

A Royal Wedding

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[0 : 0 0] Poor Tony missed out while Posh Spice made it, clinging to her husband's bootstraps, that would be his football, bootstraps, an invitation to the royal wedding, worth its weight in gold, indeed considerably more than its weight in gold. I wonder if you saw the guests queuing up outside Westminster Abbey, half past eight, quarter to nine, there they were, a lovely sunny day that helped, and there they were in all their splendor queuing up to get into the abbey, and they were clinging on, clenching their invitations as if their life depended on it.

Imagine if you'd lost that invitation, and as a result were denied entry to the abbey. Well, this morning I want us to consider a royal wedding. I want us to consider being invited to a royal wedding, invited to the royal wedding, the wedding of the king and his beautiful bride.

We will read of that occasion as we are given an insight, a glimpse of it, in the book of Revelation. Turn with me, if you will, to Revelation chapter 19. We will read from verses 1 to 10, and consider what we find there concerning this royal occasion that is in the future, and to which we can be invited. Revelation chapter 19, we'll read from the beginning of the chapter through to verse 10. We are interrupting, as it were, into this vision that has been granted to John, and we read at this point of the vision what John witnesses, or what he describes to us.

After this, I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven, shouting, Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments.

He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.

[2 : 3 5] And again they shouted, Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever. The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God, who was seated on the throne, and they cried, Amen! Hallelujah!

Then a voice came from the throne, saying, Praise our God, all you his servants, all who fear him, both small and great. 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, and his bride has made herself ready.

Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints. Then the angel said to me, Write, Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

And he added, These are the true words of God. At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, Do not do it. I am a fellow servant with you, and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus.

[4 : 0 1] Worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. The Word of God. Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

Well, who are those invited? And how can you get on that wedding list? We'll discover that in a moment.

But first of all, let's see what we can learn about this wedding that is described for us in a measure in the verses that we have read. First of all, we ask the question, When will this wedding take place?

This wedding that John witnesses in his vision, when will it take place? What is the date of this wedding? When will it be? Well, verse 6 of the chapter begins with a word that would identify the occasion of this wedding.

We read there in verse 6, Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude. John is describing for us what he sees, what he witnesses, and he says, Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude.

[5 : 20] And that word, then, serves to place the event to be described, which he goes on to describe in the following verses. This wedding banquet of the Lamb. This word, then, locates, places the event within a sequence of events.

And what comes before the big day? What comes before this wedding banquet? What event clears the way for the royal wedding?

Well, the answer, and it is a solemn answer, is found in the opening verses of the chapter. There, in verses 1 to 5, an event is described for us that comes immediately before this wedding banquet, this royal wedding.

In these opening verses of the chapter, there is described for us John's vision of praise in heaven. And it is indescribably glorious.

In verse 1, After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven, shouting. I say it is indescribable.

[6 : 32] An attempt is made to describe it, but it is only an attempt. I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude. Language is not able to do justice to what it is that John is witnessing and hearing in his vision.

He can only approximate to a description. It is glorious praise. And why is this multitude in heaven praising God?

What is the reason? What is the motive? What is the cause of their worship in this event that precedes the royal wedding, that precedes the wedding banquet that John goes on to describe?

What is the reason for their praise? John has already witnessed in his vision this same multitude praising God for his salvation.

We can read in chapter 7 of Revelation in verses 9 to 10, After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.

[7 : 43] They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands, and they cried out in a loud voice, Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

Praising God for his salvation. Praising God for he is their Savior. That was the cause on that occasion, but here there is another reason.

There is another motive. There is another cause for their praise of God. And what is it? Well, we read there in verses 1 and 2, Hallelujah!

Salvation and glory and power belong to our God for true and just are his judgments. You see, the cause of the praise of the multitude in heaven before this great wedding banquet is the judgment of God.

His true and just judgments. God is being praised by the heavenly choir for executing his just judgment.

[8 : 49] Now, that may grate with us somewhat. Yes, let's praise God for his great salvation. Let's praise God for his abounding grace and love. But here the praise is driven by another truth.

The praise of the heavenly choir is for God who is executing just judgment. And what does this involve? Well, we are told in what follows there in verse 2, He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries.

He has avenged on her the blood of his servants. This is what this just judgment involves, the condemnation, the punishment of the great prostitute.

Who is this great prostitute? We read in chapter 17 of Revelation in verse 5, Mystery. Mystery. Babylon the Great, the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth.

There the great prostitute is identified as Babylon, the great city of Babylon, representing the enemies of God, representing all of God's enemies, and at the head, led by his first and great enemy, the fallen angel Lucifer, Satan.

[10 : 14] Satan. He is the king of Babylon, and he is condemned. He is punished on this day of judgment. But is it only Satan?

Is he the only one who is condemned? Is he the only one who is the object of God's just and true judgments? Perhaps we would wish it were so, but it is not so.

For all who have followed in his footsteps in rebellion against God, they too will be punished.

They too will be justly and rightly condemned on that great and awful day. In the following chapter, we read of Satan's doom, and we discover that he is not alone.

In chapter 20 and verse 10, we read, And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night, forever and ever.

[11 : 15] To that, perhaps, we might say amen. But then, what do we go on to read? Then I saw a great white throne, and him who was seated on it, earth and sky, fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne. The books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.

The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.

The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. So it is not Satan alone who is condemned on that great day.

Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life. And what is the punishment of Babylon and its citizens? Well, we read in verse 3 of chapter 19, and again they shouted, Hallelujah!

[12 : 23] The smoke from her goes up forever and ever. This is picture language, but it is picture language that reveals gospel truth.

And it speaks of punishment that is meted out that is eternal and irreversible. The smoke from her goes up forever and ever and ever.

Satan and all who rebel against God condemned to hell itself. And in the face of this awful judgment, does the angelic choir recoil?

Does the church triumphant look on in horror at what is unfolding? Do the celestial singers protest in silence at what is being done? Are their tongues stilled in the face of such severity?

No. They sing Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever. They praise God, the righteous judge.

[13 : 32] They praise Him for His true and just judgments. So when will the wedding take place?

This wedding banquet of the Lamb, when will it take place? When Jesus returns to judge the world, when Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead, when Jesus returns to judge you and to judge me, then, then, once that day of judgment has passed, then, and only then, the royal wedding can proceed.

So we know when this wedding will take place, but who are the bride and groom at this great royal wedding? Well, we can begin with the groom. Verse 7 speaks of the wedding of the Lamb.

Let us rejoice and be glad. Sing the heavenly choir. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory, for the wedding of the Lamb has come.

The wedding of the Lamb. And who is the Lamb? Well, we know the answer. We know how John the Baptist directs our gaze in the right direction. We know that when John saw Jesus approaching, these were His words as we find them recorded in the Gospel of John in chapter 1 and verse 29.

[14 : 55] Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And John the Baptist directs our gaze as he did then, so he does this morning to Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. He is the Lamb of God. Jesus is the groom.

This is not the wedding of a prince. This is not the wedding of an heir to the throne. This is the wedding of the king, of the one seated on the throne, the king of kings and lords of lords. It is His wedding.

Jesus is the groom. But who is the bride? Is the bride of royal stock? Or is the bride a commoner like Kate? The bride, in verse 7, is not named.

For the wedding of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. She is not named, but there is no mystery in this, as in the following verse, she is identified.

[15 : 58] Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. The bride was given. Fine linen, bright and clean. And then we read, Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.

And in this explanation, is identified the bride. The bride are the saints. The bride is the church of Jesus Christ. Now, the image of the church as the bride of Christ is a very familiar one.

Indeed, in both Testaments, this image is used to describe the relationship between a loving covenant God and His covenant people. And the image was rightly highlighted at the service on Friday morning when the Archbishop made reference to the familiar words in Paul's letter to the Ephesians in chapter 5 and verses 25 to 27.

What do we read there? Familiar words. Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word and to present her to Himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

And as Paul goes on to say, this is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church. So the bride of Jesus, the bride who is described here and presented to us in this vision that John is given of this heavenly wedding, the bride is the church of Jesus Christ.

[17 : 45] So those invited are invited to the wedding of Jesus and His bride. Those given to Jesus by the Father, the church, the redeemed, the church of Jesus Christ, is the bride of Jesus Christ.

But there remains, what for some is the big question of any wedding, the big question. Some might see it as of not great import, but for many it's the big question.

what will the bride be wearing? What will the bride be wearing? Many of us marveled at how the secret of Kate's dress was kept hermetically.

In this age of social networking and of leaks of one kind or another, this was one detail that we didn't know. Nobody seemed to know. None of the experts, none of the commentators, knew what she would be wearing, what the dress was like.

It was the great secret. And the experts speculated until finally Kate emerged from the Goring Hotel near Buckingham Palace.

[19 : 02] And we got a glimpse, just a glimpse, an ivory gown with lace applique. I needed to Google that to find that out.

I didn't find that out from mere observation. A classic look designed by Sarah Burton of Alexander McQueen.

This is what the bride was wearing. What about the royal wedding at the end of time?

What will the bride be wearing? Is it a secret? It's no secret. It's no secret. We're told. There in verse 8, the bride has made herself ready.

Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. We're told what the bride will be wearing. Fine linen. And what does this fine linen, bright and clean, what does it signify?

[20 : 06] Well, we are told what it signifies. It stands for the righteous acts of the saints. And yet, we are also told that the garment, beautiful in its simplicity and purity, has been given to the bride.

Notice the language that we have there in verse 8, and particularly this verb, fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.

And so we have two truths concerning this garment that would appear to be in conflict. On the one hand, we're told that the fine linen signifies the righteous acts of the saints, that which the saints have done, that which is, it would seem, to their credit.

And yet, at the same time, we're told that this garment has been given them. It is a gift, not something that they have earned, but something that they have received out of the sheer grace of a loving groom who gives the garment.

So what are we to say? What are we to conclude? Is the garment a gift of grace or her own righteous acts, the bride's own righteous acts, earned by the bride, we might say?

[21 : 26] What are we to conclude? Well, the conflict is only apparent. The garment is a gift. That we are told explicitly.

A garment has been given her. The righteousness with which God's people, the church of Jesus Christ, are clothed is not our own.

The righteousness with which we are clothed is imputed to us, is credited to us. It is a gift from the groom. We, the church, as we put our trust in Jesus Christ, are clothed in Christ's righteousness, a righteousness not our own.

That much is clear. And yet, the same Savior who clothes us in His righteousness invites and enables us to live lives marked by righteousness.

He gifts us also good works to perform to the glory of His name. We know this is true. We know that it is made very clear to us in the Scriptures, indeed, in passages that speak so clearly of how we are justified by faith alone, yet in those same passages we are told that that is that we might then adorn our profession with good works.

[22 : 59] Listen to Paul in Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 10, for we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Yes, the saints are justified by faith alone, but the gift of faith which justifies is never alone. And so, there is no conflict.

Yes, the garment of the bride is a gift from the groom, a love gift from Jesus, but that same Jesus, that same groom would have His bride live a righteous life and indeed would enable us to live a righteous life characterized by righteous acts.

Indeed, as we bring to bear associated truth revealed in this same revelation to John, we might even speak of how our righteous acts are made white in the blood of the Lamb.

What do we read in chapter 7 of Revelation in this same revelation of the apostle? We read there in verse 13, Then one of the elders asked me, These in white robes, who are they?

[24 : 14] And where did they come from? I answered, Sir, you know. And he said, These are they who have come out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

This is the wedding garment. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. You can't buy it in the shops.

No fashion house in London, Paris, or Milan can design it for you. It is priceless. It is a love gift from the groom to the bride.

What a wedding! What an occasion! And so we echo the words of the vision, Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

Blessed are those who are invited to this great occasion. Which brings us back to a question with which we began.

[25 : 23] But 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.

The guests are the bride herself. But back to this really big question. Are you invited?

Will you be there? That will depend on a prior invitation and how you respond to it.

The groom, the Lamb of God, Jesus, the Christ is today. Yes, today, this morning, extending to you an invitation.

Listen to the words of Jesus that He directs to you. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

[26 : 27] That invitation is directed to you this morning. and I ask you, are you weary of a life lived far from God?

Are you burdened by an appreciation, a conviction of your own sin and guilt and rebellion against God? Will you, in the light of that, come to Jesus in repentance and faith and put your trust in Jesus?

Will you respond to this invitation? Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, 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.

Indeed, not only invited, the wedding will not take place without you, for you are the bride. Could the wedding on Friday have taken place if Kate had not appeared?

No, the wedding could not have taken place. Without a bride there is no wedding. And so, at this great wedding, the bride must be there. Without the bride there is no wedding.

[27 : 41] And if you accept this invitation, that Jesus extends to you this morning, come to me, graciously and tenderly and lovingly extends to you, come to me.

You haven't come yet, you've had ample opportunity, but once again, I come and I invite you again. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.

Rest for your soul, forgiveness of sins, new life. Come to me. If you will accept this invitation, then you most assuredly will be on the invitation list for this great wedding banquet, for you will be the bride.

And if you turn down the invitation, what will happen then? Will you have a place at this great wedding banquet?

There will be no place for you, for you will be deprived of suitable clothing. You will be dressed not in the righteousness of Christ, but in the filthy rags of your own self-righteousness.

[28 : 51] And you will have no place, no place at the wedding supper of the Lamb. Rather, listen to your fate as solemnly described in John's vision, as we have already read.

If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, if anyone's name was not on the wedding list, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

God grant that it would not be so for you. Let us pray. Let us pray.