

Revelation 19:1-10

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Date: 06 October 2019

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[0 : 0 0] I was at a wedding this week, which in my book makes it a good week. I love weddings.

The excitement, the happiness, the food, the kelly, the whole works really. I really love weddings. I'm sure you do as well. When I was thinking about my love of weddings in the light of the passage and even just thinking how to introduce the passage, I was kind of, I guess, conscious of one of the downsides of returning to Peru is that we're going to miss out on a couple of weddings here in Bon Accord that we would have loved to be part of. Now, for the avoidance of doubt, for those of you who know our family circumstances, there is one wedding we will definitely be returning for, just in case you thought we were that cold, but no. Now, one thing you do need to participate in a wedding is an invitation. Our passage this morning speaks about a wedding, a royal wedding, no less, and interestingly, there is a particular focus on the blessedness or happiness of being invited. Notice what it says in verse 9 of chapter 19, then the angel said to me, write this. It's rather curious that at this point in the vision, the angel wants to just make sure that John is scribbling it all down. Presumably he's been doing that right through, but the angel wants to be sure. And so the angel said to me, write this.

This is important. This is at the heart of what I'm wanting you to understand and those with whom the vision will be shared to understand. And what is it that he has to write? Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb. Blessed are those, happy are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb. Now, again, you can call me shallow, but I love that the invitation is not simply to the wedding, but to the wedding supper of the Lamb. This is a full-day invitation that includes the banquet. Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb. Now, I want us to think about this passage by asking a few questions about the wedding that is spoken of and described, at least in a measure. And the following questions will kind of direct us in studying the passage. First of all, we can consider the time of this wedding. When will the wedding take place? And then we'll think about who will be participating in, particularly, who are the bride and groom? And then the question that is always one that is, that provokes interest, perhaps not in everybody, but in some, what will the bride be wearing? We're told about what the bride will be wearing. And then finally, which is in a way the heart of the matter, given the angels' preoccupation or stress on this, who are invited? Who are these blessed, happy people who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb?

So those questions that revolve around this event, this wedding, will direct what we have to say this morning. First of all, when will the wedding take place? Well, in verse 6, which introduces reference to the wedding, the verse begins, Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder shouting, Hallelujah, for our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory, for the wedding of the Lamb has come. So this eruption of praise in heaven, announcing the wedding, is introduced with this word, then. Then I heard. And that word, of course, serves to place the event, the wedding that is pronounced or announced in this praise. The word then serves to place the event to be described within a sequence of events. And so we're able to discover what has happened immediately before the wedding ceremony is about to take place. And what is it that comes before the big day? What ushers in the big day? What event clears the way for this royal wedding that is being described? Well, the answer, and it is a solemn answer, is found in verses 1 to 5 of chapter 19. These verses paint a picture of praise in heaven. And it is indescribably glorious, this praise. Indeed, I use the word indescribably deliberately because even John fails to find language that will adequately describe it. And so he, on a number of occasions, will speak in these terms. After this, I heard what sounded like or what looked like. And what he's really trying to do is grapple with how does the language that he has at his disposal, how can it do justice to what he is witnessing, this heavenly praise. And so what precedes the wedding ceremony is this scene of heavenly praise. And the heavenly choir is responding to the call made to rejoice that we read and noted in verse 20 of the previous chapter. Then in verse 20, there is this call to God's people, rejoice over her, you heavens. A call particularly to those in heaven. Rejoice over her. Rejoice over

Babylon being destroyed. Rejoice over her, you heavens. Rejoice, you people of God. Rejoice, apostles and prophets, for God has judged her with the judgment she imposed on you.

[6 : 20] Now John had already in this vision witnessed this same multitude, this great multitude referred to in verse 1 of chapter 19. He's already witnessed this multitude praising God. In chapter 7 and verses 9 and 10, we find the multitude praising God also. And they cried out in a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. This great multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language celebrating God's salvation.

And this same multitude once again are praising God and they are praising Him also for His salvation, but for one profoundly solemn aspect of God's salvation that they are focusing on or celebrating in praise.

And that is God's final judgment of His enemies. Their focus in this eruption of praise is on this aspect of His salvation. And let's be clear, judgment is part of God's salvation. It's not as if we have judgment and salvation. The big picture is God's saving act. That includes judgment. And it is this aspect of God's salvation that the heavens are celebrating and praising God for. God is being praised for executing judgment on Babylon. What do we learn about this judgment? What does this judgment involve? Well, it involves condemnation. Verse 2, He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. Condemnation.

Condemnation of the one described as the great prostitute. Who is the great prostitute? Well, the great city of Babylon that in the previous chapter is being laid to waste. Babylon represents the enemies of God. Babylon is led by God's mortal enemy, Satan, the dragon we were introduced to in chapter 12 that we were looking at last Sunday morning. And condemnation, of course, is the outcome of judgment. Having judged, the accused party is found guilty and is condemned. A judgment has taken place. The evidence has been considered. A judgment has been arrived at and the accused party stands condemned. So, this judgment leads to, involves condemnation. It involves destruction. We read there in verse 5, and again they shouted, Hallelujah! The smoke from her, that is from Babylon, the city destroyed, the smoke from her, the smoke from her, goes up forever and ever. When we see this picture, this description of smoke rising forever and ever. I don't think we should understand this in the first instance as a reference to hell. Revelation does speak about hell, but I think on this occasion when this language is used, I think it's rather the picture of a city totally destroyed and consumed.

The picture is of complete destruction with the language of forever and ever pointing to the totality and permanence of its defeat. And what the vision is making very clear for all who are willing to listen is this wonderful and comforting truth that Babylon will never rise again. And again, if we just place ourselves perhaps in the shoes of those who were reading this vision, receiving this vision for the first time, and particularly those who found themselves under the cosh, suffering from the weight of Roman imperial power, suffering persecution and violence because of their loyalty to Jesus. And Rome seems so invincible, eternal Rome, as the Romans like to imagine or delude themselves in describing the empire of which they were a part. And yet here in the vision, it's made clear that there is a day coming when Rome, when Babylon, when all of those who oppose God will be destroyed and destroyed forever. Babylon will never rise again. Babylon will not rise, phoenix-like from the ashes, for these ashes will be ashes from which the smoke rises forever and ever.

[10 : 54] The picture then being painted is one of complete and absolute destruction, which of course is part of their condemnation. Now the question is, how does heaven respond to this scene of mass destruction and death?

Does the angelic choir recoil in horror at what is going on before them? Does the church triumphant look on in dismay? Do the celestial singers protest in silence at the horror unfolding before them?

Are their tongues stilled in the face of such severity? None of these things. Rather, they sing hallelujah. Hallelujah. Salvation and glory and power belong to our God. They praise God. That is how they respond to the destruction of Babylon. They don't lament the destruction of Babylon. They celebrate.

They rejoice. They praise God for the destruction of Babylon. Why this response? Why do they respond in such a way? Well, we could maybe answer that in different ways, and the different ways supplementing or together giving us an answer. First of all, we can say that they praise God for His justice.

And that, of course, is stated very explicitly, or is part of their praise in a very explicit way. Hallelujah. We're in verse 1. Hallelujah. Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are His judgments. The very first thing that the heavenly choir recognizes is that what God has done is true and just. It is righteous and just. There is no injustice involved. There is no undue severity. There's no sense here that God is acting in a capricious, vengeful manner. No, what He has done in destroying and condemning Babylon is true and just. So they praise God for His justice. Thank God that God is just. What a frightening thing it would be if God was not just.

[13 : 09] If we could have no security as to whether ultimately He would act justly in the face of evil and wickedness. But we have a God who always acts in justice. So they praise God for His justice. And they praise God also very particularly for His vindication of His people. We read there in verse 2, He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. And then we read, He has avenged on her the blood of His servants. This day of judgment and condemnation and destruction is the long-awaited ultimate answer to the plea of the martyrs that we first met in chapter 6 of this vision. In chapter 6 and verse 10, you have this cry of the martyrs. In verse 10 of chapter 6, they called out in a loud voice, How long, sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood? How long? You see, they could see around them that the enemies of

God were not being judged or certainly not ultimately judged. They were still able to do all that they were doing. They seemed to have the upper hand. And so this cry rises to heaven, how long? Or rises from heaven to God, how long? How long? And here we find the ultimate answer to that plea. So they praise God for His justice. They praise God for His vindication of His people. And really the big picture is that they praise God for the victory of Jesus. The judgment of Babylon signals the victory of Jesus.

It is part and parcel of the victory of Jesus. You cannot have one side victorious if the other side has not been defeated. It stands to reason. And so the destruction of Babylon is part of and integral to the victory of the victory of Jesus. And so those who love Jesus, those who belong to Jesus, celebrate the destruction of Babylon.

I wonder why when we read the language that we find here in the vision, some of it, of course, is symbolic language, but that doesn't make it any less harrowing because it symbolizes realities that are perhaps even more harrowing than the symbolism can possibly portray. Why is it when we come across this language and this reality described, why do we sometimes at one level perhaps understandably recoil from it?

Is it perhaps in part because we don't really get God, we fail to appreciate the character of God, the God who is altogether righteous and altogether holy and altogether just, the God whose very character demands that evil be punished and evildoers be condemned.

[16 : 19] The saints in heaven get God and they rejoice. So the wedding will take place when Jesus returns to consummate his victory over his enemies and to judge the world, when he returns to judge the living and the dead, when he returns to judge you and me. That leads us to the second question that we'll deal with more briefly. Who are the bride and groom? Well, we can begin with the groom. In verse 7, we're told who the groom is. In chapter 19 and verse 7, let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory for the wedding of the Lamb has come. It's the wedding of the Lamb. The Lamb or the one spoken of as the Lamb is the one to be.

Who's married is the groom in this wedding ceremony? And who is the Lamb? Well, in the Revelation or in the vision recorded for us in Revelation, we have the answer to that question. The vision has already identified the Lamb. Way back in chapter 5, we meet the Lamb and the Lamb is identified for us.

When the scroll is opened, when the scroll is opened. You remember the scroll and nobody was found worthy to open the scroll. And then there's great rejoicing in heaven because one is found worthy to open the scroll. And who is the one found worthy? It's the Lamb. Chapter 5 and verse 6, then I saw a Lamb looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. And then in verse 9 and 10, we are told more about this Lamb. And they sang a new song saying, you, that is the Lamb, are worthy to take the scroll and to open it sealed because you were slain. And with your blood, you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation and it goes on. And so very clearly, the Lamb is identified as Messiah Jesus, the one who died to rescue and purchase a people for himself.

It is the Lamb, King Jesus, Messiah Jesus, who is the groom at this wedding ceremony. The wedding is the wedding of the King of Kings, the one seated on the throne. This is the royal wedding.

Royal weddings, there may be many, but this is the royal wedding. But what about the bride? Who's the bride? Well, the bride is not named. The bride is reference for the wedding of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready. But who is this bride who has made herself ready? Well, she is identified in the verse that follows. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to the bride to wear. And then we read, fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people. And so there, the bride is identified as the saints or God's holy people or the church of Jesus Christ, identified as the bride who will marry the groom on this occasion. Now, the image of God's people or the church as the bride of Christ is a familiar one in the Bible. In the Old Testament on different occasions, Israel is described in those terms as the bride of the Lord. And then, of course, in the New Testament also, perhaps most memorably or most explicitly in Paul's letter to the Ephesians and chapter 5, the church is described in those terms as the bride of Christ. So, we have identified the groom and the bride. Those invited are invited to the wedding of Jesus and His bride. Those given to Jesus by His

[20:11] Father at the church. Now, what will the bride be wearing? That was the next question that we said we would try and answer in the light of the passage. As I suggested, there's always great excitement surrounding the wedding dress, at least for some people. Some of us get less excited about that than others, and that's fair enough. But often there is great excitement about what will the bride be wearing?

What about the royal wedding at the end of time? What will the bride be wearing? Is it a secret? You know, in weddings, perhaps that's sometimes something that some try to keep secret, but it's no secret in the matter of this wedding that is being described. We have the wedding dress described in verse 8.

Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. Fine linen, bright and clean. What does this wedding dress signify? This is a vision. The different elements signify certain truths.

But what about this wedding dress? Fine linen, bright and clean. Well, we're told, we're not left to speculate. We're told there in what follows fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people. This garment, beautiful in its simplicity and purity, represents, stands for the righteous acts of the saints. But then there's another detail that seemingly creates a difficulty for us. On the one hand, we're told that the garment represents the righteous acts of God's people. But then in verse 8, we are told, we've already been told, fine linen, bright and clean was given her to wear. So the garment, on the one hand, is a gift from the groom to his bride. There's no merit involved. It's a gift.

The bride received the gift of this garment. And yet immediately we're told that the garment, in some sense, represents the righteous acts of God's holy people, of the bride. Do we have or might we imagine that there's some kind of a conflict here, some kind of contradiction? Is the garment a gift of grace or a reward for the bride's righteous acts? I think that the conflict that there appears to be, again, there is an apparent conflict or maybe even contradiction. I think it is only apparent.

[22 : 49] The garment clearly is a gift. In the light of the broader teaching of the New Testament concerning what Christ has done for us, we understand this garment to represent Christ's righteousness given to us or imputed to us, to use the theological language. It is a righteousness not our own. We, the church, are clothed in Christ's righteousness. And yet the same Savior who clothes us in His righteousness invites us and enables us to live lives marked by righteousness. He gifts us our righteous acts to perform to the glory of His name. We're reminded of what Paul explains to the church in Ephesus. In Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 10, we read as follows. In Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 10, if we take the reading from verse 8 to get a sense of how verse 10 follows on in the argument Paul is making, for it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast. Making very clear, your salvation is not because of it your righteous acts, so that no one can boast. But then he goes on to say, for we are God's handiwork created from Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. The saints are justified by faith alone, but the gift of faith is never alone. It's always accompanied by righteous acts that give evidence of what God has done for us. If we think of this picture of a garment, as I was kind of reflecting on this in my own mind, I wonder if this can maybe help get across what is being said here, these two parallel truths. You know, a garment can serve as a marker of who we are, a uniform, if you wish, that identifies who we are, and we're given that to identify us. But that garment can also be work clothes, work clothes that allow us to do a job that we have been given to do. And there's a sense in which the righteousness spoken of here has those two senses. It is a gift God grants us. He gives us a righteousness not our own. He clothes us in the righteousness of His Son, but He clothes us that we might work. There are work clothes that we would live and do righteous acts for His glory and for the good of others.

It's also in the context of Revelation, what we've seen as we've been making our way through Revelation, it is worth remembering the stress on righteous acts in Revelations 2 and 3 where there are the letter to the churches. You know, it's often highlighted, the churches who demonstrate their identity by their righteous acts. You know, their righteous acts are evidence of the genuine nature of their faith and of their discipleship. So, this is the wedding garment, bright and clean, fine linen given her to wear that stand for the righteous acts of God's holy people.

This is the wedding garment. You can't buy it in the shops. No fashion house in London or Paris or Milan can design it for you. It is priceless, the precious gift of righteousness given to the bride by the groom. Which takes us to the final question we wanted to just touch on. Who are invited?

The angel stresses to John the importance that he write this down. Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb. Well, who are invited? And at this point, the imagery of the vision is stretched almost to breaking point as the bride and the guests merge into one. That's really what happens in the vision. That's the thing about visions. You're allowed to do that. On the one hand, the bride is being spoken of. And then you have the guests being spoken of and they merge into one.

The ones invited are those who will be the bride, who will participate not only as observers, but as the bride in this wedding ceremony. But that maybe leads us to take a step back and ask an even bigger question than who are those invited. And the bigger question that I think we need to pose as we consider who are invited, as we consider if we'll be there, if we've been invited, the prior invitation that you need to respond to is one that Jesus addresses to you, extends to you, extends to all, even today.

[28 : 21] Jesus extends this invitation, come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. How we respond to that invitation will determine if we are those who are blessed and invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb. Are you weary of a life lived far from God, of a life lived relying on and depending on your own resources and your own wisdom? Are you burdened by the load of your own sin and guilt? Will you come to Jesus in repentance and faith? Will you do so for the first time? Or will you do so having done so in the past, but drifted from Him? Will you respond to the invitation, come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and experience the truth of the promise made, and I will give you rest. All those who accept this invitation and put their trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior will be invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb. Not only invited, the wedding will not take place without you, for you are the bride.

And if you turn down the invitation, find yourself as a result deprived of suitable clothing, dressed not in the righteousness of Christ, but in the filthy rags of your own self-righteousness, you will have no place for the wedding supper of the Lamb. Rather, there is another place prepared for those who reject Christ's invitation, something that we're told of in this same book of Revelation. Listen to the fate of those who reject the invitation as solemnly described for us in John's vision. If anyone's name was not found written in the list of guests to the wedding supper, he was thrown into the lake of fire. That is the outcome for those who reject the gracious invitation that is extended by Jesus to come to Him and to find in Him forgiveness and wholeness and new life. May you respond to that invitation and may you be part of that great royal wedding at the end of time. Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your

Word. We thank you that you are the God who is sovereign over history and you are leading the affairs of the world to their determined conclusion. We acknowledge that there is much that goes on that we fail to understand. We are often unable to see your hand governing over affairs. What we see so often appears to be without any reason and completely chaotic. But we thank you that it is not so. We thank you that that is because our vision is limited. We thank you that we can trust in the assurance that you are the God who is doing all things and all things well. We thank you that your acts are just and true. We thank you that there is a day coming when Babylon will be judged and condemned and destroyed never to rise again.

And as Babylon is destroyed, so the glorious outcome of that will be enjoyed by all those who form part of the new heavens and the new earth, the new heavens and the new earth, where there will be no more opposition, no more persecution, no more tears, no more violence, no more injustice, no more oppression, no more death.

And we look forward to that day. Heavenly Father, help us and help all of us to know what it is to respond wisely to the gracious invitation that is extended to us time and time again to come to Jesus, all those who are weary and burdened. Help us as those who are in so many ways, weary and burdened to come to Jesus and find rest in him. And we pray in his name. Amen.