

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Heavenly Hallelujahs, Part 3

Scripture: Revelation 19:7-10

Code: 66-68

Well, we'll open our Bibles now to the nineteenth chapter of Revelation and look again at the marriage of the Lamb...the marriage of the Lamb. What a great privilege it is to dig into the Word of God on the Lord's day. What a joy.

The greatest social event in the ancient biblical world was a wedding. In fact, it's probably the greatest social event in most of the world as it always has been. And it is that wedding imagery which Scripture uses to describe the joyous celebration that will occur when Jesus Christ is joined finally and fully to His beloved people.

The terminology is pretty clear. Let's start at verse 7 and read a few verses and just set the context for the message tonight. Verse 7 of Revelation 19, "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 we'll stop at that point.

There is that magnificent marriage imagery which is designed to demonstrate the greatness of the celebration when the Lord is joined to His beloved people. In this imagery, the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ is the groom and His beloved church is the bride. That will be a glorious day. That will be a wonderful day, a day like no other day when we are joined together with our Lord in the fullness of that eternal glory which He has planned for us.

Now I told you last time that repeatedly in the pages of the New Testament the Lord is depicted as a bridegroom. We saw it in Matthew 9:15. We saw even in Matthew 22:1 to 13 and 25:1 to 10 that in the parables there the king's son and the bridegroom is representative of the Lord. We saw John the Baptist referring to the Lord Jesus Christ as the bridegroom in John 3:29 and 30. And then we also noted that the Lord Jesus appears as a bridegroom in 2 Corinthians 11 verse 2 and as a husband in Ephesians 5:23 down through 32.

There's no doubt then that at this wedding the One who is presented as the groom is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. That's very obvious because it is clearly in verse 7 stated, "This is the marriage of the Lamb." And then again in verse 9. The Lamb, as I noted for you, being used as a reference of Christ 30 times at least in the book of Revelation.

The question then comes...who is the bride? We noted the answer in 2 Corinthians 11:2 and Ephesians chapter 5 again is that the bride is first and foremost the church. So here in chapter 19 we have the Lord Jesus Christ being joined together in the consummation of the great marriage between Himself and His beloved church.

Now remember that chapter 19 begins with a series of heavenly hallelujahs. You find in verse 1, "Hallelujah, salvation and glory and power belong to our God." You find again verse 3, "Hallelujah," verse 4, "Hallelujah," and then again in verse 6, "Hallelujah." And this time the "hallelujah" has to do with the marriage, the marriage of the Lamb and His bride has come.

I told you last time and I just briefly remind you that weddings in ancient biblical culture were divided into three components. There was a betrothal and a presentation and then a final ceremony. That might somewhat parallel the idea of an engagement and then some kind of a coming out or engagement party and then ultimately a wedding ceremony in our own culture.

Betrothal was done between two parents. It was a contract that they drew up between themselves, pledging their children to one another in marriage. And I noted for you that very often it was made before the children were ever born because it was more important for those days and those people to select a family than it was an individual. And so we can see the betrothal in the ancient marriage as being somewhat of an illustration of the Lord choosing His own bride before the foundation of the world. Before we were ever born He had already made a covenant with God the Father to take us as His bride.

The second part of a wedding was the presentation. That was the time when the betrothed bride was brought out into the public and presented to all of the publics that were related to her bridegroom and to the families of both parties. And we might suggest to you that that presentation would be for the church the Rapture, when the church is raptured, that is gathered up from the earth, joined with Christians who have already died who have received their glorified bodies and the raptured now triumphant church is taken into heaven and presented in its fullness to all of the heavenly hosts of angels and Old Testament saints as well.

Then when the Lord Jesus comes back at the end of the time of Tribulation to set up His Kingdom, the glorified resurrected exalted church comes back and is now presented to those on earth. And there is the glorious manifestation of the children of God made known, not only to heavenly beings but to those who are still alive on the earth who go into the Kingdom. So the presentation of the bride can take place from the Rapture to the return of Christ in the establishment of His Kingdom. First they're presented in heaven, then they're presented on earth.

And then the culminating thing is the final supper and the ceremony and the consummation of the marriage. We find that final marriage supper, I think, really played out in the millennial kingdom. It's when glorified saints and saints still alive on earth all come together, all recognizing the glorious bride of Christ, all joining in on the festivities and the celebration. And that's the final supper. You say, "It's a long one, isn't it? It lasts a thousand years." Yes, but a thousand years is as a day with the Lord. And the marriage is consummated into the new heavens and the new earth when the bridegroom takes the bride into her eternal home where she will dwell with Him forever.

That's the beautiful picture that is behind this text. Betrothal in eternity past. Presentation begins with the Rapture. The church is presented in heaven. The second coming presented on earth. The final supper through the Kingdom leading to the consummation and the bride goes into her eternal home in the new heaven and the new earth. This complete and final union then, this ceremony between Jesus Christ and His church is about to be accomplished here. The final great supper taking place in the Kingdom. And so we read in verse 7, "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him for the marriage of the Lamb has come." It's about to happen. It's on the edge, on the brink of occurring.

Then this statement we noted last time, "His bride has made herself ready." His bride has made herself ready. She is ready now. No sin, no impurity, she is a flawless, spotless, blameless virgin without blemish. She has been presented in a glorified condition before the throne. We might even suggest that there's another part of her being made ready. When the church is raptured do you know the first thing that happens after the church is taken up into glory? Well, you should know that, the Apostle Paul told us exactly what it is. It says that when the Lord Jesus comes and He takes us to be with Himself, listen to what's going to happen. "We must all appear before...what?...the judgment seat of Christ," 2 Corinthians 5:10. We're going to receive rewards for what we have done. The useless things will be burned up and all that will be left to judge will be those priceless valuable things. And the Lord will then reward His people.

Perhaps that reward constitutes part of the readying of the bride. As the wood, hay and stubble is burned up, according to 1 Corinthians 3, and the gold, silver and precious stones remained, the bride then becomes bedecked, as it were, in majestic beauty. Thus she is made ready by being purged. She is made ready by being rewarded. She is made ready by being cleansed of all iniquity. She is made ready by being made more beautiful because of her eternal reward. The bride has been glorified. The bride has been rewarded. The bride has made herself ready.

Now let's pick it up where we left off in verse 8, and here we see another feature of her readiness, other than the one I mentioned in the Bema Seat, rather the first one. "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 there, of course, is the purification. She puts on what was given to her by God. She puts on the garments of cleanliness. She puts on righteous acts.

Now listen, when we were saved we were clothed in righteousness. What kind of righteousness? Really the righteousness of Christ, right?, imputed to us. But now the glorified church has a righteousness all its own. It is not just a garment of righteousness put over her to cover her sin, it is righteous acts that characterize this bride. She is righteous not just on the outside, not just with a covering, but she is righteous through and through.

That is depicted in the fine linen, bright and clean. Now this is a...this is a marvelous concept here. It has the idea of holiness, purity, spotlessness. Such garments appear earlier in the book of Revelation. Go back to chapter 15 verse 6, this will help you a little bit. Here we meet the seven angels who come with the seven final judgments. And it says, "The seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple...notice this...clothed in linen, clean and bright." There again we see this kind of garment on the angels. This kind of garment that marks out those who are not just covered with a holiness not their own but who are holy in themselves, these are the holy garments worn in that particular vision by heavenly angels.

Fine linen was the most expensive and the loveliest of cloth. The word "bright," lampron, means glistening, shining, radiant. "Clean," katharon, means just that. In fact, the same word appears in the twenty-first chapter of Revelation, verses 18 and 21 and is translated "pure...pure." It also could have the idea because in verses 18 and 21 it says, "Pure gold like pure glass." Pure gold like transparent glass. So what...what is on the bride here is this expensive, magnificent, beautiful, fine linen radiant, shining, pure, transparent...it is a transparent kind of brilliance. It's a kind of glory, isn't it? It's a kind of Shekinah. And here we see the church made righteous, the church fully righteous.

By the way, would you look down at verse 14. "And the armies which are in heaven," that are the armies which are in Christ when He returns when He comes out of heaven on a white horse, "The armies which are in heaven clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses." In this vision we see Christ returning and as He returns, all the saints are with Him.

You say, "Is this talking about glorified saints?" Yes. "But don't angels wear those garments? Couldn't it be speaking about them as well?" Yes. But I think you see here primarily the picture of the saints. And he is building on the description back in verse 8 when he describes them the same way in verse 14. The bride then, all glorious and all radiant, returns with her bridegroom for her presentation on earth. She is glorious, radiant, magnificent, pure, and bright, the chaste virgin ready for the final ceremony. And her purity is the righteous acts of the saints. She will no longer have only an imputed righteousness and a partial righteousness, but an imparted perfection. At the Bema judgment, at the judgment seat of Christ, all the detracted from her glory, all the detracted from her beauty was burned up and only her magnificent beauty remains and her purity. And this is the glorious church made perfect. This is the glory that was promised in 1 John 3 when it said we will be like Him. The glory promised in Romans 8 when it said it doesn't yet appear what we'll be like but the

glorious manifestation of the children of God will make it known.

Now all this marriage imagery is to center our attention on the final all-glorious union of Jesus Christ with His beloved church. And this is that for which we wait. This is what we live for. This is the great climax of our lives.

I was thinking to myself today, I'm sure our attendance will be low tonight, but it's so difficult for me to understand how anybody could be indifferent to the greatest event in all of redemptive history. The very reason why God chose you before the world began in the first place was to bring this event to pass. What kind of a spiritual commentary is it on us that we're indifferent to this? It's highly unlikely that if we were living in dire circumstances, if we were living in oppression, if we were living under some kind of tyranny, if we were grasping for every morsel of food and every hope for another breath that we wouldn't be ecstatic to hear of this kind of joy in the future, really. We have become satiated, glutted and satisfied with the world's fare and those things which are far beyond that, believe it or not, have little interest to us. That's sad. Can we say with the Apostle Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I've kept the faith. In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge will award to me on that day and not only to me but also to all those who have...what?...loved His appearing."

Do we love His appearing? Is that where our affection is? Or have we affection for many other passing things? And what about Philippians chapter 3 verse 20, "Our citizenship is in heaven from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory." What would we say about a bride who had waited years and years and years and years for the coming of the bridegroom and was indifferent to it? Rather than having a heart ecstatic with hope.

This is the consummation of God's plan. This is the pinnacle. This is it. This is what we live for. This is what we die for. The day we wait for when we are joined with our beloved bridegroom.

Now the celebration then begins, of course, for us at the Rapture of the church, at the judgment seat when we are purified and rewarded. Then we come back to earth, then the glorious Kingdom goes on. But go over to chapter 21 for a moment, just to take you all the way to the consummation of God's plan. The whole thing really never is consummated until John says, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth." That means the Kingdom is over. The millennial earth is gone. The universe as we know it is gone. The restored, renewed earth is gone. And now there is a new heaven and a new earth. The old one has been destroyed. The elements have melted with fervent heat as Peter said. "And now there is a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth passed away. There is 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. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men and He shall dwell among them and they shall be His

people and God Himself shall be among them." That's the consummation. That's when all the bride is taken to the new heaven and the new earth to dwell forever with the bridegroom.

Go down to verse 9. "One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the last plagues came and spoke with me saying, 'Come here, I'll show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.' And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God."

You say, "Well is the bride the church or is the bride the city?" The answer is yes. The bride is the church that occupies the city. It becomes the bridal city. But listen carefully to what I say to you. The bride is distinctively the church, but it is more than the church. At the end of the time of the Tribulation Daniel says that the Old Testament saints are going to be resurrected. They will be gathered together with the New Testament church. During the Tribulation, Tribulation saints will be gathered together into heaven, into glory. They too will be a part of that redeemed humanity that occupies the Kingdom, that glorified humanity. During the time of the millennial Kingdom, people on earth will believe, will be born again, will come to the knowledge of God. Many of them will be translated, transformed into that glorious band of glorified saints. All of those saints collected not only from the church but resurrected bodies from the Old Testament era, resurrected Tribulation saints, redeemed Kingdom saints are all going to make up the final form of the bride and occupy that glorious bridal city, the new Jerusalem.

So the picture expands. And I'll say more about that in a moment.

Let's look at verse 9 then. Verse 9, "And he said to me, 'Write, blessed are those who are invited to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.'" This is very important. This is beatitude number four. A beatitude is something that begins with blessed. This is beatitude number four. You remember the first beatitude in the book of Revelation? The first promise of blessing? "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and heed the things written in it for the time is near." The last beatitude comes in chapter 22 and verse 14, "Blessed are those who wash their robes that they may have right to the tree of life and may enter in by the gates into the city." This is beatitude number four. It is a book of blessing. It is a book of benedictions. This one says, "Blessed, or happy, joyous, satisfied, fulfilled," any of those words will suffice, "are those who are invited to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb."

Now stop right there. Who is that? Not the bride. Did you ever know a bride who got an invitation? You don't send an invitation to the bride, she doesn't need one, she sends invitations. Or the bridegroom sends invitations. Nobody sends an invitation to the bride, she's not an invited guest, she's the bride. Brides aren't invited to the wedding, so who is this? Who is this group who are those invited to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb? Who are the guests?

Go with me back to Matthew. Matthew chapter 8...Matthew chapter 8 verse 5, "When Jesus entered Capernaum a Centurion came to Him entreating Him, or pleading with Him, and saying, 'Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home suffering great pain.' And He said to him, 'I will come and heal him.' But the Centurion answered and said, 'Lord, I'm not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word and my servant will be healed.'" Hmm, great faith. "For I too am a man under authority with soldiers under me and I say to this one go and he goes, and another come and he comes and to my slave do this and he does it." He's saying, "I understand Your power, I understand Your authority."

"Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following Him, 'Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. And I say to you that many shall come from east and west and recline at the table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the Kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness in the place...in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

Now I just want to draw you to one thought here. Jesus identifies faith and says the Kingdom will be made up of the faithful. They'll come from east and west all over the world and they will recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of heaven. And while I believe that that reclining and that Kingdom can be the spiritual Kingdom, I think also it has messianic reality attached to it. I think Abraham and Isaac and Jacob are going to be in the Kingdom, right? They're going to be glorified and they're going to come back for the Kingdom. They're going to be there. They're part of the invited guests. They're not the church, a part of redeemed Israel. There will be many others who are Jews, truly saved, proselytes to Judaism, Luke 13:28 says, "When you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God," I believe Old Testament saints are going to be a part of that, all the prophets, all the faithful, all the priests, all the believers redeemed by grace through faith, Enoch and Noah, all of them are going to be raised, according to Daniel chapter 3, they're going to be raised, I believe at the coming of Jesus Christ to set up His Kingdom. All of the Hebrews 11 heroes that we referred to this morning, they're all going to be there in the Kingdom. They're going to be the invited guests. The greatest Old Testament prophet who ever lived, John the Baptist, he'll be there. He died, too, before the cross and before the resurrection.

John serves as a good model for us. He was never a part of the visible church of Jesus Christ. He belonged to and he died before the Holy Spirit inaugurated a new dispensation. That is why the great John the Baptist says in the third chapter of his gospel, "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom which stands and hears Him, rejoices greatly." John the Baptist calls himself really the friend of the bridegroom, an invited guest. He's not part of the church. He's a guest. He's a friend who stands and rejoices in the favor of God on the couple that are being married. Matthew 11:11 speaking of John the Baptist, our Lord said, "Verily I say to you, among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist." Jesus said he's the greatest

man that ever lived and yet he said he that is least in the Kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

The bride is something very special. The least of us who have been saved, the humble of us...the humblest of us who belong to the bride of Christ are something very special. Those Old Testament saints are not the bride, they are guests invited to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, special guests.

Now somebody is going to say, "Wait a minute here. Since..it's all of grace anyway, why should we be treated special?" I don't know...I don't know the answer to that except to say we shouldn't. "Why should the church be the bride and Israel just the guests?" Well ask another question. Why should Israel have been the covenant people in the first place and everybody else left out? I don't know. God designed it and He can do whatever He wants, He's God. But would you please remember this, we're only talking about imagery here. That's all. We're talking about imagery rather than reality in this sense, that the picture of a marriage is just a picture and the imagery of the bride is just a symbol of intimate union. And the point is simply that the Lord is going to take the church to Himself pure and holy and rewarded. And He's going to put on the greatest celebration the world has ever known. But Old Testament saints are going to be there, too. And they'll be in on the celebration just with everybody else. All the proselyte Gentiles, all the Jews who believed before the cross though technically they're not the bride anymore than we are Israel. And we each have unique roles in the Kingdom, Israel will rule in the Kingdom. The Apostles will sit on twelve thrones over the twelve tribes of Israel. The Jews will be exalted so that they will be bringing Gentiles to the seeing of the Messiah. In fact, the prophet said ten Gentiles will be hanging on the garment of every Jew. It's their Kingdom, it's the throne of David.,

And in the picture that is given in the Old Testament of the Kingdom, it looks like it belongs to Israel exclusively and in the picture that is given to the church in the New Testament, it looks like it's ours. And that's the way God would have it. It's just imagery. The reality is, we'll all be there and we'll all be enjoying the celebration. And yet there's a distinction and always has been between the church and Israel.

We have to include those who were saved in the Tribulation, Jews and Gentiles. All Israel will be saved, according to Romans 11, and of course an innumerable number of Gentiles according to Revelation 7 that can't be numbered. They have all died, they've all gone to glory. They'll all come back with the bride to earth. They'll all be here for the celebration of the Kingdom. They'll all go into the new heaven and the new earth. They'll all occupy the bridal city when it descends into the new heaven and the new earth, and therefore they'll all ultimately be encompassed in the same intimacy with the living God.

All the guests at a wedding enjoy the celebration. You've been to a wedding. You just go into the celebration after the wedding, however it's set up, and everybody is there, a variety of people, an

assortment of people from different families and different locales and everybody lands with the same purpose and that is to celebrate. And people are looking around and saying, "Who's that...and who's she...and who's he...where did he come from...and I don't think we've met him, he's not in our church,

is he...I've never seen them before." But the celebration draws people from everywhere and so will this. And in the end they'll all be brought together in that eternal bridal city of the new Jerusalem.

Now certainly Israel looked forward to this feast. Let me take you to the Old Testament for a minute. Look at Isaiah chapter 25, I read you something from it this morning and as I was looking over Isaiah 25 I noticed that this really does look right at the time of the Kingdom and even the Marriage Supper. Look at this in verse 6, Isaiah 25:6, "And the Lord of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain, a banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow and refined aged wine. On this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples, even the veil which is stretched over all nations. He will swallow up death for all time. The Lord God will wipe tears from all faces, remove the reproach of His people from all the earth. For the Lord has spoken and it will be said in that day, Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited, let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation for the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain."

I believe you have a Kingdom glory and a Kingdom feast there. That is the anticipated joy of the people of Israel. Verse 1 of chapter 26, "In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah. We have a strong city. He sets up walls and ramparts for security. Open the gates that the righteous nation may enter, the one that remains faithful, the steadfast of Mine Thou will keep in perfect peace because he trusts in Thee. Trust in the Lord forever for in God the Lord we have an everlasting rock. For He has brought low those who dwell on high, the unassailable city, He lays it low, He lays it low to the ground. He casts it to dust, Babylon and everything with it. The foot will trample it, the feet of the afflicted, the steps of the helpless." There's the crushing of the end of man's day. And then magnificently in verse 7, "The way of the righteous is smooth."

Down in verse 19, "Your dead will live, their corpses will rise. You who lie in the dust awake and shout for joy for your dew is as the dew of the dawn and the earth will give birth to the departed spirits." What's that? That's a...what?...that's a resurrection, it's the resurrection of Old Testament saints to be taken to the banquet, to be taken to the Kingdom celebration. The Old Testament believers will be there along with the New Testament church, the Tribulation saints will be there as well. We'll all join in that celebration.

Listen to what Jesus said, quite an interesting comment in the light of this. Luke 22:15, He was reclining at the table with His apostles and He said to them, "I've earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the

Kingdom of God." I'm not going to be able to do this with you again until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom. The Kingdom will be the next time we'll do this. Matthew 26:29, "I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's Kingdom."

What's He doing? He's promising to some pre-cross, pre-resurrection, pre-church believers that they're going to be in the Kingdom at the festival, at the feast, reclining at the table with Him.

So, let's go back to Revelation 19. When it says, "Blessed are those invited to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb," we would conclude then that this is something other than the bride. This includes Israel, this includes Gentile believers in the Old Testament, this includes Tribulation saints, both Jew and Gentile, everybody outside the church. The hope of a happy marriage for the church is the same as the hope of a kingdom for Israel.

You know, it's a..it's a sad thing when you think back into Israel's history, just briefly. Israel once was designated as the wife of Jehovah, weren't they? The nation Israel? Isaiah 54 verses 5 and 6, in that particular passage Israel is identified as Jehovah's wife. Jeremiah chapter 3 verse 8, Isaiah chapter 50 verse 1, both of those passages talk about God being related to Israel as a husband to a wife.

It is dramatically illustrated, this relationship, in the prophet Hosea. Hosea was a remarkable man. He was told by God to be a living illustration. And so he was told by God to go marry a harlot named Gomer...which he did. I've always thought anybody who would marry a girl named Gomer was probably asking for trouble. But he married this harlot named Gomer because he was supposed to be a living illustration of what it was like being married to Israel. And he demonstrated by his relationship to her and the grief of it, how God felt about Israel.

But wonderfully, Hosea also came to a point in his life where in spite of all of her harlotries, all of her debauchery, she finally left him, prostituted herself to the degree that she was...he found her naked on a slave block being auctioned and he paid the price and bought her back. It's an incredible...and he treated her as a virgin and took her as his beloved wife. And God is saying in the end, through the book of Hosea, in the end I'm going to buy you back. In the end you...you're going to come back, I'm going to take you to myself. I'm going to make you My very own. I'm going to buy you, as it were, off the block in the slave market. And God will redeem Israel.

Listen to what He says at the end of the book of Hosea. Say...he says in verse 4, "I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from them. I will be like the dew to Israel. He will blossom like the lily, will take root like the cedars of Lebanon. His shoots will sprout. His beauty will be like the olive tree and his fragrance like the cedars of Lebanon. Those who live in his shadow will again raise grain and they will blossom like the vine. His renown will be like the wine of Lebanon." I'll bring him back. I'll bring back the nation Israel. I'll bring this unfaithful wife. I'll take her again as My own.

And so, I believe in the Kingdom you have the bride and the bridegroom, the church...the Lord and His church. But you also, if you want to steal Old Testament imagery and throw it into the future, you have the Lord recovering Israel and folding Israel into the bridal people.

The church is different than Israel. The church is never a harlot like Israel. But the Lord will restore His people Israel. What tremendous grace. What tremendous grace.

So the church functions then as the bride during the presentation in heaven, presentation on earth, the church is enlarged to encompass the glorified saints of the past, reaches the earth and then encompasses all those who are saved during the time of the Millennium. That period of time is the Marriage Supper. The final event is when the new heaven and the new earth are created. The marriage is consummated, all the redeemed are folded into the bride. They all become residents in the bridal city, the new Jerusalem. He descends and becomes the capital city of the new heaven and the new earth.

It's wonderful to see the grace of God in the case of Israel. And lest you think that the new Jerusalem as a bridal city is only...is only remotely related to Israel, lest you think that this bride, this bridal city coming down out of heaven is only slightly related to Israel, listen to the description of it. "It had a great and a high wall with twelve gates and at the gates twelve angels, and the names were written on them which are those of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west. And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones and on them were the twelve names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb."

It's not only incidentally related to Israel, it's very graphically and dominantly related to Israel. We are the bride of Christ but in that final city where we dwell, that bridal city, a restored wife, Israel, will be brought back, folded into the bride and all God's people will be gathered into the glory of that eternal consummation.

So, Israel forfeited rights but will be guests and ultimately to be included in the bridal people. Whatever distinctions are made in Scripture, all believers of all ages eventually will enjoy the fullness of the celebration and the glories of eternity. Lots of rabbinic literature has in it invitations of the rabbis to the messianic age which is a blissful time of feasting, none other really than the glorious Kingdom. So they'll be there at the Supper, at the feast, at the festival when God's gathering of His people takes place.

One writer puts it this way, "Whatever distinctions may exist between the saints of the pre-Abrahamic period, the saints in Israel before Christ, the saints among the Gentiles from Abraham to Christ, the saints of the Tribulation and the saints in the church from Christ to the Rapture, such distinctions are

secondary to the great primary truth that all will be there by virtue of the saving work of Christ and their personal trust in the true creator God and in His provision of salvation."

There is only one God and that one triune God will be in personal fellowship forever with all the redeemed saints of all the ages. He will dwell with them in the holy city forever. The blessedness of the great union and the feast accompanying it is so great and so important that it is emphasized again to John that these sayings are true. We find that in the very next verse, let's look at it...the very next statement rather in verse 9, "And he said to me these are the true words of God."

Why does he say that? Because it seems so amazing, so almost impossible that God was going to do this in the end, gather all these people together. Remember now, John is on the isle of Patmos. I'll never forget as long as I live, being there last summer. Some of you were with me. All had gone so badly, so tragically in his own life from a human standpoint. The church was being slaughtered and crushed. And yet while it seemed as if God was being defeated, this tremendous message comes that God in the end is going to gather all His saints from the beginning of His redemptive plan to the very end of it. And these are the true words of God.

Who said that? Who said that? Well the angel, the angel said it. The angel who's been talking to John through this. These are the true words of God. He said to me, just like he said to me, "Write, blessed are those invited to the Marriage Supper." If you follow the "hes" you'll go all the way back to verse 1, the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven saying...and you keep going back to chapter 18 and you keep going back to chapter 17 and you come to verse 1. "And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me." It was an angel. Angelic affirmation...the angel is saying believe what I've said, these are the true words of God, this is going to happen. And John believed. He believed that angel.

And then he did a most amazing thing in verse 10. "I fell at his feet to worship him." Ha...that's not a good thing to do. But he succumbed to the temptation in this vision. He was overwhelmed. I mean, he was just astounded. He was staggered. He was blown away at the words of truth from the holy angel that God was going to collect all His redeemed from all the ages and there would be a Kingdom, there really would be a Kingdom. There would be a marriage. There would be a supper. All that the Jews and all who followed their ministry of the Word had hoped for would come to pass. And when he heard it, he was in awe. He was overwhelmed. He yielded to the temptation of the moment and he just fell down, it says, at the feet of this angel to worship him.

You know, this isn't the only time he did this. Revelation 22 verse 8, "I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. When I heard and saw I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things." Now, you know, John is a very responsive guy. In both cases he just kind of collapses in a heap and he said to me, "Do not do that, I'm a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren, the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God." Get up, John.

He was so overwhelmed that he just collapsed in worship.

Well now go back to the text that we're reading in chapter 19 and that's precisely what we read here. "And he said to me...same thing...Do not do that. I'm a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus, worship God." Get up, John. John yielded to the temptation to worship angels. That's wrong. That's evil, in appropriate.

Colossians 2:18, "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize," that is defrauding you of your eternal reward, "by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of angels." If you worship angels, you're going to forfeit your reward. God's going to chasten you by taking away your reward. We are not to worship angels.

Now when I say that I know what people are going to say. Somebody is going to run over there to Numbers 22, "The Lord opened the eyes of Balaam and he saw the angel of the Lord...verse 31...standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand and he bowed all the way to the ground." You say, "Well now wait a minute, there's old Balaam and he's bowed down to that angel." That's not worship, my friend, that's fear. That angel has what in his hand? A sword. That's healthy respect. It doesn't say anything about worship.

Somebody else is going to say, "Well what about Joshua chapter 5 because in Joshua chapter 5 verse 13, he lifted up his eyes, Joshua did, by Jericho and behold a man was standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, 'Are you for us or for our adversaries?' And he said, 'No, rather I indeed come now as captain of the host of the Lord.' And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and bowed down and said to him, 'What has my Lord to say to his servant?'" That is not worship. Again that is...what?...fear, that is respect. "And the captain of the Lord's host said to Joshua, 'Take your sandals off, you're standing in a holy place.'"

Well what about Judges chapter 13, don't we have an incident there in Judges chapter 13 and verse 20? "Manoah," the father of Samson, "came about," verse 20, "when the flame went up from the altar toward heaven that the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell on their faces to the ground. Now the angel of the Lord appeared no more to Manoah or his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the Lord." You say, "Manoah bowed down, fell on his face to the ground before the angel of the Lord?" Yes, but the angel of the Lord was none other than whom? Well verse 22, "Manoah said to his wife, 'We'll surely die, we have seen God.'" We've seen God.

No, there was no worship of angels by those individuals on those occasions in the Old Testament, there was healthy respect. And there was worship when the angel of the Lord was none other than God made visible. God, no doubt, in a pre-incarnate appearance.

In Acts chapter 10 verse 25, "It came about that Peter entered. Cornelius met him, fell at his feet and worshiped him." Here's Cornelius trying to worship Peter. Peter raised him up saying, "Stand up, I am just a man."

I wish some of those gurus would take a clue from Peter. Acts 14, "The multitude saw what Paul had done..verse 11...raised their voice saying in the Lycaonian language, 'The gods have become like men and come down to us.' And they started calling Barnabas Zeus and Paul Hermes because he was the chief speaker." They were so upset verse 14 says they tore their robes and rushed into the crowd and said, "Men, why are you doing these things, we are also men of the same nature as you?"

There's no place for that. No place for worshiping any other than God, and not a man. No matter how noble a man, if it's Paul or Peter, no place for that. Only God is to be worshiped.

You say, "What about Daniel chapter 2?" That one comes to mind, I didn't think of it earlier. Verse 46, "King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face and did homage to Daniel and gave orders to present to him an offering in fragrant incense." Was Nebuchadnezzar worshiping Daniel? No. Because listen to what he said in the next verse. "The king said to Daniel, 'Surely your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries.'" He was bowing down before Daniel but his worship was directed at God.

And so we go back now to the text of Revelation 19 and we can support around the Bible that it is always inappropriate to worship angels. The Roman Catholic Church talks a lot about the veneration of angels, they try to define veneration in some rather innocuous terms but it readily slips over into worship. There's no room for worshiping angels. In response to John's inappropriate worship, the angel gives him a strong rebuke. And the angel said to me...verse 10, "Do not do that." Which being interpreted means, "Stop. I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren," same thing the angel said over in chapter 22 verses 8 and 9. I'm just a sundoulos, I'm just like you, I'm a servant. In fact, like you I'm a servant...that's fellow servant, but my service is to serve you. So don't worship me because I'm just like you, a fellow servant of God. And even more than that, I'm below you because I've been sent to serve you.

Particularly what does he mean, "I'm a fellow servant of yours and your brethren"? Those who preach, prophets, apostles, preachers. Hebrews 1:14 says, and what a tremendous, tremendous promise it is that angels, couldn't say it any clearer, are ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation. They're servants of believers, particularly apostles and prophets and preachers and teachers.

And then follow this, as we wrap it up. "I'm a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus." What's that? The testimony about Jesus. What is that? The gospel. I'm just a

fellow servant of God whose service is to aid the preachers of the gospel. Boy, that's encouraging to me. He serves the Lord just like John only he serves the Lord by serving John. Don't worship me. Worship God.

And that, by the way, beloved, is the theme of all redemptive history. Worship God. What are we going to do when we're all gathered into the bridal city and the bridal city descends? We're probably going to be held captive in that bridal city while the new heaven and the new earth are being recreated. And then we'll descend into that new heaven and the new earth. And then what are we going to do forever and ever and ever and ever? Worship God. We are saved to worship God. In fact, John 4, the Father seeks true worshipers, that's why He redeemed us to make us worshipers. That purpose stretches from Genesis to Revelation.

And then one last word from the angel and what a word it is. He says, "I'm a fellow servant of yours, I'm sent by God to serve those who preach the gospel, you worship God for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Boy, that's a great statement.

What does it mean? The spirit of prophecy, or the heart of prophecy, prophecy means preaching, proclaiming, speaking forth. Literally it means to stand before and speak. The very heart and the very soul, the very spirit, the very breath of all preaching is the testimony of Jesus. And the angel says, "I am sent to help preachers and apostles and prophets and testimony and witness to Jesus because that is the soul of all preaching."

If the preacher isn't preaching the gospel, he's not going to have angelic support. He's not going to have heavenly affirmation. What a promise it is that all preachers who are loyal to the gospel and preach Jesus, all preachers who are faithful to the testimony about Jesus which is the saving gospel are going to be enabled by the angels to fulfill their calling because the testimony of Jesus is at the very heart of preaching. And God wants to make sure that that message gets across and He sends His angels to help. Tremendous truth.

So, the hosts of heaven say their hallelujahs...hallelujah because salvation and glory and power have come. Hallelujah because smoke of man's world rises forever and ever. Hallelujah because God, verse 4, sovereignly sits on the throne and rules everything. Hallelujah, verse 6, the Lord our God reigns. Hallelujah, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb has come.

That's such glorious news John is overwhelmed. We should be. Don't worship the one who brought the news...the one who brought the news is one who's only a fellow servant, who helps preachers preach the gospel because that's the heart of all proclamation. Great truth.

Don't be left out of this event. Don't be left out. Don't be like the man who tried to crash the wedding in Matthew 22 but didn't have the garment. Don't be like the five virgins who really wanted to be a

part but they didn't have the oil. The great event is coming, don't be left out. The garment is the garment of righteousness. The oil is preparedness, readiness which can only be granted through faith in Jesus Christ.

Father, we thank You for our wonderful evening in Your Word. We have touched, as it were, so lightly on these truths. So much more could be said, should be said and perhaps in God's wonderful grace will be said to our hearts and minds in days ahead to give us even a richer and more fulfilling understanding of this tremendous, tremendous coming event. We thank You, Lord, for what You have prepared for them that love You. We thank You that eye has not seen and ear has not heard, neither could it enter in to the heart of man the things that You've prepared for those that love You. We can't even imagine what this day is going to be like. But we long for it. Cause us, like Paul, to love Your appearing more than we love anything else and then to live in the light of it, having such a hope, says John, purifies us. Thank You, Father, for again opening Your truth. Thank You for the help of the preacher by Your Spirit and perhaps even occasionally by Your angels. And may we be faithful to worship You now and through all eternity in a way that pleases You, in Christ's name. Amen.

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