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Bridgeway Church
Revelation #32
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Sermon Summary #32

You're Invited to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (RSVP Required) Revelation 19:1-10

Why does Bridgeway exist? We exist to exalt Christ in the City. We *do* many things. We preach Scripture. We pray. We evangelize and go on mission trips. We gather in small groups and sing. We serve one another and love one another and sacrifice for one another. We strive for ethnic reconciliation. We strive for biblical justice. But *why* do we do these things? We do them because of the reason why we exist. We exist to make Christ known, to exalt his beauty and majesty, to act and speak and live in such a way that Christ is seen as preeminent and glorious and worthy of all our heart's affection and joy and delight.

You may think that I have a multiplicity of goals when I preach God's Word. I don't. I have one goal. I have many subsidiary goals that I want to achieve. But I seek to achieve them in order that they might enable me to achieve my highest, singular goal. And that goal is to be an instrument in the hands of the Holy Spirit by which your heart's affections might be transformed and your mind's thoughts might be aligned with who God is and your spirit's desires might be to praise and magnify Jesus.

My ultimate goal is that God as revealed in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit might be treasured and prized and enjoyed and extolled as supreme and altogether satisfying to your soul. Any church that exists for anything less is not aligned with Scripture. Many churches may do many different things, and that is fine. But if the "many differing things" that these churches do doesn't serve the single ultimate aim of exalting God as revealed in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, it has failed to achieve what God had in mind when he called us out of sin and darkness into the light of the kingdom of Christ.

And why should any of us believe that the God of the Bible is the sort of God who deserves this sort of single-minded, whole-hearted admiration and enjoyment? We are given numerous reasons here in Revelation 19:1-10. Our God is . . .

- a God of salvation and glory and power (v. 1),
- a God whose judgments are true and just (v. 2),
- a God who vindicates his servants and avenges their blood (v. 3),
- a God of small people and great people (v. 5),
- an Almighty God who reigns in sovereignty over all that he has made (v. 6), and
- a God who ordained from eternity past that his Son, Jesus Christ, would have a Bride, a people whom he redeemed from sin and death, with whom he now celebrates in the great marriage feast (v. 7).

Let's place this paragraph in its proper context. Virtually everything you read in the previous two chapters, Revelation 17-18, is a description of the judgment that God will bring to bear against Babylon, that global network of human defiance and unbelief and idolatry. That rebellious, immoral, Satanically-energized conspiracy among the nations of the earth to cast aside and crush Jesus is finally and forever crushed and destroyed in Revelation 17-18.

You may recall that chapter 17 opens with these words: "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters" (Rev. 17:1b). Then in chapter 18 we read this: "Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great!" (Rev. 18:2b). Again, we read in 18:8, "she will be burned up with fire, for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her" (Rev. 18:8b). And again, "Alas! Alas! You great city, you mighty city, Babylon! For in a single hour your judgment has come" (Rev. 18:10b).

Then chapter 19 begins with the words, "After this," that is to say, after the portrayal of the certainty and finality of God's judgment against wicked Babylon, that world city and civilization that opposed him. What follows in Revelation

19:1-10 is the response of God's people and the angelic hosts to the judgment that he will bring on Babylon. "He has judged the great prostitute" (Rev. 19:2b). And for this reason he is to be praised.

Thus what we have in Revelation 19 is John's hearing of the worship in heaven as God's creation and the Church celebrate their Lord's triumph over wicked Babylon. In fact, worship of our great Triune God is not only the purpose of the book of Revelation. It is the purpose for all existence. It is why we are here. ***Revelation 17-19 are saying to all: Don't worship the wealth of Babylon. Worship God! Don't worship the power of Babylon! Worship God! Don't worship any of the sensual or worldly pleasures that Babylon offers you. Worship God!***

John records for us what he hears in heaven so that we on earth might join in the celebration and admiration and adoration of the God who not only judges Babylon but who also has redeemed men and women from every tongue and tribe and nation and people. John writes this while sitting in exile on the island of Patmos. We listen to it while sitting in luxury and peace and calm in a building in OKC. Surely we can join with him in the praise of who God is and what he has done.

Do you realize what is happening when we sing our praises to God? Do you understand what we are saying not only to God but to this city and state? ***We are saying that we refuse to be seduced by Babylon's treasure and pleasure. We are saying that we refuse to buy into the Satanic lie that there is more satisfaction to be found in the world than in Jesus. We are saying what David said in Psalm 16:11, that it is in God's presence that we find fullness of joy and at God's right hand that we experience pleasures that never end.*** Here is how John Piper put it:

"Corporate worship is the public savoring of the worth of God and the beauty of God and power of God and the wisdom of God. And therefore worship is an open declaration to all the powers of heaven and to all of Babylon that we will not prostitute our minds or our hearts or our bodies to the allurements of the world. Though we may live in Babylon, we will not be captive to Babylonian ways. And we will celebrate with all our might the awesome truth that we are free from that which will be destroyed."

Worship is far more than singing. We don't merely sing songs. We sing to celebrate and proclaim the God of heaven and earth. We sing to enjoy him. We sing to savor all that he is for us in Jesus. We sing and pray to connect with God himself. Worship is all about engaging with God, encountering God, extolling God, enjoying God. I love what Piper said about worship: ***worship "is the blatant, public savoring of God in the midst of a very seductive Babylonian culture. Worship is the flagrant, open enjoyment of God as the fountain of life. And therefore it is a public declaration that God is more to be desired than all the pleasures of Babylon."***

Now that we all understand the ultimate purpose of this paragraph, let's pull it apart piece by piece.

Eavesdropping on the Worship of Heaven's Inhabitants (vv. 1-2)

I greatly envy John. Here once again he is allowed to eavesdrop, as it were, on what is happening in heaven. He hears a "great multitude" shouting praise and crying out to God. Who is it that he hears? Are these angels, or perhaps the 24 elders that we encountered back in Revelation 4-5, or maybe these are the voices of the 4 living creatures? It could be the martyred saints, those who have been killed because of their allegiance to Jesus. My guess is that it is probably all of them, joining together as if they were a heavenly choir.

Note carefully that this declaration in v. 1b is more than a simple doxology. "Salvation" belongs to "our God" in the sense that he alone can provide redemption and forgiveness of sins. Whatever other so-called "god" you may seek, you may find much, but you won't find deliverance from divine judgment.

"Glory" belongs to "our God" in the sense that the weighty, priceless beauty and splendor for which our souls long and with which we will be captivated for all eternity are found only in the Christian God. For most in our society God is inconsequential. If he is regarded at all, he is regarded very lowly. When I once heard someone take the Lord's name in vain, cursing wildly with a string of "G-d's" I challenged him. He immediately apologized by saying, "Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean anything by it." My response was: "That's precisely the problem! God ***doesn't*** mean anything to you. He is inconsequential to your life and your language. He has value to you only to the degree that his name adds punch to your profanity."

And “power” belongs to “our God.” Not weakness, not feebleness, not fragility, but omnipotent power to create and uphold the universe and to supply us with everything we need to thrive in a broken world.

Their declaration of praise is no doubt in response to the judgment on Babylon described in chapters 17 and 18. This is confirmed by v. 2 (note the transitional word “for” / “because”). God is to be praised and all power and glory ascribed to him precisely because he has “judged the great prostitute” (v. 2). Far from the outpouring of wrath and the destruction of his enemies being a blight on God’s character or a reason to question his love and kindness (as unbelievers so often suggest), they are the very reason for worship!

As we saw earlier in 15:3-4 and 16:5-7, God’s judgments against the unbelieving world system and its followers are “true and just”. They are true and just because the great prostitute “corrupted [cf. 17:1-5; 18:3,7-9] the earth with her immorality,” thereby meriting divine vengeance.

Of all the questions I am asked by people, the one that rings most loudly and consistently is this: “How can God do this and be just? How can God permit that and be just? If God were just he would do A and not B and most certainly would never permit X or Z.” I cannot explain how or why or for what purpose God does all that he does, but this I know with absolute certainty: whatever he does, be that saving a soul or judging another, granting access to heaven or casting into hell, he is always and ever wholly just and true!

You might think that the word translated “Hallelujah” (lit., praise Yahweh) would appear everywhere in the NT. It actually occurs only four times in the NT, all of which are found here in Revelation 19:1,3,4,6.

The ESV translates the final phrase in v. 2, “on her,” when it literally should read, “from her hand.” This may simply be a figure of speech in which a part (“hand”) represents the whole (all of Babylon). Or it may be that God “has avenged the blood of his bondservants *which was shed by her hand*” (cf. 2 Kings 9:7).

Praising God for the Eternal Duration of her Destruction (vv. 3-4)

As if once were not enough, now “once more” the cry of Hallelujah! is sounded. The wording here comes from the OT description of God’s judgment against Edom (Isa. 34:9-10) and is similar to Revelation 14:11, all of which points to the never-ending nature (or effect?) of Babylon’s judgment. Beale suggests that “the portrayal of the city’s *eternal* judgment may be a partial polemic against the mythical name *Roma aeterna* (‘eternal Rome’), which was one of the names for the Roman Empire” (929). This verdict is then echoed (note their “Amen”, a formal expression of ratification and endorsement) by the 24 elders and 4 living creatures (cf. Ps. 106:48 for this combination of “Amen” and “Hallelujah”).

Praising God from both Small and Great (v. 5)

Whose “voice” is this that John hears in v. 5? Is it Jesus? Could it be Michael or one of the other angels, or perhaps one of the 4 living creatures? The fact that it came “from the throne” has led some to say this is Jesus calling everyone to worship the Father. If so, would he say, “Praise *our* God,” “Give praise to *your* God,” or even “Give praise to *my* God”? In any case, those called on to praise God (again, given the context, for the judgment of Babylon and all God’s enemies) include all God-fearing bondservants, both great (powerful and important) and small (weak and unnoticed). Worship is incumbent on us all, regardless of our earthly status, socio-economic achievement, reputation, or accomplishments.

Praising God for his Sovereign Reign (v. 6)

Again, a “great multitude” shouts forth its praise (v. 6). Surely this is the same group, whoever they may be, that began this worship service in v. 1. Only here their voice is even louder (like the “roar of many waters” and “mighty peals of thunder”), gradually increasing as they reflect more deeply on the reasons why God is worthy of praise (as stated in v. 2 and all of chapter 18).

When we lived in Kansas City I had the privilege on several occasions of attending football games of the Kansas City Chiefs. Arrowhead Stadium, where the Chiefs play, is famous for being one of the loudest, if not the loudest outdoor sports arena in the country. And I can testify to it. During a typical moment in the game, I could turn to Ann with my

lips pressed against her ear and loudly say something, and yet she couldn't hear a thing. Such was the level of excitement among the fans. But that pales in comparison with the roars that are incessantly heard around the throne of God! ***Would that the worship at Bridgeway be comparable to "the roar of many waters" and "the sound of mighty peals of thunder"!***

The judgments of God against Babylon are indicative of God's "reign" (v. 6). This is important, because the wickedness and rebellion of all earthly non-believing people and nations might appear to call into question whether or not God is actually in control. We tend to think that the rampant evil in our world is a sign that God has lost his grip on creation and the affairs of men.

But no! God is to be worshipped precisely because through it all, he and he alone reigns. His will is done in both heaven and earth. Nothing in Revelation has caught him by surprise. ***The one thing that will keep you singing your praises and extolling our God is your assurance that he is almighty and sovereign and in control, even if the evil plans of Babylon on earth end up costing you your livelihood or even your life.***

Praising God for the Salvation and Sanctification of the Bride of Christ (vv. 7-8)

Do you realize that the way in which God brings glory to himself and gladness to us is by graciously and lovingly securing a Bride for his Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ? ***The totality of the biblical story, from Genesis to Revelation, is concerned with God's redemptive pursuit of a people for Jesus.*** All of history consummates here, in the spiritual union and joy and ecstasy of God's people with God's Son.

The image of Jesus as the bridegroom and his people the bride reaches all the way back into the OT. But it was Jesus himself who spoke of this more than any other. Jesus replied to the religious leaders that the reason his disciples were not fasting was because he, the Bridegroom, was present with them (Matt. 9:14-15). When he would depart, then they would fast. He described heaven as being like a wedding feast: "And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son'" (Matt. 22:1-14). He portrayed his Second Coming as the coming of a bridegroom (Matt. 25:1-13). When John the Baptist described himself in relation to Jesus he basically said, "I am the best man but Jesus is the bridegroom" (see John 3:29).

Let's begin by noting her clothing, or as David Aune has put it, "the bridal trousseau" (3:1030).

- The "*fine linen, bright and pure*" is an obvious and intentional contrast between the clothing of Babylon (where it functions as "a symbol of decadence and opulence" [Aune, 3:1030]), and the clothing of the bride (where it functions as a symbol of righteousness and purity; see esp. the OT background for this imagery in Isa. 61:10).
- The "fine linen" is then said to symbolize "the righteous deeds of the saints" (v. 8b). Some believe this points to the idea repeated throughout Revelation of the saints "holding to the testimony of Jesus" (cf. 19:10), i.e., bearing witness to Jesus in both word and deed (see 1:9; 6:9; 11:7; 12:11,17; 20:4). Others emphasize the idea of purity that results from persevering faith amidst trials and suffering (cf. 3:5-6).
- Another suggestion is that the phrase "righteous deeds of the saints" points instead to God's act of vindication on behalf of the saints. In other words, God's act of judgment against Babylon and the beast, persecutors of the saints, is a declaration of acquittal. I.e., God has vindicated them. He has passed judgment *on their behalf*. If so, the "fine linen" points to the final reward for having lived righteously rather than the righteous living itself.
- Finally, note the classic theological tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. On the one hand, the bride "has made herself ready" (v. 7). There is something we must do. We must be prepared for that day. We are responsible to obey what God has called us to do in Scripture. I tremble at the thought of how much time and money were required so that my daughters could be "ready" to meet their respective bridegrooms as they walked down the aisle! They exercised to lose weight, they purchased cosmetics, hired hairdressers, and their wedding dresses, . . . well, you can only imagine the painstaking process of selecting just the right one and the monetary price that I had to pay! But it was worth every dollar!

Yet on the other hand, “it was **granted** to her [by God] to clothe herself” (v. 8). On this tension see Philippians 2:12-13. Yes, the bride must actively and willingly pursue purity of life (“work out your salvation with fear and trembling”), yet all the while acknowledging that it is God’s grace that makes it possible (“for it is God who is at work in you to work and to will for his good pleasure”). **The good deeds, the righteous deeds with which we are clothed, are a gift from God.** Paul says in Ephesians 2:10 they have been prepared for us before the foundation of the world that we might walk in them. And this makes it all the more fitting and appropriate that we should give God the glory, as we saw in v. 7.

Praising God for the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (vv. 9-10)

I don’t know what will be served at the marriage supper of the Lamb. But contrary to what many of you might otherwise believe, I can assure you that squash will not be on the menu!

There is a slight change in perspective from vv. 7-8 to v. 9. In the former verses the bride is viewed corporately, on the verge of marrying the Lamb. But in v. 9 the focus is on individual believers who are portrayed as invited guests at the marriage supper. Both pictures describe the intimacy of communion between Jesus and his people. But **this is an invitation to which you and I must personally respond.** Many of you, sad to say, ignore the requested RSVP when you receive an invitation to a wedding. But to be a part of this wedding you must respond in repentance and faith and embrace the Bridegroom as your own!

Of all possible scenarios or spiritual metaphors that could have been used to portray the relationship between the Lamb, Jesus Christ, and his people, why was that of marriage and a wedding feast (cf. Isa. 25:6) chosen? What is it in this imagery that John finds particularly appropriate when describing the nature of how we feel about and relate to Jesus? Joy? Celebration? The beginning of a new life together? Intimacy? Trust? Oneness? Commitment? Delight in one another? Yes!

As the father of two daughters I know what it costs to pay for and host a wedding reception and dinner. I did the best I could for my two girls given the money that was available to me at the time. But nothing will ever compare with the feast that the heavenly Father plans on hosting for his Son, the bridegroom, together with his bride, the Church. Not all the wedding cakes and exquisite dinners and luscious desserts that you’ve enjoyed at the most lavish of wedding feasts can compare with what the Father has planned for his Son!

The angel speaking to John has anticipated our objection that surely this is all too good to be true. It must be a spectacular exaggeration. “Ah,” says the angel in v. 9b, “These are the true words of God.” So when you hear him say that those who are invited to this wedding feast are “blessed” you had better believe it!

There is an obvious contrast between, on the one hand, the marriage “supper” of the Lamb, to which the Bride is invited, and, on the other, the “great supper” of God (vv. 17-18), to which the birds are invited that they might eat the flesh of his enemies! At the end of history there will be two great suppers, at one of which all people will attend. Either you will eat or be eaten! Either you are a guest who dines, or you are the dinner! One is a reward for faith and righteousness, the other a punishment for unbelief and wickedness.

People have often wondered why John would be so naïve as to fall at the feet of an angel and worship? Some have tried to dismiss the problem by saying that the word “worship” (*proskunesis*) need only refer to a normal gesture of respect, far short of genuine worship. Whereas the word can often have this meaning in the Bible, the angel’s response in v. 10b and his advice to John indicate otherwise. There are at least two answers to this problem, both of which bear a measure of truth.

First of all, this is only the first of two such occurrences, the other in Revelation 22:8-9. It may be that John, much like Daniel in chapter 10 of his prophecy, was overwhelmed with the brilliance and power of this angelic being. Let us remember that in 18:1 an angel is described as “having great authority” and so completely reflecting the glory of God that “the earth was made bright with his glory.”

Second, the angel has just pronounced an awesome beatitude or blessing on John and others who are invited to the marriage supper, immediately followed by a powerful declaration that authenticates its reality: “These are true words

of God” (v. 9b). The impact of this statement may have been simply more than he could fathom. He may have thought that any spiritual being commissioned from the throne of God with such profound news was deserving of special reverence.

But is there any other reason why the Spirit, through John, would include this story? Yes.

- First of all, note that it is the angel as *the giver of prophetic revelation* (esp. seen in 22:8-9) that explains why John prostrates himself in this way. But “in rejecting worship the angel disclaims this status: he is not the transcendent giver of prophetic revelation, but a creaturely instrument through whom the revelation is given, and therefore a fellow-servant with John and the Christian prophets, who are similarly only instruments to pass on the revelation. Instead of the angel, John is directed to ‘worship God’ (19:10; 22:9) as the true transcendent source of revelation” (Bauckham, 134). As 22:16 makes clear, “the angel is a mere intermediary, Jesus is the source of the revelation” (134). The angel wants to make it clear that when it comes to revelation, he belongs on the side of the creatures who receive it, while Jesus belongs on the side of God who gives it.
- Second, it may be that John is reinforcing in this story one of the principal themes of the entire book: namely, *the difference between true worship and idolatry*. Everyone in Revelation either worships God or the dragon/beast/Babylon. There is no third way or middle ground.
- Third, and related to the above, is the fact that this scenario presents both an example and a warning of how easy it is to be deceived and seduced into idolatry. If someone like John, who has been the recipient of such marvelous revelatory experiences as found in Revelation, can fall prey to this temptation, how much more should we be on the alert!

You and I, together with John and all those who have been invited and made fit to attend the marriage supper of the Lamb, have one ultimate responsibility and privilege: **“Worship God!”** (v. 10b). Why? Because “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (cf. 1:2,9; 12:17; 19:10b; 20:4). Let me help you understand the connection between the command to worship God and the declaration that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

The Greek would allow us to render the first part either of two ways: (1) “the testimony *about* Jesus,” or (2) “the testimony *which comes from* Jesus,” i.e., which Jesus himself bears or declares. The latter option points to the idea that all true prophecy has its origin in the words and acts of Jesus. But I think the former option is more likely. It highlights the idea that *all true prophecy consists in testimony or witness to/about Jesus himself. I.e., he is its content and focus* (whether directly or indirectly). In other words, the reason you should only worship God is because the testimony of all prophecy is about Jesus, not about angels, not about mere human beings, but about and concerning the God-man, Jesus Christ.

The second half of this statement may mean that all true prophecy is inspired by the Holy Spirit (i.e., energized and sustained by him). Or it may mean that the essence of prophecy, the purpose and principle of it all, is bearing witness to Jesus. Or again, it may mean that the (Holy) Spirit is chiefly characterized by prophetic manifestations. And since all of you who know Jesus have the Holy Spirit dwelling within you, all of you therefore potentially may prophesy concerning who Jesus is and what he has done.

Conclusion

The wedding day is near. The bridegroom is coming! Have you betrothed yourself to Christ? Have you made yourself “ready” by turning to him in faith and clinging to him above all others? The invitation has been extended. If you wish to attend the marriage feast of the Lamb, you must respond. RSVP in trust and adoration and confident hope that Jesus alone can save your soul, forgive your sins, and clothe you in fine linen.