

Sermon – 27/04/2008 pm

Marriage Supper of the Lamb

Study Text: Revelation 19:7–11

Years ago I was invited to a wedding in a remote village in India. I arrived around eight with a young colleague who came with me on my bike. The village was home to the young bride – young as in 11. The place was decorated with lights and banners. As guests we were expecting a rich feast – mutton curry and rice.

According to custom the bridegroom would come with family and friends – and a brass band. After the marriage, or what was in fact betrothal, the young man would return to his home until his wife had come of age. I waited till nine, ten, eleven and still nothing happened. We had a long wait.

Jewish marriage custom also involved a period of betrothal or engagement. Engagement was a formal ceremony, almost as binding as marriage. Mary was betrothed to her husband Joseph – she was called his wife – even before they started living together (Matthew 1:19, 20). The betrothal involved the giving of gifts by the groom's father. The groom himself had to pay a bride price – seven years work in Jacob's case.

After the period of engagement, the marriage day came. The bride prepared herself for her husband. She adorned herself with perfume, with jewellery and fine clothes. She came to her husband's home, to the place, the marriage tent that he had prepared for her. This was a time of great celebration and feasting. The celebration went on for a week or even longer.

Jesus' relationship to us parallels that of husband and wife, including this marriage ceremony. Hosea said that the Lord had betrothed himself to Israel (Hosea 2:19). The book of Hosea is all about the unfaithfulness of Israel to whom the Lord had betrothed himself. The apostle Paul writes *I am jealous for you for I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ* (II Corinthians 11:2). He also told the Corinthian believers 'you were bought at a price, therefore honour God in your body and in your spirit which are God's' (I Corinthians 6:20).

Marriage Supper

Jesus first public appearance and demonstration of his power and glory was at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. His last appearance as a free man was at the last supper with his disciples. At this supper he said *I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes*. As he gave the cup to his disciples he was looking beyond the Cross to the fulfilment of God's eternal purposes in the coming kingdom of God. Moreover he said them that they would eat and drink with him at his table in his kingdom (Luke 22:30).

'The Lord's supper is an anticipatory meal of this coming union of Christ and his church'. Jesus was pointing his disciples to the marriage supper of the Lamb. He said to them at that same meal 'I go and prepare a place for you and I will come again and receive you to myself' (John 14:6). He was using words familiar to the Jews from the marriage custom. He would

come and take them to be with him in his Father's house. Jesus spoke of drinking anew with them in his Father's kingdom (Matthew 26:29).

Let us be glad and rejoice and give him the glory, for the marriage supper of the Lamb has come (19:7). In this prophetic letter to the seven churches John writes that the marriage supper has come. John is writing what he hears from heaven. The picture is that of a great wedding feast in heaven. Jesus the Lamb is at the table with his bride, the people of God. There is great rejoicing with all giving praise and glory to God who has planned this wedding from eternity.

Dispensationalists argue about whether this supper is on earth or in heaven. They also fail to agree whether it is before the millennium or during the millennium. We do not have to enter into such arguments for the Scripture is clear. The marriage supper will be at the end, it will be when Jesus comes again; and when Jesus comes again heaven and earth will pass away (21:1). In fact the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God is referred to as *a bride adorned for her husband (21:2)*. Remember also there will be one bride not two – there will not be a Jewish bride and a Gentile bride as some dispensational teaching seems to indicate.

Bride Made Ready

The amount of time and money some women spend on making themselves beautiful for their wedding day is mind boggling. Not hundreds but thousands of dollars are spent on a dress, on shoes, on hair and on make up – not to mention jewellery and the bouquet. To some it may seem extravagant and over the top – all this expense for just one day, for a few hours. But the bride is not dressing up to please you; she is dressing to please her husband. She spares no expense in making herself ready for her husband.

The Lamb's wife has made herself ready. To her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright (19:7, 8). She has made herself ready with the garment granted/given to her. Given to her by whom? This word granted usually refers to divine permission (13:7, 15). Here it is a divine gift. Yet the garment is said to be *the righteous acts of the saints*. A divine gift, yet also the righteous deeds of the saints – how can this be?

The picture becomes clear when we look to Ephesians chapter 5. Before doing so, note that this can be understood as *righteous acts for the saints*. Elsewhere in Revelation white robes are given to the saints (3:6, 11; 19:14). In Isaiah 61:10 wedding robes of righteousness are given by God to Israel his bride. The apostle Paul writes of Christ and the church *that Christ might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that he might present her to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:26, 27)*. Jesus the Lamb actually makes his bride, the church, ready for the marriage with himself.

This is the marriage of a pauper to a prince. The pauper is filthy and dressed in rags. Some years ago I picked up a man on the side of the road. When he got into the car I realised my mistake. The smell was horrible. I opened every vent I could find, wound down the window even though it was freezing and managed to survive for 4 hours! Imagine a bride smelling and looking like that. The truth is that is how we were when Jesus found us – lost on the road to hell. He took us and washed us in his own blood to make us acceptable to himself, the Prince of peace and King of kings.

The bride arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright stands in contrast to the other woman, the great prostitute. The great prostitute was arrayed in purple and scarlet, not white. She had many lovers who did not clothe her but stripped her naked (17:16). This woman who symbolized money and worldly pleasures was now consigned to the lake of fire. With her out of the way there is rejoicing in heaven and great celebration as Christ and his bride make their glorious appearance.

Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb (19:9). One who was presumably an angel spoke these words to John. Did he think that it was Christ? The angel told him to write this beatitude down. These are important words. They *are the true words of God*. They are wonderful words declaring the blessing of Almighty God on those called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Have you been called? Are you one of the elect of God invited to this heavenly feast that never ends? Do you know the wonderful blessings that are yours as one washed in the blood of Christ and clothed in his righteousness? This is of course the only way you get a seat at this table. Are you a member of the true church which is the bride of Christ? Being a member of this church or another visible church is not what gets you a place at this supper – it is being called and clothed by Christ himself. Are you ready to dine with Jesus at his banqueting table in glory?

Worship God

Did John mistake the angel for Jesus, or was he just so filled with awe and wonder at what the angel was telling him that he fell down at his feet in worship? Clearly it was not Jesus but a *fellow servant and one of your brethren (19:10)*. It was an angel, a created being like us. Amazingly John fell down *to worship before the feet of an angel* a second time (22:8). At that time he also heard a beatitude – *blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book (19:7)*.

John was rebuked for worshipping an angel, but before we stand in judgment we might ask ourselves what we would have done in the same circumstances. How do you respond when you hear God's blessing pronounced? How do you respond when you hear the word of God read? Some people are so bold as to walk out of church when the word of God is being read. Some choose to chatter or let their mind drift off somewhere. John was so moved when he heard the word of God that he fell down before the messenger!

Worship God! This is the theme of this whole book. God, the Triune God alone is worthy of our worship. We are not to worship angels or any other created thing or being. Idolaters do not have a place in heaven. Millions worship idols of wood and stone, or of money and men.

Even some who call themselves Christians fail to worship God alone. Paul had to condemn some in the church at Colossae who started to worship angels (Colossians 2:18). What of those who worship Mary and so called saints? What of those who worship their ancestors? It is too easy to fall into such idolatry in worship. We must worship God alone. We must worship him in spirit and in truth. The truth is Jesus testified to in this book and the rest of Scripture. The spirit of prophecy is the power by which we understand the words of this book and apply them to our hearts.

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