

"The Bride of Christ"

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[0 : 00] Good morning, church. Would you turn with me to Revelation chapter 19. We are continuing our series in the book of Revelation today, picking up in chapter 19, looking at verses 1 through 10.

Last week, if you were here, we considered the fall of Babylon, the worldly city. And in that chapter, we heard a call for followers of Jesus to make sure our allegiance was not bound up with the broken structures of this world, but rooted in Christ our King.

We're called to be citizens of Christ, first and foremost, no matter what earthly city we find ourselves in. And in our text today, as we kind of continue this same section of Revelation, we'll hear the praise of heaven, glorifying God, not just because the worldly city has fallen once and for all with all of its injustice and oppression, but also glorifying God because of the glorious future He has in store for His redeemed people and His redeemed creation.

So let me pray, and then I'll read this text for us. Let's pray together. Father in heaven, we do ask for the work of Your Holy Spirit to come and to take these words that He has inspired and He has preserved and He has used so often in Your church to build up the saints.

We pray that His work would continue today in our midst and that above all, we would see Christ more clearly in His saving power and goodness and glory, that our hearts might come to love Him and worship Him and serve Him all the more.

[1 : 50] We pray this in Jesus' mighty name, Father. Amen. All right, Revelation 19, 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 the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God who is 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.

[3 : 15] 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.

So, when you think about eternity, when you think about eternity, what comes to mind? That is, when you think about kind of the ultimate future towards which all of creation is headed, what does it look like or what does it feel like in your mind or in your imagination?

Because, you know, it matters, actually, what sort of future you believe in. If the future is just a cold expansion of atoms into limitless space, if that is ultimately where everything is headed, you know, then perhaps you might be motivated to make the best use of the few years you have.

[4 : 40] But that future ultimately leads to a very bleak and even meaningless approach to life now. But what sort of picture does Scripture give us, does the gospel give us, of the future God has in store for His creation and for His people?

Well, over the next couple of months, that is much of what we are going to be considering in the book of Revelation. How does the story end? What does the last chapter look like? Is it just the end?

Is it nothing? Or is it, as C.S. Lewis put it so wonderfully, at the end of his Chronicles of Narnia, is it chapter one of an even greater story, which no one on earth has read, which goes on forever, in which every chapter is better than the one before?

Well, chapter 19 gives us Revelation's first glimpse of this ultimate future. And the first glimpse is pretty surprising. The first taste that we get of the future that God has in store for His people is the taste of a feast.

But not just any feast. A wedding feast. Look again at our text. First, in verses one through five, the heavenly host praises God for His justice because the worldly city that's full of evil and idolatry has fallen.

[6 : 05] Now, since we looked at the fall of Babylon last week, we won't spend much time there in those first five verses today. But then, in our text, in verses six through ten, the heavens erupt into song for a second time.

And there's rejoicing and exultation. Why? Verse seven, And in verse nine, The ultimate future that God has in store for His people, for His redeemed creation, is a feast.

But not just any feast. Heaven is a wedding feast. Heaven is a wedding feast. Now, I want to do something a little different this morning than what we typically do in our Sunday morning sermons. Typically, as you know if you've been at Trinity, we kind of walk piece by piece through a text explaining and applying the main ideas as we go. But rather than going verse by verse today, I want to just pull this single thread and see how the whole Bible contributes to this beautiful idea.

The story of the Bible from a very important angle is the story of a wedding. History culminates in a wedding feast between God and His people, between Christ and His bride.

[7 : 28] So let's look at that story together, and then after we've done that, let's consider what difference it makes in our lives today. So first, let's consider the story, the biblical theme of marriage, of a wedding.

And you know, we might think of this theme in three parts. In Scripture, we see the making of marriage, and we see the marring of marriage, but then we see something that we might call the mystery of marriage.

Now, we read about the making of marriage. We read about that earlier in the service, in Genesis 2. God creates the institution of marriage. It's not something that humans originally came up with. God brings male and female together into a one flesh union, into a covenant, into a binding promise. And that joining of male and female in marriage, this union is meant to have priority over all other relationships, right?

The narrator in Genesis puts it this way. He says, Therefore, a man will leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. All other human relationships, even to parents, become secondary to this new thing made in marriage.

[8 : 34] And the sense you get from Genesis 2 is that the making of marriage brings great joy, right? The man exclaims upon seeing the woman, This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.

At last! There are words of joy, of surprise. You know, the first attempts of human poetry were right there in Genesis 2.

The first attempts of human poetry were written in the wonder of love. So, you know, when you feel romantic and you want to start writing love poetry, there's a deep human instinct there. You can take part of.

At last! Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. But now, no sooner do we see the making of marriage in the biblical story, but we learn, too, tragically, of the marring of marriage.

In Genesis 3, sin enters the world through the first humans. Adam and Eve disobey God, and through sin comes the curse. And it's not just their relationship with God that's broken.

[9 : 36] It's also their relationship with one another, right? Because of sin, the joy and the union of marriage will now be marred with strife and with discord.

And the sad history of humanity plays this out. Marriages in Scripture and out are marked by the tragic consequences of sin, by selfishness and neglect and even violence.

The Bible is at times almost embarrassingly honest about how broken human relationships in general and human marriages in particular can become.

And it might seem like the story, then, of marriage ends there. It was a pretty short one. It was made by God and then marred by sin. But that's not the final chapter that we see in Scripture.

As the story of Scripture progresses, we see that there's also an unfolding mystery to marriage. And I use this word mystery because it's one that the Apostle Paul uses in Ephesians 5.

[10:38] In Ephesians 5, Paul's talking about how husbands and wives should love and honor one another. And then he quotes that verse we read earlier from Genesis 2. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

And then he says this. He says, this mystery is profound. Marriage is a profound mystery, according to Paul. And the word mystery there has a bit of a technical meaning.

You know, it means more than just sort of something that's tricky to figure out, right? Like a Sherlock Holmes story. No, for Paul, the word mystery means a redemptive reality that has only now fully come to light because of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Something that was there all along, but we didn't see it until the day broke, as it were, and sunlight flooded the room.

And then in the light of day, the thing that was there all along suddenly became clear. That's what Paul means by mystery. So what is this mystery of marriage?

[11:52] What's the thing that marriage has been saying for generation after generation, but we didn't necessarily have the ears to hear it or the eyes to see it? Paul says the mystery of marriage is that all along, it referred to Christ and the church.

That from its institution in creation, it always had a more profound significance. It was a living signpost in the middle of human history.

Marriage was like performative art all along, enacting the story of the gospel. And consider even the Old Testament, you hear echoes there of this mystery.

There are echoes of this mystery even in the Old Testament, prefiguring the new. Isaiah telling the people in exile, your maker is your husband. God commanding Hosea to take back his faithful spouse to demonstrate God's own love for his wayward people.

The song of Solomon flowing with poetry, I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine. And then you hear the central covenantal promise of the whole Old Testament. What is it? What is the one thing that God keeps saying, this is the core of my covenant with you, my people?

[13:09] What is it? I'll be your God and you'll be my people. I'll give myself to you and you'll give yourself to me. And then as the New Testament opens and Jesus begins to teach and to heal and to forgive sins.

He's doing all this, but the people are confused. Jesus, they ask, our religious leaders, you know, they all say that we should be fasting.

But you and your disciples, you don't really seem to be fasting. You seem to be feasting. Your first miracle was turning water into wine at a wedding feast. What kind of religious leader are you?

And then Jesus says this. He says, can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? Now, is Jesus just using an illustration there?

Or is he uncovering the mystery? The mystery that he is the bridegroom. He is the great divine husband.

[14:21] Come for his beloved. Come for his bride. Come to get her back from her waywardness. Come to win her freedom. That's certainly what Jesus' apostles taught.

Paul will say in 2 Corinthians 11 that when the Corinthians heard the gospel and believed, it was as if they were betrothed to Christ as their true husband. And again, in 1 Corinthians 6, Paul will say that Christians are now spiritually united to Christ.

They're one flesh and one spirit with him by faith. So the mystery of marriage is that human marriage was always meant to be a projection of a greater divine reality, the divine reality of a Savior who gives himself sacrificially for his bride, the church.

And of his church, the bride that gives itself willingly back to him. And here in Revelation 19, the mystery of marriage reaches its fulfillment in this feast of eternity.

The feast of eternity will be the wedding feast between Christ and the church. And notice again how Revelation describes Jesus here. He's the Lamb, the Lamb who was slain.

[15:36] Is there any greater love story than a lover laying down their life for their beloved? You know, when I was in high school, the movie Titanic came out.

You know, the one with Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet? You know, you know that one, right? Now, when I was a high schooler, I thought that was a dumb movie. I thought that was really dumb. I still kind of do, actually.

But at the end of the movie, why does it grip us? Why does it move us? Because Jack is willing to put himself into the cold depths of the sea so that Rose can stay safe.

He goes down so that she can stay afloat amidst what would otherwise be certain death. Friends, the story of humanity is the story of marriage.

Your story is the story of marriage. No matter what your relational status is, we're made by God.

We're marred by sin. God made us to be united to Him in love, to receive the poetry of His love and to make our relationship with Him the highest of our loves.

[16:51] That's why we were made. But we've marred it. We've rejected His love. We've rejected His rightful place in our lives. And our result of rejecting our heavenly Creator, our heavenly Lover, the result of that rejection is the curse of death.

How could it be otherwise? If we cut ourselves off from the source of life, what is left for us but death? But there's a mystery.

There's a saving mystery. Though we have been unfaithful spouses to the God who made and loved us, Jesus came and was completely faithful. On the cross, He willingly plunged down into the cold depths of death and hell.

So for us, His beloved, His bride, so that we might be rescued. On the third day, He rose from death so that all who trust in Him will be forgiven of their sins and reunited, reconciled to God in an unbreakable bond of love and union.

He rose from death and the day will come. The day will come when the King will return for His bride and the marring will be healed once and for all.

[18:11] The tables will be set and the wedding feast will begin and we will be with the lover of our souls forever. Friends, that's the biblical theme that reaches its climax right here in Revelation 19.

So what difference does it make? What difference does this story make today? Let's consider three points of application. First, if history is headed toward this heavenly wedding feast, if history is headed toward this heavenly wedding feast, then earthly marriages are charged with eternal significance.

Earthly marriages are charged with eternal significance. You know, if you were to ask most people in history what the point of marriage was, they'd probably give you one of two answers. They'd probably say that the point of marriage is either to provide social stability or to bring personal fulfillment, right?

You know, if you were in more like socially conservative circles, they'd probably emphasize one. If you were in, you know, more progressive circles, they'd probably emphasize the other. But those are the two answers most people would give.

And you know, in a sense, marriage does bring both of those things. Marriage does bring social and financial stability. Studies have shown that again and again. And marriage does bring personal fulfillment, right?

[19:32] It does. But the real point of marriage is in either of those things. According to Scripture, the point of marriage is to picture the love of Christ and His church.

It has a significance far beyond whatever social or personal benefits come out of it. But because it has this eternal significance, that means for Christians, marriage should be filled with just the deepest reservoir of joy.

Because marriage is a, for a Christian, marriage is a knowing reflection of the joy of heaven. It's a picture of the future come into the present.

It is imperfect, yes, but it is greatly to be enjoyed. Marriage is a greater and more precious gift than we often realize.

And that's why Christians have also had a very countercultural approach to marriage. Christians have always had a very countercultural approach to marriage, understanding its significance in this way.

[20 : 43] I mean, if you would ask most people in the first century, what made Christians really weird or offensive, right? This is what, this is one of the things that would have been really, really high on the list.

First century people looking at Christians, one of the things that they would have said, Christians are totally weird, one of the things was how they approached marriage and sexuality. In the first century, Christians were very strange.

First, they believed that sex should only be between a man and a woman in marriage. And that was just confusing to first century folk. They looked at that and they thought, why should your sexual appetites only be confined in that way?

Right? That just seems unnecessary. That seems unhealthy. Right? But second, here's the other thing that made Christians very weird in the first century. Christians believed not just that, but they also believed that a life of singleness and a life of a life without marriage, without sex, was just as meaningful and fulfilling a life as someone who was married.

Lifelong singleness and celibacy was held up as a perfectly normal and fulfilling way to live. This is what made Christians very strange, one of the things that made them very strange from the very start.

[22 : 04] Now, perhaps you're saying to yourself, you know, Nick, I have news for you. It's not just first century people who found the Christian ethic around marriage strange. Right?

Maybe you find this pretty hard too. Right? Maybe this is a fairly significant barrier for you to becoming a Christian. Now, if that's you, and honestly, that is most of us at one point and another in our spiritual journey, if that's you, if you're wrestling with this kind of biblical Christian approach to marriage, I think it helps to see this teaching in the context of this bigger story, in the context of the mystery of marriage and the coming wedding feast.

You see, if you are married, then your marriage is meant to display Christ's love for the church. And at a definitional level, what is marriage?

It's two fundamentally different partners, a male and a female, becoming one in a lifelong covenant to live in sacrificial service and self-giving. Just as, that's a mirror, just as Christ and the church, two fundamentally different partners, human and divine, are united in an eternity-long covenant that will continue in sacrificial service and self-giving love forever.

You see how it's meant to display that. So, married couples, if you're finding married life hard and every marriage goes through those seasons, remember that your faithfulness to one another through hard times, through trials, through disappointments, your choice to continue loving and forgiving one another and staying faithful to each other, that is bearing forth a weight of glory that is so much greater than what you can see right now.

[23 : 59] Your perseverance in trials and your celebration in joys, these are bearing witness to the greater marriage, the reality of Christ's love for His church.

But there's a message here for single Christians as well. If marriage really is about the union of Christ and His church, then friends, every Christian has the substance of which earthly marriage is only the shadow.

The joys of earthly marriage are but a reflection of the greater feast, the greater consummation that awaits the bride of Christ. This is why Christians in the first century and in the 21st century could live their lives in singleness their whole lives and be completely fulfilled, dignified, and take their place in the community because they knew that the greatest love and greatest joy was already theirs.

They had a lover who would not disappoint and their wedding feast was already being prepared. Now, that's not to downplay the challenges of single life, but it's to put it in the right biblical and theological perspective.

You know, you can read the old spiritual writers of the faith and sometimes it can almost be a little shocking to hear how they spoke of their intimacy with Christ. I think we've lost some of this.

[25 : 39] I was reading the letters of Samuel Rutherford a few years ago. Rutherford was a 17th century Scottish pastor who was persecuted and imprisoned. And in his letters, he often speaks of his communion with Christ with language that just overflows with love and intimacy with passion.

He speaks of going to Christ in prayer as being a tryst with his beloved. If I said that in a sermon, you'd probably be like, I don't know what's up with Pastor Nick, right? But this was the kind of intimacy that they had with their Savior that I think we've lost.

You can almost hear Rutherford just echoing back that ancient poem to Christ, at last, here is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. He just breathes intimacy with Jesus.

And you know, if you were to visit Rutherford's tombstone today, you know what you find on his tombstone, on his monument over his tomb? Acquainted with Emmanuel's love. That was his life. Here was a saint who knew what it was like to live in the mystery of marriage and who knew that history was headed toward a heavenly wedding feast. And that meant his life of faithfulness was not just one of mere duty, but of delight.

[27 : 01] Because he knew intimately his heavenly bridegroom. Rutherford once said, faint not, the miles to heaven are but few in short.

faint not, Christians, the miles to heaven to this heavenly wedding feast are but few in short.

History's headed toward the heavenly wedding feast, and that makes all the difference of how we approach marriage today.

There's another application here, though. If history is headed toward the heavenly wedding feast, then our earthly loves should be ordered more and more to eternal realities.

If we are headed toward this feast, then our earthly loves should be ordered more and more to these eternal realities. Notice what we see at the end of verses seven and eight. Seven and eight says, 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. The idea here is that the church has been preparing for this great feast.

[28 : 05] Now, if you've been married, you know that planning for a wedding day can become an all-consuming task, right? There are seemingly endless details to arrange and decisions to make, but in the midst of all that, the couple is usually consumed by the coming wedding day, not just because there are all these social expectations about how many guests you should invite and what sort of meals you should serve and all that.

They're consumed by the coming wedding day. Why? Because they can't wait to spend the rest of their life with their beloved. They're eager to begin the journey of marriage and union of common life and common joy.

And that same anticipation should fill the heart of the Christian in this life. We are soon to be seated at the feast with our heavenly lover never more to part, ready to begin the great adventure of eternity in the new heavens and new earth.

And how do we get ready for that great day? Well, verse 8 has this wonderful phrase. It says, Isn't that an interesting turn of phrase?

It was granted her, something was given to her as a gift, to clothe herself. She then took it for herself and made it her own. What is this fine linen?

[29 : 22] What is this fine linen that on the one hand is a free gift of grace and on the other hand is something that we take for ourselves and make our own? Well, verse 8 says, It's the righteous deeds of the saints.

But how are the righteous deeds of the saints both freely given as a gift and something we make our own? Well, I think this idea is similar to what Paul says in Ephesians 2.

In Ephesians 2, Paul brings these things together. He says, For by grace you have been saved through faith. This is not your own doing. It's a gift of God. It's not a result of your work so that no one can boast.

And then he says, For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Did you catch the balance there?

There is no doubt where our righteous status before God comes from. We're forgiven and accepted solely by grace, not by works. But, though we're not saved by our good works, God does create us in Christ Jesus for good works.

[30 : 27] They flow out of a life changed by the gospel of grace. In fact, Paul says that God prepared those good works beforehand that we should walk in them. So how do we eagerly anticipate the coming feast?

We align our hearts to the good works that God has prepared in advance for us to do. We take up the freely given fine linen, bright and pure, and we dress ourselves each day in the heavenly attire. And practically, we seek to learn and to love more and more what Christ loves. What do we see Him value in His Word?

What do we see Him pursue? What does He command? What does He forbid? We make the Word and the ways of Christ more and more the pattern of our own affections. And we do so as Christians not because we fear some future punishment.

The punishment has been paid by Christ. No, we do so because we're eager to be united in all things to our heavenly lover, to love what is loved by our beloved.

[31 : 42] That's Christian obedience. That's the motivation. Simple as that and profound as that, to love what is loved by our beloved.

So, Christian, in anticipation of the coming wedding feast, are you learning to love what Christ loves? And if so, is it evident to those around you, to your spouse, to your kids, to your roommates, to your neighbors?

Our passage ends with John falling down before the angel who shows him these things in an attempt to worship him. The angel is sort of glorious and wonderful and John falls down to worship him but the angel says, don't worship me.

I'm just a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God. And then the passage ends with this curious phrase. It says, for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. And that phrase could mean something like, all true prophecy bears witness to Jesus.

Does our life bear witness to Jesus? In the power of the Holy Spirit is what our life speaks forth, is what it professes, the testimony that Jesus is worthy of our love and affection.

[33 : 04] Lovers are always talking about their beloved, aren't they? It can sometimes be annoying when you have a friend who just started dating someone who's like all they can talk about, how great so-and-so is, and you're just like, man, they're not that great.

Settle down. But church, may our hearts never cease to flow with love for Christ.

Would His name naturally come to our lips? Would the Holy Spirit's work in our lives bring forth the testimony of Jesus? And would we see this life as a preparation for a greater feast to come?

Would we make ourselves ready, clothing ourselves in the fine linen, the righteous deeds that have been granted to us, that have been prepared in advance for us to walk in them? One last observation, then we'll wrap up, and it's this.

If history is headed toward the heavenly wedding feast, then our God is worthy of endless worship.

If we're headed toward this heavenly wedding feast, then God is worthy of endless worship.

[34 : 15] You can't come away from this passage having missed the repeated refrain, right? Hallelujah. Hallelujah. It's a Hebrew word that just means praise God. The heartbeat of heaven is worship of God the Almighty.

And as we've seen, worship isn't just a key theme in this particular passage. It's a key theme of the whole book of Revelation. There's no other book in the New Testament that's filled with passage after passage ascribing glory and praise to God.

God is worthy of endless worship. And what a wonder, what a surprise, what a cause for even greater worship that this infinitely great God has prepared a feast for us.

And not just a feast, a wedding feast. Do you know what you mean, Christian, when you say that you have a relationship with God?

with God? Do you realize how utterly staggering that is? How unique it is among all the world religions that the infinitely holy God has prepared a feast for you.

[35 : 27] But a, not just a feast, but a wedding feast. Because you're the bride. Because he's taking you as his own. Jonathan Edwards once preached a sermon called The Church's Marriage.

And he put this staggering truth of the gospel like this. He said, Then the church shall be brought to the full enjoyment of her bridegroom, having all tears wiped away from her eyes, and there shall be no more distance or absence.

She shall then be brought to the entertainments of an eternal wedding feast, and to dwell forever with her bridegroom, yea, to dwell eternally in his embraces.

Then Christ will give her his loves, and she shall drink her fill, yea, she shall swim in the ocean of his love. You know it's good when there's two yays in a quote, right?

She shall swim in the ocean of his love. Christ will give her his loves, and she shall drink her fill. And the heavens say, Hallelujah.

[36 : 46] Blessed are all those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb. And friend, you are invited right now. Take Christ by faith, and this ocean of love will be yours, and you too will have

a place at the feast.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you for the invitation that goes forth to sit down at table with you and to dine.

And the great meat and the great drink of that day will be the unending courses of your love for your people. Oh God, would you make us ready for that day?

Draw our hearts up to the beauty and the wonder and the anticipation of it. And Lord, we pray that the magnificence of your love would break through our stony hearts.

And would we throw ourselves in faith upon our mighty Savior, Jesus. Amen. that the Similes will me after the ■■■■■ will finally■ the■■ digestive the whale the afterlife will ■■■■■ib