

The Coming Explosion of Heaven's Praise

Revelation 19:1-10

Will you take the infallible record of the Word of God and turn to Revelation chapter 19?

We now come to the climax of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the staggering disclosure of his glorious physical return to earth.

For millennia those who fear God and hate sin have longed for a day when God will finally rule the world in righteousness. Can you imagine what that will be like? A day when all of those who have lived in rebellion to him, who serve their father the devil, will finally be vanquished, a day when—as the prophet Habakkuk said—“When the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea,”¹ a day when the very prayer that we have been asked to pray will finally come to fruition and that is, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”²

Beloved, this is the magnificent theme of chapter 19, the theme of the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, an event that is so utterly transforming that before it actually happens heaven will erupt in resounding praise.

Let me read to you the first 10 verses that we will focus on this morning in Revelation 19 verses one through 10.

After these things I heard, as it were, a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; BECAUSE HIS JUDGMENTS ARE TRUE AND RIGHTEOUS; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and HE HAS AVENGED THE BLOOD OF HIS BOND-SERVANTS ON HER."

And a second time they said, "Hallelujah! HER SMOKE RISES UP FOREVER AND EVER."

And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!"

And a voice came from the throne, saying, "Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great."

And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude and as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready."

¹ Habakkuk 2:14.

² Matthew 6:10.

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And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

And he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God."

And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."³

Any student of Bible prophecy can see that the current events of our world point to a one world empire that will be led by the antichrist, that which is described in the prophetic Word. And only a fool would deny that the world is spinning out of control, that it is increasingly being led by Christ hating tyrants that would have us submit to their utopian ideologies that inevitably put man at the center, not God. And as we study the Word of God we see that this is only going to get worse.

May I remind you of where we have come from in our study of the book of Revelation because I know it has been a number of Sundays because of the Christmas break, a number of Sundays that we have not been in it? And so since we have been away from the subject I believe a review is in order.

There is a chronology that we see in the prophetic Word that gives us a sense of the final days of man's rebellion upon the earth before the Lord returns. You will recall that in chapter one verse 19 the Lord himself outlined his revelation for us. And there John was to chronicle, first of all, "the things which you have seen." And that was a reference to chapter one and he had a vision of the glorified Christ.

But, secondly, he was to write down "the things which are." And there we have in chapters two and three letters to seven prominent churches that were representative of churches all down through redemptive history.

And then the third section that the Lord gives us, that John was to record, was in reference to "the things which will take place after these things." In other words, after the Church has been removed, after it has been translated into heaven, and there in chapters four through the remainder of the book we have a description of the seven seal judgments, followed by the trumpet judgments and then finally the bowl judgments, we have details regarding the rise and the fall of the antichrist and his world empire, the false prophet and his false religious system. We have descriptions regarding the protection and ultimately the redemption of Israel, the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ that we have here in chapter 19. And following that we will have more disclosures that the Lord gives us regarding the millennial kingdom, the great white throne judgment, the glories of the eternal state in heaven and so forth.

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And as we piece together other prophecies in Scripture, we get an even bigger and better picture of the things that will transpire before the Lord returns. And I know there are those who will differ with some of the things that I am going to say because we can't be dogmatic on all of them, especially in terms of the actual chronology, but we know that ultimately these things will transpire. Let me give you what I believe will be the basic order, and I think this will help us have a sense of context for where we are in chapter 19.

After the Church has been translated into heaven, the United States which is currently in an economic and moral free fall, will basically become insignificant in the world. It will be both unable and unwilling to protect Israel. At that time a Russian and Arab alliance of nations will come together and they will seize this opportunity to attack Israel and that is described in Ezekiel 38 and 39, the war of Gog and Magog. And there we discover that these armies will be supernaturally defeated on the mountains of Israel. The world will then recognize that God is the protector of Israel and the Jews will finally be able to build their temple on the temple mount in place of the Islamic Dome of the Rock which still remains the most disputed piece of real estate in the world.

During this time the antichrist will emerge as the world's political savior. He will offer an explanation as to what has happened with the disappearance of all of these Christians as well as the defeat of the Red army and the vast armies of Islam. On behalf of a massive European confederacy he will lay out for the world a very compelling plan for peace that will somehow bring order out of the chaos that has transpired and he will then negotiate a covenant or a peace treaty with Israel who, at that time, will have unprecedented world power.

The signing of this covenant will trigger what is called the tribulation, Daniel's seventieth week as we read in Daniel 9:27. And after a short period of peace God will begin to pour out his seal and trumpet judgments upon the earth during that first half of the tribulation. And that will result in catastrophic destruction upon the world.

During the first half of the tribulation the antichrist will continue to build a political and commercial empire that will coexist with the false prophet who will head up a massive false religious system that we studied in Revelation 17, one called "a mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of all harlots." The antichrist will initially use this religious system to unify and control the nations of the world to advance his political agenda. And as we study the Lord's revelation we see that the false prophet will even use his alleged miracle working abilities to deceive the world into worshipping the antichrist and wearing a mark that he will demand.

Towards the end of the first half of the tribulation the antichrist will fake his death and resurrection. He will go into the Jewish temple and he will defile it. He will then establish himself as god and turn on the harlot church and destroy it.

During the last half of the tribulation God will pour out upon the beast worshippers, those who worship the antichrist, the final seven bowl judgments. During the final days of

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human suffering the antichrist and his empire will include 10 other regions, each of which will have their own ruler, their own administrator and they will all serve him and together they will have one primary goal and that will be to eradicate all of the Jews in Israel and around the world and certainly all those who worship the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ. They will wage war against the Lamb finally at the battle of Armageddon where they will be slaughtered.

In chapter 17 we studied how the Lord will deal with the great harlot church in judgment. And in chapter 18 there is a description of the character and the judgment upon commercial and political Babylon, that component of the antichrist's empire. And these events in chapter 18 will occur just before the seventh bowl judgment.

Keep in mind. There will be six bowl judgments that last just a few weeks and then the final fall of Babylon will culminate in the seventh bowl judgment which will then lead to the killing fields of Armageddon in the final hours just before the Lord returns. And at this point the antichrist's empire called "Babylon the Great" will finally, completely and eternally fall. This will be a result of the long anticipated climax of divine wrath that will be poured out in the seventh bowl.

Now this brings us to chapter 19. Anticipating the final elimination of these hardened unbelievers who have defiantly tried to thwart the purposes of God to bring glory unto himself, finally the heavenly hosts of heaven will erupt in praise and they will do so for four reasons that we will examine this morning.

First, they will praise him for the glory of God in salvation. Secondly, there will be praise for the judgment of God upon the wicked. Thirdly, praise for the reign of God upon the earth. And, finally, praise for the love of God for his bride. These subjects will be delineated in this particular exposition and I have entitled it, "The Coming Explosion of Heaven's Praise."

First notice how the heavenly host praise God for his glory in salvation.

In chapter 19 verse one it begins, "After these things..."⁴ In other words, after the destruction of religious and commercial Babylon in chapters 17 and 18, "After these things I heard, as it were, a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven."⁵

John now hears that. And, again, keep in mind. Ninety some odd year old John on the Isle of Patmos languishing there in that penal colony and he is having all of these things revealed to him. And now it is coming to a climax and here is what he hears, "a loud voice of a great multitude."⁶

Think about it, friends. What a remarkable contrast this is to the utter silence that now characterizes Babylon the Great after its death as we read about in chapter 18 verses 21

⁴ Revelation 19:1.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

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through 24. And what are they saying here, perhaps even singing? “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God.”⁷ Here the angelic hosts of heaven explode in a paean of praise. And in verse five they are even going to invite all of us, the Redeemed to join in this oratorio of tribute.

“Hallelujah.” A remarkable word. It is a transliteration of the Hebrew word **HALLEL** (haw-lal') and **YA** (yaw), praise God, praise Yahweh. And it is a phrase that is found in a variety of psalms in the Old Testament and it is interesting, as we study those phrases we see that they are typically associated with God's judgment upon the wicked and his salvation of his covenant people. For example, in Psalm 104:35 we read, “Let sinners be consumed from the earth, And let the wicked be no more. Bless the LORD, O my soul. [Here it is.] Praise the LORD!”⁸ And this is the motivation here. Why? Because salvation and glory and power belong to our God.

Now, bear in mind. Salvation includes more than just our justification and sanctification, as marvelous as that is. But now the ultimate fruition of our inheritance is complete in our glorification thereby evoking praise from the heavenly hosts. In other words, “hallelujah, all of the obstacles have been destroyed. The kingdom is now about to come. And all the glory and power belong to our God” as we see. Now the whole world will witness the glory of God. Salvation and glory and power belong to our God is what they will say. And, indeed, it is only by the power of God that truth and righteousness can ever prevail and that is what we see in verse two.

So, first, we see praise for the glory of God in salvation. Secondly, praise for the judgment of God upon the wicked in verse two. Why? “BECAUSE HIS JUDGMENTS ARE TRUE AND RIGHTEOUS; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and HE HAS AVENGED THE BLOOD OF HIS BOND-SERVANTS ON HER.”⁹

You see, by this time, beloved, the world will be absolutely, thoroughly deceived into worshipping the beast. By this time they will be so utterly hardened to divine truth, so comprehensively in love with their sin, their materialism, their immorality, their hatred for Christ and all who know and love him, that they will be irreversibly lost beyond the possibility of repentance.

This is a great example of Romans one where God eventually gives a person over to the consequences of their iniquity, the eternal consequences. You see, when sin's corruption reaches such a stage, God's judgment should evoke our praise that he might be glorified, that these obstacles be removed, that the glory of God would shine forth throughout the world.

I want you to notice. He judges the great harlot here for “corrupting the earth with her immorality.” Bear in mind, this was a religious system spawned by Satan himself at the

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Psalm 104:35.

⁹ Revelation 19:2.

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tower of Babel as we have studied. She has plied her trade, the trade of her whoredom through countless false religious systems down through redemptive history. In fact, in chapter 17 verse four the Lord describes her as, "Full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality."¹⁰ This blasphemous, idolatrous religion that will ultimately demand that the world worship Satan himself through the antichrist, a Satanic religion that will be responsible for the torture and for the murder of countless believers during the time of the tribulation. Remember the murder of the two witnesses and to allow their corpses to literally rot in the streets. Suddenly they are destroyed. This religion is gone. And this is what evokes the angelic praise.

It is interesting. As we study the Word of God we see that Scripture tells us that we are to give praise for many things, for his grace, his mercy, his love, his faithfulness, his goodness, for the gospel, for the Lord Jesus Christ and on and on it goes. But do you realize that this should also include praising God for his judgment upon the wicked. In fact, in Revelation chapter 18 verse 20 we are commanded to do just that. There we read, "Rejoice over [Babylon], O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her."¹¹

We could go all the way back into the Old Testament. For example, in Deuteronomy 32:43 and there we have this same example of giving God praise for his judgment on the wicked. There we read, "Rejoice, O nations, with His people; For He will avenge the blood of His servants, And will render vengeance on His adversaries."¹² Likewise in Psalm 48:11, "Let Mount Zion be glad, Let the daughters of Judah rejoice Because of Your judgments."¹³

Now certainly we take no joy in the damnation of the wicked, nor does God do that. But we do rejoice in seeing God honored and the Lord Jesus Christ exalted. And as in this case here there will be great rejoicing knowing that not only that will happen, but also the curse upon the earth will finally be lifted in the glorious millennial age.

Psalm 58 verse 10 reads:

The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance; He will wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. And men will say, "Surely there is a reward for the righteous; Surely there is a God who judges on earth!"¹⁴

When I think of the millions of believers down through history that have been persecuted, that have been tortured and martyred for their faith—and I understand that now the estimate is about maybe 1000 a day that is occurring around the world—when I think of that, beloved, I do rejoice knowing that their murderers will one day face God's vengeance and they will be removed that God will be glorified.

¹⁰ Revelation 17:4.

¹¹ Revelation 18:20.

¹² Deuteronomy 32:43.

¹³ Psalm 48:11.

¹⁴ Psalm 58:10-11.

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Paul addressed this very thing in 2 Thessalonians one verse six. There he said:

It is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.¹⁵

So, again, the 90 year old apostle John languishing here in exile on the Isle of Patmos witnesses this angelic praise. And don't you know the triumph of that scene and the sound of that heavenly oratorio must have been absolutely overwhelming to him? I get overwhelmed when I just think about it and try to imagine it as I meditate upon the passage. And especially for John, because think about it, certainly he, too, was an early victim of this ancient foe, this ancient harlot. But he sees that her days are numbered.

Verse three. "And a second time they said, 'Hallelujah! HER SMOKE RISES UP FOREVER AND EVER.'"¹⁶ This is reminiscent of the language used to describe the judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. And the second hallelujah here underscores the praise that this judgment deserves. This commercial, political system that we now witness even has to some degree an element of this harlot church mixed in with it. Don't you see all of this "spirituality" now being mixed in with all of the chaos of politics today? But one day it will all be destroyed.

Now bear in mind when the curse is lifted on the earth during the millennial kingdom and the earth is returned back to Edenic splendor, the bounty of the earth will ultimately eliminate all of the commerce as we know it. Things are going to be so radically different it is almost hard for us to wrap our mind about it, around it. Except for a short lived and unsuccessful revolt by some at the very end of the millennium, the wretched consequences of human depravity and satanic lies will be eliminated.

I was thinking about this the other day. No more ACLU. No more ACORN. No more corrupt politicians. No more tyrannical little leaders, little dictators threatening to blow up the world. Think about it. No more poverty. No more crime. No more hospitals. No more insurance. And I have to add this. Even though we will be in our glorified state I still rejoice for those who will not be because you know what? There will be no more mosquitoes, no more ticks, no more chiggers. Won't that be something? I mean, folks, my point is things are going to be radically different. And because of... and these are some of the mundane things. But when you think about it, this is what is evoking such praise from the angelic chorus.

¹⁵ 2 Thessalonians 1:6.

¹⁶ Revelation 19:3.

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So we have seen praise for the glory of God in salvation and praise for the judgment of God on the wicked. But, thirdly, there is praise for the reign of God upon the earth. Notice verse four. "And the twenty-four elders..."¹⁷

Now, bear in mind. As we have studied before, these are the representatives of the glorified, raptured Church, "...the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures..."¹⁸

This would be a reference to the cherubim, the highest order of exalted angels that protect the holiness of God and that are constantly around his throne. "The four living creatures fell down and worshipped God who sits on the throne saying, 'Amen.'"¹⁹ Literally, "May it be so," an expression of Solemn agreement, "Amen and Hallelujah, praise God."

And then the entire host of redeemed are joined... are asked to join in. Verse five. "And a voice came from the throne..."²⁰ In other words here we have, you might say, an angelic song director, probably one of the four cherubim even though it is impossible to know for sure. "A voice came from the throne, saying, 'Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him.'"²¹ Literally, "All his slaves, even those who fear him." And, of course, this underscores the fact that all those who are truly redeemed are willing slaves of the master and yield honor and obedience to him. And he even goes on to say, "The small and the great."²²

I love that. Think about it. This really denotes the utter elimination of all of the categories that men use to distinguish themselves. Won't that be something? Can you imagine that? All that is going to be gone, whether it be race or social status of intelligence or whatever it is. Everybody has got to have somebody to hate, right? All that is going to be over with. The small and the great are asked to join in because, beloved, at this point there will only be one category and that is sinners saved by grace. That's it.

Dear Christian, imagine what this would be like, an angelic oratorio of praise to God as the Lord Jesus Christ prepares to physically return to earth to judge the world that has hated him and hated all who belong to him. And then we will join in with them along with the four living creatures who fall down and how worship God who sits on the throne. What an indescribably magnificent moment this will be.

I was thinking about. Even those saints who, for whatever reason, never lift their voice in praise during a song service are going to join in. I don't know what I would do if all of you actually sang at the same time. But at this moment in redemptive history this is what is going to happen. The sin of sullenness will finally be over with.

¹⁷ Revelation 19:4.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Revelation 19:5.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

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Now with the full company of the heavenly host and the redeemed combining their voice, the *Hallelujah Chorus* of this oratorio is utterly electric with praise. And notice the apostle's inspired description here in verse six. "And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude and as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.'"²³

You can see John here is trying to come up with some way to describe to us how incredibly loud and powerful and glorious this is. "The Almighty reigns."

Focus on that for a moment because this is ultimately what is evoking their praise at this juncture in verse six. Even today he reigns over the sphere of salvation upon the earth. We understand that in some spiritual sense. But, beloved, that is not the end of it. The fullness of his kingdom, of his reign has not happened yet.

Let me digress for a moment.

In 2 Samuel chapter seven God made a covenant with David and that covenant contained four elements. First of all, that his name will be great. Secondly, that God would provide for Israel and place and a home of their own. And, thirdly, that Israel will be given undisturbed rest from all of her enemies and, finally, that a royal dynasty and a kingdom will be given to David forever.

Now, the fulfillment of this covenant was initially set into motion at the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ as the promised seed of David. Now think about it. After his life, after his death and resurrection he ascended to the right hand of the Father as the Messiah, as the Davidic King until a day when he returns to fulfill the remaining promises of that covenant. You see, this church age is not some plan B that God had to come up with because his people rejected him. It is not some parenthesis in the divine scheme, but rather a continuation of the Old Testament messianic program. Beloved, don't think that the Church age is merely... is just merely a postponement of the Davidic promise, but rather the initial fulfillment of those promises.

Let me argue this point for a moment. Remember when the angel Gabriel came to Mary what did she say? That you would have a son, his name would be Jesus and that the throne of his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. His kingdom will have... will never end. Now Mary would have understood this in the context of the Old Testament prophets. She would have understood this in terms of the Davidic covenant. She would have understood that this was something far more than merely a spiritual reign in the hearts of men.

Remember the priest Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. Remember that he prophesied in Luke one verse 69 that God was raising up "a horn of salvation."²⁴ And he went on to say, "In the house of David his servant."²⁵

²³ Revelation 19:6.

²⁴ Luke 1:69.

²⁵ Ibid.

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In Mark 1:14 we read:

Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."²⁶

Why was it... what does he mean it was at hand? Well, it was at hand because the king was present.

You see, not only does the Lord Jesus Christ now currently rule in the sense of ruling over the sphere of salvation as he rules in the hearts of men in some spiritual sense, but ruling always includes a specific realm, a territory, a kingdom realm. And that will include, as we see in the prophetic word, a restoration of a national Israel consistent with the Old Testament prophecies.

Remember what Peter reminds us of in Acts 2:33 that Christ Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of God. In other words, the Lord now is in the position of messianic authority. He is awaiting that day when he returns to establish his earthly kingdom. In fact, in Acts we see that, indeed, Jesus was the fulfillment of the promised seed of David.

Peter said in Acts 2:36 that God had made this Jesus both Lord and Christ and, likewise, in Acts 13:34-37 the apostle Paul, the converted rabbi makes it very clear that the blessings promised to David had been fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus to an incorruptible eternal life. And we know that in Revelation five and verse five was it not Jesus the Son of David who alone could take the title deed of the kingdom of God that was promised to the Davidic dynasty? Was it not he that could take that and open up the seals? And there we read in Revelation 5:5. "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals."²⁷ And ultimately, according to Revelation 20 and verse four we know that Christ will reign upon the earth for 1000 years. And if language means anything it means what it says.

But, beloved, nowhere do the New Testament epistles use the word "reign" in relation to the present ministry of Christ. The ultimate concept of reigning is always one that is future. In fact, I find it interesting that in 2 Timothy 2:12 as well as Revelation 5:10, believers, we as believers are promised to reign with him. But I would submit to you there is no reference in the New Testament about us currently reigning in a kingdom. You see, all of that is future.

But here Revelation 19 we see the fullness of his reign coming to fruition. So for this reason heaven is going to explode in praise. And that is why at the end of verse six they say, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns."²⁸

²⁶ Mark 1:14-15.

²⁷ Revelation 5:5.

²⁸ Revelation 19:6.

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In other words, the fullness of the messianic kingdom has come. This is the ultimate goal of biblical history, that magnificent bridge between the end of human history and the eternal state, the eternal kingdom.

But there is yet one more reason for this explosion of praise. And that is praise for the love of God for his bride. Notice in verse seven. "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready."²⁹

Now, the metaphor of marriage and bride is employed in the Old Testament to depict the covenant relationship that God has between his people Israel both past as well as future. We see that in a variety of passages. And it pictures there the deep personal union between God and his people that is manifested not only by his elective love for them, but also their responsive obligation to be faithful and to be pure. But, likewise, the apostle Paul in the New Testament uses the marriage metaphor and the bride to describe the relation between Christ and the Church. And we see it, as well, here in verse seven with the marriage supper of the Lamb.

And even in the description later on of the New Jerusalem, interestingly enough, in Revelation 21 and verse two. And there the apostle John sees "the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband."

So think about it. With the people of Israel, with the Church and even with the New Jerusalem, the marriage and bride metaphor symbolizes God's covenantal love for his people, this perfect union that he has with the redeemed. And the inestimable beauty of his bride that he has bestowed upon her as we see in the illustration of the New Jerusalem, not to mention her spotless purity.

Now, to fully, understand the transcendent glory of this text, this idea of the marriage of the Lamb with the bride that he has made ready, some background is necessary. So bear with me for a few more minutes.

The ancient Hebrew marriage consisted of two, some would say maybe three... it depends upon how you define it, stages. Some would say that the first stage has two parts and that is fair. The first stage was the *kiddushin*. I talked about this before. It is the betrothal or the engagement period. It included a contract whereby the couple were actually considered to be legally married. It often lasted at least 12 months and it was a time for them to prove their sexual fidelity, to make sure that the young lady was not pregnant and so forth and a time for a young man to go and to prepare a place for his bride.

At the close of the betrothal period, the groom would then go to his bride, often unannounced and take her to his father's house to present her to his family and to his friends over a period of time that typically lasted one week. During that time there would

²⁹ Revelation 19:7.

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be great festivities, great celebration. And at the end of that time, that time of presentation, the bride would go home briefly with her... as well as the bride's maids and they would gather their things and then the groom would come with his groomsmen to the bride's house and escort his bride and her bridesmaids to the actual ceremony. When I was in Israel I saw this a couple of times as they came through the street with all of the celebration. It was a remarkable ordeal.

And then, finally, you have the *hupah* or the marriage ceremony where the actual vows were exchanged. And then after the ceremony there would be a final meal that would take place followed by the physical consummation of the marriage, of that sacred union in the private chamber that the couple would have.

Now, beloved, this imagery dominates our Lord's relationship with his Bridal church. And it is crucial to helping us understand prophetic scheme. Please hear me. We as his bride were betrothed to him in eternity past by his uninfluenced grace. Paul described this in 2 Corinthians 11:2, "For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin."³⁰

Now, currently the groom to whom we are betrothed is preparing a place for his bride. Jesus spoke of this in John 14. In verse two he says:

In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.³¹

This period of betrothal is also a period of sanctification as we are now as a church being prepared for a day of presentation. The apostle Paul speaks of this in Ephesians five verse 25 where we read:

Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.³²

Now, I believe that the presentation will occur at the rapture of the Church when the groom comes unannounced for his bride and takes us unto himself, the pure, sanctified Church. And during the seven years of tribulation upon the earth the raptured Church will be presented to the heavenly host not having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, holy and blameless. And then at the end of the seven year celebration the final ceremony will take place including the marriage supper of the Lamb that we see here before us and that will actually begin and coincide with the millennial kingdom.

³⁰ 2 Corinthians 11:2.

³¹ John 14:2-3.

³² Ephesians 5:25-27.

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You see, ultimately the ceremony will extend throughout the entirety of the millennial kingdom with the final consummation occurring in the new heavens and the new earth when with the descent of the new Jerusalem as Revelation 21:2 says, "Coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband."³³ And then, my friends, there in the new heavens and the new earth, the glorified bride, which will ultimately include all of the redeemed from all ages, not just the Church, will live in perfect union with the bride groom and the bridal city, the new Jerusalem.

All of that to say this is the final theme of the heavenly song. Praise for the love of God for his bride. Again, verse seven. "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready."³⁴

That last phrase is a marvelous thought, is it not? You see, by God's grace and by the power of the indwelling Spirit of God the bride has made herself ready. And here, once again, we are confronted with the inscrutable mystery of man's responsibility in light of God's sovereignty, a concept that is perfectly summarized in Paul's words in Philippians two beginning in verse 12 where we are told, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling."³⁵ There is our responsibility. And he goes on to say that "It is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."³⁶

John continues his description in verse eight, "And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints."³⁷ And here, again, the stunning attire that we saw the angels wear in Revelation 15:6 now adorns the bride.

May I remind you of something very important here. This is an amazing transformation that will one day take place. You will recall that as we understand salvation, at the point of salvation, we are then clothed with the imputed righteousness of Christ, right? But now at this point in history something has changed. Now the righteousness is no longer imputed, but, beloved, it will then be intrinsic to our glorified state. It is an amazing thought.

Finally, the promise of Romans 8:19 will be realized, the revealing of the sons of God. And in verse 21 of that same chapter when we will be set free from the slavery to corruption and to the freedom of the glory of the children of God. And, once again, imagine the exhilaration for this world weary apostle who now is able to see with his very eyes in this magnificent vision that which he earlier declared in 1 John 3:2 where he said, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be.

³³ Revelation 21:2.

³⁴ Revelation 19:7.

³⁵ Philippians 2:12.

³⁶ Philippians 2:13.

³⁷ Revelation 19:8.

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We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.”³⁸

And now he sees it. Can you imagine that? Finally, an angelic messenger speaks to John, most likely one of the angels of the seven last plagues who initiated his role as John's guide in chapter 17 verse one. He says to him in verse nine, “And he said to me, ‘Write, “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”’”³⁹

Just briefly, these invited guests represent the Old Testament saint whose bodies will be resurrected at the end of the tribulation in connection to Israel's restoration as we see in Daniel 12:1-2. You remember John the Baptist is a prime example of this. Jesus described him as the greatest of all Old Testament believers in Matthew 11:11 and yet John described himself in John 3:29 as a friend of the bridegroom. So these invited guests will include those Old Testament saints, but also the tribulation saints who will have died and have been glorified as well as those who are still alive upon the earth when Christ returns.

Now, I would caution you. Be careful with this marriage bride imagery. You can carry it too far. You can think that somehow the bridal Church is superior to the rest of the Church, but that is not the case. This is merely metaphorical imagery. Ultimately Scripture makes it clear that the bride will include all of the redeemed down through redemptive history.

And finally the angel says in verse nine, “These are true words of God.”⁴⁰ In other words, God has said it, you can count on it. And I love this. Verse 10 we see that John falls at his feet to worship him. I mean, obviously John gets caught up in it all. It is overwhelming to him. He collapses under the weight of the glory that he has witnessed. And the angel says, “Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus.”⁴¹

It is fascinating, isn't it? Like us, the angels are the Lord's servants. They, too, give witness of Jesus. And the angel says, “Worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”⁴² Said differently, “He who has the spirit of prophecy will convey Jesus' testimony.” That is the idea. And, indeed, the Spirit of God is the one that is working in and through the prophet. He is the source. Worship him.”

Dear Christian, as we close this morning we don't have to wait until this day to worship him, to give him praise. Let's give God praise today and every day of our life for his work in salvation, for the judgment of God upon the wicked, for his reign of God that will come upon the earth and certainly for the love of God for his bride.

³⁸ 1 John 3:2.

³⁹ Revelation 19:9.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Revelation 19:10.

⁴² Ibid.

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Finally, dear friends, I hope you know my Savior. I hope you really know him. I hope you really love him, not this phony “churchianity” that is so indicative of our culture. I hope your soul craves the pardon and the forgiveness that can only be found in the blood of Christ who willingly suffered and died in your place.

If you have never trusted him I plead with you to do so today before it is too late.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for these eternal truths. I pray that they will stimulate great praise within our hearts. And I pray, Lord, that it will translate into actually how we live, that we might live out the gospel and that others would be able to look at us and see the transforming power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly for it is in your name that I pray. Amen.

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