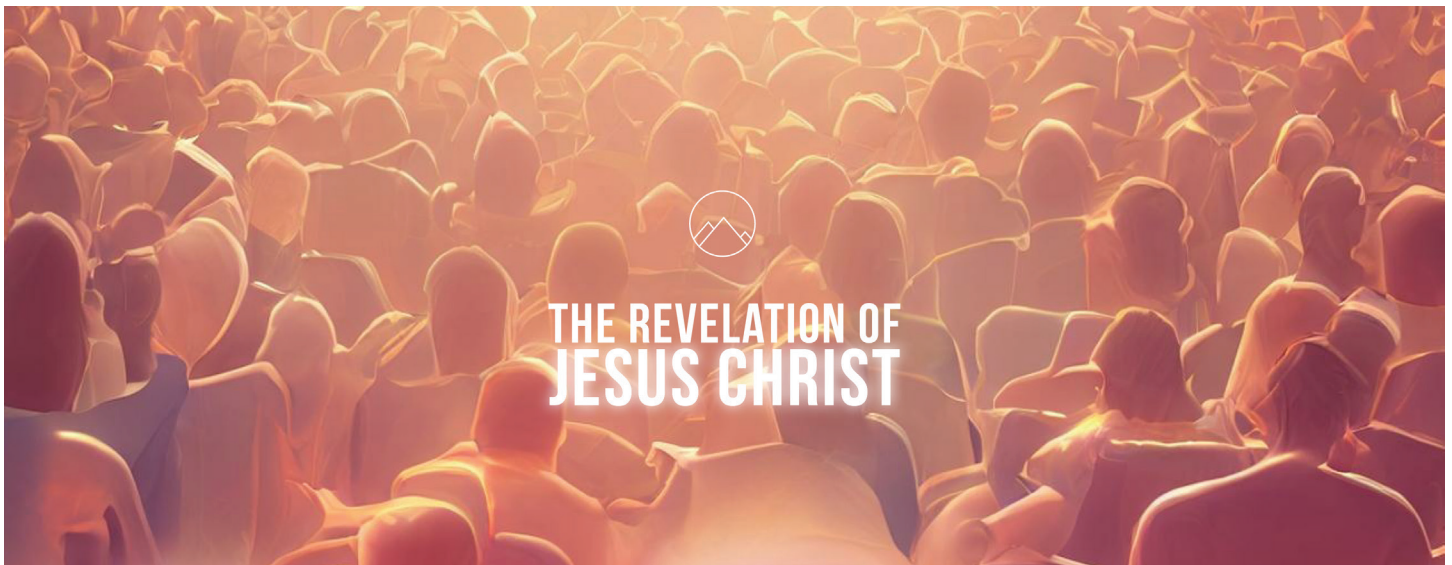




April 27, 2024
Revelation 19:1-10

Our last message was all about the fall of Babylon. We learned that the term Babylon was not necessarily meant to focus on a specific city, but rather to be used as a metaphor for all wicked and corrupt kingdoms and societies that follow after the beast and its ways. Babylon was pictured as a harlot dressed in scarlet riding the beast. And the juxtaposition between the harlot dressed in scarlet and the bridegroom clothed in white was made apparent as the implied question was being asked: Who will we worship? The Harlot or the Bridegroom? The kingdom of darkness or the Kingdom of Light? There are only two options - only two allegiances. Allegiance to Satan or allegiance to Jesus. And so Babylon represents the wicked of the wicked, and no matter how powerful they might seem, they are simply no match for the power and authority of Jesus Christ. Just as Babylon of old was defeated in 539 BC, so will the Babylon of today and the Babylon of tomorrow also be defeated for it cannot stand up to the power of Jesus Christ. So the call to worship here has never been clearer. Worship the beast that is falling or the Christ who is victorious!

And so, as we step into Chapter 19, the scene painted before us today is one of incredible praise and earth-shaking worship as all of Heaven now shares in the victory of Jesus Christ as Babylon the Great has fallen.

Revelation 19:1-10

'After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! 2 For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her." 3 Again they said, "Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!" 4 And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, "Amen! Alleluia!" 5 Then a voice came from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!"

6 And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! 7 Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." 8 And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

9 Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God." 10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

The victory of Jesus Christ over Babylon here is so emphatic. And it's important to understand that His victory has always been. He has never not been victorious. The beginning chapters clearly showed us that the Lamb that was slain has always been sitting on the Throne, ruling victoriously as a Lion. This is nothing new. This is just now the part of the story where we get to see the victory of Jesus Christ in full array and let me tell you, it is magnificent! Absolutely magnificent!

Now this scene is such a significant scene because in it we see the cry of 'Hallelujah' resounding throughout the heaven-lies in ways that have not been witnessed before. Vs. 6 makes it very clear just how incredible this scene really is: '...the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia!" The cry of Hallelujah here is interesting to me because Jesus uses it not once, not twice or even three times, but a total of 4 times.

Hallelujah - Salvation belongs to the Lord
Hallelujah - Babylon has been defeated
Hallelujah - Praise our God all you His servants
Hallelujah - the Lord omnipotent reigns

Now, in our studies, we learned the significance of the number four, and it's interesting to see the four living creatures being referenced here again in addition to the 24 elders. We learned that the 24 elders represent the entirety of the church - both old and new. 12 tribes of Israel in the OT and 12 disciples in the NT. And the four living creatures being symbolic of the four winds of the earth or the four corners of the earth. The idea being that this term hallelujah reaches from the north to the south to the east to the west. The implication being that there is not a corner of the Earth that it does not touch. The victory of Jesus Christ is simply undeniable and felt everywhere!!

Now, the word Hallelujah is a really, really significant word and when broken down consists of two parts. 'Hallelu' means praise. 'Jah' is the short-form for Yahweh/God and so when put together it is a specific term that simply means, 'Praise that is solely directed to God.' And if you really think about it, it's one of the most common words that we as Christians use - especially in our worship. I can't think of a single Sunday where someone doesn't speak or sing Hallelujah. And perhaps even surprisingly, it is also a word that has found its way into our society and culture as well. So much so that it is the name of one of the most well-known classical works of our time - the Hallelujah cho-

rus, by Handel. Even secular artists like Leonard Cohen have written songs with this title that have been sung by many a budding-artist or featured in many, many movies and films world-wide.

Now, as well-known and well-versed as the church and even society are in this term, you would think that it is a term that is prolific in Scripture. However, it's really interesting to note that although the term Hallelujah is mentioned a total of four times in this section, this is the only time it is used in the entirety of the New Testament.

Conversely, if we were to look at the Old Testament, the term Hallelujah exists only a handful of times and exclusively in the Book of Psalms.

Such an incredibly powerfully foundational word with such limited exposure throughout the Bible, begs the question, why? Like seriously, we probably use the term more on a single Sunday than the Bible uses it in its entirety!

I think the answer lies in the context in which it is used.

The place where this term is used the most is through Psalms 113-118. Historically these Psalms are known as the 'Hallelu' Psalms - or more commonly referred to as the Praise Psalms which were actually sung during Passover in the First Century. Psalms 113 to 114 were typically sung before the Passover meal and Psalms 115 to 118 after the meal. Mark tells us in his gospel that after Jesus and his disciples celebrated the Passover meal together, and after He had instituted a new meal - which we call "The Lord's Supper" - that "after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives," (Mark 14:26). Interestingly, the hymn that Mark would have been referring to here would have been either Psalm 115, 116, 117 or 118, or perhaps even a medley of all of them sung together.

The point being that if you look closely at all of these Psalms, you will see the common thread of praise being sung to God for rescuing his people out of captivity in Egypt. That He alone was able to bring victory. So the fact that the same term, hallelujah, is now being used here again, would be a reminder to all who were reading that just as God delivered His people from Egypt - Hallelujah, He has also delivered His people from wicked Babylon - Hallelujah. That just as He was victorious in Egypt, He would continue His reign of victory in Babylon. Hallelujah - a term reserved for the highest praise of victory in the Bible. There is no term higher than that and it is reserved for God and God alone - who is the ultimate victor.

And so, in verse seven when we read that the reason for this great declaration of praise is because the Lord is omnipotent and victorious, we can clearly see the connection now between the victory of God over Egypt and now Babylon. However, the verse doesn't end there, now we read that the reason for this great declaration of praise also exists because the marriage supper of the Lamb has come.

Which is a really interesting thing to declare isn't it - and at first glance doesn't seem to fit the common theme of victory here.

You see during Passover, the meal was eaten to commemorate the victory of God over the Egyptian's. In the last supper, we partake to commemorate the victory of Jesus Christ over sin and death. But a wedding supper is a very different meal than these other two meals isn't it? And since the term hallelujah is applied to all three of these, and it means great victory and omnipotence of our Lord then it must mean that somehow this wedding feast would also symbolize the victory and omnipotence of Jesus Christ. Which raises an obvious question of how?

This is where an overall understanding of the rest of the Bible can really help to bring further clarity to this picture. You see, whether we realize it or not, there are numerous scriptures in both the Old Testament and the New Testament that use the example of marriage as a metaphor for the relationship that Jesus shares with us, His church. In this metaphor Jesus is the Groom and we the church, His Bride. There are a number of different metaphors that are used throughout Scripture for the relationship that God has with Christians, such as: believers, followers, sons/daughters, friends, witnesses and even martyrs. But now, most significantly He calls us Bride.

To be called any of these things is great enough. To be His sister or brother is family. To be His friend – wow! But to be His Bride?? That is a whole other level of relationship!

Now, marriage is a big deal in our society today, but it was a much bigger deal and more involved process in first-century Judaism.

Back then there were three main steps to getting married which all began with the betrothal - or as we would call it, the engagement.

The groom would leave his father's house and travel to the house of his future bride. There, he would finalize arrangements with the bride's father, in particular settling on the purchase price. (In that day a woman was, 'bought with a price.') As soon as the groom paid the purchase price, the marriage technically went into effect. It was at this point that the husband would pour a cup of wine and offer it to his bride. Upon her acceptance of this cup by drinking it, a new covenant would be formed as the groom pronounced: '...this is the cup of my new covenant to you.' The man and woman at that point were legally considered husband and wife. Even though they would not yet live together for quite some time, the wife was declared to be consecrated to the groom, or in other words, 'set apart,' exclusively for him.

The groom would then leave the bride and return to his father's house. He would be away from her for a period of approximately twelve months, give or take. During that period of separation, the groom would prepare a room for the bride in his father's house or on the property. And during the separation period, the bride would prepare herself for the wedding.

Now, although they did not see each other during this time, and although they did not share intimacy with each other, they were legally and spiritually bound to each other. So binding was this betrothal agreement, this covenant, that if the man died during the betrothal period, the woman would be considered a widow. In addition, to break the betrothal agreement would be considered to

be the same as divorce.

At the end of the betrothal period, dressed in his wedding attire, the bride groom would make his way back to the bride's house. Although the bride knew to expect her groom after about a year, she did not know the exact day or hour. He could even come earlier. So, for that reason, the bride and her bridesmaids were to keep their lamps ready at all times, just in case the groom came in the night, ready to take her home. So, at the appointed time - which no-one knew - the groom would gather his groomsmen and start the procession towards his bride's house. And with much noise, fanfare and celebration, he would carry the bride home. Now finally, they would consummate their marriage and live together as husband and wife, fully partaking in all of the duties and privileges of the covenant of marriage.

So fast forward with me to approximately 33 AD where Jesus is in the Upper Room with His disciples in this most iconic of scenes and He takes a cup of wine, gives it to His disciples and what does He say? He says, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood.' (John 13:36) Jesus then tells them that He has to leave and that, 'Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward.' But that He is going to, '...prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.' (John 14:2-3)

Do you see what Jesus is doing? He is metaphorically walking his disciples through a wedding ceremony. He is declaring that He is the bridegroom, the husband of the people of God. That we are his bride. That He has already paid 'the purchase price' for His bride with his own body and blood. He has sealed the engagement with a cup of wine; 'this cup is the new covenant in my blood.' And He is preparing a place for us in His Father's house. And He is coming back to take us to Himself to be with Him forever.

And so in this wedding metaphor, we - the church - are betrothed to Jesus Christ. It's as if we are engaged to Him and that's massive! There is a covenant in our relationship with Him that cannot be broken. That cannot be overlooked! That cannot be forgotten! We are His!!

And no-one else's!

And that right there is the point. This is why all of Heaven declares Hallelujah! Because where we as humanity were once destined for death, Jesus Christ victoriously pulled us out of that lane, and has now destined us towards life and life eternal!

And so the wedding supper symbolizes the culmination of God's redemptive plan and the ultimate victory of Jesus Christ and the fulfillment of His promises to redeem and reconcile humanity to Himself. It is the fulfillment of the Passover. It is the fulfillment of the Lord's supper. It is the ultimate victory.

Hallelujah.

And so all of a sudden certain 'marriage' scripture references start to make a whole lot more sense:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

'Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.'

2 Corinthians 11:2

'For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.'

So, since we the church are engaged to Christ, what does this now mean for us?

I can think of a number of things, but I'll give you 5:

1. The nature of His love for us is incredibly powerful. The Bible teaches us that He loves us as friends and that He loves us as disciples that He even loves us as sisters and brothers - which is all amazing. Revelation teaches us that our Lord loves us, more tenderly, more authentically, more affectionately, then all of that. For He loves us as His bride. I love my children, and I love my parents and I love my in-laws and I love my brothers and sisters and I love you all. But as powerful as all of that love is, there is a special uniqueness when it comes to the love that I have for my wife. He calls us bride.
2. The highest purchase price was paid for you and for me. This tells me that his love for us is unrivalled. We can live with an incredible security, knowing that this is true. We didn't choose Him, rather, He chose us! As the Song of Solomon says, His desire is for me and you.
3. Loyalty. He is loyal to us, and so also, we need to be loyal to Him. This is why the previous chapter showed the juxtaposition between the harlot and the bride. We cannot be seduced by Babylon. Babylon, the harlot, is very powerful, and very seductive. Babylon deceives us into thinking that we can live by the value system of the harlot, whilst being engaged to the Lamb. But this is simply not true. We cannot find ourselves involved with the Harlot while waiting for the Lamb.
4. Sin needs to be viewed as adultery. And because no amount of adultery is acceptable in a marriage, then we must strive to live lives that are faithful and pure, rejecting sin and resisting temptation. You see, as Christians, the presence of sin in our lives is akin to spiritual adultery, which acts as a barrier to intimacy and communion with God. As such, we are called to repentance, seeking forgiveness for our sins, and renewing our commitment to faithful devotion to Christ.
5. Return to your first love. If we go back to the very beginning of the letters that Jesus Christ wrote to the churches, we would see that to the church in Ephesus, He told them that they had lost their first love. That they had caused themselves to be so focussed on doing the right things, dotting all the I'd, and crossing all the tee's but that in all of their work, they left the heart behind. And it's not that we aren't called to do good things, it's just that Jesus wants your heart before He wants your hands. Sometimes we tend to complicate things and lose the intimacy that we have with Jesus and I think He just wants us to go back to the beginning to remember why we're here in the first place. I think in many ways, as a married man, I can relate to this. You who

are married as well might agree. Remember when you were engaged? Remember how simple life was back then? The only thing that mattered was being with your fiancé. Amazing how it worked – we found all kinds of time. Being in love does that – it simplifies things. So at the end of the day it's a call to discipleship, especially under the pressure of the harlot and Babylon. It's the call to do whatever it takes to stay in love, to do whatever it takes to live in and work towards intimacy with Jesus Christ.

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