

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

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[0 : 0 0] Welcome again. For those of you who weren't here at the beginning, welcome to our new home, the new space God's provided for Church of the Advent. We're so thankful for this church. They've been amazing hosts already, helping us problem solve before the service and seeming as eager as we are to make sure everything goes well. So thank you and praise God for them. A lot of change.

I mean, there's a lot of change in the life of our church right now. We have two new people who have just joined our team. They literally came in weeks before this major space change, and they got thrown into the deep end. And we're so thankful that Amy and Kaylee have just stepped up to the challenge.

Thankful for many of you who have showed up, who have worked hard to make this transition go as smoothly as possible. But anytime there's a lot of change, I think it's important as a community like ours to remember what all this is for. To come back and spend a little time remembering what this is all about. Why are we going to all of this trouble? And at the core of this is a relationship. It's a relationship that God desires to have with his people, with us. And then it's all of the relationships that flow out of that. The relationships that exist in this room and much more broadly beyond this room throughout the world. And so this morning, we're going to focus on that relationship, the relationship between God and his people. And, you know, I know some of you are here, and maybe you're visiting and you're not a Christian. I'm so glad that you're here. And this is actually a fantastic week for you to be here, because this is the very heart and soul of the Christian faith.

What we're talking about this morning is this is the essence. And if you're here and you are a Christian, this is the kind of thing that needs to come back into our minds. We need to remind ourselves of again and again and again and again. It's the very fundamental core of our faith. Because, honestly, most of the time when Christians go off the rails, it's because we've forgotten something of what we're going to be talking about this morning.

[2 : 1 0] We've lost sight of it. So we're going to be looking at the book of Revelation, which is the last book in Scripture. We're going to be looking at chapter 19, verses 1 through 10. And the Apostle John is given here a vision that shows us the whole story. It shows us the whole, the whole, all of the gospel is more or less summed up in these 10 verses. It's all here. And it shows us three things about our relationship with God. It shows us the relationship that we ought to have with God, that we were intended to have. It shows us the relationship we actually have with God.

And then it shows us the relationship that we can have, the relationship that's possible through Jesus Christ. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word. We thank you for this space. We thank you for the myriad ways you provide for us. Lord, some of which we've asked for, many of which you thought of without our help.

You are always the God who loves us, always the God who goes before us, always the God who provides for us. And we know that your word is perhaps your greatest provision, because in your word we see your truth revealed, and we come to know your living word, Jesus Christ. And it's in his name that we pray.

Amen. So the relationship we ought to have with God. There's a lot of images in the Bible that try to capture metaphorically the kind of relationship that we are called to have with God. God is portrayed as a king, and we are his subjects. God is portrayed as a shepherd, and we are his sheep. God is portrayed as a father, and we are his children. And there's some truth to all of these images. They all are worth our reflection and contemplation. But all through the scripture, the primary image we see, or the kind of relationship that God made us for, is most like a marriage. And, you know, this was a big wedding weekend. Some people in our church, Nate and Emily, got

married. I, Lord, yes, give thanks to God for that. And Laura and I had another wedding that we had to be a part of out in Northern

Virginia. Shree Harder and Christopher got married. That was also a great, yeah, for those of you who know them, praise the Lord. Great celebration. So a lot of weddings, and I was struck as I was sitting there yesterday, I was struck at the beauty, and I was struck at the significance of the fact that God would take something like a wedding, and that God would say, in a place like Revelation 19, here's how you're going to know that all has been put right in the world. Here's how you're going to know that all that is wrong has been dealt with. Here's how you're going to know that everything that is broken has been restored. Here's how you're going to know that all of the hopes that you never even dared hope, they've all come true. All of the dreams that you were afraid to dream, they've come true, and guess what? It's gone way beyond that. The world is moving into a place that no one ever dared imagine possible. Here's how you're going to know there's going to be a wedding, and you are going to be presented to God like a bride is to a groom, and then there's going to be a great celebration. And that way, I was staggered by that. This is the culmination of human history, a great wedding celebration. And I want to think about what this is saying. You know, think about a king. You know, a king may have subjects who fear him. A shepherd may have sheep who depend on him.

[6 : 04] A father may have children who love him. And all of those things are appropriate when it comes to our relationship with God. Fear and dependence and love. But the thing that sets marriage apart is intimacy. It's vulnerability.

There's a kind of intimacy, a kind of openness, a kind of mutual indwelling that's only possible in marriage. It's only appropriate for marriage. And we look at scripture, and this is how it portrays the relationship that we were created to have with God. If you look at the Song of Songs in the Old Testament, the Song of Songs is a book of erotic poetry. And for those of you who were a part of that series a little while ago when we walked through it, we saw undeniably this is about erotic love. And yet, what we recognized is that from the earliest days of the church, the churches understood that this was not just about human love, that it was actually also pointing to the love that exists between Jesus Christ and his people, between God and his people. Listen to what the bride says of the groom. She says in chapter 1, verse 2, let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your love is better than wine.

The groom says in chapter 4 to the bride, your lips drip nectar, my bride. Honey and milk are under your tongue. The fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon. Only lovers talk to each other this way. I hope you don't talk to your dad this way. I hope you don't talk to your boss this way. I hope that if our president ever were to visit, you would not talk to him that way. It's only the kind of language that lovers use. And it may sound odd to you to think of God in these terms, but the thing that we need to understand is that this is the language of intimacy. It's the language of intimacy.

You know, you and I were made for intimacy with God, not just to know him, not just to fear him, not even just to love him, but to be naked and unashamed in his presence. To be laid bare, to be fully known and fully loved by our maker, and likewise to fully know and fully love our maker.

The kind of intimacy that outside of that relationship you only see in marriage. And I think this is why we feel a kind of restlessness in life. You know, I think that's why even when you have a really great, meaningful job, and even if you're able to find somebody that you really love and you marry them, even when you're able to have kids and you love your kids and your family is healthy, even when all of the pieces seem to be in place, there's still something missing.

[9 : 14] You sort of realize, I'm kind of where I want to be in my career, I'm where I want to be in my family life, and everything seems good, and I should be happy, and yet there's something missing.

I think deep down under that restlessness is that sense that ultimately the intimacy that I was made for, I have not fully realized yet. There's something more that I was created to experience, and that's this intimacy with God.

Now, there may be some people who say, yeah, I've never felt that longing, I've never felt that restlessness, I've just never felt that. People talk about the God-shaped hole, I've never felt that, I don't know what you're talking about. And maybe we have friends or people in this room who say that, and here's what I would say, maybe you don't feel that, but here's what I want you to consider doing.

Take an hour and remove all the tech, all of the distractions, all of the booze, all of the diversions, remove all of that, all the noise, and just sit in a room by yourself in quiet solitude for an hour, and just see what happens.

You might be surprised. But this is the kind of relationship that we were meant to have. Now, there's a problem. You know, the story doesn't end there, because there's a problem. There's a reason why we can't just step into this intimacy.

[10:38] And this brings us to the relationship we actually have. What's fascinating about this passage, and you also see this back in chapter 18, is the way it summarizes all of the problems of the world.

You know, you ask people, what's wrong with the world? And people talk about, you know, systemic injustice. People talk about corrupt governments. People talk about economic injustice. People talk about racism, and division, and hatred, and violence, and exploitation, and environmental degradation.

People list all kinds of things. And if you ask in this room, what's the biggest problem of the world? You probably have a lot of different answers of what's the number one problem. But it's interesting how the Bible summarizes what's wrong with the world.

The entire way of life apart from God is summarized in chapter 19, verse 2. The great prostitute, that's the world apart from God. It's an image, metaphor.

The great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality. Now, I want to be sensitive to the plight of people who are actually prostitutes in our society. This is not a way of heaping unneeded shame on the plight of anyone who actually has to experience this in their lives.

[11:49] The point is, the point is, this is giving us a way to understand why things have gone so wrong in our world. It says, here's the problem.

The world has become like a prostitute. And the world has been corrupted by immorality. The word there is *pornea*, which means sex outside of a married relationship. Something like adultery.

So this is the problem. This is the diagnosis. And so this begins to give us insight. This is why God cares so much about sin. This is why sin matters to God.

It's not simply because God wants a bunch of rule followers. It's not like God is sitting there saying, oh, I want you to do the right things, and you're doing the wrong things, and you need to get your act together. You know, God doesn't just want a bunch of obedient sheep.

He doesn't want a bunch of loyal subjects. He doesn't want a bunch of sort of fearful children.

Ultimately, God wants a faithful spouse. He wants a faithful spouse.

[12:50] Yes, you're his child. Yes, we're his sheep. But we're more than that. He doesn't just want our fealty. He wants our affection.

He wants our heart. He wants our love. He wants our devotion. You know, God created us to be his bride. And this is saying that instead, we've become more like a prostitute.

One of the great love stories in Scripture is the story of Hosea and Gomer. And if you've never read this in the Old Testament, it's worth your time. God comes to the prophet Hosea and calls Hosea to marry Gomer.

And Hosea and most other people have heard about Gomer. And they've heard that Gomer is a bit promiscuous.

And she has this reputation. And Hosea knows, because he's a prophet, he knows that she's going to break his heart. But he marries her anyway.

[13:50] And he hopes for the best. And then not long after, he begins to hear rumors and more rumors and more rumors that Gomer is going and sleeping with other men.

She's not coming home at night. She's out and about. And he begins to realize this is happening. It actually gets so bad that he begins to wonder if his children are even really his biological children. And then the unthinkable happens. Gomer is continuing to sleep with these men. And then eventually, she falls in with the wrong crowd. And she is captured. And Hosea hears that she's going to be sold as a slave.

And, you know, this is a, it's a tragic story. But it's actually a pretty appropriate illustration of our own spiritual predicament.

The Bible says that my main problem and your main problem, whatever you think it is, it says that your actual real problem is that we're a lot like Gomer. That instead of loving God as a faithful spouse and being committed to God as a faithful spouse, spiritually speaking, we sleep around.

[15 : 05] And maybe it's a different person every night. And we give ourselves to other gods. We give ourselves to other lovers. And the Bible uses the word idol to talk about these other competing lovers.

This is why the word porneia is not only used to describe sex outside of marriage or adultery. It's also used to describe idolatry. Because in the Bible, it's the same thing.

And as a result of this kind of spiritual adultery, we, like Gomer, become slaves to these lovers. We get sold into slavery.

We don't even realize it's happening. And if you want to know what an idol is, an idol can really be anything that we look to to give us things that only God can give us. It can be anything. A lot of times it's a good thing that we just start to allow to become too important, too ultimate in our lives. A great book on this is by Tim Keller called Counterfeit Gods. And he lays out different categories of idols. There can be sexual idols. You know, like a pornography addiction that promises satisfaction, but leaves you empty and loathing yourself.

[16 : 16] It could be a political idol. A political idol on the left or the right or libertarian, where you take some aspect of the political order and you absolutize it.

And you say, this is the ultimate problem. Or this is the ultimate solution. This is what people do with free market. This is what's wrong with the world. This is what will fix the world, right? There can be, you know, racial idols or national idols, where you take ethnic pride, and ethnic pride starts to become bitter, or it starts to become oppressive to some other people group.

You can have relational idols, people who put all of their hopes in the person that they're dating. And this relationship is worth anything, so I'm going to change myself, do whatever I have to do. I'm going to compromise all my values to make sure this person doesn't leave me. Or parents, it's easy to cross that line between loving our kids and starting to find all of our worth in our kids. And if our kids don't do well, if they're not succeeding at school, if they don't have friends, if they have issues that they have to deal with, then somehow we feel like we're failing. We feel like our worth is diminished. There are religious idols, like moralism, legalism.

[17 : 31] There are cultural idols, like individualism or consumerism. And then there are the deeper idols, the motivational idols, those really insidious things.

Like when we come to believe that unless we are approved of and respected, our life is not worth living. Unless I'm able to live in a certain kind of house or have a certain quality of life, life is not worth living.

Unless I get that position, life is not worth living. Unless I have that thing, you know, a lot of us, I think, struggle with the need for control. Unless I have a sense of control over my life, unless I can see the future and know what's coming, I can't cope.

I can't live with that. So the Bible says there's all these lovers out there, and they catch our eye, and we leave God, and we go after these lovers.

And this is what's wrong with the world. This is why we have sin and brokenness and injustice, right? So you say, what's the connection? I'll just give you one example for the sake of time.

[18 : 43] If I were to ask you, if you wake up in the morning sometimes and say, I'm going to tell some really great lies today, you'd probably say, no, I don't connect with that. Most of us think of ourselves as honest people.

And yet, if you look at our lives, if somebody were to put up a transcript of our daily interactions, you would hear all kinds of lies. I mean, just to be totally honest. I mean, if you heard a transcript of my day in, day out, you'd be like, whoa, that's not true.

I definitely know that's not true. And the question is, why do we do that? Well, a lot of reasons. Say you're late to work, and you really want to impress your boss.

Your boss kind of looks up and says, weren't you supposed to be in here 30 minutes ago? What do you say? I was out late last night. I drank way too much, and I slept in. No. No.

You don't tell them about your small group. You say... See, I know. You say the traffic was horrible.

[19 : 42] The metro was late. I missed my bus, right? That's what you say. It's totally not true. But you say it, right? Or, you know, maybe somebody hurts your feelings, and you say, oh, it's no big deal.

It's no big deal. I'm fine. Don't worry about it. And then you just marinate on it for the next week, and you think of all the things that you want to say to them. But you don't dare say it because you don't want to rock the boat. You know?

So that's a lie, right? You're not fine. You're angry. Why don't you admit it? You're lying, right? Or maybe there's a group of people that are talking about a book that they've all read or some article, and they're like, and then one of them looks at you, and they say, you read it, right? And you're like, yeah. You don't even know the title. But you say you read it. Why? Because you want them to respect you. And you see, you tell these lies, and you ask, well, why are you lying? It's not because you woke up and said, I want to lie today. I'm a liar, and I'm proud of it. Why? It's because in that moment, you're lying because deep down, you've made an idol out of other people's approval.

[20 : 48] I want my boss to like me and respect me, right? I want to keep the peace so that there's no conflict because I hate conflict, right? I want these people to think I'm smart.

It's an idol. In that moment, you've said, God, you're great, but that's what I want, and I'm going to go here, and I'm going to spend the night here, but I'll be back in the morning, and surely things will be okay.

That's how we think. And just like Gomer, these idols end up enslaving us. You know, Becky Pippert wrote this great book years ago, *Out of the Salt Shaker*, and she says, if you live, and this is paraphrasing, if you live for control, then you will be enslaved to control.

And guess what? You'll always feel out of control. You'll always feel powerless. You know, if you live for approval, then you will be enslaved by the people that you're trying to please, and you'll always worry about their disapproval.

You'll analyze your interactions with them again and again and again, and I can't believe I said that. I was so stupid. Because you've made an idol out of their approval. You know, no one, she says, no one controls himself or herself.

[22 : 08] Whatever you live for is your master. So let me summarize where we are. Here's kind of where we are so far. The relationship that we ought to have with God is like a marriage.

It is intimate. It is vulnerable. We are naked and unashamed with the one who made us. Mutually indwelling. The problem is human beings are not faithful spouses.

We are spiritually adulterous. And we've been duped into thinking that our lives will go better if we give our love to other things, that somehow my needs are not going to be met with this spouse.

I have to go and I have to get those needs met with all these other lovers. And so our relationship with God is broken.

We're alienated from God. You cannot have intimacy if you have adultery. It's not possible. And this is why the gospel is such good and unique news.

[23 : 10] This is the kind of relationship that's possible. Here and now with Jesus. Maybe the most important verse in this passage comes in verse 8. And it's about the bride.

It says, It was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure. Listen, it doesn't say she clothed herself. And a lot of times when people quote this passage, they say, you know, she clothed herself.

They imagine a bride getting ready and clothing herself. But this tells us something about where the dress came from. It was granted her. It was given her. To clothe herself.

In other words, the wedding dress is a gift. And what it represents, the purity, the holiness, the faithfulness, that's a gift. So going back to the love story of Hosea and Gomer, Hosea is a faithful husband.

He loves his bride. And even though Gomer had committed adultery again and again and again, she had flown in the face of their marriage a thousand times maybe. Nevertheless, he goes, he finds the slaver, he pays the price to purchase her, and then he brings her home to be his bride again.

[24 : 30] He didn't have to. He wasn't obligated to. He did it. Because even though she was unfaithful to him, he was faithful to her. Even though she broke her promises to him, he kept his promises to her.

And as great as that story is, it's nothing compared to the greatest love story of all time, which is the story of Jesus Christ, who is a faithful husband.

And even though his people have been unfaithful to him again and again and again, even though we mocked him, and even though we tortured him, and even though we killed him, when Jesus looks at us in the world and he recognizes that our adultery has led to slavery, he doesn't bat an eye.

He comes, he finds the slaver, sin and death. He pays the price owed, which is his own death. He purchases us, and he brings us home to be his bride again.

And this is the great, amazing news of the gospel. And he does this so that we can be his bride once again, so that it can be given to us to make ourselves ready for the great wedding feast.

[25 : 50] And this is what sets Christianity apart. You know, all other religions say, here's the God, you're the servant, follow the rules, keep your promises, and it'll go well for you.

Break the rules, break your vows, and you will be judged. You will be punished. You will be condemned. Christianity says, not only are you not a servant, you're a spouse.

But no matter how many times you break your promises, no matter how many times you break your vows, God will forgive you. Because ultimately, the strength of the marriage is not based on your ability to keep your vow to God.

It's based on his willingness to keep his vow to us. It's based on the fact that God never breaks his promises. And as we say every week, his eternal nature is to have mercy.

So this is the God, this is the only lover, that if you give yourself to this lover, if you give yourself fully to him, if you allow yourself to be taken up into this great love story, then even when you fail, you know that you will be forgiven and restored.

[27 : 11] So I just, what I would like to do is just this week, take some time and reflect on your life and your heart. Are there idols, other lovers, to whom you have given your heart for an hour or a day or a week or longer?

Are there things you're living for that you can't live without that have replaced God? Are there things that have a vice grip on your heart?

Places you're going in search of meaning or wholeness or satisfaction. Who are those other lovers? And wherever you're going, recognize this.

You cannot have intimacy and adultery. If you want intimacy with God, you have to leave those lovers behind. You have to close the door.

You have to end the relationship and you have to come back to your spouse. And you have to ask his forgiveness and we know he will forgive. And we know you will immediately be welcomed home.

[28 : 21] But that's the only way to have any intimacy with God. You can come to church, you can be baptized, you can do all of the things. But if you're having an affair, there's going to be no intimacy.

So think about the things that you need to turn away from. Think about the things that may be robbing you of intimacy with God. And then look to Jesus Christ.

Because he's the one who has come to win you back. And he'll do it again and again and again.

And that relationship with Jesus, the one who fulfills you, the one who forgives you, you know, the most meaningful job can't do that.

The most amazing marriage can't do that. The most incredible kids can't do that. Only Jesus can do that. And one day the Bible says Jesus will come to us and he will say to quote the Song of Songs, to each of us he will say this, arise my love, my beautiful one, and come away.

For behold, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come. Let's pray.

[29 : 39] Lord, even as I say this, I confess it. I know my sermon is a confession. That there are many ways that I have strayed.

Many lovers I have sought out other than you. Many idols I put my hope in other than you. Lord, my desire to be loved and respected.

Lord, my desire to avoid conflict. Lord, I could go on and on and on. And I desire more than anything to be yours and to know my worth when I see it in your eyes.

And so Lord, I pray for the strength for myself, but also for all those gathered here, or maybe some for the first time, to leave those idols behind and to come running to you, even as you run down the road to embrace us.

I pray that as we step together toward this table and receive the bread and the wine, we would recognize that we're receiving you into ourselves, that this is the sacrament of marital intimacy.

[30 : 49] and I pray that through the bread and the wine, your body and blood, we would know and experience the one who has always loved us. And we would rest in your arms.

And we pray this not only because we need it, but because it glorifies you. It glorifies you. In your son's name. Amen.