

A Tale of Two Suppers

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- [0 : 0 0] Now, if you turn back in your Bibles to Revelation 19, which is on page 1247, what we're going to think about this morning is a tale of two suppers.
- But we're going to begin with what I think, anyway, is the greatest opening sentence in fiction. It comes from Charles Dickens' Tale of Two Cities.
- It was the best of times. It was the worst of times. It was the age of wisdom. It was the age of foolishness. It was the season of light.
- It was the season of darkness. It was the spring of hope. It was the winter of despair. And so it goes. And Dickens' point as he begins that novel is that the same event, the event in question is the French Revolution.
- For some people, it was a wonderful moment. For others, it was a terrible moment. And central to the drama of the French Revolution and the Tale of Two Cities is the King of France.
- [1 : 1 2] And in particular, that cry, down with the king, pulling down the monarchy, the victory of the republic. That was a tale of two cities.
- Well, we're thinking about a tale of two suppers. And we use that title because we're coming to Revelation 19. And the facts here in Revelation 19 tell us of the greatest remaining event in history.
- The one great event that is still to come. The return of King Jesus. And the timing of this event will be experienced very differently by different groups of people.
- We're going to hear that for some, this is a moment of great joy. But for others, it will be a time of sorrow. For some, it brings eternal salvation. For others, it brings eternal judgment.
- And central to this drama is King Jesus. And central to the hope of the Bible, and we find it here in Revelation 19, is the promise that in the end, goodness wins.
- [2 : 2 0] That evil falls and fails. That the revolution against the true king does not work. And that Jesus sets up his eternal kingdom.
- It's Revelation 19 and the tale of two suppers. Vital to this chapter as well is for us to recognize that again, while there's symbolic language, this is a tale of true history.
- It's one of the things, incidentally, that makes Christianity different from all the other religions. It's been well noted of Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism. That they're not rooted in historical facts.
- You could take away any historical traces and their books and their religion would stand. But Christianity is quite different. It is entirely dependent on the facts of history recorded in God's Word being absolutely true.
- Our hope and our faith is rooted in a real historical Jesus, who did come at a particular point in history, the Son of God becoming one of us. He did engage in a public ministry where he taught great things and he performed great miracles.

[3 : 30] That there was a point in history where he really did die and then three days later he rose again. And there are sources from those who are friendly to Christianity, sources who are opposed to Christianity, that document that Jesus was a real historical figure and these events really happen.

And that's important as we understand how significant history is to Christianity to recognize what Revelation 19 is telling us.

That the real Jesus will really return one day in glory. That history is not in an endless repeat. That we're not all trapped on a hamster wheel where history is going nowhere.

Jesus will come back. We're being told here is the goal, here is the destination of history. It's the eternal kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that takes us to our details, to the tale of two suppers and also the royal portrait of Jesus that we get in this chapter.

And I hope as well that as we think about these details we get a sense of the urgency, the call that there is within this chapter to seriously consider, to respond, to live in light of the fact that Jesus is coming back.

[4 : 46] Okay, so I said there was two suppers. The first supper in the verse 10 verses is called the wedding supper of the Lamb. When we listen to Revelation 19 being read, how did we hear it when we heard all those hallelujahs?

And maybe we thought of Handel's hallelujah chorus. Maybe it created that sense of here is a football stadium full of supporters celebrating some great victory.

There's that sense of here is a group who are celebrating something wonderful. Did you notice who is included in this shout and song of hallelujah?

Look at verse 1. We hear it first as the roar of a great multitude in heaven. So the voices in heaven are singing praise to God. And then in verse 4, the attention shifts to those who are immediately around the throne worshipping God.

And they too are singing hallelujah. And then it shifts again to verse 6. And we hear this great roar that comes from the earth. Now it's all the people of God, all the Christians on the earth, singing with joy, praise to God.

[5 : 56] There's a great song that leads to a great supper. So to just think about the theme of these songs, there's three songs in these verses. There's two different themes, but they're really two sides of the same coin.

One theme that leads to joy for God's people is that God saves His people from their enemies. See how the song begins in verse 1? Hallelujah.

Salvation and glory and power belong to our God. When God steps in decisively, when God acts to save, when God shows His power and glory to save a people for Himself, there's joy.

Verse 2, there's joy because the judgments of God are true and they are just. It is good news that our God loves justice even more than we do. That the judge of all the earth will and must do what is right.

There is joy in knowing that there is a decisive judgment. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth. He has avenged on her the blood of His servants.

[7 : 00] There is decisive judgment on those forces that look to deceive people to turn them away from Jesus the King. There is a decisive judgment on corruption, immorality, rejection of the rule of God.

And there is a judgment on those who persecute God's people. Verse 3, reminding us about the fall of Babylon in chapter 18.

The song goes, hallelujah. The smoke from her goes up forever and ever. There is that somber reminder of eternal punishment in this picture of eternal smoke.

So the question becomes, why does this theme lead to the hallelujah chorus? Why does this theme provoke a sense of joy in the hearts of God's people and in heaven?

Well, God's people are invited to praise. Because when Jesus returns in final judgment, that's when heaven and earth, the people of God can say, it is now over.

[8 : 12] The evil empire that set up its rule against God has been replaced by an eternal kingdom of love that lasts forever.

That those who attack and destroy and look to defeat the people of God, they are now decisively dealt with. So peace can be established.

Do we see why that's good news for the people of God? I think it can be a tendency for us as modern people to imagine that judgment is unworthy of God.

We could probably, if we're honest, live quite happily with a God who would overlook sin and sweep sin under the carpet and accept everybody. But it's not the character of God who's given this revelation and it's not the character of Jesus.

The message of this vision is that if there is a God who fails to judge, if there is a God who fails to act with righteousness, then He's unworthy to be the true God.

[9 : 17] That for God to be holy, He must act against everything that is unholy. And so Revelation reminds us that the righteous rule of God is shown in salvation, but it's also shown in judgment.

And that reality has always meant good news for a suffering, persecuted people of God. So that's one theme of the song, that God saves His people from their enemies.

The second theme, and this takes us to the wedding supper theme, is that God saves His people for relationship. And it's there in verses 6 to 10. And this is where we pick up this wedding supper theme.

The greatest hallelujah of all is there in verse 6 and 7. And so within these verses, there is this great sense of joy because there is the prospect that one day Jesus will reign forever, that the glory of God will fill the earth.

And for the people of God, there is joy because we get to be with Him forever one day in that world made new. We are invited to that feast of joy that never ends.

[10 : 42] And so it's fitting that it's pictured as wedding joy. The wedding of the Lamb has come. Because weddings are a picture of shared celebration. Weddings are a picture of a uniting of a bride and a groom.

And here we are being reminded this is God's goal, for redemption history. God made people so that we might live with Him and He with us. And God has so worked salvation that in the end, God will be with His people forever.

And that's a joyful thing. In the Old Testament, there was joy. Isaiah 26, there's that imagery of God setting up a feast on His holy mountain. And the people of God invited, and tears are wiped away.

And in place, there's joy. Think about all the parables of Jesus. About feasting. About feasting. And about banquets. It's an invitation to joy.

And then we have it picked up again here. And we are being reminded that Jesus, Jesus Himself, is the joy of His people's heart.

[11 : 43] And there is a joy coming when our faith will become sight. There's wedding joy.

He also speaks in verse 8 about the wedding clothes. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. This bright, clean, white, pure clothing.

It speaks of purity. But it also speaks, if you remember the idea of the Roman triumph, white also speaks of victory. So when an emperor or a great general won a decisive battle, they would get a Roman triumph.

They could parade through the streets and everybody would wear white. Notice that these wedding clothes are clothes that are given to the bride to wear.

And this reminds us something really important about the gospel. That it is Jesus' blood that washes us clean. God doesn't say to us by ourselves, you must be pure.

[12 : 49] Because we cannot be pure enough for God. Rather, He sends Jesus to live a pure life and then to die and for His blood to cover and to cleanse and to make us pure.

And likewise, the victory that we celebrate is the victory that Jesus won at the cross and that He shares with His people. And so the joy comes because of the work of Jesus.

And then there's the wedding invitation. The angel said to me, write this, blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

And Jesus often told stories this way, didn't He? Story of a wealthy man or a king preparing a feast. There's a moment of celebration.

The preparations are made. The wedding is about to happen. And the invitation goes out. Come in. Come and enjoy. It's a time for feasting and celebration.

[13 : 59] And here as we get towards the end of the Bible, that invitation is still there. There is still this note of opportunity. The invitation to believe the good news.

That God has loved us so much that He sent His Son Jesus into this world to die in our place for our sins. To believe that what Jesus did in the cross is sufficient to free us from sin and from death.

And we have this good news delivered by an angel that to accept the invitation to believe in Jesus is to enjoy what the Bible calls blessing. Life in right relationship with God.

Life from God and with God. And so here I think is a reminder for us that we cannot and we will never understand Christianity properly without understanding that it is all about Jesus.

That we have, by God's grace, been saved by Him and we are saved for life with Him. That at the center of the story of redemption is the Lord Jesus.

[15 : 23] And the implication then is that your heart and mine must be captured by His beauty, His goodness, His love and His truth.

To understand that when Jesus invites us to Himself, it's not a call to dull duty. It's a call to the delight of our hearts.

This isn't an invitation to a weekend overtime and a life of drudgery of following Jesus. It's an invitation to a wedding.

It's an invitation to joy. So that's the first supper, the wedding supper of the Lamb. And it speaks to us of joy.

But there's a second supper called the Great Supper of God that we meet towards the end of the chapter. If chapter 19 of Revelation were an art gallery, so you had hanging up on this side of the wall the wedding supper of the Lamb, if we pan over to this side, there's another portrait of another feast.

[16 : 36] But the mood is very much different, much darker, the color much darker, creating a very different impression on us as we look at it. Gone is the joy of the wedding supper.

Now there is a sense of horror and despair of the Great Supper of God. And Jesus places that here in His Word so that you and I would pay attention.

Again, so that we wouldn't be unprepared. We wouldn't be taken by surprise. And also that we wouldn't miss out on the lasting joy that Jesus stores up for His people.

So let's look for a moment at the Great Supper of God. There in verse 17, I saw an angel standing in the sun who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair.

It's the birds that are invited. Come, gather together for the Great Supper of God so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals and the mighty, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small.

[17 : 43] It's a very different scene. This is the portrait of a battlefield the day after the battle, of bodies, of corpses lying on the battlefield, of the vultures, of the eagles swooping down to feast on those bodies.

It's a very graphic lesson, a great reminder that unlike the French revolution against the king, which was successful, at least for a while, rebellion against God's king, Jesus, the true king, will fail, will be punished.

And it speaks to us of the horror of the final judgment that is real. The imagery, the end of verse 20, of the beast, and the prophet who spoke for the beast being thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur, reminds us of real, conscious, eternal punishment for those who say no to the rule of Jesus.

The great supper of God is there to warn us that Jesus delivers final judgment on his enemies.

The picture of armies coming together and of the absolute destruction of the forces of evil reminds us, as we've said so often, that the battle between good and evil is not a battle between equals.

[19 : 23] The goodness will always prevail, that God is on the throne, that that victory that began at the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ and through his resurrection will be completed at his return.

When Jesus returns, that is the point where there will be final and eternal judgment and final and eternal salvation. So that Revelation 19 becomes an invitation to serious reflection.

Perhaps there is no more serious question to reflect on. You know, before we choose to write Jesus off as insignificant, before we make him incidental to our lives, to recognize through these two suppers that in the end there are only two kinds of people.

There are those who bow the knee to worship Jesus and there are those who reject Jesus. And that our response determines which supper we go to.

Is it one that will be for us eternal joy? Or is it one that will be for us eternal judgment? And to recognize that the figure who's at the center is the king, King Jesus.

[20 : 56] And that we must trust him if we are to receive joy and if we reject him we will certainly receive judgment. And so let's look together to see something of our king.

Let's look at the royal portrait that we're given in verses 11 to 16. But again, just to stop for a moment, maybe you've seen this portrait last year.

The art world raised its eyebrows because King Charles, our king, had his first royal portrait commissioned. It was unveiled in May last year.

There was this guy Jonathan Yeoh. You can see the artist up there. Painted in incredibly vibrant colors. That's his style. He used red because Charles often likes to dress like the Welsh guards.

You can maybe see a butterfly on his shoulder to speak to us a little bit about his environmental ecological concerns. The art world, I'm not an art person at all, but the art world I read about it was very divided in its reaction to this portrait.

[22 : 06] But here's the thing. Like, whatever we think of the portrait and whatever the art critics think of the portrait, it's important to know what King Charles thought about it because he had it commissioned and he was pleased with it and he wanted it to be shown to the world.

He felt that this was an image that he wanted to convey. Now take that idea and apply it to Revelation 19. So we've used the art gallery image.

So we've got these two suppers. Well, hanging between the two suppers in Revelation 19, connecting them together, is another royal portrait. And it's important for us to recognize that Jesus has commissioned this portrait.

That what we have in verses 11 to 16 are truths about Jesus that he wants us to see. And I expect as we reflect again on the values that we find there, that there will be something of a mixed response to them, perhaps in our own hearts.

We might find aspects that surprise us, aspects that shock us, because it's the portrait of conquering King Jesus who comes to destroy his enemies and to establish his eternal kingdom.

[23 : 29] Let's look at the details together to appreciate this portrait. Just look at the names of Jesus that we find here. Verse 11, we find the first one.

The rider is called faithful and true. What are we being told here? Jesus is faithful and true to his calling as God's appointed king.

He is faithful and true to God's plan of salvation. He is faithful and true to his word and to his promises. The second name for Jesus we find in verse 13.

His name is the word of God. Maybe that makes us think of John's gospel. In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God.

And when Jesus is described as the word of God, it brings us to ideas of creative power, and authority. And here is the one who reveals God's glory. And God's word is also how he judges and saves.

[24 : 31] And then in verse 16, we meet the rider with the name written on his robe and on his thigh, King of kings and Lord of lords.

What a wonderful statement. It's no Caesar, no emperor, no president that rules and reigns. reigns is Jesus. There is no king like Jesus. There is no lord like Jesus.

He is the greatest of all. And that's important in this portrait because as such, he does have the power and authority to bring history to God's intended purpose.

He does have the power and authority to set up God's eternal kingdom, and he will. Think about the details in the appearance of Jesus. Verse 12, his eyes are like blazing fire.

Jesus has a penetrating gaze. Jesus is able to burn through our masks and burn through our defenses. He is able to see and to judge.

[25 : 38] Verse 12, symbolic language again, remember, on his head are many crowns. Here is a picture way of saying here is the ultimate king.

There are no others who can claim his throne. He is absolute authority and glory. And then in verse 13, there's this detail.

He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood. tied up to the fact in verse 15, he treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.

Here is a picture of Jesus, the warrior king, fresh from battle, fresh from victory over his enemies. Here is a force such that no one can stand against him.

No Pharaoh, no Caesar, no king. But notice, this isn't just about the great. Verse 18, remember who's there, the kings, the generals, the mighty, all people, free and slave, great and small.

[26 : 55] Judgment comes on all who oppose Jesus, the king. And it reminds us again, in the dramatic appearance of Jesus, that for God's people to live with him in a kingdom of peace that lasts forever, to enjoy friendship and love and fellowship that will never be broken, there must be a decisive defeat of those enemies that oppose his rule.

And we have the promise that in the end that defeat will come. The final aspect of the royal portrait are his weapons of war. Look at the weapons of Jesus.

First of all, verse 14, as he rides out, the armies of heaven were following him. Although it's really interesting, it's a very dramatic picture, we get this dramatic picture of two armies coming into battle, but actually those armies of heaven, in the end, they really don't have to do anything because the battle belongs to the Lord.

It's his word that speaks and brings judgment and brings salvation. That connects to the sword that Jesus has. And again, notice the symbolism in verse 15, where is the sword?

Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. Again, it takes us to the word of Jesus that judges and that saves.

[28 : 23] Here is that reminder that eternal destiny depends on our response to the word of the gospel. How do we respond to the good news that God has sent his son Jesus to live a life of perfect obedience that we should have but that we failed to?

And then to die on a cross in our place, bearing our sin, bearing the punishment so that we could be forgiven, so that we could receive the spirit, so that we could enjoy life with him if we trust in him.

And then there's the iron scepter in his hands. Verse 15, he will rule them with an iron scepter.

It's the club of the shepherd king. He fights off predators. He keeps his people safe. In the end, all those who oppose his will will be crushed.

So Revelation 19 takes us to this gallery, showing us scenes of future history. And standing right in the middle is this royal portrait of King Jesus.

[29 : 36] And he wants us to know these details. There's aspects of Jesus' life that I imagine we're all familiar with. We'll not least something of the mercy of Jesus and the miracles of Jesus and the compassion of Jesus and the cross of Jesus.

But do we understand that we need this picture of Jesus too? The warrior Jesus who fights against his enemies and for his people. Because again, without the total defeat of sin and evil and death and darkness, we can never be saved.

We would have no eternal hope. There would be no hallelujah chorus, but because he wins, there's joy, there is hallelujah.

We need this Jesus conquering his enemies and ours by way of the cross, who can promise future resurrection, life and joy and glory because of his resurrection and his return.

We need him as the king of power and glory who invites us to find our joy with him and in him. We need to receive his invitation to receive eternal life, to be ready for his return so that that day would be for us the best of times, would be the spring of hope, would be the dawning of unbreakable joy.

[31 : 03] Let's pray. Amen.