

Saints Triumphant
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You're Invited to the Wedding!

Pastor Michael Ewart
Revelation 19:1-9

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Life is discouraging for the Christian. Anti Christian government. False churches and false teachers leading millions astray. Instead of standing up for the truth of God, we see individuals and organized religions compromising the truth. Where the truth is held fast, we usually see persecution. Everywhere there is unfaithfulness to the one true God. Materialism is rampant. Humanism in our schools.

And all of this trickles down in out our own lives. Even when we manage to live faithfully according the will of God, it seems like there's no reward for it. In fact sometimes we will suffer for it. And we suffering a sinful world just like everyone else. Sickness, financial losses, conflict, pain... and also death.

Have you ever felt like giving up? Have you ever been tempted to doubt that everything our life is built on is true? After all, if it is, why do things look the way they look? Why are things so bad... even evil. Why does it seem like injustice reigns instead of justice? Why does hate seem to conquer love so often?

Are you feeling like a worn out, beat up Christian? Are you battle weary? Are you starting to go numb, indifferent... eyes glossing over? Are you feeling hopeless, helpless and like you've hit a dead end? If you're not there now, I know you either have been, or you will be. Life on this side of paradise can get very ugly.

Friends, listen. God knew that we would sometimes feel like this as we lived out our lives in the valley of the shadow of death. He knew we would feel like we're losing the battle. He knew we might get discouraged. So in his wisdom, he gave some words to the apostle John for our comfort. Really the whole book of Revelation was given to John as an encouragement to the church on earth which remains constantly under attack. Constantly barraged. We're going to turn our attention to Revelation 19:1-9

Revelation 19:1-9 After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah!"

What's going on here? What is John seeing? Remember that Revelation is a series of visions that God gave to the apostle John when he was old and exiled to the island of Patmos. John was persecuted. The church was being persecuted. She needed hope and encouragement. This was it! John gets a glimpse of heaven. But not just a view of God in heaven. No, John gets a glimpse of post-Judgment Day heaven. But actually, what strikes him isn't what he sees, but what he hears. The roar of a great multitude shouting. So this isn't a heaven inhabited by God and a few angels. Think Memorial Stadium on game day. This is a huge crowd.

And again, it's the sound that he notices. You've probably heard what it sounds like when a stadium full of people are shouting and cheering. That's what John's hearing. But they're not shouting and cheering for some sports team. They're shouting and cheering for God. They say: "**Hallelujah!**" That's an Old Testament word that means, "Praise the Lord!" In fact, Revelation 19 is the first time the word occurs in the whole New Testament. This capacity crowd is praising God.

For what are they praising God? **Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants."**

The reason for the shouting is the condemnation of the great prostitute. Who is this? Throughout Scripture, this picture is used. God's faithful people are his bride. All who are unfaithful, or who oppose him, or who believe in other gods are often called prostitutes. In the book of Revelation, the great prostitute is used for the antichristian governments, or even false teaching churches that lead people away from God and persecute Christians to try to get them to fall away. The great prostitute is a symbol of the leaders of the unfaithful, antichristian forces that make life miserable for Christ's Church.

So here's the thing: Do they have real power here on earth now? Yes! Do they do damage? Yes. Are they sometimes successful in their efforts to oppose God and his people and to destroy the souls of man? Yes. When we see the enemies of God succeeding, we are greatly discouraged, aren't we? But not in eternity! Once Judgment Day comes, everything is set straight. God's enemies are judged. So the triumphant church in heaven is praising God because of **salvation** (rescue was needed and given.) They praise him for his **glory** (all acknowledgment must go to God.) And they praise him for his **power**. (The foe was strong, God was greater.) The victory is complete! The Church militant (battling) has become the Church triumphant (victorious)! The blood of all God's faithful people which was shed by God's enemies is avenged! God is praised for his justice!

Honestly, here on earth, that's a little hard for us to grasp. We praise God especially for his love, mercy and forgiveness. But doesn't a part of you long for justice? How long with the evil succeed? Not forever! One day we will gather with the crowd praising God for his justice!

And again they shouted: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever."

Imagine God's judgment over the wicked reigning down on them. The smoke is still going up from his destructive force. And it will continue to forever. The punishment is eternal, just as the reward of heaven is eternal for believers. Again, this justice of God is the reason for the multitudes in heaven to shout, "Praise the Lord!"

The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: "Amen, Hallelujah!"

12 + 12. A symbol of the Old Testament church (12 tribes) plus the New Testament church (12 apostles). The four living creatures a symbol of the created world. They join in this praise, and add their approval and praise with an , "Amen! Hallelujah!"

Then a voice came from the throne, saying: "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!"

Now a voice the throne, God himself, verifies this praise and the reason for it is good and right. He encourages the continuance of this praise.

Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, (again, the image of countless people, a massive crowd join their voices together in words of song and praise) **shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns.** Do you see the significance? Have you ever doubted during your life here on earth that the Lord God Almighty reigns? Have you ever wanted to ask the question, "God, if you are ruling all things, and you love me, and you are all powerful, then why are you allowing this to happen? Please excuse my weakness, but God, it doesn't seem like you're there, or in control, or that you care!" Will it help you to know that you won't always think this way? Will it help you to know that one day you will shout with a massive crowd of people with total confidence that our Lord God Almighty reigns?

The multitude continues: **“Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! [Why?] “For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)**

Old Testament, God’s chosen people are called the bride of the LORD. Israel’s unfaithfulness was time and again compared to prostitution! So also in the N.T. The Church is the bride of Christ. So here’s the image portrayed here. Christ has betrothed himself to us. We are not yet living with him in eternity. He is coming to take us to himself. We must prepare ourselves. But then comes Judgment Day. But for believers, God would have us think of it not as Judgment Day, but as our wedding day! Christ our groom has come for us! The Church, his bride has been eagerly anticipating and waiting (remember the Gospel lesson.) And why is she ready for the groom?

Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) There is a question here as to the right translation. The NIV went with “righteous acts” of the saints. I don’t think that really fits the context, or the rest of Scripture very well. This could also be translated, “Fine linen stands for the “verdicts of not guilty” of the saints.” In other words, believers stand ready, dressed in bright, clean, pure robes of righteousness, not because of the good things we have done, but because we are clothed in a not-guilty verdict. These clothes were given us at our baptism. We were clothed in Christ. We were washed in the blood of the lamb. Jesus’ perfection is poured out on us through faith. Our guilt is removed through his death on the cross. We are declared not guilty when we trust in Christ Jesus, and are found in him. God has provided us with this garment so we are ready for the wedding feast of the Lamb! Apart from Christ, we would never be ready.

Then the angel said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”

Blessed, happy are those invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb. Judgment Day for these people is actually their wedding day. And here is the good news: You are invited! **“These are the true words of God.”**

We sometimes talk about the inspiration of Scriptures. How it is true. How important it is to stay true to the Word of God. How many people drift from the truth. Many churches have introduced false teaching. So what? **The true word of God is to make us sure of the happiness before us because of the atoning work of the Savior.** Without that truth a person may not receive the invitation! Without the truth, a person may lose the invitation! Without the truth, the fine, bright, clean clothes, the verdict of not guilty, may be lost! Hope may be lost. Faith may be lost. What confidence comes to us when we hear, “These are the true words of God!”

Now... do you have a good picture in your head of this vision John saw? You know what, visualizing it isn’t enough. The most important part of John’s vision was what he heard. What I would like to do now is listen to a powerful piece of music... the Hallelujah chorus from Handel’s Messiah. Composed in 1741, it reflects in song some of the truths we just learned. It allows us to hear what John was talking about, and not just visualize it. The portion we’re going to listen to is 4 minutes long. While it plays, would you just relax, and visualize yourself in heaven, with the multitudes at the throne of God praising him for his justice, power, salvation. Knowing that you are free and safe forever in God’s eternal presence. Whatever has you stressed or worried or depressed or anxious, let this sound of your eternal future help anchor God’s good promises in your heart!

Amen