

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

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[0 : 00] Let's turn then to the chapter that we read before in Revelation chapter 19, and we're going to read again from verse 6.

Revelation 19, verse 6, 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. I told you last week that we were going to try and finish off what we started several years ago, and which we took a rather long break from, partly because of my own confusion about how to handle the book of Revelation.

[1 : 25] But handling the end part of Revelation is much easier than handling the middle part. And that's what we're going to do over the next few weeks. You'll remember that last week we looked at the contrast between chapter 18 and chapter 19.

The worldwide ghost town of chapter 18, and the place of ultimate rejoicing and perfect happiness in chapter 19.

And of course, that is what the gospel is all about. It places before us tonight, as never before, to choose life, the kind of life that God can give us, which will last forever.

The world will come to an end. And all the things that capture our attraction and take our attention in this world, they will come to an end. No matter how pleasant they are and how thrilling they are today, they will come to an end.

And that's why Jesus said to invest in the future, to invest in heaven. And we can only do so by coming to Jesus Christ and by asking for his forgiveness and for the salvation that he can give us.

[2 : 37] And so time and again, the Bible comes to us with the same truth, the same message, the same promise. And this time, of course, it's put in a slightly different way.

Today, the book of Revelation is about the culmination, of course, I said last week that there is a lot of controversy about what exactly how to interpret the book of Revelation.

But there's no question at all, but that it does point us in the direction of heaven. And we're pointed once again in the direction of heaven.

Heaven is very often it's expressed in various ways in the Bible. Sometimes it's a kingdom.

Sometimes it's the house, the God's house, which has many rooms, said Jesus.

And here it is expressed as a marriage, a marriage between God or rather Jesus and his people.

So it's interesting that the Bible both begins with a marriage and ends with a marriage.

[3 : 41] It begins with a marriage of the very first people who God created to be in the world, Adam and Eve. And he brought them together in that bond, in that union, that unique union of marriage, in order to create that structure in which they would exist and live together in that unbreakable bond, and in order that their children would grow up in an atmosphere and in a structure of stability and love.

But marriage is much more than that in the Bible. It looks forward at the same time. It's not just a practical convenience. It looks forward and always did look forward to that day, as we've just been reading in chapter 19, when ultimately at the end of time, God will bring himself into union with his people, or rather there will be the culmination of that union, a final day, a final feast, and a final celebration.

Now, in order to understand this, you have to once again understand, try and grasp the language of faith and the language of heaven.

And you can't go on to language school to learn that. There's no such school. We can only learn it by asking God to reveal the truth of this word to us.

And I hope tonight that as we're, once again, as we're trying to wrestle with one of the more obscure parts of the Bible, the mysterious parts of the Bible, that as well as trying to wrestle with it intellectually ourselves, that we're asking God to reveal himself to us.

[5 : 31] That's the only way we're ever going to understand the Bible. The natural man, Paul says, does not understand the things of God. And that way, that means that whatever you can be, you can be a scholar, you can be a PhD, you can have half a dozen degrees, and you still may not be able to appreciate what is put down in front of us, because you won't until the Holy Spirit makes it known to us.

That's why it's so essential to come prayerfully whenever we read the Bible to ask that God would open up your eyes, that you may see wondrous things out of his law.

That's always got to be our prayer. The other thing we've got to understand is that the love of God that is expressed, not just here, but in other parts of the Bible, the Bible is God's love book.

A lot of people criticize the Bible because they think that God is harsh and that God is the God of wrath and judgment and punishment.

But if a person concludes that after reading the Bible, they are entirely biased. Because anyone who reads the Bible with an open mind, and I'm asking you tonight, once again, I've done this before, to read the Bible with an open mind.

[6 : 50] And the person who reads the Bible with an open mind will discover that there is an enormous love in the Bible that is in a class of its own. It goes beyond. We all know what love is.

We know where to find it in our homes and with our friends and between a husband and a wife or a father and his children, brother and sister. We live in a world in which love is part of our existence, and thankfully so.

But the Bible speaks of a love that goes beyond the love that we find in this world. It's an entirely unique love. In fact, in the New Testament, there is a unique word, agape, that is given for the love of God towards his people.

And love, God is love. That's what the Bible tells us, that God is love. And the most amazing thing about this is that God has extended his love to people who don't deserve it.

People who are rebellious against him. And people who have no right to stand in front of him tonight, like you and like me. The amazing thing about the gospel is that God's love extends towards us.

[7 : 59] It's not just God's generosity. God's generous to this world in making the crops grow and giving us the air that we breathe and the food that we eat and the clothes that we wear. That's the generosity of God.

But there's something more than that. There's something that you and I are invited to experience tonight, which goes beyond just his generosity.

I shouldn't perhaps say just his generosity because that's a wonderful thing. But I'm talking about the singular, unique love of God. And that's what the gospel is.

The gospel, and I can't explain it. Because I know I don't deserve it. Whenever I begin to reflect on this truth, I begin to feel a sense of discomfort.

Because there's a voice that's always within me that says, How can God love you? How can you say that God can love you? How can you stand there tonight and say that God loves you?

[9 : 02] Remember, you're talking about God here. And when God loves something or someone, his love is perfect. And his love is absolutely enormous. It's boundless.

It's got no beginning and no end. So when we talk about the love of God, we're talking about an infinite love. A love that goes beyond anything that you and I will find here in this world.

And here I am. I have the audacity to stand here and say that God loves me. The only way I can say that is because he tells me that he loves me.

And he tells me that despite everything that I have done against him, all the sinfulness and the filth and the shame and the darkness, that God loves me and his love can never, ever break.

Nothing can separate me from the love of God. And it goes more than that. Because all I have to do is to try and delve a little into the enormity of that.

[10:01] The Bible tells us there is no measure to God's love, either by way of height or depth or by way of breadth. There is no measure to the love of God. And that means that tonight, that even although it makes me so uncomfortable to say that, I have to say God is absolutely delighted with me.

I can tell you it's not easy to say that. But what I can also say is that God is absolutely delighted with all those who follow Jesus.

It's not just that you've been forgiven. That's a great truth. It's an absolutely wonderful truth. It's not just that you've been forgiven. It's not even just that you've been adopted into his family.

But that he loves us with an indescribable love. And that love does not change.

Not even when we backslide. I'm not saying that God does nothing about our backsliding. He does. But it's because of his love for us that he does something when we backslide.

[11:13] Tonight, God, if you are in the Lord Jesus Christ, if you're trusting in him, you and I can both say that God is absolutely thrilled with us.

He takes delight in us. He loves us with an everlasting, unbreakable, infinite love that no one can change.

He couldn't love us more. And he couldn't love us less. That's where we start with.

That's what this chapter is all about. And marriage, as it began in Genesis chapter 2, looked forward to the culmination of that love, which we're reading about way at the end of the Bible in Revelation chapter 19, where we come across the marriage supper of the Lamb.

The marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. So we've talked about the love of God. We have to try and understand the terminology that is used here.

[12:27] But even going, we have to understand that God's love goes beyond what we understand it or what we experience it in this world.

Now, first thing that we notice, of course, is the bride and the groom. The bride is those who belong to Jesus, which is essentially billions of people.

We hope that by the end of the world, I think I said last time that heaven will be an enormous and is an enormous place, comprising millions and millions and millions of people.

of those who have heard the gospel and who have been called in and invited into the kingdom of God and who belong to him.

At the end of time, there will be this coming together, this union that takes place by way of the greatest celebration, the greatest marriage that has ever taken place in the world.

[13:28] And it's described this as the Lamb. The Lamb is the bridegroom. The Lamb. Now, you and I both know, having read the book of Revelation, that the Lamb is a particular title that is given for Jesus Christ.

We're introduced to him as the Lamb in Revelation chapter 5. He sits on the throne. He is the Lamb that has been slain, and yet who is alive.

And you remember, of course, what the Lamb was all throughout the Bible. The Lamb was the sacrificial Lamb, which meant the difference of me being forgiven before God or not.

And we said this this morning, that if I wanted in the Old Testament to be forgiven, if I wanted to worship God, I had to bring a Lamb. And that Lamb had to die in order for me to be forgiven.

And of course, all of these sacrifices, they looked forward, and they represented the great sacrifice, where Jesus himself, the Lamb of God, that's what John the Baptist said when he saw Jesus, behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

[14:34] And Jesus has never lost that title. Not even when he rose from the dead, and not even when he ascended up to heaven, did he lose that title. He never ceased to be the Lamb of God. And still here tonight, he is the Lamb of God.

He always will be the Lamb of God that takes, because his people will never, never forget that they are saved by grace, saved by his death.

And so, this is the marriage where the Lamb is the bridegroom. And where there is this massive, massive multitude of people, and collectively they constitute the bride of the Lamb.

And what's being described here is this culmination, this final union, where his people are able to see his face once and for all, and experience his company in a way, in an unbroken way, that they haven't, this side in this, in perfection, and in bliss.

The second thing that we want to look at this evening is that this wedding is, this wedding will literally never end.

[15:53] It will literally never end. I say that because perhaps we've read this chapter before, and we think of the marriage of the Lamb as somehow an event that will happen and will finish.

that this will just be simply one, something that will take place at one particular time, if you like, perhaps on the day of judgment, the last day, and then afterwards.

Just like when you have a wedding in a church, you have a celebration that lasts a day, and then after that, everybody goes away and they all go to their homes and the bride and groom go off on honeymoon and then they live life as husband and wife together.

The marriage has been finished. But this marriage lasts forever. The wedding ceremony, I should say, lasts forever.

It is an eternal celebration. it is ongoing. It simply never comes to an end. In Jesus' day, weddings lasted seven days.

[17:06] Nowadays, they last one day. I guess we can't afford to make them last any more than one day. But in those days, weddings lasted seven days. And often you have comments made at a wedding either by the minister or by someone who's making a speech about the harsh reality and sometimes the contrast.

There's a contrast between the greatness of the celebration of the moment, the joy of the actual wedding itself, the service and the meal afterwards and the celebration and the harsh, what people call the harsh reality, it's not that harsh, reality of what it is to live together as husband and wife. Very often you'll get that. You know, we don't want to be too happy because there is always the real life element and the real life is often contrasted with the celebration.

But there's no such contrast here in this marriage. The celebration is the marriage, is eternity, is the love of Christ finally and fully revealed in all its glory to his people in his company forevermore in which they see his face and his name shall be on their foreheads and every tear will be wiped away from their eye and he will lead them like a shepherd and they will rejoice in him with unbroken joy forevermore.

So it's an eternal celebration, one in which there are no separate component parts. The whole of eternity will be one great superb wedding.

[18:54] Never ends. It's also a wedding that will be the richest of all time. I wonder how much the royal wedding cost last year.

Must have cost a fortune. Of course, that's what you would expect in a royal wedding. Nobody's complaining. When I used to go over to Thailand, I was told that the president of Burma had spent eight million dollars on the health service for his people and he spent eighty million dollars on the wedding of his daughter.

You come across these celebrity weddings that take your breath away as to their lavish expenditure. but this will beat them all.

All the riches of heaven, all the glory of heaven will be displayed in such a majesty and such awesomeness that you and I will never ever have seen the like before in all our lives.

There is a glory about a wedding, isn't there? There's something about a wedding and I'm not talking about just the simple fact of two people coming together.

[20:18] There's something I often feel that. I often, you know, when I'm have the great privilege of conducting a wedding, there's something really, really unique about it theologically.

I'm not talking about just, you know, people romanticize it and they sentimentalize it and all the rest of it. Of course, there is that element to it. But for Christians, we understand the significance of what is happening.

We very often read that verse that I read in Ephesians chapter 5, that talks about Jesus sanctifying his church, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word so that he might present the church to himself in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

There's something deeply humbling and awesome about when God's will is done and that's why I actually am afraid tonight.

I'm afraid when I contemplate what our society is doing to marriage. It actually makes me fear because what we're doing is we are throwing what God has given to us and we are tearing it up and throwing it in the bin deliberately because our world has turned against God and it's one more evidence of a world that has not only become complacent but has become hostile to the gospel and to everything that God is and I wonder where the future of that world will be.

[22 : 09] I don't want to spend any time on that but it just occurred to me. It's also a wedding which God is preparing his people for as we speak.

What does it say to us? It says in verse 8 for it was granted the 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 people and that's why of the saints.

What that means is remember that in those days weddings were organized slightly differently to what they are just now. First of all when a couple decided that they loved each other they would become betrothed to one another.

Now if you were betrothed to someone it goes much further it's much stronger than being engaged to someone. The promise if you broke that promise it was like getting a divorce.

And so once you were betrothed to someone then it was only a matter of time before the final wedding was going to take place. And during that time there were all the preparations there was an interval there was always an interval I don't know how long it was but there was an interval between the betrothal and the wedding itself during which time there was a dowry paid between parents and of course all the arrangements were having to be made.

[23 : 40] Now when the day came of course there was no church weddings like we have here registry office weddings these are a modern idea but what would happen is that the groom and all his friends they would all dress up and they would go in a procession to the bride's house and then they would collect the bride and they would all go with the bride and her friends they might have a meal at the bride's house if they had come a long way but they would definitely go all the way back to his house where of course the bride and the groom would stay but once they got back to his house it was like seven days of feasting and celebration that's what's being described here this was an enormous occasion that's why the title the marriage supper of the lamb wasn't strong enough this was an enormous enormous occasion but during the interval between betrothal and marriage there was all the preparation to be done just the same way as there is now during an engagement where everything had to be ordered and the bride herself had to make herself ready and this is what's been spoken about here the bride has made herself ready what does that mean and especially when you read on it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen bright and pure for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints well it tells us here in

Ephesians chapter 5 that this is what Jesus is doing with his people and in his people right now he's working in them to change them and to prepare them for this very day that's what the Holy Spirit right now if you and I belong to Jesus we follow him then we're indwelt by the Holy Spirit whose task it is to cleanse us and to wash us and to transform us and to prepare us and to condition us more and more into obedience to Jesus Paul puts it like this that we are fashioned we are conformed to the image of Jesus Christ and therefore that means that God wants each one of us to change from day to day to become more and more like himself sometimes it doesn't feel that way does it sometimes we're so conscious of our own recurring weaknesses and our own recurring faults and sins that we think this is never going to happen we fall in the same way we fall into the same temptations and we think that's it I can't cope with this I'm not a

Christian but it's not about your conclusions it's about what God is doing in you Paul tells us that God is working to will and to do of his good pleasure in you therefore he says work out your own salvation with fear and trembling and that way that means that every time we're reminded of this every time we come to church and we're reminded of who we are as God's people it ought to be an impetus to us to go out and to serve him with renewed vigor and enthusiasm and love for the one who loved us and gave himself for us because he is the one and ultimately we will never deserve heaven you and I will never ever deserve heaven if God himself doesn't give us this clothing and if he doesn't prepare us himself and work in us to make us ready and to perfect us each one of us and to evict all the imperfections and the blemishes that you and I carry and we're all aware of them some of them we're not aware of but God has promised this that one day we will be perfected and we will be glorious it's hard to think of us as glorious isn't it when we think of ourselves and how ugly we are inside it's hard to think of us but God is working within us we have that as his word he is working within us and a day will come when like a wedding say in this church when the door opens and the bride walks through that door and there is something awesome about that moment sometimes very often in fact the groom who will be standing there he'll say to me he'll whisper to me can I look and I always say of course you can look and you know that tells us something about the

Lord as well because when he looks it will be his work and he will take the glory to himself because he's done a perfect job in preparing and perfecting his people for himself but this is also a wedding to which there are guests blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the lamb blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the lamb you know invitations are the biggest nightmare in any family preparing a wedding and I've gone through this several times so I know what I'm talking about you sit down and you want to invite everyone everyone you know problem is everyone you know extends to hundreds and hundreds and hundreds if not thousands of people and the most painful thing is that day when you have to sit down it's the one thing you put off as long as you possibly can because you don't want to make that decision but you're going to have to decide how many people are coming to the wedding maybe a hundred say 150 75 for the groom 75 for the bride choose now those 75 people and I'm telling you you lose sleep over it because there's always that one person who's number 76 who you feel should be there and you couldn't have invited because you were restricted to 75 and you think that person is never going to speak to you again in fact you think loads of your friends are never going to speak to you again it's a great honor it's a great privilege to be invited to a wedding it's a huge massive privilege but those who are preparing the wedding they have to work within a certain restriction and they feel awful they feel absolutely awful about not inviting the people that they would like to invite sometimes their choice is because of other things like family connections and all that kind of thing sometimes invite people who've never met before that's the way it is it's always restricted do you know what every single one of you is invited to this one every single one of you the greatest wedding of all time and I've got an even better message than that it goes even better than that you're not invited just as a guest you are invited to be part of the bride herself that's the only invitation there is there are no spectators in heaven there is only

God and his people and God joined ultimately and finally with his people in perfect love and in an awesome eternal joyful majestic place a place of many rooms where Jesus is preparing for us right now as we speak and he's still inviting people to join his kingdom there's your invitation will you take it remember what happened in Matthew chapter 22 see I have prepared my dinner my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered and everything is ready come to the wedding but they paid no attention and went off one to his farm another to his business

[33 : 06] God forbid tonight that having been invited to the greatest wedding of the universe that you would put your farm or your business before your eternal life let's pray our father in heaven we ask that you will speak to us we recognize that the natural person does not understand the things of God that's why we need your power this evening we need oh lord for you to come amongst us in great power and draw us with your own to your own love and give us to experience the enormity of that love once and for all our father in heaven we pray that you will give us to ever discover more of that love the love that was shown to us and demonstrated when

Jesus died for sinners like ourselves lord bless this service this time of worship to each one of us bless our study in your word for we ask in Jesus name amen