

THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB

Revelation 19:1-10

Introduction:

Almost 300 years ago, in 1741, George Frederick Handel composed the "Hallelujah Chorus" as part of his classic work, "The Messiah." David Levy tells this story, which is taken from a book of illustrations:

On March 23, 1743, The Messiah was performed for the first time in London. In attendance was King George II of England. He was deeply moved as the "Hallelujah Chorus" was being sung, and at the words, "For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth," the king rose to his feet and stood until the end of the cantata. From that time to this, it has been customary to stand whenever the "Hallelujah Chorus" is performed. When Handel composed The Messiah, he was so immersed for the 23 days it took to write, that he hardly ate or slept. At times he would run to the harpsichord, waving his arms and singing, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" Handel said, "I think I did see all heaven before me, and the great God Himself."

The text for *The Messiah* was written by Charles Jennens and was intended to depict Christ's life, death, resurrection, eternal glory and the concept of redemption. After sending the text to Handel, Jennens wrote to a friend, "I hope [Handel] will lay out his whole genius and skill upon it, that the composition may excel all his former compositions, as the subject excels every other subject. The subject is Messiah."

Without a doubt, the crowning piece in the entire composition is the "Hallelujah Chorus" which is the final piece in Part II of *The Messiah*. The words are taken primarily from three verses in the book of Revelation (11:15; 19:6,16). It is in Rev. 19 that we find the only use of the word "Hallelujah" in the New Testament.

That word "hallelujah" is an interesting word. It is a universal word, essentially the same in any language. It is a compound word, composed of two Hebrew words – *hawlal*, which means praise or glory, and *jah*, a contraction that is a shortened form of Yahweh (Jehovah), which is the name of God, the LORD. So hallelujah literally means "Praise the Lord." It is transliterated from the Hebrew into Greek and into English and many other languages.

This morning we come to the 19th chapter of the Book of Revelation. It is a welcome change from the past number of chapters. We have spent many weeks looking at the terrible events of the Tribulation period. It will be a time of unparalleled disaster and catastrophe, as those who have rejected God find themselves facing both the wrath of God and the fury and madness of Satan.

But chapters 17 and 18 gave us a quick overview of the ruling system during the Great Tribulation. Chapter 17 outlined the rise and fall of the Great Harlot, the one-world religious system that came to power and then was destroyed as the kings and the beast turned against her. Then last week, as we looked at chapter 18, we saw the final destruction of Babylon at the end of the Tribulation. Let me just clarify something here. There are differing views on whether there is a literal rebuilt city of Babylon during the Tribulation. I believe that Babylon will be and even now is being rebuilt. But the destruction of Babylon in chapter 18 is more than just the destruction of a city. That city represents an entire political, economic and commercial system that will rule the earth under the authority of the Antichrist. It will come crashing down and be destroyed at the end of that seven-year Tribulation period.

But now, the way is prepared for the return of Christ. In Acts 1, as the disciples watched Jesus ascend into heaven they were given the assurance by the angel that one day he would return. Jesus himself made it clear that one day he would come back. His second coming would be much different than the first. He told his followers that just when it seems that things can't get any worse, and people's hearts are fainting with fear that "...then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." (Luke 21:27)

That coming is described in Rev. 19. But as a prelude to that coming, we are first given another picture, which we are going to look at this morning. That prelude to the return of the Messiah to earth is the marriage of the Lamb. It is a time of great rejoicing and celebration in heaven. All the hosts of heaven, the saints and the angels are involved as they join together in worship of the Lamb. These first 10 verses of Rev. 19 can be divided into two parts. In verses 1-5 we see the singing of the multitudes, and in verses 6-10 we see the marriage celebration.

In Praise of Our God

In these verses there are four hallelujahs. These expressions and exclamations of praise and worship involve all the hosts of heaven—saints and angels. We find reference in these verses to a great multitude in heaven (possibly the martyred Tribulation saints), the twenty-four elders (representing the church, who sing the song of redemption in ch. 5), the four living creatures (the seraphim, surrounding the throne of God), and servants, small and great (v. 5). These would be all the servants of heaven, whatever their status.

So then, the question is, for what are they lifting their voices in praise and worship. There are a number of reasons.

The first hallelujah is for the fall of the Great Harlot, Babylon, the counterfeit church (see chapter 17). *Read vv. 1-2* – there is praise for God’s salvation, and for the righteousness of his judgments. He has rightly judged the false religious system that corrupted the earth with her sexual and spiritual fornication.

The second hallelujah is for the destruction of the city of Babylon and all that she represents—the political, economic and commercial center of the Antichrist’s godless system (see chapter 18). *Read v. 3* – we saw last week in chapter 18 the destruction of Babylon as the whole system disintegrated into smoke and ashes.

The third hallelujah is focused on God himself. *Read vv. 4-5*. The scene is reminiscent of the scene around the throne in chapter 4. All the hosts of heaven, along with the saints of all the ages are gathered in worship of the One seated on the throne – Almighty God himself.

The fourth hallelujah is the preparation for the marriage of the Messiah to his bride and the marriage supper of the Lamb. That leads us into the second part of this amazing scene.

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

Read v. 6 - those are the words Handel used in his “Hallelujah Chorus.” The KJV says, “For the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth!” Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! He is the one worthy of all honor and glory and majesty, for He is eternal.

Read vv. 7-9 - In order to really comprehend what is happening in these verses, it is first necessary to understand the Jewish wedding system that was common in Jesus’ day and was still used among Jews until about a hundred years ago. The Jewish marriage system had four distinct stages, all of which can be easily seen in the relationship of the Church as the Bride of the Messiah.

In the **first** stage, the father of the groom made *the arrangement* for the bride and paid the bride price. This first stage might happen when the children are very young, or as late as one year prior to the marriage. It was quite possible for a long period of time to transpire between the first and second stage. The minimum was one year. Often the bride and groom did not even meet each other until their wedding day. This time between the arranging of the marriage and the actual wedding was called the betrothal. The groom would spend this betrothal period to prepare a home for his bride, attached to his father’s house.

Eventually came the **second** stage, known as *the fetching of the bride*. In this second stage, the groom would go to the home of the bride in order to fetch her and bring her to his home. This was often done in accompaniment with a wedding procession. However, the father of the groom determined when the fetching would occur. Furthermore, it had to wait until the groom had a place prepared for her.

Then came the **third** stage, which was *the marriage ceremony*, which was preceded by the writing of a marriage covenant, a willing agreement between the bride and groom that outlined the obligations of the husband and the rights of the wife. The bride would also prepare for the ceremony by a ritual immersion for ritual cleansing. In biblical times the ceremony was conducted at the home of the groom, attended by the immediate family, two witnesses, and a few close friends. The couple would then leave the guests to go to a place prepared where they would actually consummate the marriage.

Finally came the **fourth** stage, *the marriage supper or feast*, which would last for as long as seven days. Many others not invited to the ceremony were invited to the feast. After this week of feasting and celebration, the new couple would settle into their new home, which had been prepared for them by the bridegroom.

It is easy to see all four of those stages in the relationship of the church and the Messiah. **First**, the Father of the Groom made *the arrangement* for the Bride and paid the bride price. In this case, the bride price was the blood of the Messiah. Ephesians 5:25 tells us that “...*Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*” While the first stage has already been completed, the other three stages are still future.

The **second** stage was *the fetching of the bride*. Even as a long period of time could transpire between the first and second stages in the Jewish system, so it has been with the Church. Almost two thousand years have passed since the first stage was accomplished. Someday the second stage will take place, when Jesus will come in order to fetch the Bride to His home. He promised in John 14 that “...*I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.*” This fetching of the Bride is referred to today as the Rapture of the Church and is described in I Thessalonians 4:13-18.

The **third** stage, *the marriage ceremony*, will take place in Heaven just prior to the Second Coming at the end of the Tribulation. This is what we have described in Revelation 19:6-8. The wedding announcement will be made (v. 6) and the Bride will finally be made ready (v. 7). The reason the Bride will now be fully ready for the marriage ceremony is because she will have her entire bridal gown on (v. 8). This bridal gown is said to be *the righteous acts of the saints*. This shows that the process of sanctification will be completed, for all that will be showing on the Bride are her righteous acts. But this also indicates that the marriage ceremony takes place after the Judgment Seat of the Messiah, when the saints are rewarded for their deeds on earth (I Cor. 3:10-15). All the wood, hay, and stubble has been burned away and all the gold, silver, and precious stones have been purified. This corresponds to the ritual cleansing of the Jewish wedding system.

After the marriage ceremony will come the **fourth** stage, *the marriage feast*, talked about in Revelation 19:9. *Read verse 9.* Once again the Apostle John is given the command to write something down. And this is the fourth of seven beatitudes given in the book of Revelation. “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” So who are the invited guests? There are a couple of schools of thought on this, but I would suggest that these are the OT saints and the Tribulation saints. The church—all the saints saved during the church age in which we now live—cannot be the invited guests. The church is the bride, the one being united in marriage to the

Lamb. So the invited guests are all of the saints from outside of the church age. What a glorious celebration that is going to be, when the bride of Christ is presented in purity, perfected and made ready and the marriage of the Lamb is celebrated in heaven.

At the revelation of this glorious event, John falls at the feet of the angel in worship, but he is sharply rebuked. *Read v. 10* – God is the only one worthy of worship. This entire revelation is about Jesus, the Messiah. He is the fulfillment of all prophetic truth.

Conclusion

There are a couple of things that stand out to me by way of application from our text today. The **first** is the anticipation that this should arouse within us as believers. Are you looking forward with excitement to that day when we will meet our Lord and Savior and be united with Him as his bride for all eternity. What a celebration that will be! This marriage supper of the Lamb will usher in the millennial kingdom, which in turn will lead into eternity in the new heaven and the new earth.

The **second** truth that cries out to me for attention is encased in that statement, “...*his Bride has made herself ready...*” What are we doing to prepare ourselves for that great day?

Read v. 8 again and discuss – the righteousness of Christ ⇔ our righteous deeds... Are you living your life in such a way as to be prepared for that glorious wedding day? Am I?

Close with invitation...