

Sermon 53: Revelation 19:1-10: The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

OUTLINE

The Bride
The guests

INTRODUCTION

What is the typical happy ending for a boy meets girl story? A wedding! The finale to your average TV series/fairy-tale/movie/book, etc. usually has that long torturous frustrated love relationship which seemed doomed to fail climax in a wedding. God who created the institution and was the first Father of the bride when He gave Eve to Adam will consummate the long seemingly doomed to failure love relationship between Christ and His people with a wedding to start them off on their 'happily ever after.' Satan's bride the wicked prostitute oppressive witch god-mother Babylon has been slain with covenant curses and now Christ's Cinderella-bride is free to marry her Prince. Chapters 17-18 marked the fall and judgement of the anti-church and this section has two parts, firstly an anthem of praise v1-5 and then an announcement of the marriage, v6-10.

This section is distinctive because it has the only 4 references to the OT name for God in abbreviated form in the word Hallelujah, which means Praise Yah! The anthem of praise extols God for His perfect justice and wrath, and rejoices in the perfect punishment she receives. Some have tried to tone down these exclamations saying that this is just a vision and that the rejoicing is over a city which is a symbol and that this is not the church literally rejoicing over judgement. We will be praising the God that whose holiness we will be seeing clearly for the first time because of the punishment of sin which we will be seeing for its true nature for the first time. 14:9-11 echoes this language and applies it to people not merely a city, and 18:4 implies there will be people who participate in her plagues of judgement. Some have tried to clip the eternal nature of the punishment by saying that smoke not fire goes up forever, but this is borrowed from Is. 34:10 where both fire and smoke endure forever.

The bride

The Warrior-husband has fought for His bride and now the marriage can commence. V6 begins with extremely loud shouting, 'Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.' All enemies are toppled, the King is ruling over all, the people feel the burden lifted and they shout out in praise of God.

V7 gives us the information about what this victory now enables, 'Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready.' The idea of a bride of humanity for Jesus was the purpose of creating humanity and the very institution of marriage. Divorce is so serious because it is not merely breaking down a vital social building block but because it is attacking a redemptive analogy. The permanence, intimacy, joy, and fruitfulness of marriage are all intended to teach us about the gospel and the richness of knowing Jesus. The idea of God's people being a bride is a familiar one in the OT. This picture was often used to portray Israel's unfaithfulness and God's saving grace in the picture of a faithful husband pursuing an adulteress wife. Hosea is a familiar story of a prophet commanded to take an unfaithful woman as a wife to show what Israel was like. And even when Gomer was unfaithful and castoff Hosea was to take

her back as a picture of God's pursuing love. This marriage of the lamb at the end of time will be a remarriage. The bride and Christ is a failed divorce and testimony to the triumph of God's grace. We will be revirginized, renewed, recreated, purified and start again to be perfect forever.

The idea of the church as a bride speaks as well of the intimacy we enjoy with God. The Song of Solomon has some powerful verses that press home our acceptance with God. 6:5, 'Turn away your eyes from me, for they overwhelm me---Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead.' 4:9, 'You have captivated my heart, my sister, my bride; you have captivated my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace.' Dressed in the righteousness of Christ we are truly beautiful to God and He loves us deeply and seeks intimacy with us.

The emphasis of Rev. 19:7-9 is on the Bride and her making herself ready and dressing in righteous deeds. It is true that many of the ideas bound up with the church as the bride amplify God's grace but they also speak of our responsibility. We must be faithful, we must resist all the suitors that attempt to seduce us and lure us away from Christ. We must resist all those toy-boys and rich playboys who promise the world, who make us feel desirable, useful and can deliver cheap thrills. The bride of Christ must keep her purity intact. This was Paul's desire for the Corinthians when he urged them to keep away from false apostles and their teaching, 2 Cor. 11:2-4, 'For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. 3 But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. 4 For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.' By keeping away from false teaching, from idolatry and from the moral laxity of this life we will present ourselves as virgins for our wedding day.

The wedding dress is the fixation of the bride as she presents herself at what she considers to be her most beautiful dressed more extravagantly than she ever will be for the rest of her life. This vision tells us that our beauty will be our holy deeds which will follow us. This is not to undermine the garment of salvation God provides in the imputed righteousness of Christ. This vision intends to make a different point. Do you want to please Christ on that final day? Do you want Him to smile upon you and to delight in you? Then dress yourself in the beauty of holiness, of righteous deeds. They are despised by the world but loved by Christ. The motivation is for us to strive to want to be well dressed on that day.

The guests

In verse 9 we have a slight change in image, 'And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God.'" The picture changes from a bride at her wedding to the wedding guests. This shift has raised much discussion. Some have tried to say that the bride is the church but the guests are the Jews. But since the book of Revelation often uses multiple images for a single reality, and because it is taught in the NT we understand the benediction pronounced upon the wedding guests to be upon the church. Christ in His teaching often used the idea of being invited to a wedding to portray spiritual truths. A key parable is Matthew 21:1-14, 'And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, 2 "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, 3 and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. 4 Again he sent other servants, saying, "Tell those who are invited, See, I have

prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.' 5 But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, 6 while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. 7 The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. 8 Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9 Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' 10 And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹"But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. 12 And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 For many are called, but few are chosen."

In the first instance we learn that God invites people to the feast but they do not come. This is talking about the Jews in the first place for they should have been first to accept the Messiah, but this invitation has also gone out to all who hear the good news. Jesus invites all who are heavy laden and burdened by sin to come and receive rest. He invites all who are thirsty and in need, all who are hungry to come to Him for what they need. The benediction rests upon those who receive the invitation and come.

Secondly, notice the parable talks about being properly dressed. In the first instance we would stress that this is the righteousness of Christ. For we cannot stand in the presence of God unless we have Christ's goodness credited to us and our sins become His. But we could add that if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord but do not produce the fruits of faith then you will be the man dressed in rags, your faith is not true and therefore is not the means by which you are justified. You will be cast out. Make sure you are truly trusting in Christ for salvation.

The announcement of such good news that the enemies are defeated and the wedding is about to commence is so overwhelming for John that he worships the angel, v10, 'Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God." For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.' John's response amplifies the goodness of the good news. In many ways this is a very instructive mistake. The main temptation the church faces is the one of idolatry it is an insidious danger, even John can fall into it, and the angel reminds us giving us a lesson. This lesson clarifies the role of angels, they are not to be worshipped they are fellow servants. This verse is very helpful in responding to JW's who believe that Jesus is the Archangel Michael. For the book of Revelation records the lamb being worshipped with the Father, Rev. 5, but here we are told that angels are not to be worshipped. It reminds us of the wrong of idolatry the great temptation the church was facing at the time and in all ages. And it reminds us of the centrality of Christ in the message of the Bible, that it might be the message upon our lips.

The happy ending is coming but let us learn from this verse that the Bride is to make herself ready. We are to be pure, pure of error, pure of sin and pure of idolatry.

