

## Revelation 19:7-10 “The Wedding Supper of the Lamb”

Dr. Jeffery L. Hamm, PhD  
ChristChurch Presbyterian, Atlanta

The wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton took place in 2011 at Westminster Abbey, London. The groom, Prince William, is second in the line of succession to the British throne. The bride, Ms. Middleton, had been his girlfriend since their years together at the University of Edinburgh. It was a fairy tale wedding viewed by 37 million watchers worldwide. The greatest wedding of our time. In our text today, there is another wedding. Not the greatest wedding of our time, but the wedding to end time. When we examine the text we learn that since God passionately desires to know you, then you should passionately desire to know God.

### *Context*

In chapters 17-19, we have been considering the Fall of Babylon. Last time, we heard in heaven the response to the judgment of God upon Babylon. In contrast to the silence hovering over the smoldering city on earth, in heaven above there is an explosion of echoing hallelujahs. Before the throne of God, John sees the innumerable multitude of heavenly hosts, the mightiest of angelic beings erupt in celebration and worship with the “Hallelujah Chorus.” Hallelujah, a command to give praise to God for the execution of His judgment against evil. One reason for which is the marriage of the Lamb. Verse 7, *Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory. For the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready.* The judgment of Babylon brings the close of history, ushering us to the wedding at the end of the world. The wedding of the Lamb. So our attention is suddenly directed to the Bride of the Lamb in contrast to the bride of the beast; Babylon. Remember, Babylon is portrayed not only as a city, but a woman. The Prostitute, the Whore of the Earth, escorted by whom? The Beast (ch. 17). Babylon is the bride of the Beast, married to the Beast. Now with the judgment of Babylon and her destruction, the Beast’s bride is dead and gone. She is totally out of the picture. Clearing the wedding aisle for the Bride of the Lamb.

### *The Wedding in the Ancient World*

Here is the announcement about the future wedding of Christ. The climax of history, the goal and purpose of human existence. Announced for a reason, that we might discover the life-changing hope that is offered in the gospel. However, we cannot begin to fathom the bottomless bliss conveyed here without understanding the wedding customs of the day. The customs that existed in the time of Christ. So we want to review a few aspects of a regular wedding in antiquity in order to draw the points of comparison to the wedding of the Lamb. Then we can pull them together and see how it applies to our lives.

Basically, the marriage revolves around two major events. The betrothal and the wedding feast. The betrothal is similar to our engagement. But with far greater legal ramification. As we learn in the Christmas story. *When His mother Mary had been **betrothed** to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to **divorce** her secretly (Matt. 1).*

Mary is betrothed to Joseph who desires to divorce her. To break a betrothal is essentially a divorce even though the wedding has not yet occurred. Betrothal is what validates the marriage according to the law. Legalizes the marriage. Just as in our day, it is the marriage license. A minister officiates a wedding ceremony. Then he fills out the wedding license, signs it before witnesses, which must be recorded at the courthouse within a few days. The license is what makes the marriage legally binding. But at the time in the text, the betrothal is what legitimizes the marriage. From the day of the betrothal, the groom and bride are legally husband and wife. *Joseph her husband, ...desired to divorce her secretly.* Husband and wife divorced *before* the actual wedding ceremony. Because betrothal is what legalizes the marriage. It doesn't consummate the marriage. It legalizes the marriage.

The second major event is the wedding feast. The feast includes the wedding supper during which the vows are exchanged. Yet the wedding is not a 30-minute ceremony followed by a reception that last a few hours. Rather, the feast is a week-long party, sometimes lasting as long as two weeks. The feast is considered a community holiday. Which explains the crisis at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, when the host runs out of wine. The Nazarene shows that He is the God-Man by miraculously transforming water into wine. Which provides wine, not just for the small party for a few more hours. The stone basin contains approximately 30 gallons. The six basins together provide 180 gallons of vintage not only for the next day, the next week. Jesus provides what is needed. Such is the magnitude and intensity of the wedding feast. A holiday to celebrate, to rejoice in, to be of good cheer.

In between the betrothal and the wedding feast there is an interval, a time of separation during which the bride and groom prepare for the wedding. During this interval, the groom pays the dowry to the father of the bride. Sometimes the dowry is money or goods like clothes, cattle. Often the dowry is service rendered. Like the dowry for Rachel: Jacob labors seven years to pay the price for her. The dowry for the daughter of King Saul: David renders the service of slaying Philistines and thereby pays the dowry of 100 Philistine foreskins. After the dowry is paid and the long wait finally over, there is a wedding procession. The groom, decked out in his finest clothes and joined by his best friends goes to the home of the betrothed. He receives his bride, then takes her—at the front of this wedding parade—to his house. Then the wedding supper begins. That event—the wedding supper—is that announced in the text. Not that of any human wedding. The wedding to consummate the kingdom of God. Verse 7, *Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory. For the marriage of the Lamb has come.*

### *The Wedding of Christ and the Church*

At this point, we would do well to remember the *Revelation* is a book of symbols intended to be read symbolically. Not with a wooden literalism. When we read of Jesus as a *Lamb*, we should not think of Him as a small woolly creature with four legs. We don't. We intuitively know that Jesus described as a Lamb is symbolic. Specifically, symbolizing His sacrificial death on the cross whereby He is led like a lamb to the slaughter. Fulfilling His role as the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world. Just as we don't interpret *Lamb* literally, nor should we interpret *marriage* literally, lest we wind-up in a wasteland of weirdness. The *marriage* of the Lamb is a symbol, a metaphor, used to convey a profound mystery. The apostle makes this clear in his letter to the Ephesians when addressing husbands and wives.<sup>32</sup> *This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.* (Eph 5:32 NAS).

The mystery is Christ's marriage to the Church. Let's notice a few elements about Christ marriage to the Church then compare to the traditional wedding in antiquity.

First element. The Church is the bride of Christ. This metaphor of marriage isn't new to the people of God. In the Old Testament, there is a preview of this marriage. God's relationship to Israel is compared to that of a husband to his wife. Israel is described as the bride of Yahweh. To Israel, God says, *I will betroth you to me forever* (Hos. 2:19). Since there is continuity between the Old Testament and New Testament—one meta-narrative—so the marriage metaphor carries over to the New Testament. Christ is described as the Husband of God's people. A messianic claim that declares His deity and authority. Christ is the Bridegroom of the Church.

The second element. The dowry. Paul states, <sup>25</sup> *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*. Christ gives Himself to buy His bride. The dowry is His own life. He purchases her with His own blood. *And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you **purchased** men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation* (Rev 5:9 NIV). The dowry is paid by Christ's death on the cross. Service rendered in order to pay the bridal price to the Father. This is, in the most basic sense, the definition of redemption. To redeem is to buy back. Like you might redeem a coupon. To exchange for something of value. As Redeemer, Jesus comes to buy back His people, to pay the ransom price, to purchase them as a people for Himself. This is the message of the Bible, the meta-narrative. The progressive unfolding history of redemption.

Third element. The interval between the betrothal and the wedding feast. The era of the New Testament. This present age. Since Christ's ascension, the Church has anxiously awaited the bridegroom to come and take her to His wedding Feast. Meanwhile, what is the bride doing? Verse 8, *it was granted to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure*. The bride is getting ready for the wedding. Putting on her beautiful wedding dress. Symbolic of what? Good works. Stated explicitly. *for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints*. So here we are back to morality, ethics, behavior. Good works are indispensable to the life of the Christian. Not that we might earn our salvation but show it. That one cannot earn her way to heaven is clear. Notice, that about the wedding dress *it was granted to clothe herself*. She is totally passive. Her redemption is all a sovereign work of God. All the grace of God. She is not saved by good works, but saved for good works. As Paul expresses to the Ephesians, <sup>8</sup> *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; <sup>9</sup> not as a result of works, that no one should boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for **good works**, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them* (Eph 2:8-10 NAS). Often when witnessing or describing how one is saved, we are quick to quote Eph. 2:8-9 but often leave off verse 10. As those who cherish Reformation theology, we rightly champion justification by faith alone. But often we lose biblical balance. We are saved by grace for good works. That we might glorify God by loving our neighbor as ourselves. Doing good for him, fighting for justice and mercy on behalf of the poor and outcaste. In the context of the first century audience, the poor and outcaste are Christians, the original readers. Fired from their jobs because of their faithfulness to Christ and their stubborn refusal to participate in the idolatry of the local industry. Consequently unemployable, blackballed by the labor unions, banned from the marketplace. Impoverished, destitute, imprisoned, like John banished, exiled. The persecuted Christians of the first century are the poor and marginalized. For them, the righteous deeds of the saints are what? Their testimony of Jesus. <sup>9</sup> *I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation... was on the island of Patmos on account of the word of God and the **testimony of***

*Jesus* (Rev 1:9). The testimony of Jesus in the face of bitter persecution is the righteous deeds of the saints that beautifies the bride of Christ. This is what the Church is doing as she awaits the coming of her groom. Testifying of Christ. Fulfilling the Great Commission until He returns.

Finally the wonderful and glorious day arrives. Verse 9, *And the angel said to me, "Write this: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'"* Throughout the Bible, the final climax of redemptive history is portrayed in the imagery of a feast. Isaiah, <sup>6</sup> *On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a **feast** of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine-- the best of meats and the finest of wines.* <sup>7</sup> *On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations;* <sup>8</sup> *he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.* <sup>9</sup> *In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation"* (Isa 25:6-9 NIV). Here is this feast that occurs when death is swallowed up forever. When does that occur? On the New Earth. The feast to which Isaiah refers is the wedding supper of the Lamb, now announced by the angel to John. The very feast promised by Christ, *I will not drink of the fruit of the vine again until I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom* (Matt. 26:29). The wine-drinking-feast to which Jesus points in the institution of the Lord's Supper is the Wedding Supper of the Lamb.

Those guests of which are *blessed*. *'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.* The 4<sup>th</sup> beatitude in the *Revelation*. Blessed are those who are invited. Actually, the term *invited* is too weak translation. The Greek verb is *kaleo*. Literally, *called*. Referring to the effectual calling about which Paul teaches in the golden chain of salvation. <sup>29</sup> *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, ...* <sup>30</sup> *And those he predestined, he also **called**, and those He **called** He justified* (Rom 8:29-30 NIV). Ultimately, those who are justified are those who are called to be justified. Those who saved are those who are called to be saved. Effectually called. This effectual call is not like a random call to pay phone on the street for any bystander to answer. It is a call to the cell phone of the soul, vibrating the soul, awakening the soul. Effectually calling one to Christ. Irresistibly drawing one to Christ. For whom is reserved incredible blessedness.

### *The Wedding Feast of Eternal Life*

Notice the elements of Christ's wedding corresponding to the elements of any wedding in antiquity. The Church is the bride of Christ. Chosen from all eternity, betrothed to Him by His incarnation, for whom He pays the dowry in His blood. Who anxiously awaits the Bridegroom to arrive and take her to His wedding feast. Which He does at His glorious Second Coming. Then the wedding feast begins.

Which raises a critical question. When does the feast end? Never! It is not a feast that fizzles out, a party that passes away, a temporary celebration. Some friends think so. They would suggest the wedding feast lasts for only 1,000 years. The Christ is ready to move on to something else. In all fairness, they get this idea from the next chapter. Ch. 20, the thousand-year reign of Christ. Again, it becomes very problematic to read the *Revelation* as sequential chronology. It should be read as a series of seven parallel visions. These parallel visions span the same timeframe from the first coming of Christ until His second coming. They function as different vantage points overlooking the same spiritual war. Like the replay of a football game from a different angle of the camera. Each takes us progressively deeper into God's eternal plan.

Chapter 20 starts a new and the last vision cycle. So there is a recapitulation. Chapter 19 ends with the destruction of the Babylon, the False Prophet and the Beast. Chapter 20 zooms-in to focus on the destruction of the Dragon. The damnation of the Dragon. Parallel visions. The thousand-year-reign in chapter 20 symbolizes the entire time between the first coming of Christ and the second. When He returns to destroy all evil forever and take His bride to the Wedding Supper of the Lamb. The feast that lasts forever. “This feast is not a passing event; and its joy is not only for a moment. But it is everlasting” (Hoeksema, 621). In contrast to the wedding feasts of first century, “the feast lasts not one or two weeks but throughout all eternity!” (Hendricksen, 180-181). “By analogy, the church, espoused to Christ by faith, now awaits the Parousia when the heavenly groom will come for his bride and return to heaven for the marriage feast that lasts throughout eternity” (Mounce, 347). The feast lasts forever. Therein is the blessedness. In that the Wedding Feast is the description of eternal life. The eternal destiny of the Redeemed is depicted as a wedding supper.

Why a wedding? Because Christ’s relationship to the Church is compared to the sexual union of husband and wife. The most profound expression of intimacy. The greatest need of the human being: To be intimately known. That is why we have Home Groups. “To know and to be known.” The greatest need of the human being is to be intimately known. Do you know the existential question of the modern age? “Who am I?” Who am I. The question of antiquity was “What must I do to receive eternal life?” Middle Age, “How can I be made right before God?” The question for the citizens of the Secular Age: Who am I? As musically expressed by the *Goo Goo Dolls* in their song, *Iris*. “I don’t want the world to see me, cause I don’t think that they’d understand, when everything’s made to be broken, *I just want you to know who I am.*” The greatest existential need of the human being, existential consolation. The consolation that your existence on this spinning planet on the edge of the Milky Way Galaxy somehow matters. That there is meaning to your life, significance. That despite the loneliness which haunts you, that despite the fact that your own descendants within four generations will not know your own name. Despite that your memory will be erased from the face of the earth. The greatest existential need of the human being is to be intimately known. Which knowledge can only be attained by God. *Thou hast searched me and known me, You know my downsitting and my uprising. You know my thoughts from afar* (Ps. 139). That is how passionate God is about you! Passionately desiring to most intimately know you! Described in the most profound expression of intimacy. Man and wife consummating their marriage in the ultimate expression of oneness. He is gazing into her eyes, she is lost in his eyes. The two become one flesh. The ultimate expression of intimate knowledge. Never ending, ever increasing intimacy. Ever heightening oneness, ever culminating closeness. Everlasting ecstasy. That is what we can expect on the New Earth. That is how passionate God is for you. Passionately desiring to most intimately know you.

### *Intimate Knowledge Distinguishes Christianity*

This is what so vitally distinguishes the God of the Bible from the Allah of Islam whose prophet is Mohammed. Allah is not that into you. Allah doesn’t do intimacy. The Qur’an describes the relationship between Allah and his followers as that of a master to a slave. Allah is master. Yet Jesus teaches what about our relationship to God, *Our Father*... In Islam, such intimacy is blasphemy. There is no intimacy in the paradise of Islam. There are rewards, to be sure, but there is no fellowship with Allah. Allah dwells above the paradise in which his

followers dwell. But on the New Earth, Christ is so intimately joined to His redeemed that the union can only be described by the most profound intimacy found among human relationships. That of the *one flesh* union of husband and wife. Transported by delight to ever heightening oneness, ever culminating closeness.

This is also what utterly distinguishes Christianity from pantheism, whether Hinduism or Buddhism. There are distinctions, but basically for both ultimate reality is the One. God is the universe; the universe is God. When the soul finally escapes the vicious cycle of reincarnation, it is absorbed into the One. Which doesn't achieve unity, but disunity, disintegration. Your being is poured out into the Oneness like a thimble of water poured into the ocean. You lose all personality, individuality, all self-consciousness as the soul is absorbed into the abyss of nothingness. Utterly distinct from Christianity.

The powerful imagery of the one flesh union shows that though the two are joined in the ultimate expression of oneness. For, at the same time, they never cease being two people, two personalities. Two individuals. Both self-conscious of their own individuality. Though joined together as one flesh. That is the very essence of mystery. In a way, they are two. Yet in another way they are not two. That is the idea of unity, the oneness conveyed in the image of the one flesh union. The ultimate expression of intimate knowledge. Never ending knowledge. Ever intensifying. Ultimate Blessedness: to be intimately known by God. *Blessed* are those who are called to the Wedding Supper. There they will be found in good cheer, triumphantly celebrating, with gladdened hearts, euphorically exulting. Because you will know Christ and be known by Him. For "we shall behold Him face to face." Amen.