

**Church as the Bride of Christ**  
**Revelation 19:6-10**  
**Week 5**

Opening

Ask if anyone would like to open in prayer. They can pray on their own or use the prayer printed below. It also might be a good idea to reach out to a group member prior to your meeting and ask them ahead of time if they'd be willing to open in prayer. That's a great way to encourage participation without putting anyone on the spot.

*Holy God, as we study Your Word and reflect on Your Church, we pray that the power of the Spirit would be at work to connect and renew us. Give us wisdom and insight and strengthen our bonds with one another and You. In the name of our risen Lord we pray, Amen.*

Depending on time constraints you may want to take a bit of extra time to check in with folks and see how they're doing. You could also wait and do this at the end of the session before closing in prayer.

Check-in question

What is the best celebration you've ever been to (wedding, sports team success, graduation party) and what made it so great?

Read: Revelation 19:16-10

\*\*The Message translation is printed below or you can read from your own Bible

*<sup>6-8</sup>Then I heard the sound of massed choirs, the sound of mighty rapids, the sound of strong thunder:*

*Hallelujah!*

*The Master reigns,*

*our God, the Sovereign-Strong!*

*Let us celebrate, let us rejoice,*

*let us give him the glory!*

*The Marriage of the Lamb has come;*

*his Wife has made herself ready.*

*She was given a bridal gown*

*of bright and shining linen.*

*The linen is the righteousness of the saints.*

<sup>9</sup> The Angel said to me, "Write this: 'Blessed are those invited to the Wedding Supper of the Lamb.'" He added, "These are the true words of God!"

<sup>10</sup> I fell at his feet to worship him, but he wouldn't let me. "Don't do that," he said. "I'm a servant just like you, and like your brothers and sisters who hold to the witness of Jesus. The witness of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

## **BACKGROUND**

### **What Is the Marriage Supper of the Lamb?**

The marriage supper of the Lamb is a symbolic representation of the joyful, intimate, and eternal fellowship that takes place between Jesus Christ (the Lamb of God) and his bride (the Church). This future picture of a great wedding feast is drawn from both Old Testament and New Testament imagery.

#### **Old Testament Imagery**

Old Testament writers often used weddings, betrothals, brides, bridegrooms, and marriage unions as powerful illustrative resources. The nation of Israel was frequently likened to the wife of God by the prophets. Over and over, when Israel broke her covenant vows with God, she was compared to a wayward, unfaithful wife who had broken her marriage vows (Hosea 1-2; Jeremiah 2-3; Isaiah 50; Ezekiel 16; 23).

The development of the Lamb of God as imagery for the Messiah also began in the Old Testament with frequent animal sacrifices. In the story of Abraham and Isaac, the Lord provides the sacrificial lamb, foreshadowing God's sacrifice of his only son, Jesus Christ, on the cross at Calvary, for the sins of the world. The book of Isaiah describes the Suffering Servant as a "lamb led to the slaughter" (Isaiah 53:7).

#### **New Testament Imagery**

The picture of Jesus Christ as the sacrificial Lamb of God reaches fulfillment in the New Testament. When John the Baptist first sees Jesus, he declares, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29, 36). The earliest Christians believed Jesus was the Suffering Servant of Isaiah (Acts 8:32). The apostle Paul describes Jesus as the Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7). The apostle Peter explains that believers are redeemed "with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." (1 Peter 1:19, ESV)

Likewise, marriage and wedding imagery expands and is made complete in the New Testament with the coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus' first miracle takes place at the wedding feast in Cana (John 2:1-11). John the Baptist calls Jesus the Bridegroom (John 3:27-30). And Jesus himself often speaks of the Kingdom of God in terms of a joyous wedding feast (Matthew 8:11; 22:1-14; 25:1-13; 26:29; Luke 13:28-29; 14:15-24).

Paul introduces the metaphor of the Church as the bride of Christ. In Ephesians 5:25-27, he explains that the relationship between husbands and wives is like the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Church.

#### **Historical and Cultural Context**

To fully understand the imagery of the marriage supper of the Lamb, it's essential to consider the historical context of weddings in the culture at the time of Christ. For a Jewish couple to enter into matrimony, they had to go through a multi-phase process.

The initial step involved the signing of the marriage contract, or Ketubah, which was executed by the parents of both the bride and the groom. The groom's family would pay a dowry to the bride's family, sealing the betrothal. As such, the official engagement period would begin. The betrothal was bound by the terms of the marriage contract. During this period the couple did not live together or have sexual relations with each other.

Typically, one year after the initial betrothal, a nuptial procession took place from the house of the bride to the bridegroom's home (as seen in the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13). For this celebration, the bride would make herself ready to receive her groom. The final phase of the wedding ceremony culminated in a great feast, the marriage supper, which could last for several days.

### **Imagery in the Book of Revelation**

The imagery reaches its final, climactic stage in the book of Revelation. The marriage supper of the Lamb marks the end of the long engagement period between Jesus Christ and the Church and the beginning of an eternal, unbroken fellowship of love.

John refers to Christ as the Lamb who was slain (Revelation 5:6, 9, 12; 13:8), who shed his blood (Rev 5:9; 7:14; 12:11), and who overcame death and the devil (Revelation 12:10-11; Romans 8:36-37). Jesus is the victorious Lamb of God who conquers through self-sacrifice.

Jesus Christ, the Lamb, is the Bridegroom and the Church is his bride. The marriage supper of the Lamb, a great and joyous celebration, comes to this glorious climax near the end of the book of Revelation:

I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

...One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

(Revelation 21:2-11, see also 19:6-10; 22:17)

The closing passages of Scripture vividly present the crowning moments of human history. This picture of a marriage feast between Christ and his Church illustrates God's plan of salvation—a grand and celebrated romance between the Creator and his creation. The metaphor of the marriage supper of the Lamb produces a captivating portrait of the deeply loving, personal, and everlasting relationship that Jesus Christ enjoys with his Church.<sup>1</sup>

### **From N.T. Wright's "Revelation for Everyone"**

In the strange new world of postmodern Britain, weddings are still highly popular, but they are also highly expensive. So much so, in fact, that it is now the norm rather than the exception for couples to live together for some years, intending to get married, but finding that

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.learnreligions.com/marriage-supper-of-the-lamb-4686136>

in order to afford the kind of spectacle they have been led to expect they have to save up. Even in areas of relative poverty, people still spend tens of thousands of pounds to stage something that seems appropriate to the occasion. There is much about this modern custom that I find sad. It feeds commercial interests, and gives to the ceremony itself a flavor which is out of keeping with its real meaning.

But at another level I regard it as an affirmation of something profoundly true about what it means to be human. We are, after all, made male and female in God's image, and in Genesis that is the climax of the whole story of creation. For a man and a woman to come together in marriage, whether they know it or not, is to plant a signpost which says: God's creation is wonderful! God's purposes for it are not over! His plan is going ahead, and we are part of it! Theologians down the ages have always seen the promises made at a wedding, promises of faithfulness through thick and thin, as a proper reflection of God's promises to his world, to the human race, and to his own people in particular. A wedding, then, is a glorious symbol. Even when people enter upon it with no thought of God, and with an eye only for the dress, the photographs and the wine, it remains powerful.

All of that is in the background of the great reversal which now takes place in the book of Revelation. The whore has been judged; the bride steps forward. The glossy, glitzy world of Babylon has been overthrown; God's people emerge, with shining, pure linen to wear as God's own gift. The marriage of the lamb and his bride is to be the focal point of the marriage of heaven and earth themselves, and Babylon, the symbolic equivalent of the ancient Babel which thought to climb up to heaven by its own energy, is shown up as a futile parody of the real thing, a human attempt to get, by sheer greed, what God proposed to give by sheer grace.

The idea of such a wedding goes back, of course, to the ancient Jewish tradition of Israel's as YHWH's bride – wooed in the wilderness, married at Sinai, unfaithful for many generations and eventually cast away, but then wooed and won all over again in a covenant renewal that would result in the renewal of the whole creation (Isaiah 54–55). The whole of the Song of Songs, though at one level simply a spectacular poem of erotic love, has been seen by Jewish and Christian commentators alike as an allegory of the love between God and his people (for Christians, Christ and his people). Now this glorious theme comes to a spectacular completion, and is joined with another ancient theme of celebration: God's great feast, the banquet to which he will invite all and sundry (Isaiah 25.6 –10).<sup>2</sup>

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

### **Initial Reactions**

1. What from this passage confuses, inspires, or resonates with you? Perhaps hearing it read from a different translation caused you to notice a new word or phrase.
2. Were there stories or images you took away from Ryan's sermon on Sunday that helped you better understand this part of Revelation?

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<sup>2</sup>Revelation for Everyone, authored by N. T. Wright and published by Westminster John Knox Press, 2011.

### **Diving Deeper**

3. Why do you think the image of a wedding comes up repeatedly in scripture?
4. How can we ready the bride (the Church of Christ) to be beautiful for the wedding day?
5. What does verse 8 say about our salvation? What does “the righteousness of the saints” mean?
6. What do the verses 9–10 say about true worship?

### **The “so what?” Question**

7. How might these verses encourage those who are feeling hopeless or find themselves in a season of loss of grief?
8. After reading (and re-reading) this text, listening to the sermon, and discussing it with your COB, how might God be calling you to act or think differently (this can be as broad or narrow as you'd like)?

### Closing

Check in if you haven't already done so and ask for any prayer requests. Encourage group members to write down these requests and follow up as necessary.