and do obeisance before You, because Your righteous judgments have been manifested.” 5 After these things I looked, and the sanctuary of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. 6 And out from the sanctuary came the seven angels, the ones having the seven plagues; they were clothed in pure bright linen and were girded around the chests with golden belts. 7 Then one of the four living beings gave the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the fury of God, the One who lives forever and ever. 8 The sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to go into the sanctuary until the seven angels' plagues were completed. 16:1 And I heard a loud voice from the sanctuary saying to the seven angels, “Go, pour out the bowls of God's fury on the earth.”  
Introduction - 28 songs in Revelation (1:5b-6; 4:8,11; 5:9-10,12,13b,14; 6:10; 7:10,12; 11:15,17-18; 12:10-12; 14:3; 15:3-4; 16:5-6,7b; 18:2-3,4-7,10,16-17a,19,20,21-24; 19:1b-3,4,5,6b-8)

The story goes that on Easter morning, 1799, the Austrian citizens of Feldkirch were wakened by noises outside their city walls. They soon discovered that the army of Napoleon had come in during the night and had surrounded the city. They knew there was no way that they could defend themselves adequately against Napoleon's attacks. So the leaders quickly called a meeting to decide if they should hoist the white flag of surrender as soon as it was light enough to see or if they should hold out and hope for relief from the Austrian army.

The dean of the church rose first and spoke to the solemn group, and in a trembling voice said,

This is Easter day. This is the day of our King's Resurrection. We must have one moment of triumph. Let us at least ring the bells. If the town falls, it falls; but we must ring all the bells of Easter.

After some discussion and debate they agreed not to spoil Easter day, and soon, from the church towers, the bells began ringing all over the town.

The invaders who were massed outside the gate in the darkness were so surprised at the celebration that they concluded the Austrian army must have arrived during the night to relieve the town. So the French quickly broke camp and were in full retreat before the bells stopped ringing. The confident music of that morning sent the enemy into retreat.

Well, we see a similar thing in the book of Revelation. There are 28 songs in this book.<sup>1</sup> Some are only tiny fragments of songs. But several of these songs result in God's immediate judgments being poured out. There seems to be a cause and effect relationship between at least some of those songs and the judgments that follow. We will be seeing that just as the prayer meeting of chapter 8 released regiment after regiment of angels bringing judgments and spiritual warfare, there is exactly the same kind of cause and effect relationship between the Songs of Zion and the retreat of the enemy. And I want to investigate why that is the case. Why is some worship music powerful in tearing down strongholds and making demons flee while other music has zero impact upon those demons? It doesn't seem to bother them at all.

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1 Mark S. Wilson, *Charts in the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), pp. 74-75 lists the following as songs: 1. In Revelation 1.5b-6 John praises the God who saved us and made us a kingdom of priests. 2. In Revelation 4.8 the four living creatures praise God's holiness. 3. In Revelation 4.11 the 24 elders sing that God is worthy because he is the Creator. 4. In Revelation 5.9-10 the elders and the living creatures say that the Lamb is worthy because he is the Redeemer. 5. In Revelation 5.12 the angels, elders and living creatures exclaim that the Lamb is worthy. 6. In Revelation 5.13b every creature praises God and the Lamb. 7. In Revelation 5.14 every creature says Amen. 8. In Revelation 7.10 a great multitude sings that salvation belongs to God and the Lamb. 9. In Revelation 7.12 the angels ascribe praise, glory, etc to God. 10. In Revelation 11.15 heavenly voices say that the kingdom has passed to God and his Messiah. 11. In Revelation 11.17-18 the 24 elders thank God for reigning and for beginning to judge. 12. In Revelation 12.10-12 a heavenly voice calls the heavens to rejoice and the earth to lament, because the dragon has been thrown from heaven to earth. 13. In Revelation 14.3 the 144,000 receive a new song that only they know. 14. In Revelation 15.3-4 the ones who conquer sing about the works of God. 15. In Revelation 16.5-6 an angel sings that God is just for judging the persecutors of the saints. 16. In Revelation 16.7b the martyrs exclaim that God is just. 17. In Revelation 18.2-3 an angel sings that Babylon has fallen. 18. In Revelation 18.4-7 a voice calls out for people to flee Babylon. 19. In Revelation 18.10 the kings of the earth sing a lament for Babylon. 20. In Revelation 18.16-17a the merchants sing a lament for Babylon. 21. In Revelation 18.19 the sailors and sea travelers sing a lament for Babylon. 22. In Revelation 18.20 someone (the author?) calls the saints and apostles to rejoice over Babylon. 23. In Revelation 18.21-24 a powerful angel sings that Babylon has fallen. 24. In Revelation 19.1b-3 the great multitude praises God for condemning Babylon. 25. In Revelation 19.4 the elders and living creatures sing Amen, Alleluia. 26. In Revelation 19.5 a voice from the throne calls God's servants to praise him. 27. In Revelation 19.6b-8 the great multitude praises because God reigns and the wedding supper of the Lamb has arrived.

We should probably list the lament in 6:10 as a song, so that would bring the total to 28.

## **I. Revelation's songs were powerful because of Christ's presence**

I believe the first reason is that Jesus is present in the songs that send the enemy into retreat. Did you know that Jesus sings in the midst of the congregation? Hebrews 2:12 says of Jesus, "...in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You." Likewise Jesus prays in the midst of the assembly. Let me remind you of that. Turn to Revelation 8. This is not one of the songs, but it parallels the songs in its effect. Chapter 8, beginning at verse 1. 8:1 And when He opened the seventh seal there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

Edersheim says that this was the amount of time it took the high priest to prepare the incense. Once that incense was lit, the cloud of incense went up and over the curtains and signaled that the prayer meeting could start on the other side of the curtain. That incense symbolized the fact that Christ's prayers must precede and accompany our prayers if they are to be answered. And angels stand ready for warfare during the half hour before that. Their trumpets do not sound and they do not move until the incense of prayer goes up. Verse 2:

2 And I saw the seven angels who stood before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. 3 And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer. He was given lots of incense so that he could offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar that is before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints went up before God out of the angel's hand. 5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it at the earth. And there were voices and thunders and lightnings and an earthquake. 6 And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to trumpet.

What kind of prayer meeting has that power? The only prayer meetings that have this power are prayer meetings that have been lit by a coal from off the altar, representing Christ's finished work being applied to our lives. And it is prayers that are mixed with incense, representing Christ's prayers. When Christ comes into agreement with our prayers, they have power. Why? Because God always answers the prayers of Jesus.

Well, the same is true of music. When Jesus is present, God listens, our worship is accepted, and our songs have spiritual power against demons. But without Christ's presence, our worship music is actually an abomination to God. In Amos 5 God told the church of that day,

21 "I hate, I despise your feast days, And I do not savor your sacred assemblies. 22 Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, Nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. 23 Take away from Me the noise of your songs, For I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments.

In the same way, you can almost guarantee that the worship music of the

church of Laodicea in chapter 3 had zero impact upon the enemy because God was not pleased with their worship. In fact, Jesus was so disgusted with their lukewarmness that He was ready to vomit the church out of His mouth. Chapter 3:20 shows that He had already left the church and was standing outside knocking on the church door. And the text says that the church didn't realize that Jesus was absent. They went on with their preaching, their prayers, their songs, and their programs as if everything was fine. But it was not. There was no power in their worship because Jesus was absent.

So what makes for worship music that forces demons to flee, like the demon that afflicted King Saul was forced to flee when David played his psalms? What makes for worship songs that result in judgments upon human enemies as happened under Jehoshaphat when he marched against enormous odds confidently singing of God's victory. He didn't have to lift a sword in that battle. The enemy killed each other off. There was a direct cause and effect relationship between his army's singing and the victory that he experienced in history. That is what we are examining today. And the first answer we have given is that Jesus must be present.

## **II. Revelation's songs were powerful because of victorious in the midst of difficulty**

And when you have Christ's presence, you have faith. You aren't just going through the motions. Faith reaches heaven. That is the second condition for power in our songs. Faith sings in a way that lifts us above our difficulties. And anyone can have this faith. This is not just for super-heroes; this is even for babes in Christ. 1 John 5:4 says, "For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith."

Revelation's songs show an incredibly victorious faith in the midst of difficulty. It takes faith for a persecuted people to be able to sing, "You... have made us kings and priests to our God." (5:10), or to affirm in 7:10 that Jesus is sitting on His throne. In AD 70 it would have taken great faith to sing "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever." (11:15). Things were a disaster to men's physical eyes, yet by the eyes of faith they knew that Jesus was on His throne and was building His church so effectively that it would batter down the gates of Hades.

Though the beast ruled over the kings of the earth, the songs of this book confidently affirm that the beast was but a pawn in Christ's hands, and that

his doom was imminent.

Now, some might object by pointing out that most of these songs are being sung from heaven. “Of course they are going to have a victorious faith because they don’t have to go through what we are going through.” But as we went through each of those songs in our verse-by-verse exposition we saw that heaven’s worship was intended to be a paradigm for our worship; and that heaven’s confidence is to be a paradigm for our confidence. In fact, the saints on earth join with the worshipers of heaven. As Hebrews 12 words it, the church’s worship on earth is supposed to be caught up to the heavenly Zion and to join with the innumerable company of angels, and the general assembly of the church of the firstborn. God wants us to glory in this same music. He wants us to pray, “Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” If heaven is the pattern for everything we do, as Colossians 3:1-2 clearly says that it is, then our worship music should be patterned after the worship music of heaven. This involves not only singing new songs (see Rev. 3:8,11; 5:9,12,13; etc.), but also valuing the instrumental music that God loves so much in heaven (see Rev. 5:8; 14:2; 15:2). The point is that it is artificial to divide between the songs of heaven and the songs of earth.

John’s own song of praise on the earth in chapter 1 is of the same character as the heavenly songs. And we see actual commands for earth to join heaven in these worship songs. For example, in chapter 5 we have some magnificent songs and the text goes on to say that “every creature which is in the heaven and upon the earth” is supposed to sing that song - not just in heaven, but upon the earth. The songs of chapter 14 are called gospel songs in verse 6, indicating that they are sung in the region that the gospel is needed - the earth. And the command in the next verse is to proclaim that message to every ethnic nation and tribe and language and people (v. 7).

But the point is that if you measure the kind of music that Revelation sings against the music that many churches sing, the churches on earth come up short. These 28 songs are songs of Zion that require faith and stir up more faith. For the saints in heaven, this whole book is a book of the victorious advancement of Christ’s kingdom. There is never a shadow of a doubt in their minds that of the increase of Christ kingdom there is no end. They end chapter 5 by affirming that Jesus is already on His throne. They do the same in chapter 7, chapter 11, and really all through this book. They are modeling for us the kind of faith-content that we ought to have in our songs. In chapter 12:10-12 after the ascension of Jesus to His throne has resulted in a war between Satan’s demons and God’s angels, a glorious song bursts forth of

victory, despite the fact that saints are dying:

Now the salvation and the power have come, even the Kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ, because the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accused them before our God day and night. 11 And they conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not cherish their lives, even up to death.

Oooh. That's the kind of song that will raise up soldiers for Christ that are willing to lay down their lives if Christ is glorified and if it will advance His kingdom. Despite the best efforts of Satan to keep the church from converting the world, the growing church is singing songs about a growing and unstoppable church. The martyrs sing in chapter 15,

“Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! 4 Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested.”

I love the confidence of their missions: “all nations shall come and worship before You.” How can Christians have that kind of faith when they are undergoing the kind of intense persecution that this book outlines? By seeing themselves as seated with Christ in the heavenlies, and having great authority because of Christ's presence. Nero saw John as imprisoned on the prison-island of Patmos, yet John saw himself as part of a church that was an army, and a kingdom, and priests advancing Christ's kingdom. It is a triumphant song of praise to God and a total belief that God is reigning. It was praise to a God who has already seated us with Christ in the heavenlies. Ephesians 2:6 says that God “raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” If you examine the songs in this book, you will realize that they exhibit a faith that comes from being seated with Christ.

But singing good songs not only showcases faith; it stirs up more faith. It's like a circular reinforcing rhythm as week after week we realign our thinking by our worship. Not all songs are capable of doing that. What a church sings can either kill faith or stir it up. Some of the sentimentalism that is sung might elicit nice feelings if the lights are right and the air-conditioning is right, but will do nothing for the soul during times of loss or persecution. So that's the second thing that these songs show us - incredible faith in the face of disaster. It is faith that rises above the disaster. When you sing songs without faith, you won't have this power.

### **III. Revelation's songs show an incredibly rich and God-centered theology**

The third point gives the reason why these songs are so faith-filled. They aren't songs that are man-centered, or problem-centered, or Satan-centered. These songs show an incredibly rich and God-centered theology. I won't go through every song, but John's song in chapter 1:5-6 says, "To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins with His own blood—indeed, He made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen." This is a song that reflects upon the fact that God loved us before we loved Him. He loved us before we were washed and while we were still unlovable. It reflects upon the atonement, the seriousness of sin, the nature of the church as being a kingdom rather than a ghetto. It speaks of the church as being made up of priests who are intended to reconcile sinners to God. We are here to serve Christ and His kingdom, not to turn God into our servant. There is some interesting Christology and Theology in that verse, and an affirmation that we want God to receive the glory. The point is that it is theologically rich, and it is God-centered. And you see that in all of these songs.

In Revelation 4.8 the four living creatures praise God's holiness over and over. In the Majority Text it has three groups of three holies. "Holy, holy, holy; Holy, holy, holy; Holy, holy, holy; The Lord God Almighty; He who was and who is and who is coming." Repetition is OK if it focuses you upon God and His character.

In Revelation 4.11 the 24 elders sing that God is worthy because he is the Creator.

In Revelation 5.9-10 the elders and the living creatures say that the Lamb is worthy because he is the Redeemer. In fact, when you read that whole song, you see that it is dense with theology.

In Revelation 5.12 the angels, elders and living creatures exclaim that the Lamb is worthy.

In Revelation 5.13b every creature praises God and the Lamb. There is nothing man-centered about these songs.

In Revelation 5.14 every creature says Amen to the God-centered song, so earth imitates heaven.

In Revelation 7.10 a great multitude sings that salvation belongs to God and the Lamb who sits on the throne.



In Revelation 7.12 the angels ascribe praise, glory, etc to God.

And I won't go through more of the songs, but it is impossible to read those songs and to miss how God-centered they are. I wanted to walk out of a church one time when they sang butterfly kisses on mother's day at the heart of their worship service. I don't have a problem with singing such a song to your daughter, but this is the worship of Almighty God! The songs are not about how God thinks I'm important, or what I feel like, or my self-esteem. No. These songs are sung by people who look beyond themselves and are driven by a vision that is greater than themselves. God is so great that they are lost in His greatness. These songs are sung by a people with a passion for God's glory that says,

“Amen! The blessing and the glory and the wisdom and the thanksgiving and the honor and the power and the strength to our God for ever and ever! Amen.”

And as you go through song after song you realize that the songs aren't about warm fuzzies (even though they do stir my emotions); they are about exalting God on our praises. They paint man as small and they paint God as large on the canvas of our minds. They are songs worthy of the Lamb. They are true worship.

For most of my life contemporary music has often been weak in theology, feelings oriented, man-centered, and pietistic. I was pleased to see that some of the top worship songs of 2017 and 2018 were God-centered and did have some outstanding theology. Others failed miserably, if these songs of Revelation are the gold standard. But over the past two decades I have seen some improvement on the lyrics of at least a portion of the songs that are top 50 songs in the church, and for that I praise God. You can evaluate the health of a church by its songs. And based upon song usage I would say that there is a militant, victorious faith that is beginning to emerge in at least a remnant of the church. That's encouraging.

#### **IV. Revelation's songs are manly songs that seem to have a world-conquering power**

But one of the things that I was struck with as I studied the 28 songs of Revelation is how manly they are. This is the next point in your outline. There are very few contemporary songs that are this manly. Many of the songs in Revelation are war songs against the evil in the world. They are similar to the manly prayers of this book. I already mentioned that in chapter 8 the united prayer meeting resulted in God's lightnings, thunderings, and regiment after regiment of angels beginning to respond to the prayers by bringing judgments, growing the church, and vindicating His saints. Well,

the music in this book has the same function. I don't have time to show all the examples of using music in manly warfare, but let me give three.

In 11:17-18 the church shouts forth an imprecatory song that exhibits total trust in God's sovereignty, lays claim to His promises, and asks for His judgments against His enemies. It is not a song for the faint of heart. But because it is sung in faith, God responds. The very next verse says, "And the temple of God in heaven was opened, and the ark of the covenant of the Lord was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings and huge hail." This shows that heaven approves of this kind of singing and is moved by this kind of singing. The angels of heaven are no doubt waiting for the church to get its act together on this kind of singing.

God is responding to the songs of faith being sung by the beleaguered church. He is responding to the Easter bells of Feldkirch. Like that little town, the church of the first century was under siege from a mighty adversary. Chapter 2:9 says that the church of Smyrna was undergoing tribulation. He said, "Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days." The Church of Pergamos had martyrs. And the rest of the book of Revelation mentions things getting worse in the next few years. And yet throughout the book there is a confidence, a joy, and a celebration of Christ's victory. With their eyes they couldn't see the victory - they saw disaster. And yet their faith enabled them to rise above their circumstances and see things from heaven's perspective. And because they sang these songs by faith, Revelation shows time after time that God responds with judgments against the enemy and conversions of new believers.

In chapter 6 there is massive tribulation, but the saints cry out for avenging. It's an imprecatory cry. Some people think it is a complaint, but in reality they know Christ will avenge. They are simply asking how long. God tells them to wait a little while longer. And in our series we saw that they didn't have long to wait because in chapter 7 God pours out His judgments. And in response to God's vengeance the saints cry out, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever." They do not shrink from God's judgments; they agree with them. They say "Amen" to them.

In chapter 11 it looks like everyone is ganged up against two witnesses, the only faithful ones left in Jerusalem, and even they are killed. The last of the prophets are killed. Yet the church does not give up. Instead, by faith they lay claim to a victory yet unseen. They cry out saying, "The kingdoms of

this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” That is one of the most astonishing statements of faith in the entire Bible. Why do I say that? Because it came at the height of the great apostasy. Jesus had predicted that that generation would witness the greatest apostasy in history, the greatest tribulation in history, and such loss of life that the church would be almost extinguished. And yet their songs are confident of Christ’s victory! I love it! Jesus said that that tribulation would be so great, that if God did not shorten it, no flesh would have been saved, but for the elect’s sake, those days would be shortened. It looks like they are losing, but by faith they believe that Christ is about to possess the world like Joshua possessed Canaan. Yes, the previous generation had died off in unbelief, but there is a new generation arising that is ready to take on Jericho.

And of course, because of faith like this, the church grew phenomenally during the first three centuries. Scripture says, “According to your faith, let it be to you.” The church of the first few centuries had non-stop evangelistic victory with nation after nation becoming Christian until Rome finally declared itself to be Christian as well. Why? Because Christians had faith that Christ was building His church so successfully that even the gates of hell were being battered down - and their songs reflected that faith. In contrast, the bulk of the church of today has faith that we will lose and things will get worse, and that’s what we are getting. According to your faith, let it be to you. This is why I monitor the top songs of the church. When you see the church singing songs like “The earth shakes at the sounds of his voice,” or the Rend Collective’s “Build Your Kingdom Now,” or the many songs that we sing in this church, you know that we might be turning a corner. There have been a number of songs like that in the last decade.

The faith of the church can be measured by its songs. The songs of Revelation are a word of testimony that makes the demons tremble. In fact, in one of the songs it says that “they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony...” The word of their testimony has something to do with that victory. The wrath of Satan cannot extinguish the singing of the church. Should they die, the church in heaven continues to sing. Singing God-centered songs of triumph is part and parcel of the Christian faith, and it is one of the things that most distinguishes it from the gatherings of other religions.

And so music plays a big part in the victory being celebrated in this book. Like Jehoshaphat, people were walking into overwhelming odds; with the odds stacked against them; yet confident. Unseen principalities and powers

were seeking to destroy the city of God by every means possible. They were surrounded on every side by the brazen and defiant assaults of Satan against God's truth. And there are many countries today where the cause of Christ seems just as doomed as Feldkirch seemed when viewed from a human perspective. Yet in the book of Revelation, God's people sing; they sing in the face of martyrdom and persecution. They sing in the face of vast opposition. And in all these songs of Zion, we see a note of triumph and victory; that nothing can separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus - not even death.

When Jesus was caught up into heaven out of sight of the gazing apostles, a whole new viewpoint on life was opened up to them. They began thinking in terms of the kingdom of heaven invading earth. And certainly after Pentecost they were turned from fearful disciples into bold apostles because they had been convinced of the reality of an invisible power. Revelation 4:1 invites us to get a glimpse of that invisible realm where the risen Savior has gone. It says,

4:1 After these things I looked and behold—a door standing open in the sky, and the first voice that I heard, like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, “Come up here and I will show you the things that must take place after these.” 2 And immediately I was in spirit, and there, a throne set in heaven (and One sitting on the throne)

And as John gazes at the awesome power and might of the Lord, he is transformed. No longer does Rome look invincible. No way! Nero (and later on Titus) may be possessed by the incredibly powerful demon called “The Beast,” but that demon is no match for our risen Lord. Face to face with this awesome sight all doubts vanish of whether God's power and grace are sufficient. John is overwhelmed by what he sees in God. God's holiness, power and eternity are continually before him as the angels sing, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty” [not half mighty; “Almighty”], “Who was and is and is to come!” (v. 8b) He can have no doubt about whether the Lord is in charge. “...the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.” (vv. 10-11) Those enemies could not even exist if God had not willed it. They are pawns in God's hands.

Why do we sing in church? Well, there are many reasons. But one of the reasons illustrated in the Bible is that there is a spiritual power that flows when we cut loose and sing with a loud voice by faith to God. Look for example at 11:16-19:

16 And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones in God's presence, fell on their

faces and worshiped God 17 saying: “We thank You, O Lord God Almighty, He who is and who was and who is coming, because You have taken up your great power and begun to reign. 18 The nations were angry and your wrath came, even the time for the dead to be judged and to give the reward to Your slaves the prophets, and to the saints and those who fear your name, small and great, and to destroy those who have corrupted the earth.” Verse 19 tells us what happened as a result:

19 And the temple of God in heaven was opened, and the ark of the covenant of the Lord was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings and huge hail. Why do we praise God with all of our heart? Because we want the ark of the covenant in heaven to be seen in His temple, and we want God to be so pleased with the extravagance of our commitment to Him that He sends forth His lightnings, noises, earthquakes, etc on the earth to advance His kingdom. I want our worship to be more than just a comfortable celebration. I love the singing of Revelation because it is a manly singing for the stouthearted. It is the roar of Wallace’s army. It is anything but passivity. Music is connected heart and soul with the advancement of God’s kingdom. And I believe the music of many churches needs to be adjusted if we are to see world conquering faith to arise.

Our worship on earth, if it is done in the Spirit, with Christ’s presence, and in faith, affects the movements of God’s army in heaven. The bottom line is that what we sing reflects on what we believe. If we sing the sentimental songs of mystics, we cannot complain if there is no changes in society. If we refuse to sing songs of judgment like the one just read, and like the one in chapter 16 that calls for the destruction of God’s enemies, then we should not be surprised if God’s enemies continue to have the ascendancy. You have not because you ask not. According to your faith, be it unto you.

Many churches refuse to sing the imprecatory Psalms of the Old Testament because they have such strong language. But if we sing the new songs authorized by Christ’s resurrection, we will find even stronger language. I actually had one liberal pastor who argued with me for hours, and he was telling me that he didn’t believe in the God of the Old Testament because that God was too vindictive. He believed in the God of love in the New Testament. I started reading him some of the songs of Revelation and told him that the New Testament language is even more fierce than the Old if that is possible. It is obviously the same God of love and wrath. He was stunned for a moment and then finally said that he probably didn’t believe in the God of the New Testament either because his God was a God of love. And I told him that his god was the god of his own imagination and did not exist and that if he did not submit in unconditional surrender to the true God of the Bible, he too would experience the terrors of this God of wrath. Needless to

say, he is not too pleased with me. But the point is that there is no conflict between the songs of the Old Testament and the songs of the New. These are not songs for wimps. These are manly songs.

In chapter 6 the believers at the altar call for judgment on the enemies, in chapter 16 after the angel sings about the righteousness of those judgments poured out, those at the altar say, “Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.” They agree with God’s severe judgments and celebrate them. And it is in singing such language that we begin to gain the mind of Christ and see that His judgments are indeed true and our sin is more abominable than most people could possibly imagine. The songs of the church in the past 60 years have turned the church away from being the church militant to being the church complacent. And you cannot have a vision of the resurrected Savior in Revelation and be complacent. I am not saying that all of the modern worship music is that way. There are very encouraging signs of good music in some quarters.

## **V. Revelation’s songs help to shape the minds and hearts of the church**

The next point says that Revelation’s songs help to shape the minds and hearts of the church. So its not just that our songs move heaven’s angels. The songs of heaven impact our hearts and our minds and move us to action. We become what we sing. The poet Carlyle wrote, “Let me make a nation’s songs, and I care not who makes their laws.” Songs have a way of shaping our minds more than anything else. Do you have the faith to sing the song of chapter 15? Look at it. This is what I read before the sermon. As God’s people are caught up to the throne of God in worship, they join with a chorus in heaven. Let’s begin at 15:2:

2 And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who prevailed over the Beast and over his image and over the number of his name, standing on the glassy sea, having harps of God. 3 They sing the song of Moses, the slave of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: “Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the nations! 4 Who could not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? Because You alone are holy, because all the nations will come and do obeisance before You, because Your righteous judgments have been manifested.”

In their song they recognize that God’s judgments result in all nations coming to worship God. In other words, they are redemptive judgments. And notice in verse 5 what happens as a result of such a song of faith. “After these things I looked, and the sanctuary of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened.” There it is again! Heaven opening to the songs of Zion.! OH, LORD! That there might be an opening of the heavens in our

own day! He goes on: “And out from the sanctuary came the seven angels, the ones having the seven plagues...” and He goes on to speak of the judgments that came on Rome and on Israel and resulted in the greatest missionary movement in the last 2000 years, where many nations including Rome became Christianized.

It's a matter of focus. If our focus is on the earth we may complain, grow disheartened and be ready to throw up the white flag. But when you start singing these songs of faith it is hard to maintain that white-flag pessimism. They stir our hearts to believe God's promises. Part of it I think is that our bodies are coming into agreement with our thinking. When we worship at the throne of God and we see the awesome power of the risen Christ walking among the candlesticks; in the midst of the church, we have faith to ring the resurrection bells of joy in Feldkirch. We can say with Paul, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Every Sunday is Resurrection Day, and Resurrection Day is not just a message about something that happened 2000 years ago. Rather, what happened 2000 years ago continues to have relevance today because the risen Lord is reigning and He is with us as we worship. Amen?

## **VI. The songs of heaven and earth glory in Christ's life, death, and resurrection victory**

There is one more point that I want to make and that is that these songs speak of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They glory in Christ's life, death, and resurrection power. They are Gospel-saturated. I've given the number of songs in Revelation based on what one official list. But if you see the song-like statement of the angels in chapter 14 as being accompanied by the harps of verses 1-5, there may actually be more songs than 28. They sure seem like the same kind of language. If so, chapter 14 characterizes those songs as “having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth - to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice...” and then comes what appears to be a song. But whether or not that is true, you certainly see the Gospel elsewhere.

Chapter 5:1-7 describes the consternation that John felt when no one was worthy to open the scroll. John wept because there was no Mediator. But then verse 5 says,

So one of the elders says to me, “Stop weeping! Look! The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and its seven seals.”

Christ's gospel victory is the remedy for our tears. Christ lived a perfect life, He died bearing the sins of believers, and He rose triumphant from the

grave. He prevailed. And this leads to the worship service on earth and in heaven. Verse 8:

8 And when He took the scroll the four living beings and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having harps and golden bowls full of incenses, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sing a new song saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals; because You were slaughtered, and have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every tribe and language and people and ethnic nation; 10 and You have made them kings and priests to our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

This is a song of faith because it takes faith to believe that Christ’s shed blood is enough to cleanse us from our sins - all our sins. It takes faith to believe that we can be perfect in Christ when we accept His gift of imputed righteousness. It takes faith to believe that we are turned into kings and priests because of our union with Him. And only those who have encountered the risen Lord have such faith. And these redeemed ones are so overwhelmed with a sense of their own unworthiness and are so thankful for their salvation, that praise comes naturally. In fact, in chapter 5, the praise just keeps coming in an ever increasing crescendo. Verse 11 continues:

11 And I looked, and I heard as it were the voice of many angels, around the throne and the living beings and the elders. And their number was ten thousand times ten thousand and a thousand thousands, 12 saying with a great voice: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered to receive the power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing!”

Christ gave up everything in His death so that He could save us. In return, these saints want to give Jesus everything. Face to face with the risen Lord they realize how selfish it is to be self-seeking and wrapped up in fleshly desires. He has already given us everything. And they in turn, overwhelmed with love are giving Him everything back. And in John’s vision, the saints are merely joining in what the entire creation owes to Christ. Verses 13-14 say,

13 And every creature which is in the heaven and upon the earth and under the earth, and those upon the sea, and everything in them—I heard them all saying: “To Him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb: the blessing and the honor and the glory and the power for ever and ever! Amen!” 14 and the four living beings saying the “Amen”. And the elders fell and did obeisance.

Perhaps there is someone here this morning who does not know the risen Lord. You’ve never met Him. Perhaps you see the forces of evil closing in around you and it looks like it is impossible to resist. Perhaps you are going through a time of real anguish and heartache. Let me assure you that if you put your faith in Christ, you will be able to ring the resurrection bells and experience the presence of Christ who will sustain you and cause you to triumph. Let me clarify that the songs of heaven do not necessarily cause the conflict and affliction to go away. Sometimes they do, but many times they



do not. But what they clearly do is to bring the joy of Christ into your life so that you can triumph in and through the difficulties. They can even enable you to face the ultimate enemy death with confidence.

I read a story that happened during the Finnish-Russian war that I think illustrates this so well. This story was witnessed by a Finnish officer who came to Christ through what he saw. Let me read the account as told by Robert Coleman.

After one of the battles, a number of Red prisoners were placed under [this Finnish officer's] guard, seven of whom were sentenced to be shot at dawn the next day.

Confined in a cold basement room, the condemned men, with unrestrained anguish, swore and beat on the walls with their bleeding fists.

However, the officer, standing alongside, noticed one prisoner, Koskinen by name, who was different from the rest. While the others raved and cursed, he sat quietly on his bench. Then, after a while, in a wavering voice that grew stronger, he began to sing:

- > Safe in the arms of Jesus,
- > Safe on His gentle breast,
- > There by His love o'er shaded,
- > Sweetly my soul shall rest.

Over and over he sang the words. When he stopped, a wild-looking man erupted, "Where did you get that, you fool?"

The man looked at his comrades with tear-filled eyes and replied, "You ask me where I got this song. It was from the Salvation Army - I heard it three weeks ago. My mother sang about Jesus and prayed to Him."

He paused a moment, as if to gather courage. Then, rising to his feet and looking straight in front of him, he said, "It is cowardly to hide your beliefs. The God my mother believed in is now my God. As I lay awake, I saw mother's face before me. It reminded me of the song I heard. I prayed that Christ would forgive me and make me ready to stand before Him... Since then, this verse has been sounding within me. I can no longer keep it to myself."

"You are right," said one comrade. "If only I knew there was mercy for me, too, but I have reviled God and trampled on all that is holy." Sinking to the floor in despair, he groaned, "Pray for me, Koskinen."

The two Red soldiers went down on their knees and prayed for each other. It was no long prayer - but it reached heaven. A door seemed to open to another world, and everyone sensed the nearness of an unseen hallowed Presence.

Before long, all the prisoners were on their faces before God. As they prayed and wept, an indescribable change took place. The Spirit of God filled the room, and the conversation turned to spiritual things - truth hidden from kings and queens, but revealed to babes.

Occasionally they would break into singing, not only the favorite song of Koskinen, but verses and choruses of others long forgotten. The soldiers on guard united with them, for the power of God had touched them all. The angels must have joined in, too, as Zion's praises resounded through the crisp early-morning air.

At daybreak, as the first rays of light came over the horizon, the condemned men were marched out to the place of execution. Standing before the firing squad, they asked that

the usual covering not be placed over their heads and that they be allowed to sing, for one last time, Koskinen's song. Permission was granted. So before the command to fire was given, the seven men lifted their hands to heaven and, with uncovered faces, sang with all their might:

- > Safe in the arms of Jesus,
- > Safe on His gentle breast,
- > There by his love o'er shaded,
- > Sweetly my soul shall rest.
- > Hark! it's the voice of angels,
- > Borne in a song to me,
- > Over the fields of jasper,
- > Over the crystal sea.

The story doesn't tell if they were able to finish the hymn before they were shot. But the hymn goes on to tell how you can know Jesus in this personal way as well. It says,

- > Jesus, my heart's dear Refuge,
- > Jesus has died for me
- > Firm on the Rock of Ages
- > Ever my trust shall be.
- > Here let me wait with patience;
- > Wait till the night is o'er;
- > Wait till I see the morning
- > Break on the golden shore.
- > Safe in the arms of Jesus,
- > Safe on His gentle breast,
- > There by His love o'er shaded,
- > Sweetly my soul shall rest.

Jesus calls you this morning, and all the angels of heaven beckon you to come to the risen Savior. Put your trust in His finished work of redemption. Tell Him that you now believe that His death is sufficient to save you from your sins. Tell Him that you are resolved to follow Him wherever He may lead you. As you do, He will give you a joy unspeakable and full of glory; a joy that passes our understanding; a joy that will make you want to enthrone Him on your praises. We will give you an opportunity to sing of His majesty in a moment, but let's go to Him in prayer and commit our lives to Him.