

**Heavenly Hallelujahs, Part 2**

Scripture: Revelation 19:7-10

Code: 66-67

We now come to the time when we look together at the Word of God and what a great evening and wonderful service we've shared together. Now to be culminating in this look at the great book of Revelation. Revelation chapter 19 verses 7 through 10 is our text to study tonight, as we continue in our study of the apocalypse, the revelation of Jesus Christ.

For months we have been understanding the terrible wrath of God that is coming on the world. We have covered thirteen chapters that describe the judgment that is to come. It is sad, it is burdensome, it is painful to realize what is coming to those who reject the Savior. But as much space as all that judgment takes up in the text of Revelation, may I remind you it is not the theme of Revelation. Even though from chapter 6 through chapter 18 we have pretty much uninterrupted judgment, that is not the theme of this book. The book is about the revelation of Jesus Christ. The theme is the coming of Jesus Christ in glory. All the scenes of judgment as vast and comprehensive and detailed as they are, are simply a black backdrop against which the glory of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ can be set. That's the real theme. We've gone through the sealed judgments and the trumpet judgments and the bowl judgments, we've come to the time when the judgments are over and Jesus Christ will appear here in chapter 19 and verse 11.

Before that appearance in verse 11 there is a time for praise and that takes up the first ten verses of chapter 19. Judgment is finished. It is time for the King and His Kingdom. It is time for praise. So as chapter 19 opens this is what we read, "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 bondservants 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 bondservants, you who fear Him, the small and the great.' And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude and as a sound of many waters and as the sound of a mighty peals of thunder saying, 'Hallelujah, for the Lord our God, the Almighty reigns.'"

In anticipation of the theme of this book coming to its realization, the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the host of heaven realize the long awaited reality is about to happen. And they burst into praise. It is rejoicing that has been anticipated since the plan of redemption began in the Garden when

paradise was originally lost and they can now sense that paradise is about to be regained. It is the time for the Lord to arrive on earth who will destroy all the remaining ungodly, who will defeat and imprison Satan and his demons and set up His Kingdom on the earth and reign as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Before the actual arrival of Christ there in chapter 19 verse 11, before the actual establishment of the Kingdom and flows in...which flows in to the eternal state, we have this moment of praise. We are taken to heaven again and the hallelujahs of celestial joy occupy our attention in chapter 19.

In those six verses it is no wonder they rejoice. They rejoice in verse 1 because full salvation is come. Salvation and glory and power belong to our God. They rejoice in verse 2 because righteousness and justice prevail. His judgments are true and righteous. They rejoice in verse 3 because rebellion is ended as the smoke of the last rebellion of man's day ascends. And they rejoice in verses 4 to 6 because God is in absolute control, He is the Lord God Almighty who reigns.

And so there is reason for heavenly joy in the anticipation of the great realities that take place when the Lord Jesus comes. When the great Babylon falls, the final form of man's dominion in the world, when it falls it will be God's Kingdom to take its place, God's Kingdom, ruled over by the Lord Jesus Christ. And the prayers of the saints for peace and for righteousness and for equity and for justice and for truth will all be answered. All of those of us who have prayed that God would make a world of peace and that God would make a world of righteousness and justice, a world of equity and a world where truth dominated will be answered, tyrants and despots and godless governments and inept judges and purveyors of evil and wicked philosophers and lying teachers shall be no more. Kings and presidents and prime ministers and leaders are all replaced by the rule of Jesus Christ. There will be no more war to scar the earth. And the altered and restored universe will drip with righteousness and truth.

And it is in view of this great prospect, this great reality that John catapulted, as it were, by the Spirit of God into the future hears heaven break loose in thunderous praise. But some of this praise is directed at the Lord for one other glorious accomplishment...one other glorious accomplishment. What is it? Look at verse 7, "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. 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 the true words of God.'"

Another reason for hallelujah. Hallelujah because salvation has come, hallelujah because righteousness and justice prevails, hallelujah because rebellion is ended, hallelujah because God reigns, hallelujah because the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.

I believe this wonderful text invites us to our own wedding. The image here is obviously the image of a marriage. That's what it says. The image of a marriage is often used in Scripture...often used. In fact, you have to be very careful because it is so frequently used as an illustration that some people pull all the marriage illustrations together and try to create a theology out of it. And I'll explain a little bit later why you can't do that.

But marriage is a familiar concept to any student of Scripture. The image of marriage is used often for illustrations of one kind or another. Why? Because a marriage was the single greatest celebration known in that part of the ancient world. A marriage was the greatest social event that ever happened. And it still is today, for most people. People spent more money and more time and more effort on a wedding than any other event in their social life...and they still do today. In fact, I'm told that most weddings cost more than most childbirths and certainly take a lot more planning.

In ancient times marriages were even grander. We think they're pretty grand today but they're not like they used to be. They were more elaborate, more grand, more involved. They lasted longer than any marriages do today. Ancient weddings in Bible times were structured around three elements...three elements. First, betrothal. That means to be engaged, or the old word espoused. This was a legally binding contract signed by both sets of parents contracting the marriage of their children. You might be interested to know that very often those contracts were signed before the children were born. It was kind of like, "When I have a son I want him to marry your daughter when you have a daughter." Because family was the most important thing. It was more important to choose the family than to choose the individual. That makes a lot of sense. This was a binding, legal engagement and it is a very reasonable thing.

Now not always did this occur before the children were born, it did often. Many times it would occur when two sets of parents would get together and realize that there was a great affinity in the families, common values, common purposes in life and that there was obviously a potential of a wonderful friendship among those families and a wonderful relationship between their children. And so they would contract that marriage. They were wise enough to know that if you build...try to build a marriage on the flurries and the panics of romantic love, you're going to have some major disappointment. But if you have the solidarity of values and standards and morals and beliefs that pass between families, there's something cohesive in that relationship.

So betrothal was a very, very important issue. The second component in marriage was what we'll call presentation. Now the presentation was a time of festivities. Just prior to the actual wedding itself there was a time of festivities which led up to the actual wedding ceremony which culminated those festivities. And those festivities could last several days. In fact, there's a lot of literature to say they could last a week. You think it cost a lot to marry off your daughter now because you have to spend so much money for the wedding, imagine if you had to entertain the guests and feed them and house

them for a week. If a marriage occurred between somebody who was very wealthy or between somebody who had royal blood and was in some kind of role as a king or a leader, the marriage might last...or the presentation anyway might last several weeks.

Here's another little interesting note. The bridegroom was the center, not the bride. The bridegroom was the center of the event. And he would present his bride to the gathered guests and the gathered friends and they would feast together for this prolonged period of time. She was still, of course, a virgin because the legally binding contract did not allow for the consummation of the marriage, they still lived in their own homes apart from one another until the presentation. The bridegroom then would go to the house of the bride and he would get the bride along with her maidens and take them to his house and there the festivities would begin as he presented his lovely bride.

That leads to the third component in a marriage which was the ceremony, the actual exchanging of vows. There would be at the end of the period of feasting, the period of presentation when all the people would come and they would meet the bride and see her in all her glory and her beauty and they would talk with the families and all that would go on, at the end of that time there would be a final meal and then there would be the exchange of vows. The friend of the bridegroom, another name for the best man, would take the hand of the bride and clasp it into the hand of the groom. They would say their final vows and hopefully all the guests would leave. And the friend of the bridegroom would be sure they did and then the marriage would be consummated.

The ceremony and that final hour after that final meal when the vows were shared and the marriage was then consummated was the main event. That's what really brought them together. And by the way, understanding this is why we understand why Joseph was so upset when Mary was found to be with child because they were only betrothed and they had not been married. And that's why the options for him for her were death or divorce because she had violated a legal contract, at least on the surface it appeared to be so, before he was instructed by an angel as to the reality of her having conceived by the Holy Spirit.

So the last meal of the presentation festivities then comes the vows, then the consummation. This is very familiar imagery. The Lord used it in relationship to His church. In 2 Corinthians, for example, the Apostle Paul talking about the church in most beautiful language says, "I betrothed you to one husband that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin." There you have the betrothal and the presentation in one verse. Paul says I gave you the gospel as a kind of a way to betroth you, to engage you to Christ and to present you to Him as a virgin is my desire...to keep you pure through that betrothal period and to present you as a virgin, pure before Him at the time of the ceremony.

Obviously Paul was concerned about the Corinthians because in the next verse he said, "I'm afraid, I'm afraid that the serpent who deceived Eve has deceived you away from your purity of devotion to Christ." I'm so broken hearted because what a terrible thing it would be to have to present you on the

day of your wedding as a defiled bride. But there you have that imagery.

Look at Ephesians chapter 5 and you find again the same imagery of the bride and again it is in relationship to the church. This is a marvelous passage, familiar to all of us, Ephesians chapter 5 verse 22, "Wives, be subject to your own husbands as to the Lord for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her 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 should be holy and blameless."

Listen, when it came for the time of the presentation, the greatest anxiety and the greatest pain that a man would ever experience would be if at that time he couldn't present his bride to the guests and the gathered people as a pure and a chaste virgin. That would have been the greatest shame.

And again we see that the Lord who has espoused us to Himself...actually, you want to know something? He signed a contract, it's called the eternal covenant, Hebrews 13:20, God the Father signed a contract with the Son in eternity past. And in that contract was a redeemed people that would be His bride, as well as others out of the nation of Israel and out of the nations of the world. But there was a betrothal for this bride in eternity past, before the foundation of the world. And it is the desire, of course, of the Redeemer that when the day comes that the bride is presented, she be presented in all her beauty and all her purity.

The imagery here of a man and a woman and the purity of their relationship is symbolic of the church. The church then was betrothed to Christ in an eternal contract before any of us were born, thus we became part of the elect bride of the Lord before the world started. Some day we're going to be presented, that will happen at the Rapture. The church is taken to heaven. Remember John 14 Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you and if I go I'll come again and take you to be with Me," remember that? It's a very...it's a very simple picture but it carries the picture or the motif of a bridegroom who goes away to get the place ready and He'll come back to get His bride. And He'll take His bride to the place He's prepared in the Father's house.

That's how they used to do it. The father had a house and all the sons lived in the house. And when it came time for the son to marry they might build a wing. Other sons married, they'd build more wings. Sometimes they just kept building them until they enclosed them and a courtyard was in the center and families stayed together. But they would build a wing and the bridegroom would get it ready and some day he'd go get his bride and bring her back for the festivities.

And so I think this imagery is wonderfully helpful in looking at the Rapture of the church as the Lord coming to get His bride, to take His bride to make the presentation. He presents her, first of all, in glory, in her glorified form, that is with resurrected bodies, with raptured saints as well as those who have gone on before.

Then there's a time of tribulation, a seven-year period of Tribulation and during that time, I believe, that the presentation is going on. I believe that at the Rapture, at the beginning of the Tribulation the bride is taken to glory and presented to the heavenly hosts, to the spirits of just men made perfect who have now had resurrected bodies and are made glorified. And for those seven years there is feasting and joyous fellowship and wonderful celebration. But now it's time for the final supper that signals the end and the ceremony itself, the last great event. And this is what we have here when we talk about the Marriage of the Lamb, the final culminating event. The betrothal in eternity past, the presentation certainly when the saints are taken into glory. And now the final great event, as the marriage is consummated in its fullness.

Now from this imagery that I've presented to you, it seems clear to me that there's only one way to view the bride in this whole picture and that is to see the bride as the church...as the church. Some people seem a bit confused about that. I have really no understanding why they should be. It says the marriage of the Lamb is come and His bride has made herself ready. Clearly from Ephesians 5 and from 2 Corinthians 11 the imagery of marriage fits the church.

Now I want to say something in the next few minutes that's very important. From Jesus' own lips He referred to Himself as a bridegroom. He chose to use the imagery of marriage, of bridegroom and bride. And in Matthew 9 and verse 15 Jesus said to them, "The attendance of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast." In other words, you're certainly not going to mourn when the bridegroom is present. He's really borrowing an illustration. He's saying if the bridegroom is with you, you're happy, it's an occasion for joy, it's a thrilling occasion, it's not a time for fasting. And He is, in effect, saying to the disciples, "This is a time for joy because the bridegroom is here." So He really does use this bridegroom image to refer to Himself and His presence with His own and the fact that it's a time for joy and not for fasting.

See, the Jews had accused Jesus' disciples of not fasting. And He says, "Well, the bridegroom is here, fast when He's gone." By the way, the same statement is made in Mark 2:19 and Luke 5:34. Then over in John's gospel, maybe you haven't noticed this recently, chapter 3 verse 29, "He who has the bride is the bridegroom. But the friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears Him rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice and so this joy of mine has been made full, He must increase but I must decrease."

Now here's John the Baptist. John the Baptist views himself as the friend of the bridegroom and he views Christ as the bridegroom. So here is more of this same imagery that sees the Lord Jesus Christ as a bridegroom.

Clearly then, from the epistles of the Apostle Paul we can see that when a bride is identified and no bride is identified in these other passages in Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, but where a bride is identified in differing illustrations, the bride is seen as the church. Now I just want to clarify these varying passages so you don't get confused.

Now let me take you to Matthew chapter 22. And we're not going to get past some of these sort of preliminaries tonight, but this is very important. Matthew chapter 22 and the reason I'm taking a minute to do this is because people have blended all of these different passages together and concocted a sort of a marriage theology here that I don't think is accurate.

Jesus speaking in a parable here, Matthew 22, says this, "The Kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son." Okay, here's the idea of a wedding used again. Jesus used it as an illustration, as I told you, in Matthew 9 and then again in Mark 2 and Luke 5. And John the Baptist used the marriage and the bridegroom idea as an illustration in John 3:29 and 30, speaking of the fact that he was only the friend of the bridegroom, he was not the bridegroom. He had a role to play but he stepped away and when the ceremony was over, he decreases and the bridegroom increases in significance and importance. John used that same picture.

Well here in Matthew 22 Jesus tells the story about a wedding. There was a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, they were unwilling to come. He sent out other slaves saying, "Tell those who have been invited, behold, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen, my fattened livestock are all butchered, everything is ready, come to the wedding feast."

Now as I said, a wedding feast was a highlight of all social life. And this, by the way, would be the most elaborate celebration imaginable. I mean, there were only...there were only a few kings. In fact, in anybody's country there was only one, right? Only one guy was king and maybe he only had a few sons and how many times is a son going to get married and how are you going to figure you're going to get invited? And, boy, that's the greatest social event of your life.

In a sense it's incidental to this...to the point here that it was a wedding. What is important is that it was the greatest celebration those people would ever know in their entire life time...for a king to throw a party for his son who was getting married was to throw the greatest party the country would ever know. And for you to be invited as a guest would be the most unimaginable privilege you could ever conceive of if you could conceive of it.

But would you notice here there's no mention made of a bride. There's no mention made of any feature of the wedding at all. The wedding concept here is incidental to the point. It's simply to point out the greatest of celebrations. It was the greatest imaginable celebration. Now we can see in it God who is the King and Christ who is His Son. God putting together the greatest conceivable celebration for His Son. What would that be? That would be the Kingdom, wouldn't it? And inviting people to come as His guests.

Absolutely incredibly, they paid no attention, went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business. Now no sooner would Jesus say that and the murmur through the crowd would be, "O come on, that's ridiculous...that is absolutely ridiculous. For a king to put on the ultimate celebration and to invite you to come, you're going to go...you're going to go, it's absolutely ridiculous. The story is pointless, the story is absurd, it could never happen. Shunning the highest honor conceivable and imaginable, walking away in absolute and utter indifference, back to your farm and back to your business, it's preposterous, spurning such an invitation."

And then you have even worse. Verse 5,...verse 6, "And the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them." O come on, now this is really getting ridiculous. It's one thing to even imagine that somebody might refuse to go to the feast but to kill the messengers that invited them? That's unimaginable, that's bizarre.

What's Jesus talking about here? He's talking about the prophets, the Apostles who invited the Jews to come into the Kingdom and some of them were indifferent and some of them were violently hostile. And if they think the story is bizarre, then let them think about its application.

Verse 7, "The king was enraged, sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire." Hmm, maybe there's a little taste of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. in that, to say nothing of the smoke that arises from the final Babylon. "Then he said to his slaves, the wedding is ready but those who were invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main highways and as many as you find there invite to the wedding feast. And those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good." That means morally good and morally wretched, all of them. "And the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests." You have to get new guests to replace the preinvited ones.

The imagery is so beautiful. This is the church. This is the Lord just saying, "Israel, you don't want it, some of you are indifferent, some of you are angry and hostile and violent. I'll turn to some people who were not preinvited, some people who were not a covenant people, a no people. Go out in to the streets, the main highways, anybody you find, no matter how wretched they are, prostitutes, publicans and sinners or how noble they are, religious philanthropists. And the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests."



But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw there a man not dressed in wedding clothes. And he said to him, "Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?" And he was speechless. And the king said to the servants, "Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness, in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, for many are called but few are chosen."

He's saying the people who came and belonged had on the right garment. What was that garment? Isaiah 61:10, "Their clothed with the robe of...what?...righteousness."

Will you notice in that parable no bride is mentioned. There's no mention of the bride. In fact, in this parable, in this parable the church is not the bride, the church is...whom?...the guests. You see that? And that is precisely why you can't crisscross various illustrations of marriages because you're going to confound yourself. The marriage is used as an illustration, in this case the church is the guests. And it can't be...this cannot be harmonized with Revelation 19 and the reason I say that is because I read so many people trying to do that. Jesus was using marriage as an illustration there. Marriage is used as an illustration in Revelation 19 of the coming together of the bride and the bridegroom, namely the church and Christ. There is similarity in the use of marriage but you can't mingle the two illustrations.

Let me show you another thing. Look at Matthew 25. Now you're getting the whole business tonight here about this...these marriage illustrations but I hope it will be helpful to you. Here's another one. And again I read several commentators who tried to mix this one in. "The kingdom of heaven," chapter 25 of Matthew, verse 1, "will be comparable to ten virgins who took their lamps, went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise, or prudent. When the foolish took their lamps they took no oil with them. The prudent took oil and flasks along with their lamps."

Now this is going to be...this is going to be an illustration of being...what?...prepared. Right. "While the bridegroom was delaying..." Now here's what would happen. The bride's at her house and all her maids are waiting and waiting. That's why they used to be called "ladies in...what?...in waiting." They're waiting, who they waiting for? Waiting for the bridegroom. He gets to come whenever he wants. I like it. He gets to show up whenever he's ready.

You say, "Well why didn't they have a definite time? What wasn't it Saturday at eight o'clock like a normal wedding?" Because, my friends, you're talking about a week of feeding people and no supermarkets and no caterers and you're talking about just exactly what you saw in chapter 22 that I read you, you've got to butcher all the animals, you've got to do all the stuff and prepare all the deal and you can't necessarily say it's going to happen at eight o'clock on Saturday night. So you preinvite the guests and then finally when you get it all ready, you go get the bride and the word goes out, "It's time to come now." So these ten were waiting.

"But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom, come out to meet him.' And all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps." That means they clipped the little wick, you know. "And the foolish said to the wise, 'O give us some of your oil for our lamps are going out.'" It wasn't that they never had any oil, they just never had enough. "But the prudent answered saying, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you too, go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourself.'

"While they were going away to make the purchase the bridegroom came and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast and the door was shut. And later the other virgins also came saying, 'Lord, Lord, open up for us.' But he answered and said, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.'" Does that sound familiar? That sound like Matthew 7, "Many shall say unto Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and I'll say to them, 'Depart from Me, I never knew you.'" Let me ask you a question. In this illustration of a wedding, who are the redeemed? Is it the bride? No. There's no bride mentioned. The redeemed here are five wise virgins. And the five foolish virgins are like those people who hang around the fringes but aren't really ready, they're not prepared.

The whole idea is to be prepared when the bridegroom comes to get his bride. The virgins represent professed believers, some are real and some are not. Some are ready and some are not. The true believers are ready and the oil simply means preparedness. But you can't harmonize this with Revelation 19 either. The bride in 22 is incidental. It doesn't even talk about the bride. The bride here is incidental. You don't even know who the bride is. The bride in Revelation 19 is not incidental but crucial.

So again I just submit to you that you have the picture of the motif or the symbol or the illustration of a wedding used in numerous places in the New Testament, don't get confused by trying to mash them all together and come up with some kind of marriage theology...or theology of the bride. It is an important rule of sound biblical interpretation that you cannot compose doctrine by pulling together components from illustrations or parables. Both Matthew 22 and Matthew 25 use a wedding as an illustration and they hone in on some feature of that wedding. Twenty-two wants you to look at the massive kind of celebration it is and to look at the proper kind of garment. That's what that's looking at. And look at the indifference of those who refused it.

Matthew 25 wants you to look at the idea of preparedness for the moment is coming when most unexpected, who would ever expect the bridegroom to come at midnight? If you knew anything about women he would know they would be screaming, "But my hair....my hair." The point there is the suddenness and the unexpectedness and the preparedness. You can't blend that in to Revelation 19. Whatever we're going to learn about the marriage of the Lamb we've got to learn from Revelation chapter 19. Okay? And let's not confuse the issue by spreading ourselves all over the place and borrowing from every marriage illustration.

Now let's turn to Revelation 19 and just maybe a few comments because our time is gone. Oh...all right, so be it. Revelation 19 verse 7, "Let us rejoice, let us..." who's "us"? Well, the great voice of a great multitude, verse 6, as the sound of many waters, the sound of mighty peals of thunder, all the angels of heaven, the twenty-four elders, verse 4, the four living creatures, all of the heavenly voices including the bondservants...the bondservants of verse 5 who fear Him, small and great, who would most likely refer to glorified saints, raptured into heaven, probably Tribulation saints, the spirits of Old Testament saints. Let us rejoice and be glad and give glory to Him...rejoice would be enough and then he adds another Greek term, a compound...rejoice exuberantly and give glory. Do all of that because the work of preparing the bride is done. All the glory goes to the Lord for the marriage of the Lamb has come and she is made herself ready.

This is it. The complete and full union of the betrothed church is now ready. They've been betrothed in eternity past, they've been presented since the Rapture, now comes the great ceremony. It's about to be accomplished.

Now this ceremony which is about to be accomplished, I believe, takes place at the establishing of the Kingdom. And I believe this ceremony, I don't think there's any other way than this to interpret it, stretches clear through the thousand-year Kingdom and is really fully and finally consummated in the new heaven and the new earth. Why do I say that? Look at chapter 21. At the end of the thousand year millennial kingdom, which follows the return of Christ, at the end of the thousand-year millennial kingdom, John says, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth," which, of course, had been renovated and renewed and restored during the thousand years, nonetheless, that first heaven and first earth, having been restored, "Passed away and there's no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God made ready as a bride adorned for her husband."

Now again, do we have to take the imagery of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and put it all the way over into this one, or is this just another use of a marriage picture to show the glory of the new Jerusalem? It could well be that. It could be nothing more than the fact that when the new Jerusalem comes down out of heaven into this eternal state and people look and see it, the way it is described in the vision here by John is that it was decked out like a bride adorned for her husband because that's the most adorning that they would understand in ancient times.

But on the other hand, it might be unfair to exclude the thought that here is the bride, the glorified saints, all of them now out of the Old Testament, Israel, the church, the Tribulation, all of them are now in the new Jerusalem, descending into this eternal state. So it may well be, and I mean, who am I to be dogmatic, but it may well be that we can look at the ceremony as something that starts at the coming of Christ and is ultimately consummated at the establishment of the new heavens and the new earth.

You say, "Well a thousand years is a long time for a ceremony." Yes, but a thousand years with the Lord is as...what?...as one day. The marriage of the Lamb has come. And it really isn't fully consummated until the end of the Tribulation, Satan loose for a little while, a final rebellion squashed and then the new heaven and the new earth is established.

I don't think that the marriage is ultimately finally and fully consummated until eternity future, new heavens and new earth has come. And I have a lot more to say about that. Betrothal in eternity past, presentation began with Rapture, presentation continued through that communion in the presence of the Lord in the time of the Tribulation, I think that presentation leads to the great ceremony where the Lord comes together for the marriage with His bride and that marriage stretches across the period of the Kingdom and is finally consummated in that eternal state when the bride and the bridegroom settle to live forever in glory.

Now listen to what I say and we'll explain this more next time. At that point in time, even at the time of the Kingdom, I think the church is the bride, I think that's clear from Paul's text in 2 Corinthians 11 and Ephesians 5. But I also believe that the bride concept is enlarged to include all the redeemed ultimately. And I'm going to say more about that later. But I don't think you can confine it. Ultimately in eternity future, new heavens and new earth, we will all be united to God in the same way. We will all occupy the glories of that eternal state and that bridal adornment. And more about that next time.

So, the marriage of the Lamb. The word "lamb" by the way, referring to Jesus Christ, is used no less than 30 times in Revelation. The marriage of the Lamb has come and the bride, her bride...His bride has made herself ready. Can't help but remember the theme of the first song was the destruction of the harlot. The theme here is of the wedding of the bride. She is ready. She is ready.

Notice one little thought and then we'll close. She made herself ready. Does that mean that this is through works? No, no. Philippians 2:12 and 13 perhaps is a good verse if you're a little confused on that. "So then, my beloved, just as you've always obeyed not as in my presence only but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to do for His good pleasure." It is..it is us but it is Him working in us. Paul says to the Colossians, "I...I labor but it is God working mightily in me." The bride has made herself ready by the power of God and by the grace of God, by the work of the Spirit. This is that great event.

Saints raptured at the beginning of the Tribulation, with the Lord. For that period of time, come back, reign with Him on the earth and at that time they're not only presented to those who are in heaven as they are in the time of the Tribulation but they're presented to the population of the world because the raptured and redeemed saints will come back with Christ and that presentation, in a sense, will continue through the Kingdom. It's all...you don't want to draw too many hard lines. And the final culmination, I believe, comes at the end of the period of the Kingdom. That's a long time to us but to

the Lord it's one great consummation.

Another way to sort of see that point is you have the day of the Lord at the end of the Tribulation and you have another element of the day of the Lord at the end of the Kingdom, a thousand years later, and you say, "Well how can it be one day?" And Peter answers that by giving you that statement, "A day with the Lord is...a thousand years with the Lord is as one day."

So I hope you understand some of the imagery here. And that's really an introduction, next time we'll look into the text and they'll be much more that will be yielded from the text itself as we examine this.

But how our hearts should rejoice at what is ahead for those who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we have endeavored to cover some of these most important areas of truth in Your Word tonight. Our hearts are so filled with joy, we have to confess that we're glad that the study of all those passages on wrath is over and now we can look joyfully and happily at what You have prepared for Your beloved people. We thank You, Lord, that before the world began You betrothed us as Your own. We know You want to keep us pure. And, in fact, You will, You keep on cleansing us from all sin and the reality of it is, the truth of it is that some day we will be presented in glory after being raptured, we will be taken to glory and presented as a virgin bride. We will look forward to the festivities and the joy of that time of presentation. And then to come back with You to the earth and reign for a thousand years and be presented to this world as Your pure bride. And then finally and ultimately to enter in to that final home when the marriage is consummated and the picture of the bride is enlarged to encompass all the redeemed of all the ages, enter in to that eternal state. O what joy. We thank You, Father, for all that You have planned for us because of Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.

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