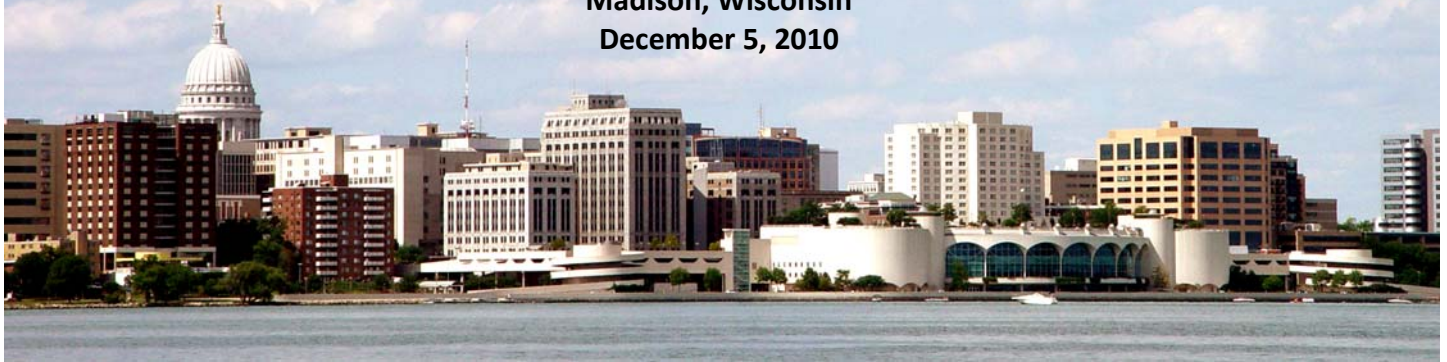


“The Marriage Supper of the Lamb”

Revelation 19:6-10

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Introduction:

Most of us here this morning have probably been to quite a few weddings, and most of us could probably make quite a list if we were asked to name some of the more popular wedding customs. In our own culture, it normally starts with an engagement. The engagement is normally followed by the sending of invitations. There is the rehearsal and the rehearsal dinner. On the wedding day, there is the old saying, “Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue,” and so on. There is the tradition that the groom should not see the bride on the wedding day until she comes down the aisle as she is accompanied by her father. We have the wedding party with at least a best man and a maid or matron of honor, we have the traditional vows, the exchange of the rings, the kiss. And then there is the reception, sometimes a large banquet where the guests come to celebrate with the new husband and wife. We have the tossing of the bouquet. Different cultures have different traditions and customs, but marriage is a relationship that is celebrated around the world. As I was preparing for this morning’s lesson, I learned that it is customary in Japan for some brides to paint themselves white from head to toe. In some parts of Africa, it is customary to jump over a broom as a way of warding off the evil spirits. In England, a bride will often put a coin in her shoe to ensure that the marriage will be blessed financially. We know that Jewish weddings will often conclude with the groom crushing a glass underfoot. In Romania, it is customary for the groom’s friends to kidnap the bride during the reception (usually by taking her to a club or a bar), and then after demanding proof that they have her (usually by demanding a shoe or a piece of clothing as evidence), the groom must then negotiate a ransom (usually in the form of beverages), in order to buy his new wife back. Well, I can see how that would liven up a reception!

But all of these long-established customs simply illustrate the fact that marriage is very important and that weddings are significant events in just about every culture around the world. We know what it means to attend a wedding. Most of us know what it means to be in a wedding. And so with this in mind, I would like for us to look together this morning at a rather brief passage of Scripture that uses a wedding to paint a picture of another very important event. The Scripture is from the book of Revelation and is found in Revelation 19. Revelation, of course, is the very last book in the Bible, it is very easy to find, and in our pew Bibles, the Scripture is found starting on page 1936.

The book of Revelation was written by the apostle John. It was most likely written around the year 95 AD as John was in a Roman prison on the island of Patmos. It was the ancient version of Alcatraz, and as John lived the last few years of his life, he used that time to write an encouraging message to several congregations in the Roman province of Asia Minor, in what is now modern-day Turkey. The message is addressed to seven churches, and the message is highly symbolic. It had to be, because the Romans were censoring his mail, and so he wrote symbolically. He couldn't tell the early Christians that Rome was about to fall—the guards would never let that message pass, but if he told them that Babylon would fall, those early Christians who understood the Old Testament would understand that he was not talking about Babylon, but Rome. Like Rome, Babylon was an enemy of God's people. Sometimes people get all bogged down with 666, and the giant hailstones, and the beasts, and all of that. Years ago, I got a phone call from a man in Janesville who was in the hospital (sometimes you get some interesting calls on the church line), and this man was irate. He wanted to talk to a preacher, and his complaint was that his x-ray came back from the lab, and it had the number "666" on it! Well, he wanted me to start a protest to have that number removed from his x-ray. I tried to explain that in our world of computers, the number "666" will come up from time to time, and that I'm sure the hospital really didn't mean anything by it. But this man was really upset by this symbolic number. However, we studied this book in our Wednesday class several years ago, and we learned that the basic message of the book of Revelation is that God wins! I guess I should have issued a "spoiler alert" here, but when you read the last few chapters of the Bible, you find that God wins, that God is in control! That is the main point of the entire Bible.

With all of this in mind, let us please look together at a very positive and encouraging message from the closing chapters of the Bible: A beautiful wedding as it is pictured for us in Revelation 19:6-10. John hears many voices praising God, and we pick up with Revelation 19:6...

⁶ Then I heard something like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. 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." ⁸ 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. ⁹ Then 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 true words of God." ¹⁰ Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

As we look at this paragraph of Scripture this morning, I would like for us to consider the concept of a wedding, I would like for us to consider what the angel said about those who were invited to the marriage supper, and then I would like for us to close with just a brief lesson based on the mistake that John made right at the end of this passage.

I. But first of all, let us please look very carefully at WHAT JOHN HAS TO SAY ABOUT THE MARRIAGE, THE WEDDING THAT WILL TAKE PLACE IN HEAVEN AT SOME POINT IN THE FUTURE.

In verse 6, we find a huge multitude praising God. The sound of their praise was a "roar," like the "sound of mighty peals of thunder." The multitude praises God for reigning in heaven. They rejoice, they are happy, and the reason is given in verses 7-8 as the huge crowd announces the "marriage of the Lamb." And with that, we have a picture that can be found throughout the New Testament, the idea that Jesus is the groom

and the church is the bride. We remember the picture that the Lord Himself painted for us in Matthew 22:2, ***“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son.”*** We have the idea of God the Father throwing a great feast at the wedding of His Son. We remember the picture painted by Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:2 where he said, ***“For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.”*** In that passage, Paul is making the point that we as the church are engaged to one Husband, that is, to the Lord, and that we are to be faithful, not ***“led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”*** Paul was worried that the church in Corinth would listen to those who were twisting the gospel message and that they would turn away. And so he used the picture of an engaged couple to emphasize the importance of being faithful. We remember what Paul said in Ephesians 5 as he wrote to husbands and wives. He was talking about love and respect, and he said in verses 31-32, ***“FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.”*** And again, the picture of a wedding is something that all of us can understand. We may have different customs, but we understand the love between a husband and wife, we understand the joy of a wedding, we understand the need to be faithful.

But as we go back to Revelation 19, we find that the wedding in heaven is a little bit different from most weddings we see today, because in verse 7 we find that someone is actually paying attention to the groom! In most weddings today, the groom is more of an afterthought. Normally, the groom and the preacher step in quietly from some side room—nobody notices, nobody stands up, there’s no praise—the groom just stands there. But when the bride enters, there is a special song that everybody recognizes, everybody stands up, pictures are taken, there are “ooh’s” and “aah’s,” and so here on this earth it is all about the bride. But in heaven, we find in verse 7 that the Groom is praised, ***“Let us rejoice and exult and give Him the glory!”***

And yet in verses 7-8 we find that the bride of Christ is also important, and the emphasis here is on what she is wearing. But remember: The book of Revelation is highly symbolic, and so the garments are not literal, but John explains as he writes down what he sees, that the fine linen is the ***“righteous deeds of the saints.”*** In other words, as we live, we are preparing for this great day to come.

And if we go back briefly to that passage in Ephesians 5, we find that the Lord Himself has helped prepare the wedding garment for His bride. Starting in Ephesians 5:25, Paul says, ***“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so 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 would be holy and blameless.”*** As the bride of Christ, we have been ***“cleansed...by the washing of water with the word,”*** a reference to baptism. The process of putting on a new garment is referred to again in Galatians 3:26-27, ***“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”*** We read about this in our Scripture reading this morning (from Isaiah 61:10), ***“I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, my soul will exult in my God; for He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”***

The issue of clothing is also addressed earlier in the book of Revelation. In Revelation 3:4-5, the Lord has a message for the church in Sardis, ***“But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.”***

As we put all of this together, we find that as the bride of Christ, we are given new clothing at the point of baptism, and our goal in this life is to keep those garments clean until the great wedding of the Lamb at the end of time. If we sin, 1 John 1:7 tells us that the blood of Christ continually cleanses us of our sins (as we confess our sins and as we walk in the light). First of all, then, we have the picture here in Revelation 19 of a grand wedding in heaven. As the Lord's church, we are the bride, and the Lord Himself is the groom.

II. **As we look back at Revelation 19, we see another aspect of this picture as we consider THE GUESTS WHO HAVE BEEN INVITED TO THE RECEPTION.**

In verse 9, the angel (John's guide through this experience) has a message, ***"And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" The word "blessed" refers to being "happy," and so the angel is saying, "Happy are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb."*** We know what it means to be invited to something. We are honored that someone would think of us as being worthy of being included in some kind of celebration. It is a great honor to be invited to a wedding and then to find our name on one of those little cards at a table. It shows a great deal of planning and preparation. It shows a great deal of concern. There is a blessing, then, on those who have been invited to attend the marriage supper of the Lamb—it is an "invitation only" event. It is a great honor to be invited to the reception.

Who are these people? Who are these invited guests? Well, it appears that we are introduced here to another group of people. You know, I cannot be too dogmatic about this—we need to step back and remember the big picture, the grand idea that God wins—but there does seem to be a difference between the bride of Christ and those who are invited to the reception. If any of you disagree with me on this, we can still be friends, but in this picture, there seems to be a fine distinction between the guests and the bride. And as I see it, the guests appear to be God's people from the Old Testament. One reason for me saying this goes back to something John the Baptist said when his disciples were upset that Jesus was starting to get more disciples than John. In John 3:28-30, John the Baptist responded to those concerns by saying, ***"You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent ahead of Him.' 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. So this joy of mine has been made full. He must increase, but I must decrease."*** John, therefore, was neither the bride nor the bridegroom, but John was a friend of the bridegroom. John was the "best man." And so, yes, John was there, he was a respected guest, but even John (living before the church was established) was not technically in the kingdom. He was not the bride, as we are. In fact, Jesus would go on to speak of John the Baptist a little bit later in Luke 7:28, and the Lord said, ***"I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."*** In other words, John was a great man, but even those of us who are least in the kingdom of God have a position of greater privilege than he did. And this is true because we as Christians are the bride of Christ. John was the Lord's good friend, but we are the bride. We also remember what the Lord said in Matthew 8:11 as He spoke of those with faith before the church was established. The Lord said, ***"I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."*** Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob will all be at the great dinner, but they will not be the bride. My conclusion, therefore, is that the guests at the reception represent those who were saved before the Law of Christ went into effect. So, we have a groom (the Lord), we have a bride (the church), and we have a huge gathering of some very happy guests (representing those who were saved under the Patriarchal or the Old Testament Age.

III. However, as we get to the end of this passage, John gets in a little bit of trouble as we have a reminder that we are to **ONLY WORSHIP GOD**.

And we can understand how excited John must have been. The door has cracked open just a little bit to where he can see into heaven, he can see into the future, he sees all of this that is about to happen, and as he sees these things he turns to the angel and falls down in worship. And at that point the angel immediately issues a stern rebuke (with the idea that they were about to both be in trouble), and so the angel says, ***“You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.”***

You know, I don’t really know why John would worship an angel. I am assuming that John must have known better. Maybe he just got caught up in the moment. Maybe he just got distracted. Maybe he just had the overwhelming feeling that he needed to worship and God just wasn’t there at the moment so he worshiped the next best thing. I don’t know. But the angel had a reminder: The angels are our fellow workers. We are both servants of God. And we are only to worship God.

Conclusion:

And with that, we come to the end of our passage with the understanding that we are the bride of Christ. The entire Universe and all of history have been focused on this one event (the great marriage supper of the Lamb), and as Christians (as the bride of Christ) all of us will have center stage. However, as we come to a close, I would like to just briefly point out a few ways that we could miss it.

First of all, it is possible that those who are not yet Christians could turn down the proposal. We could turn down the invitation. I’m thinking of those times when a young man will propose to his girlfriend. Now, I realize there is only so far we can take this illustration, but that is about what the Lord is offering to the world right now. ***“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life”*** (John 3:16). The offer has been made. We can accept that proposal through our obedience to the gospel, or we can turn it down.

Secondly, we can also miss the great wedding simply by being late. We remember the parable of the ten bridesmaids in Matthew 25. Five of the ten had their lamps all ready and they had extra oil, but the other five only had the oil in their lamps, and the bridegroom came to pick them up while the other five were out somewhere trying to find more oil. They were late, they had failed to be prepared, and so they were excluded from the wedding celebration. In the same way, many will be lost today because of procrastination, because of a lack of diligence, because they put it off. We think of Governor Felix who said to Paul, ***“Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you.”*** Like Felix, many will try to put off making a decision.

And then thirdly, there is a risk for those of us who are Christians that we will not be faithful to the Lord. If we continue the marriage picture, we realize that we as Christians are engaged to the Lord. That’s why Paul talked about that ***“godly jealousy”*** in 2 Corinthians 11:2. And again, that statement was made in the context of those who were not teaching the truth. The Corinthian Christians were being tempted to be unfaithful to the Lord, cheating on the Lord, two-timing the Lord. And so there are some ways that we can miss the great wedding in heaven.

In order to get there, we must accept the invitation. Sometimes we will receive an invitation to something that is marked “RSVP.” Those letters are an abbreviation of an old French phrase, “répondez s’il vous plait,”

[respond-ay, see vu play] or “Respond, if you please,” “Please Respond.” The phrase means that if we want to attend the event, we must accept the invitation, we must communicate back to the host. God has sent the invitation, and we respond by believing in Jesus as the Son of God, by changing the way we live, by confessing our faith in God’s Son, and by being briefly dipped in water for the forgiveness of our sins, at which point we rise up to live a new life. It does not matter who we are, or who we know, or what we’ve done—there is no other way to attend the wedding but to accept the invitation. We may have seen some unusual wedding customs. Many years ago, I officiated at a Korean wedding, and it was the fanciest and the most ornate wedding that I have ever seen. There were some unusual customs. It was formal beyond formal. It was a great honor to be involved in that ceremony. But as important as that event might have been, there is only one wedding that matters: The marriage of the Lamb of God to His bride, the church. You know, there’s a possibility that this wedding may take place this afternoon. It might take place in five minutes, five days, five weeks, five years, or even 5,000 years from now. We don’t know. Are you ready? If you would like to accept the Lord’s invitation, we invite you to RSVP as we stand and sing. Let’s sing together...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com