

Scandalous Grace: The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

Revelation 19:1-10

By Billy Dempsey

I'm going to preach from one of the Bible's most controversial books. Thank you, Reverend Strain! Thank you, thank you, thank you. Lots of phone calls coming tomorrow, Ralph, just to tell you. Stay by that phone tomorrow! Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, open our hearts; open our minds. Help us think Your thoughts after You as we look at Your Word together. Speak to us. Thank You, great Shepherd of the sheep, for speaking to us. Make our hearts soft and pliable in Your Spirit's hand. We make our prayer in Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen.

Let's begin reading with verse 1 of chapter 19. I'll read the ten verses and then we need to step back and get a little bit wide angle view of the context. Chapter 19 verses 1 through 10:

After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out,

"Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants."

Once more they cried out,

"Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever."

And twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, "Amen, Hallelujah!" And from the throne came a voice saying,

"Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great."

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. 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; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure” -

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

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.” 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.

And we know that God adds His blessing to His Word as we read it and hear it together.

Background to Revelation 19

Let's take for a second, a moment, to step back and get a little bit wider angle on these ten verses. Chapters 17 through 19 really form one unit and it's in those chapters that we see the beginning of God's definitive dealing with His enemies - first the great prostitute. In the latter part of chapter 19 we see the beast and the false prophet dealt with definitively. In chapter 20 we see the defeat of Satan, finally, definitively. But it starts that defeat, that clearly recognized defeat starts right here in chapter 17 with the great prostitute. And we see her, Babylon it says in chapter 17, the mother of prostitutes and all the earth's abominations, and you get the symbol. The symbol is the seductiveness of the world - the seduction of worldliness. We see the great scarlet beast that she rides upon and we see her great wickedness and her seduction of the kings of the earth and we see the extent as we read in chapter 17 of her power and influence. And she is drunk - this is very significant - with the blood of the saints, the martyrs of Jesus. And we see her end as the great beast and the peoples of the earth turn upon her, consume her flesh, and set her afire. Verse 17 of chapter 17 says that in that they are doing God's work for God has put it into their hearts to carry out His purpose.

And then chapter 18 declares definitively Babylon's fall and you hear the urging voice from heaven to God's people, addressing God's people, “Come out from her lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues.” And it's really an appeal to keep themselves pure from the stain and the seductions of worldliness. You know, as an illustration, think about Lot's wife as she and Lot and their daughters are being evacuated from Sodom and the angel says, “Don't look,” and it's Lot's wife that turns and looks as the destruction of Sodom is carrying

forward and she's left there as a pillar of salt. "Come out from her lest you take part in her sins and lest you share in her plagues." Most of chapter 18 is taken up with three lamentations - the lamentations of the great kings of the earth, the lamentation of the great merchants of the earth, and the lamentation of the great shipmasters and great seafaring men of the earth - all of whom have been made great because of their alliance with Babylon the great prostitute.

Rest for God's People

Now against the great backdrop you get to chapter 19 and the first thing you hear in chapter 19 is the great rejoicing in heaven, the tremendous rejoicing, the voice of the great multitude, angels and saints in heaven saying, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah, praise the Lord!" *Hallelu* - praise. *Jah* - the contraction for Yahweh. "Praise the Lord! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to our God!" What this great multitude is saying is that God has perfected the salvation of His people in the destruction of the great prostitute and the following destruction of His and their enemies. You know, what we need to hear echoed in those words is the promise that you find associated with the delivery of the Israelites into the land of Canaan - so many times that promise of "rest from your enemies." Rest from your enemies. Part of the great glory of the latter part of David's reign was that he has rest from his enemies. The great glory of Solomon's reign was that the nation had rest from their enemies. Let me say this line again. God has perfected the salvation of His people in the destruction of the great prostitute and the other enemies whose destruction is described in chapter 19 and chapter 20. His glory is demonstrated, His power is revealed; He's removed the one whose chief delight was to draw men away from God and seduce them to self-worship and self-exaltation. He has avenged the blood of the saints that she spilled throughout history. God perfects our salvation in the judgment of His enemies and ours and there's great, there's great delight in worship. We get a little bit squeamish when our friends talk to us about all that killing that goes on in Joshua. We get a little bit squeamish when we hear people talk about the God of judgment, the God of wrath. Heaven is rejoicing over the just judgment of God. They're saying, "Hallelujah! God has conquered His enemies!"

Rejoicing from God's People

And if you read chapter 17 and 18 it's graphic what happens to the great prostitute. This line is graphic too. Look at verse 3 - "Once more they cried out, 'Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.'" That's graphic and they're rejoicing over the tangible evidence of the just judgment of God. Her judgment is complete. Babylon will never rise to tempt and trouble and torment the church again. The people of God in heaven are rejoicing because in the judgment of God He has perfected His salvation and dealt definitively with His enemies and theirs. Look at verse 4 - "The twenty-four elders respond and the

four living creatures respond falling down worshiping God who is seated on the throne.” The twenty-four elders are the representatives of God’s redeemed people - twelve tribes of Israel, twelve apostles - twelve plus twelve, twenty-four; the twenty-four elders. And you find them in Revelation chapter 4 that their thrones encircle the platform on which the throne of God stands. They are seated on thrones, they are given the privilege of ruling; they surround God’s throne and they are closer to God’s throne than are the angels. That’s significant. They excel in glory and honor because they are God’s blood-bought people.

And then the four living creatures, the angels, they’re cherubim I think, they’re representative of all the angelic host and so you’ve got the representatives of redeemed humanity, the representatives of the angelic hosts falling before God and they’re saying two things. They’re saying, “Amen,” which is, “So be it,” which is to affirm that “God, justice has been done upon Your enemies.” They’re not quibbling; they’re not second guessing. They’re saying, “Amen! Justice has been done upon Your enemies!” And they’re joining the rest of the multitude in heaven in worship, “Hallelujah! Praise Yahweh!” “And from the throne,” verse 5 is very interesting, “From the throne there came a voice, ‘Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him small and great.’” Who’s that talking to? I thought that was exactly what they were doing. Well they are, in heaven. They don’t need so much command in heaven to praise. We’re the ones, the church on the earth, we’re the ones that need the command to praise. We’re the ones that need the exhortation to praise. That’s the privilege and the duty and the glory of heaven - continual worship. We’re not there yet. And so the voice in heaven, if it’s addressing anybody, it’s addressing the church that’s still from the earth. The voice from the throne is addressing the church that’s still on the earth. We need to remember to praise God, to serve Him, to fear Him, small and great.

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

And that gets us into the next section and why we’re using this passage as part of the series of passages to talk about Jesus’ meals with sinners. All that becomes the platform to talk about the event of the marriage supper of the Lamb. Because God is conquering His enemies is dealt definitively with the great prostitute, will deal in the latter part of the chapter and in chapter 20 with the rest of His and our enemies, they can begin to anticipate the marriage supper of the Lamb. Let me read verses 6, 7, and 8 because they form a tight unit:

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. 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; it was granted her to clothe herself with

fine linen, bright and pure” -

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

Think about this - the roar of many waters; the sound mighty peals of thunder. It sounds like John is describing what's a growing, rolling, crescendo of praise that arises from this great multitude around the throne. It's not so much a choir singing in an organized fashion; it's really more like people talking to one another and telling one another and passing the message. It's loud, vocal, spontaneous praise that crescendos. It starts as the roar of many waters which is tremendously loud. If you've been to a place like Niagara Falls or someplace like this or at the beach when the waves are really crashing in - the roar of many waters - but it crescendos and it peaks in the sound of mighty peals of thunder. We've heard that; we've heard that. It's all enveloping, isn't it? It's heart-stopping; it's arresting. When that thunder cracks, everything stops - mid-sentence, mid-stride, everything stops because it's alarming and it's all enveloping. It consumes our attention. And that's the noise of the great multitude speaking a message and their message is, "The Lord God, the Almighty, has now revealed himself in full majesty of his royal glory and power." It's like they are saying, each one to his neighbor, and this is the language being used, "Let us rejoice and exult and give Him the glory!" They're talking to one another, they're yelling at one another. They're shouting in joy to one another, "Rejoice! Exult! Give Him the glory!" It's a crescendo of vocal - I would even use the word, I don't even know if the word raucous is too far out there to use because of the joy that accompanies their praise.

And why are they joyful? Why are they loudly joyful? Why is it raucous? There's a reason. God, having dealt with His enemies, His people begin to prepare for the marriage of the Lamb has come. That's why there's so much jubilation and it's so loud and rowdy. The marriage of the Lamb has come. I've got a lot here on the marriage customs of the Jews and I won't go into it because of time, but just understand that as John's readers hear that they understand there's been a process that's been worked; they're familiar with their marriage customs. There's betrothal - the end of which the bride and the groom really are legally husband and wife, they're not together yet because details have to be worked out. The bride price and that has to be paid - that's done and there's a great procession. The bride prepares or adorns herself; the groom comes in his best clothing accompanied by his friends and proceeds to her home and takes her back to his home and there's a great procession. There's great joy. There is there the wedding feast, which includes the marriage supper, and those festivities in their day would last seven days or even more. Here's a quote from William Hendriksen. "In Christ, the bride was chosen from eternity. Throughout the entire Old Testament dispensation the wedding was announced. Next, the Son of God assumed our flesh and blood. The betrothal took place; the price, the dowry was paid on Calvary. And now after an interval, the bridegroom returns and it has come - the marriage of the Lamb. The church yearns for this moment - the

church on earth as well as the church in heaven.”

As a Bride Adorned: The Righteous Deeds of the Saints

Notice the bride’s adornment. John sees that she is given fine linen to wear, bright and pure. She didn’t provide that for herself. That was provided for her. God Himself has provided the wedding gown for the bride. That garment is bright and pure. Her own clothing, according to Isaiah, is filthy rags. Paul says in Ephesians chapter 5 that Christ cleanses His bride and presents her to Himself without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish. The fine linen that John sees in verse 8, the fine linen given to her he defines, or the angel defines to him, is the “righteous deeds of the saints.” Here’s the bride clothed with the garment of fine linen, the righteous deeds of the saints. Which opens the questions of the obligations of the bride - the obligation of the bride while she’s still on the earth. We saw one of them. Chapter 18 verse 4 - “Come out of her. Come out of Babylon, my people, lest you be stained with her sins and with her plagues.” Faithfulness to the bridegroom. Another obligation would be waiting expectantly for His coming. You think about the parable of the ten virgins who were waiting for the coming of the bridegroom. Another obligation of the bride - to do the good works that God has prepared. Again, we go back to Ephesians chapter 2. “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God has prepared in advance, beforehand, for us to do.”

We think about those things, we think about the clothing and the righteous deeds of the saints, but let’s not get lost in the central truth here. The clothing provided for the bride is the gift of God. She wears what His grace has provided for her. And the righteous deeds that we talk about are made possible through God’s grace at work in our heart. That is, God’s grace at work in your heart, in my heart. We’re no longer slaves to sin; we live to serve God. We’re slaves of righteousness, Paul says in Romans chapter 6, and that means, to pick up what Jesus was talking about in Matthew chapter 25, the final judgment scene He describes, that means in Jesus’ name we feed the hungry, we give the thirsty something to drink, we give hospitality to strangers, to clothe the needy, we visit the sick and those in prison - why? Because Jesus has done for us, because we’ve enjoyed the mercy of God, we’ve enjoyed the benefit of the grace of God. The grace of God, the love of God shed abroad in our hearts prompts us, motivates us, to love in return, to give in return, to extend mercy and grace in return. Those are the righteous deeds of the saints. They’re not ours to come up with; they’re the fruit of the grace of God at work in our hearts. God in grace clothes the bride and His grace active within her prompts her to be beautiful, prompts her to do the beautiful work reflective of the beauty that He has made of her from the inside out.

Worship: The Response of a Grateful, Redeemed Sinner

Well a couple of things to wrap up before we pray. “The angel said to me,” John says, “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.” Who’s invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb? It’s those who have responded to the Gospel; it’s those who have trusted Christ, those who have repented of their sin, those who have received the gift of salvation. They’ve been clothed with the white garments of the righteousness of Christ. They’re seated at the table of the Lamb. God extends an invitation to His guests and His words are true without fail. How do we respond to something as great and as beautiful as this? John’s response is telling. Look at verse 10. “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 knows who to worship and John knows better than to worship angels, but I also think that if you and I were standing there grappling with the weight of what we had seen and the beauty of what we had seen and what we had heard our knees would buckle too. John needs to worship. He doesn’t need to worship an angel, but falling down in worship is the only response he can make. And the only response that the angel can make is to say, “I’m a servant too. Worship God.” He directs his worship rightly but John responds correctly. Worship. Praise. Adoration. Wonder. Brokenness. It’s the only response we make when we see the Gospel so beautifully and clearly displayed. We see the love of Christ for sinners like us, sinners whose best garment was filthy rags, who have now been clothed with fine linen and whose beauty is not just a beauty from the outside but a beauty propelled from the outside because of the redeeming grace of God working in His people from the inside out. It’s a marvelous picture. It’s a marvelous picture of what God has done for broken sinners like us, sinners who were held under the thrall and the seduction of a great prostitute, freed by the aggressive grace and the seeking mercy of God, and made people they would never be without Him.

Let’s pray.

Father, thank You for this marvelous picture. Let its beauty and its glory soak into our hearts so that we would spontaneously before You worship, bow the knee, unhinged by such aggressive and beautiful and wonderful grace that You would extend to the likes of us. Hallelujah, hallelujah! You are wonderful, our Father. Thank You for the love that You have extended to us. Would You help us to leave here and be part of extending that tremendous love and that tremendously beautiful Gospel to folks around us who are right now like we were - blind and seduced. Thank You, in Jesus’ name, amen.

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