

FGBC: Just Judgment: Getting Hitched

Revelation 19:1-10

March 22, 2020

Dan Hoffman

Welcome again to Lighthouse/Fort George and our first video recorded sermon. I want to give some special thanks to all those who have helped pull this off this week. And I also want to ask for your patience as we get the hang of this. Please let us know about any glitches you experience while trying to watch.

...

So the medium is different. We are all sitting in our homes instead of gathering together at church. Many of us are by ourselves or just with family members. Some of you may have invited others over from the church to watch with you – thanks for doing that. And I'm sure all of this feels surreal. It's certainly surreal for me. I get to watch church with you all this weekend – too bad we couldn't find a better speaker.

The medium's different, but the message is the same. Jesus has this. Even though the world is quite literally coming apart at the seams, He is in control. That's the message of the Bible, and that's very much the message of Revelation.

...

If you're just tuning in with us this week we've been in a very timely series through the Revelation that Jesus gave to the Apostle John while he was imprisoned on the island of Patmos in around 96AD.

And today we are in the first 10 verses in chapter 19, please grab your Bibles and follow along – Revelation 19. We are getting close to the end now. We are beginning the homeward stretch of the journey. And this is not just because there are only four chapters left in the book, but because at this point the anticipation builds very quickly.

So, if you are able, would you stand with me as we read Revelation 19 verses 1 to 10. Hear now the word of the Lord:

[Read Revelation 19:1-10]

Now as we read that you probably noticed the word "Hallelujah." Hallelujah is one of those words that everyone has heard before whether you go to church or not. Leonard Cohen sings it, Cold Play sings it. It's one of those words that has a nice ring to it even though most people don't know what it means.

It turns out it's a Hebrew word, here written in Greek, that means "You praise God." Hallelu is "You praise" and Jah is God or more exactly "YHWH." In King James it's "Praise ye the LORD." And it pops up four times in this text. And it sits at the venter of what this passage is about because it points to two celebrations or feasts that tell us the end is near.¹

¹ Outline adapted from Darrell Johnson's "Discipleship on the Edge"

Now any first century Jew would recognize, by the word Hallelujah, that this text was pointing to the feast of Passover. Of course none of us are first century Jews and so this might have gone over your head like it did mine until I started studying this.

What I didn't realize on my first read was that this word is totally out of place here. And that's because it's an Old Testament word, not a New Testament word. In fact these 10 verses are the only place in the New Testament where it is used. But it pops up all over the Psalms and especially in Psalms 113-118 which are called the Hallel Psalms.

And these Psalms were sung at Passover. People would sing them as they were celebrating the Passover feast which was all about remembering that God had delivered them from Egypt. This is what Jesus would have sung with His disciples after the Last Supper.

...

Now here's the connection to Revelation 19. In chapters 17 and 18 John was describing the fall of Babylon – we talked about that last week. And so it's appropriate to sing Hallelujah here because God's people are being delivered. God is bringing them out of the city of Babylon and into the city of God. This is what happens at the end.

So this is like a new Passover celebration, a new exodus. Out of Babylon and into life with God. And everyone who gets invited to this feast – verse 9 – is blessed. That's the first feast that's pointed to with the word Hallelujah. But there's another.

...

The second feast that is being alluded to here is the typical Jewish wedding festival. And we know this because John calls this the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

...

So throughout the Old Testament the arrival of God's kingdom is spoken about as people entering into a great wedding feast. For example in Isaiah we read:

In Jerusalem, the LORD of Heaven's Armies
will spread a wonderful feast
for all the people of the world.
It will be a delicious banquet
with clear, well-aged wine and choice meat. (Isaiah 25:6)

That sounds awesome, especially since Prince George will be eating mostly toilet paper over the next few weeks. But what's even more relevant is that Jesus picks this idea up in "The Parable of the Marriage Feast" that we get in Matthew 22.

So Jesus starts "The Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a king who prepared a great wedding feast for His son." Here Jesus is talking about the Father and Himself. And He says one day the Father is going to throw a big party because I'm going to get married. That's going to be a celebration!

And this is what Jesus is alluding to in Revelation 19, And so the multitude cries out – verse 6 – "Hallelujah, for the Lord God Almighty reigns."

You see the Dragon has tried to topple Him and failed. The Beasts have sought to undermine Him and failed. The great King reigns unstoppable. And now the wedding of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. It's time to party!

...

So the imagery we get here is a combination of the Passover feast and a Jewish wedding.

Now here's the point. Yes, this is talking about the future return of Christ. But Jesus, and the Bible aren't saying "Here, look into the crystal ball and know the future – isn't that interesting?" No! He tells us this because He wants us to do something right now. He wants us to be disciples.

And I think this makes sense since Jesus' great commission doesn't say: "Go figure out what is going to happen in the future" – that's not what this is about. It says:

Go and make disciples of all the nations.... Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

So following Jesus is about being a disciple and making more disciples. And this is what Revelation is about too. It asks us which city we are going to live towards – are we going to orient ourselves towards the harlot or towards the bride?

Now the picture of God's people being His bride isn't new either. It shows up throughout Revelation and the rest of scripture. So for example when Jesus wrote His letter to the church of Ephesus, remember what His complaint was? He said:

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.
(Revelation 2:4)

What's Jesus saying? He's saying "Hey, you Ephesians. You've got all sorts of great programs in your church, but you aren't in love with Me anymore. And that matters to Jesus because Jesus wants a bride.

The Old Testament is full of this too. So in Isaiah we read:

Fear not.... for your Creator will be your husband;
the LORD of Heaven's Armies is His name!...
For the LORD has called you back from your grief—
as though you were a young wife... (Isaiah 54:4-6)

God loves us. These are tender words. But then look at how God responds when His people began to center their lives on other things instead of Him. He says:

"How can I pardon you?
For even your children have turned from Me.
They have sworn by gods that are not gods at all!
I fed my people until they were full.
But they thanked Me by committing adultery
and lining up at the brothels.

They are well-fed, lusty stallions,
 each neighing for his neighbor's wife.
 Should I not punish them for this?" says the LORD.
 "Should I not avenge Myself against such a nation? (Jeremiah 5:7-9)

Do you see how the language God uses to describe the relationship between Him and us is marriage language? And so when we turn from Him He sees it as adultery.

...

That's strong language. And then the New Testament takes this language and applies it to Jesus and the church. And this is huge! This is the New Testament claiming Jesus is God.

And there are tons of passages I could give you on this, I'll just give you one. Paul says:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. (Ephesians 5:25-27)

Here's the point: God's people, Old and New Testaments, are the bride of Christ.

...

Now, take that with you, I want to unpack some of the marriage customs of first-century Judaism so that we can fully appreciate Revelation 19.

...

Here we go: So there were three steps to getting married in the first century. There was the engagement, which they called a betrothal. Then there was the preparation for the wedding. And then there was the wedding feast itself.

So a betrothal would begin when the prospective groom would leave his father's house and travel, with his best man, to the prospective bride's house. And there he would make a deal with the bride's father. (Now resist the temptation to be repulsed at how backward this is compared to 21st century woman's liberation. This was culture. What I want you to see is the parallel to what Christ has done for us.)

So in particular the groom and the father-in-law would agree upon the dowry. In the first century a wife was "bought with a price."

Now as soon as this price was paid the marriage was legal – they were husband and wife. But they wouldn't live together for a long time yet. Instead they would be "consecrated" to each other – or "set apart" for each other from that time forward. And a "new covenant" would be established between them which they would seal by drinking a cup of wine and saying: "This cup is a new covenant."

Now nobody here, or watching this, is a first century Jew, but if you've been around church this language should sound like communion.

...

Alright, at this point the groom would leave the bride's house and return to his father's house. And the couple would avoid seeing each other for the duration of the betrothal. And most betrothals would last a year – try to reconcile that with dating culture today!

And during this time the groom would prepare a room for the bride in his father's house – literally he's build an addition on the back of dad's house – there were millennials back then too. "We aren't moving out, we're staying here." Anyway, at the same time the bride would be preparing herself for the wedding. But while they wouldn't see each other they were legally bound such that any relationship break down at this point would be considered divorce, and any other relationship a person entered into would be adultery. That's betrothal.

...

At the end of the betrothal period, the bridegroom, dressed in his festive clothing, and accompanied by his best man and friends, would make his way back to the bride's house. Now they would let the bride's family know roughly when this was going to happen so they could be ready, but they wouldn't disclose the exact day or hour.

In fact, in order to add to the element of surprise, he would often arrive at midnight. And his arrival would be announced with a shout "Here is the bridegroom! Come out and meet him!

And the bride would put on a veil and accompanied by her maidens carrying lamps, would come out. And the groom would "take" his wife back to his father's house. And his father would put on a feast that would last sometimes 7-14 days. Imagine the tab for that party!

...

Now, jump with me to the day of Jesus' arrest. He's in the upper room with His disciples having the Last Supper. He has already broken the bread and passed the cup saying "This cup is a new covenant between God and His people- an agreement confirmed with My blood."² And then He says to them:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in Me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am. (John 14:1-3)

...

Do you hear what Jesus is saying? He's the husband. He's the bridegroom. We are the bride. He's paid the purchase price and sealed the engagement with a cup of wine. And now He's preparing a place for us so He can come back and take us to His Father's house.

This is why everyone in Revelation 19 is shouting – let's celebrate –Hallelujah! It's because the time has come for the marriage feast. So in verse 7 it says "Let us rejoice and be glad... for the wedding of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready."

² Luke 22:20

...

Now this is the day we look forward to. The day Jesus comes back. But what do we do with this today? What does the text call us to? I want to leave you with three things:

First, if you are someone who has pledged yourself to Jesus, then you can have confidence – you can live in the confidence – that He loves you. The Lamb loves you.

...

Throughout scripture Jesus says some incredible things about us. He calls us friends. He calls us sisters and brothers. He even calls us children of God. These are intimate expressions. But here the metaphor is even more powerful. Jesus loves His church as His bride.

...

If you're married today do you remember the days and weeks leading up to your wedding? Do you remember how you longed for the day to arrive? I remember one night I was sleeping and had a dream that I was lying beside my bride to be. And I rolled over to give her a hug and smashed into the wall. I had to turn the lights on to make sure I hadn't put a hole in it. Friends, Jesus longs to be united with His bride. He longs for you.

...

Just a note here: what if you aren't sure whether you are part of the bride yet. What if you haven't been betrothed to Jesus yet. If this is you then pray "Jesus, I accept your purchase price on my behalf. Thank you for dying for me, a sinner. I choose now to live for Your glory. Help me to do this. Help me, by Your Spirit living inside me, to prepare myself for Your return." If you pray that and give yourself to living for His return then you are part of the bride.

...

So first we can have great confidence that Jesus loves us. Now second, since we are betrothed to the Lamb, following Jesus today – discipleship – means loyalty. It's an issue of faithfulness. We don't want to be found cheating with another lover when He returns. And Babylon the harlot that we looked at last week, is powerful and seductive. She wants to deceive us into thinking we can have her now while engaged to the Lamb. We can worship Jesus and live for the pleasures of this world too.

But that's Satan's lie, and when you put it that way doesn't it sound ridiculous? You can't be engaged to two people. You can either have the harlot or the Lamb.

One hates you and just wants to use you. The other loves you so much that He gave His life for you. Which one will you orient your life towards?

...

Finally the call is for us to be ready. The Bridegroom has gone away to prepare a place for us, and He is coming back. It's going to be soon. But we don't know the day or hour. So prepare yourself today. Pursue holiness. Live in a way that you know would please Him so that when He arrives He will find His bride to be wearing fine linen, bright and clean. Give yourself to living for Jesus because, Hallelujah, we're getting hitched!