**The Wedding Supper of the Lamb**

March 30, 2013

Revelation 19:1-21

Key Verse 19:9 “Then the angel said to me, ‘Write: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’ And he added, ‘These are the true words of God.’”

The author of Revelation is the Apostle John (one of the original 12 disciples). Apostle John lived far longer than any of the 12 disciples. Having lived so long, John had seen the rise of Christian persecutions at the hands of the Roman Empire. By the time he received the visions found in this book, John had seen so many saints killed and their blood spilled by cruel punishers. Eventually John himself was captured and thrown into a pot of boiling oil. Miraculously he escaped without dying. Soon thereafter he was exiled to Patmos, an island used for criminal detention. It was there on Patmos island that God gave John the visions that became the book of revelation. God gave this book to the church during the time of intense persecution. The intended purpose of Revelation was to strengthen, encourage and refresh the persecuted Church by giving a vivid and clear vision of the hope they had in heaven and the victory Christ had accomplished. So as to help them to keep following Jesus, God gave a book that would crystallize their hope and describe in detail the glory they would soon have. Though we don’t face death on a daily basis like the early church, Jesus’ church today needs the encouragement to keep following Jesus. Nowadays we don’t see the same kind of persecution as in the days of Apostle John. But we face more dreadful ones, that is, we see resistance, stumbling blocks and fiery temptations which are all aimed at one thing: to distract people from following Jesus. All types of incitements and lifestyles are being promoted so that people are persecuted into not following Jesus. Whereas in John’s time, the point of persecution was to scare people from becoming Christians, the point of modern day persecutions is to confuse people and tempt them away from following Jesus. These persecutions are exactly the same but they are perhaps more dreadful because of their deceptive nature. So how did God help the Apostle John and encourage the church to follow Jesus?

I. The Wedding Supper of the Lamb

Look at verses 1-8. In these verses John “heard” two sets of praises. The first set of praise can be found in verses 1-5 and is related to an event called the fall of Babylon; the second set of praise is described in verses 6-8, and is related to an event called the “wedding of the lamb.” So who is this “great multitude”? The great multitude mentioned here are the body of believers who have lived by faith in Jesus. Some of them are the ones who died so sacrificially and the people whom John would have known. If we are faithful to follow Jesus, we too will be part of this praise. What about the contents of their praise? In the first instance the great multitude is praising God for his “salvation,” “glory” and “power.” They are rejoicing in God’s justice because he has “condemned the great prostitute” and because he has “avenged” on her the blood of his servants. The great prostitute is the world and all the godless people who make up this world’s systems, governments and lifestyles. The term “great prostitute” is God’s way of describing this corrupt world. Prostitutes have no commitment and no shame. Likewise the world and its people resist commitment to Jesus as their spiritual husband and they go about sinning without shame or remorse.

This great prostitute (a.k.a. the world) who was drunk with the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus was now utterly destroyed and John heard the praises of the multitude as they rejoiced in God’s justice. Since the time of Abel’s murder, people like Cain and his descendants had been building up the kingdoms of men and had resisted the kingdom of God by killing God’s servants. Finally, after so long a time God’s justice had brought an unequivocal end to all the world’s wickedness. As they said in verse 3, “The smoke from her goes up forever and ever,” the end of the great prostitute was complete with no hope of being restored. Surely, this helped John to vividly see how the persecuted church would have the final victory over the world. With such a clear impression of God’s judgment, John could keep encouraging the Church to continuously resist the persecution. He could even encourage Jesus’ flock to be martyrs as a testimony of Christ.

In our days the wickedness is increasing to unimaginable levels. Many Christians are losing heart because the world seems to be gaining ground and winning. The Church is mocked and ridiculed and is put in a terrible light by many. Just by watching news, you quickly see that believers are painted as being intolerant, simple minded and fools for believing in Jesus. The world has put pressure on Christians to be ashamed of their faith and to not speak up. It is easy to want to give up resisting this world and just live as an undercover Christian. Yet, in view of God’s vision to John, we must testify boldly to Jesus Christ and resist this world. We have the victory over this world and we therefore should not grow weary in resisting it.

The second set of hallelujahs found in verses 6-8 are all based on another event called the “wedding of the lamb.” This event is the polar opposite of the first event. Instead of rejoicing over the end of something wicked, the same “great multitude” are rejoicing over the beginning of something beautiful. Let’s look at these verses more carefully. Look at verses 5-8. “Then a voice came from the throne, saying: “Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!” Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: “Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)” What is the “wedding of the lamb”? This event is the most important event for believers because it is the time of being fully united with Christ. Much like how a husband and a wife become one flesh when they are united, so Jesus and the church will be made truly one at this time. Attending a wedding is always exciting and beautiful but no wedding is greater than your own wedding. Being a guest at a wedding and being the one getting married are two completely different endeavors. But at the “wedding of the Lamb” everyone who is a guest is also getting married. It works this way because Jesus sees us collectively as his church and as his bride. But as individual Christians, we are guests of the wedding. We can understand the great multitude’s call to “rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come.” For in this passage we are finally being united with Christ and so we should praise God and rejoice even now. Amen.

So what will the church be wearing to the wedding? Thank God we won’t be wearing a dress! In verse 8 it says, “Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” We learn here that these linens are not actually linens at all but are the righteous acts of the saints. What are righteous acts of the saints? They are the things we do in and through Jesus Christ. Apart from him we can do nothing but as we remain in him, we are empowered to do something honorable, noble and godly. So after hearing the great multitude praising God, an angel came up to John and said, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” And he added, “These are the true words of God.” When John heard this, he fell at the angel’s feet to worship him. What hit John so hard that he had to fall to the ground and worship, even mistakenly, the messenger who brought the Word? The answer is that John was overwhelmed by glory he heard. The reality of the saints being invited to such a glorious wedding of the Lamb made him fall down in worship. Surely, the torture of seeing Jesus’ flock led to the slaughter was relieved and he was filled with peace and overwhelming joy at God’s victory over the world and the eternal blessedness of the wedding of the Lamb. The angel’s remarks that “blessed” are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb probably restored John’s sense of mission to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth. For us who read this now, we realize clearly that when we were invited to follow Jesus, we were invited to attend this wedding supper of the Lamb. Apostle John’s vision has the power to ease our heavy hearts and to comfort us when following Jesus requires so much.

I know many missionaries who sacrificed lucrative careers to participate in bringing the gospel to the ends of the earth. I know many Bible teachers who take upon themselves the sticky and difficult problems of their Bible students. All these people are like modern day Apostle John’s who need to be refreshed by the overwhelming glory of what we are invited to. Likewise, new disciples need Apostle John’s vision of the wedding supper of the Lamb so they can continue to follow Jesus out of this world and into God’s kingdom. With this vivid hope we gain the necessary strength that makes following Jesus joyful and wonderful. May God bless us to open our eyes to see how blessed we are to be invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb! Amen.

II. The Great Supper of God (11-21)

In this part of the chapter Apostle John sees a vision of Jesus riding out to fully conquer the inhabitants of the World. He sees Jesus’ glory as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This is a much more fearsome image than that of the Lamb. Here Jesus’ eyes are blazing with fire and out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. There will be many rebellious people who will meet Jesus in this terrible manner. They will not be united with Jesus but will instead be ruled by an “iron scepter” which means punished most severely. On these people, verse 15 says “He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.” If that wasn’t worse enough, it was just the beginning. In verses 17-18 John sees an angel calling out in a load voice to all the birds of the air, “Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.” Here, instead of enjoying supper with Jesus, God makes the wicked people who refused to follow Jesus the supper for the birds of the air. This is the polar opposite of what the believers experience in heaven. This is the destiny of those who do not accept the invitation to the wedding supper of the lamb.

Lastly, the Apostle John sees the “beast” and “false-prophet” being captured and thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The people of the earth had followed these instruments of Satan instead of following Jesus. They were instantly judged and thrown into the lake while anyone left was destroyed by the sword that came from Jesus’ mouth. This part is written so that we can see clearly how blessed we are by having a relationship with Jesus and having been invited to the wedding of the Lamb.

III. God’s Victory (20:1-15)

We do not know the exact meaning of the thousand years. But there is one thing we can say for sure. Look at verse 10. “And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” John tells us in graphic detail the consequence of ignoring God and living for ourselves. Every person will have to face the judgment seat of God. Look at verse 12. “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.” Ultimately, our faith in Jesus which is reflected in our deeds is what determines our standing before God. But I think this verse reminds me that nothing we do in life is meaningless. God sees every deed, great and small, good or bad. We often rationalize sin to ourselves by saying: just this once, or it’s not that bad, or at least I’m not killing anyone. But the Bible tells us everything is recorded. And each person stands alone based on what they had done. It’s not based on whether they did better or worse than their neighbor. Each of us needs to make a personal decision of faith to commit ourselves to Jesus and to following him. It’s the only way to have peace, joy, and eternal hope in God’s kingdom.

May Jesus help us to have in our hearts the vivid vision Apostle John has shared with us so that we never grow weary in following Jesus. Hallelujah. Praise the Lord.