



Sunday School Lesson for May 6, 2007
Released on May 2, 2007

"The Final Banquet"

Printed Text: Revelation 19:5-10

Background Scripture: Revelation 19:1-21

Devotional Reading: Psalm 148:1-14

Revelation 19:5-10

5 And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great.

6 And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

9 And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.

10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

Today's Aim

Facts: to reveal reasons for praise to God in heaven and to describe the marriage of the Lamb of God, Christ, to His bride, the Church.

Principle: to motivate believers to rejoice in their union with Christ beginning now and culminating at the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven.

Application: to praise God the Father and Christ with our mouths and by the righteous way we live.

Introduction - "Senioritis"

A few years ago, I had a very capable senior-level student in my class-let's call him Jason-who simply could not bring himself to complete one last, easy, two-page assignment. Jason had a case of senioritis. If you know a student, then you've no doubt heard that term. Right when it counts the most, college and high-school seniors find that the repetition and hard work begin to take their toll.

As a professor, I see this all the time at this time of year. Even our very best students can succumb to the effects of senioritis. Their hard work begins to wear on them, they lose the plot, they take their eyes off the prize of graduating. Before long we have bad grades, missed classes, and a halfhearted effort that characterizes their work.

Jason's senioritis caused him to think that such a small assignment wouldn't really matter. But while it was only a small assignment, it was still very much a part of the course and thus the degree. And you can't graduate without completing all of your courses.

Jason and his parents were horrified to find out the day before graduation that he was going to fail the course and thus not graduate. He had family coming in from around the country to celebrate his accomplishments, and his friends assumed everything was fine. Sadly, Jason failed to achieve what he had worked hard for. It was all because he lost his focus and thus his motivation.

The daily rigors of life take a toll on our ability to stay the course. It may be finances, relationships, or "everything in general"; all of us sometimes find that we just want to give up. And, of course, this is only too true of our spiritual journeys. The terrain becomes difficult to traverse and we begin to falter and fall. We often don't want to get up again.

But there is a solution. The same solution that enables students to complete their requirements is what can help us continue our spiritual journeys. That solution is a confident expectation of the future. Students keep working because they know that if they stay the course, they'll earn a degree. And we can keep going in our spiritual lives because we know that there is an eternal reward waiting for those who are able to stay the course.

Lesson Background

As we come to the next stage in our discussion of the book of Revelation, let's consider where we've been so far. John's Revelation has been a story of hope. John repeatedly makes the same point throughout Revelation: if you are faithful to God, then you will be a part of God's eternal victory.

Between last week's lesson text and this week's, much has transpired. There is an agreement among many that what is described in Revelation 6 through 19 occurs during the Great Tribulation.

In these chapters we encounter Babylon, the great harlot. The reason for this was that Babylon, in the history of Israel, was a place that brought about the destruction of many of God's people. Babylon thus stood as an icon of human arrogance, a place that put itself before God in its pursuit of worldly pleasure and success (even though God used it as His instrument).

Worldly pleasures-fame, possessions, money, etc.-appeal to virtually all of us on some level, don't they? And this appeal is characterized as the lure of a prostitute; thus we have Babylon as the great whore who lures people away from God. As we look into the next part of the story in chapter 19, we find John using this image of the great harlot to contrast the virtuous character of the bride of Christ.

Messiah Supreme – Rev. 19:5-8

1. What does “small and great” mean in Revelation 19:5?

All those who fear God, that is, all His servants, are called upon to render praise to the Almighty. The phrase “small and great” means every believer on earth, regardless of their social-economic status or level of spiritual maturity (Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, Eerdmans). Although some think these servants are a select group within the church, such as martyrs (17:6; 19:2) or prophets (10:7; 11:18; 16:6; 28:20), most think they represent “the whole company of God’s people” (Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, Eerdmans).

2. How is the voice heard by John described? (v. 6)

John describes this voice as the sound of a great multitude. Earlier in the chapter (vs. 1-2), a heavenly multitude praised God for His judgments upon Babylon. Now this same multitude rejoices in the approaching marriage of the Lamb. “The sound that John hears is like the sound of a great throng of people, like the roar of mighty rushing waters, and like a great peal of thunder. Such high drama is appropriate for the announcement that God has at last established his universal reign on Earth” (Mounce).

3. What does “Alleluia” (vs. 6) mean?

The book of Psalms contains many exclamations of the great multitude. “Alleluia” is a variation of “hallelujah” and means “Praise ye the Lord” (Psalms 111:1; 112:1; 113:1; 148:1; 149:1; 150:1). Interestingly, Revelation 19 is the only place where “alleluia” appears in the King James Version of the Bible. The Hebrew equivalent, halleluyah, which has the same translation as “alleluia” appears many times in the Old Testament.

4. What does “omnipotent” mean? How else is the Greek term translated? (v. 6)

The reason the servants of God can sing this hallelujah chorus is that “the Lord God omnipotent reigneth” (Rev. 19:6). The Greek word translated “omnipotent,” meaning “all-powerful,” is elsewhere rendered “almighty” and is used only of God. In the New Testament, this word is found ten times, nine of which are in Revelation. Literally, the word means “ruler of all,” or “one who holds things under his control.” It is comforting to know that God has absolute control of our circumstances. Though we may go through some bad times, God can make it all work for the good (cf. Rom. 8:28). Since God has all power, He will have the winning team in the end. If you are not on the winning team, trust Christ as your Lord and Savior, and you will be on the team.

5. What is the “marriage of the Lamb” (vs. 7)? Who is the “wife” of the Lamb?

The image of the festive occasion of a marriage now emerges upon the scene. Jesus is known as the Lamb of God since He died for the sins of the world. Students of Scripture know that this image is not a new one, for the Lord is often pictured as being married to His people. This was true of both Israel (Isa. 54:5; Jer. 3:14; Hos. 2:19-20) and the church (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:22-33).

We know that Christ will return one day for His church. As a bride makes painstaking preparations for her wedding, we must make preparations as we anticipate time when we will be united with the Lord. Indeed, "the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready" (Rev. 19:7).

"In Biblical times a marriage involved two major events, the betrothal and the wedding. These were normally separated by a period of time during which the two individuals were considered husband and wife and as such were under the obligations of faithfulness" (Mounce). So it is for the people of God as they await the return of their blessed Redeemer. Therefore, let us be "ready."

6. What is meant by the "righteousness of saints" (vs. 8)?

This verse develops the previous verse's idea of the bride's readiness for the Lamb. The nature of the clothing projects an image of purity: *fine linen, clean and white* (compare Isaiah 1:18; Revelation 3:4, 5; 6:11; 7:9-14). This wedding attire is not something the bride herself could have acquired. Instead, as John says, it is *granted* to her to dress in this manner.

The final phrase of verse 8 reveals that the description of the fine wedding outfit reflects the "righteousness of the saints." We don't have a righteousness of our own. Rather, it is the sacrifice of the Lamb of God that enables the bride to present herself in the white and clean wedding dress (compare Philippians 3:9). The imagery of Isaiah 61:10 is powerful: "He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness."

Marriage Supper – Rev. 19:9-10

7. How and why did John draw our attention to the marriage supper? (v. 9)

The "wife" of verse 7 is an image of the faithful who join Christ forever. Now John refers to the same group as *they which are called*.

There is a slight change in the dynamics of the story here because now John tells us that he has been asked to write *the true sayings of God*. While all Scripture has its origins in God, John now draws even more attention to the vital nature of the message. His readers must know of the utter reliability of the point that anyone who is faithful to God, and thus participates in this *marriage supper of the Lamb*, is truly *blessed*.

We recall that John's original readers are in the midst of suffering and are in desperate need of maintaining hope. John helps them, and us, with a reminder of the reliability of God's promises. This is a major theme of the book of Revelation: God is faithful and true to those who are faithful and true to Him. The book of Revelation is thus a source of hope for all Christians of all centuries who suffer and experience attacks against their relationship with God.

8. How do you praise God when you are going through tough times?

God desires that we continually praise and worship Him through both good times and bad. It is important that we realize that temptations in life are not from God (James 1:13, 14). God does permit us to go through temptations and trials, but He is always faithful to prevent us from being tempted beyond what He knows we can bear (1

Corinthians 10:13). Because of this promise we can praise Him. We know that God can bring good out of these tough times (Romans 8:28). We are indeed "blessed" (Rev. 19:9).

9. How did the angel identify himself to John (v. 10)?

We may think that the apostles were not prone to make mistakes, but here John reveals his own error. John is so overcome by the magnificence of God's blessing of His people that he attempts *to worship* the angel who is delivering the message. The angel rebukes John for the mistake but also helps John to understand the problem. The angel correctly responded by telling John that he was merely a "fellobservant" (v. 10).

Angels are heavenly beings who have great power and privilege. They are nevertheless "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb. 1:14).

10. What is meant by the phrase "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (v. 10)?

The last phrase, "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" is ambiguous and has been interpreted in a variety of ways. This could be taken to mean that "the testimony about Jesus is the common substance of all prophecy always manifests itself in bearing witness to Jesus ... [or] that the witness or testimony that Jesus bore is the essence of prophetic proclamation....For this reason people are to worship God, the giver of revelation, and not the angel, who is merely the interpreter of visions" (Mounce).

Conclusion - We Have What it Takes

The Christian life is filled with challenges that wear us down and threaten our ability to remain faithful. Satan knows all our weaknesses, and he doesn't hesitate to exploit them. The book *The Screwtape Letters* by C. S. Lewis offers us a hypothetical account of demons trying to figure out the best ways to tempt humans. We may see ourselves as willing victims on every page!

If we understand the true nature of God-that He really is victorious, destroying His enemies and blessing His faithful-then we have what it takes to remain steadfast, even in the face of suffering. If we are steadfast in our faith, then we will be ready for the groom's arrival. Our eternal future is under His protection. What a reason for praise this is!

Prayer

Our mighty and gracious Father, we thank You for the hope You have given us through the sacrifice of the Lamb. Help us to remain steadfast and faithful to You as we await Your return. To be with Jesus for all eternity will be worth it all. In Jesus' name, amen.

Thought to Remember

Be ready for the wedding feast.

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

Our next lesson promises that we'll be **"Finding a Home in Heaven"** Revelation 21:1-8. Our place at the table, then, is not merely as guests. Our dwelling place is there. The lesson text includes the dire warning that not everyone will share this place. There will be some whose place is in the fiery lake. They are the ones who reject the Lord in life. But we need not fear that place, that "second death." When we join the Lord in Heaven, we're there to stay!

Lesson Summarized By

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