

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

09.15.2024 | God's Faithfulness to Perfect His People | Revelation 19:1-10 | Dr. Ben Day, Senior Pastor

If you have a Bible this morning, I want to invite you to turn with me to the book of Revelation chapter 19. Book of Revelation 19. Revelation is the last book of the Bible. Chapter 19 is getting towards the end of that book. So if you just start at the end of the Bible, you can turn backwards a few pages and you'll find your way there. This morning we are continuing in a series in which we're considering God's faithfulness to His people. As Pastor Clark mentioned, we are visiting this topic as we prepare for our 175th celebration next Sunday. We just recognize that our church has been sustained for that many years only because of God's faithfulness. But God's not just faithful to our church or to any one church. He is faithful to His church, His people. We saw a couple of weeks ago that God is faithful to pursue His people, that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, that we had all strayed from God, but yet God is faithful to love us while we're still sinners, to pursue us and to bring us into His people.

Last week we considered the great reality that God is not only faithful to pursue His people but also to preserve His people. But Jesus is building His church. God is holding us fast. Just as God has sustained the church for thousands of years, He is continuing to sustain us. He is both guarding our inheritance and us ourselves until we are with Him forever. And that's where we turn our attention today. Today we're going to cast our gaze into the future and see the fact that God is going to be faithful to perfect His people. Today we are looking at God's faithfulness and seeing that God's faithfulness allows us to trust Him for things that have not yet happened. To look into the future and believe that this will come to pass because God is faithful.

So Revelation chapter 19, I'm going to read verses one through 10. John writes that after this, "I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God. For His judgments are true and just. For He has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality and has avenged on her the blood of His servants." Once more they cried out, "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever." The 24 elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne saying, "Amen, hallelujah!" And from the throne came a voice saying, "Praise our God, all you His servants, you who fear Him small and great." Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. 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. It was granted to her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints." And the angel said to me, "Write this. Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God." Then I fell down at His feet to worship Him, but He said to me, "You must not do that. I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God, for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

A few years ago, I preached a sermon series here that I titled, "The Dearest Place on Earth." It was a sermon series on the church and the title for that series came from one of my favorite quotes from the great preacher Charles Spurgeon. In the quote, Spurgeon basically said, "If you've been around the church at all, you surely have found that it is an imperfect place." Only many of you could testify to that. If it doesn't take you long of being around church to find that it is an imperfect place, my wife and I both grew up in the same church. Not only were we there at the church, but our families were very involved. So we were very involved even as young people, which meant at a very young age, we got exposure to the imperfections of the church. I mean, I can remember as high schoolers, us seeing people mistreat each other, mistreat our pastor, hurt one another within the church. It was probably good for us to experience this at a young age because a few years later was a pretty new, a married couple when she was pregnant with our first son. We moved across the country to Las Vegas to work at a new church. And we quickly found out that it was an imperfect church. It was about three weeks of us being at that church that there was this contentious business meeting and there was basically a church split. And we were saddened by this, but we certainly weren't shocked because we knew that the church was an imperfect place.

We did not have any ideas that this church in Las Vegas would be the perfect church. And actually in his quote, Charles Spurgeon says, "If you ever find the perfect church, make sure you don't join it." Because as soon as you join it, you're surely going to mess it up. You are an imperfect person. And so it was just good to know that we weren't going to mess

up this church because it was already imperfect. But you know, he goes on to say that as imperfect as the church is, it is also the dearest place on earth. And I hope that you would be able to testify to that as well. I talk to people all the time who have experienced maybe church hurt. They've experienced that the church is imperfect, but they also speak of the fact that the church has been very dear to them. Some of their best friendships, some of their greatest community, the biggest support has come from the church. That was definitely our experience at this church in Las Vegas. It was a church that was imperfect, but it was very dear to our young family. In 2016, when our hometown in Louisiana flooded, the church sent me and a team from our church down to Louisiana to help work on people's houses, including my parents' house and Atlanta's parents' house. When our two month old niece died at the beginning of 2020, the church helped buy plane tickets for Atlanta and I and watched our boys while we traveled for this tragedy in our family's life. It was a dear, dear church to us. And in many ways, I think this is what the church on earth will be throughout its whole time. It is going to be an imperfect place, but it is also still going to be a very dear place.

What the Bible says is there will actually come a day when that is no longer true. Actually there's going to come a day, Revelation is telling us, when the church will no longer be imperfect, but it will actually be perfect. The people of God will no longer hurt each other, speak ill of each other, will no longer treat people outside the church in the wrong way, but it will be perfect. This is the vision that God is giving here in Revelation. He is showing that he is making all things new, but particularly is showing what he is doing in and through his people. And my hope is that as we would get this glimpse of the future today, it would encourage us and empower us to be the church today. That as we see that God is going to be faithful to perfect his people, it would empower us right now to live as his people. As imperfect as we are to be a dear place for those who are here and those who are around us. So what I want to do this morning is to try to give us a glimpse that we see here in Revelation of what is God doing? Where is he bringing us? Where is he bringing all things?

What does that mean for us today? So in Revelation 19 we get this view kind of into the future in some ways if you will. The first part of this glimpse is the judgment of sin. This is where I want to begin to think about what God is doing, where he is bringing things and how that should encourage and empower us as the church today. The first thing that we see is the judgment of sin. Now we're obviously jumping into the book of Revelation in the middle actually kind of towards the end but we've not been following along with what's been revealed to John. Lord willing one day as a church we'll walk through this book together and see what God is revealing through this revelation. But here we jump in in chapter 19 and one of the things that you need to know is it begins with this kind of praise of God's judgment and specifically the judgment has come upon what's been referred to in Revelation as Babylon.

So if you've been reading Revelation you would see that there's the great city of Babylon has been used kind of as an image. People have different interpretations as if it's going to, if it might represent a certain city or a certain people at one point in the end times but I think in general most people agree that in Revelation Babylon tends to represent the kingdom of the world. Babylon tends to represent the systems of the world kind of as opposed to the kingdom of God. There seems to be what God is doing to bring about his kingdom, to culminate his kingdom but kind of in opposition to that there is Babylon and Babylon is constantly kind of testing and bringing persecution upon the people of God and there is these kind of plagues and judgments from Babylon that are all throughout the book. But then in chapter 17 and 18 Babylon falls. It finally is brought down low and God brings his judgment upon Babylon. It's a picture of the fact that one day the kingdoms of this world will come to nothing.

One day God will judge the kingdoms of this world. One day God will judge sin and at the beginning of chapter 19 there is this praise that happens over the judgment of this sin. So let's just read the beginning of the chapter again just to get an idea of this judgment that's happening and the praise that's happening around it. It says in verse 1, "After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, "Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God." Why are they praising God? Verse 2, "For his judgments are true and just. For he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality. This avenged on her the blood of his servants. Once more they cried out, "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever."

Now you know us sophisticated modern people living in San Francisco in the 21st century usually find such language of judgment kind of appalling. I mean we think about that God is bringing judgment on someone or something. We hear about the smoke, the judgment going up forever and ever and most of the time we would probably say, "Well that just doesn't sound like something I would praise God for." It's not something that would lead me to say, "Hallelujah! Why

would anybody celebrate this judgment? Why would people be praising God for his judgments here?" I think the reason that the text actually gives us, it gives us a hint as to what actually the judgment is for. It gives us a picture as to what sin is. You see here in the picture Babylon is not just a city but it's described here and throughout the book of Revelation as a prostitute. That's pretty graphic language but it gives us a picture of what sin is. See the Bible says that while God is a great God in heaven, he's a king over all things and yes one day people will bow down before him and worship him as king. The Bible actually says that God doesn't just desire a relationship with us that's only like a king and his servants. Yes he is the king and we will worship him that way but the Bible says that God actually desires from us a relationship that is actually like a husband and a wife. That God desires an intimate loving relationship with his people. And so all throughout the Bible sin is depicted as adultery, being unfaithful to your heavenly spouse. Sin is not just disobedience, it's not just breaking the law, it is actually being unfaithful to a God who loves you even more than a husband loves his wife. It is being unfaithful to our heavenly spouse.

You know adultery and cheating is actually still probably pretty condemned in our culture. Like you don't have to be a Christian to kind of look down on people who've cheated on their spouse or their partner but the Bible is actually saying we don't have any room to look down on anyone. The Bible is actually saying that this sin that so many people would condemn even if you're not a Christian is actually something we are all guilty of. That we as people who sin we are unfaithful to this loving God. But actually it says even more than that. Do you notice that it says this prostitute has corrupted the earth and then it even speaks about the blood that she has shed on the earth that he is going to bring vengeance of the blood of his servants. You know the picture here is not just that sin means that you are unfaithful to God but sin also means the corruption and the destruction of God's good creation. That it hurts people made in God's image. It destroys what God created as good.

In fact I think if God was to never judge sin it would mean that he is probably apathetic towards his creation. If sin was to come in and corrupt all the good that God had created and to hurt the people God has made in his image and God was to do nothing it would probably mean that he doesn't care that much about his creation. About the people he has made. He's okay with them being destroyed and corrupted. But God's not apathetic he is loving towards his people. He is loving towards his creation and so God's judgment of sin is good and right. That's what they are praising him for. That all the unfaithfulness against God and all the corruption that sin has brought is now being judged. All the wrongs are being made right. And not only when sin is judged is it good because it means that the wrongs are being made right but it also means that the wrongs are being removed forever. This judgment of Babylon means that the kingdoms of this world are gone from the presence of God and the people of God forever.

And that's good news for us because so often the church is an imperfect place because we allow Babylon to come into the church. So often the church is an imperfect place because we live according to the kingdoms of the world rather than the kingdom of God. We so often will work according to the world's values rather than God's values. So often we're going to be greedy rather than generous. So often we're going to be selfish rather than selfless. So often we're going to treat people the way the world would tell us to treat them rather than the way Jesus told us to treat them. The church is an imperfect place here on this earth because we so often allow Babylon into the church but what the Bible is saying is there will be a day when sin is judged, when Babylon is destroyed, when the things of this world are no more. And that is good because it allows them there to truly be a perfect people with God forever.

And of course I'm speaking about the judgment of sin. I think that's what we see in Revelation. It's mostly the systems of the world and the kingdoms of the world that are being destroyed. But you have to be honest and say that that also means the judgment of sinners. It's not just this idea or this kind of thing, this esoteric sin that's being judged, but even sinners are being judged. Those who have chosen to live in Babylon rather than the kingdom of God. Those who have chosen to worship the things of Babylon rather than the one true God will also experience the judgment of God. But there is an invitation because God will judge sinners but God is also gracious to sinners. That's the second part of the reality that I want us to see that is being kind of cast for us. There is this judgment of sin but there is the graciousness to sinners. All those who are part of Babylon will be part of the judgment that Babylon receives. There is this invitation to come out of Babylon and there is this praise that is happening around that as well.

You'll notice that after verse five the praise doesn't stop but it shifts in focus. Before in the first five verses there was this praise of the judgment that was happening but then in verse six it's no longer about a judgment that is coming but it's

about a marriage that is happening, a wedding that is happening. It's no longer a celebration of the removal of something but rather it's the celebration of the reuniting of something. Look at verse six. There is again this great multitude of voices like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder. I'll just pause there for, make a side note. That means it's really loud, right? Like it's supposed to be a loud rejoicing that John's describing. One time there was somebody who emailed me that said they had visited our church and they weren't going to come back, they're going to go find a different church which was fine. I don't know why they needed to email me. I think they decided to email me because they thought there were some things we should change and I can always agree there's probably things that we should change as a church but one of the things they complained about was how loudly people cheered for a baptism. They said they thought it was a bit, I think they said like kind of disrespectful for people to be that loud. Maybe it was more suited for like a football game or a sporting event than for a church but if we could cheer so loud for the Niners to score a touchdown, shouldn't we cheer a little bit louder for someone to come into the kingdom of God? I mean the picture here is that there's going to be loud. So anyways, that's a, I didn't play on that one. That was a, that was just a side note but it's loud, right? It says hallelujah. For the Lord God Almighty reigns and what are they praising God for here?

Not the judgment of sin but 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. I think this gives us a picture here of the graciousness of God to people because God is inviting people in to a marriage with him. God is bringing his people to be his bride and it says here that she has made herself ready and we're going to get to that in just a moment. But the idea here I think is that God is faithful enough to pursue people who have in many ways prostituted themselves or have been adulterous people who have been unfaithful to God yet he has been faithful to them so much that he would desire to have this type of relationship with them. There's this kind of contrast between the great prostitute and the bride of Christ. It's also depicted as a contrast between the cities, city of Babylon and the New Jerusalem. In fact one time the bride is actually the city.

Revelation chapter 21 verse 2, John says that he saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. It's kind of interesting it's a place, it's a city, the New Jerusalem but it's also a people, it's the bride of Christ. What God is saying here is that there is a union that is happening between the Lamb of God and the bride of the Lamb, the people of God. And that is a gracious union that is happening because we know that we as the people of God only become the bride of Christ because of the graciousness of God, because of the work of Jesus Christ. In Ephesians chapter 5 Paul speaks of the fact that marriage here on earth is a reflection of God's relationship with his people and he writes this, he says in verse 25 of Ephesians 25, husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing that she might be holy and without blemish.

Do you notice how the bride, the people of God are so passive in that passage? Jesus is the one doing all the work. He is the one who laid down his life. He is the one who cleanses her. He is the one who sanctifies her. He is the one who is perfecting her so that one day she would be holy, perfect, without blemish or spot or any such thing. It is all the work of Jesus. It is all the graciousness of God to call us into God's people and also to perfect us as God's people. To make us ready as a bride for her wedding day. Even it says in verse seven that the bride has made herself ready, but it says in verse eight, but it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure. That yes, the bride has made herself ready. Yes, the linen is the work of the saints, as we'll talk about in just a minute, but it was granted to her to be able to do this because of the work of God. It's something we emphasized last week, but I always feel like we need to revisit it just because it's so easy for our minds and our hearts to go somewhere else. That our hope as the people of God is not going to be that we're going to be preserved and perfected because we're going to get it all right, but our hope is in the fact that God is gracious to preserve us and to perfect us. We should not have a vision of the future in which the church is perfect that is just built upon us looking around and saying, yeah, I think we're doing a pretty good job.

In fact, a lot of times when you look around, you'll see both that the church is dear, but that it is imperfect. No our hope, our vision for the future that one day the people of God will be a perfect people with God forever is not based upon how good we're doing, but by how gracious he is. That he has called us to be as bright. He has promised to sanctify us, to cleanse us totally. He has granted us to clothe ourselves in these fine linens to be able to be a beautiful bride on this wedding day. Is all the graciousness of God and you have to know that that graciousness is extended to all sinners. While

God's judgment will come upon those who remain in Babylon and live in the kingdoms of this world. It's also graciousness extended to all types of sinners. In fact, in verse nine, the angel says, blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the lamb. I think they are specifically referring to the people of God who are coming to the marriage supper of the lamb, this great wedding feast. But the Bible tells us is that actually all are invited to this great wedding feast.

Jesus told parables about how God's word had gone out to the people of Israel. They had heard the prophecies. He was now being revealed to them and yet so many were refusing to come. And so he told a parable about go out into the highways and the byways. Go to every street, go to every person and invite them, implore them to come in. What Jesus was saying is there is an invitation to this great wedding feast that is available to all. No matter what kind of sinner you are, God is gracious to you. No matter what you've done, how far you've strayed, not much you've hurt somebody. No matter how much you've been hurt, God is gracious to bring you into his people, to perfect you as part of his people, to bring you to be with him forever. This is the gracious work of God towards sinners.

But as I mentioned last week, that God's graciousness doesn't mean our passivity. Just because God is gracious to preserve us and to perfect us doesn't mean that we do nothing. Actually, what we see is that God's grace empowers our activity. We were talking about this as a community group last Sunday night and I use a phrase I had heard before from another theologian. He talks about grace driven effort. The fact that God's grace is what empowers us, but it empowers us to do the work that he has called us to do. That's the next reality that we see in this vision for the future and that is the work of the saints. God is going to judge sin. He is graciously inviting sinners to be a part of his bride, to be a part of his people. But there is this mention here of the work of God's people, the work of the saints. So often I think we often, when we think about heaven or we think about the future and this kind of vision for what God's going to do, we kind of just think, well, that sounds great. I can't wait to be there one day. I hope Jesus returns today. It's just going to be great. All things removed, but we don't always know what does that mean for us today?

But this text gives us an answer to that question. What is the fact that God's doing something in his people? He's perfecting us. What does that mean for us today? And the call is that we as the bride of Christ would be making ourselves ready. You see in verse seven, it says, "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. It was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints." You notice how it says the bride has made herself ready? It seems to be, in my kind of study, that that's the only time in Revelation it talks about the people of God making themselves ready. And again, it is only because God granted it. It is only because his grace has empowered it, but yet his grace has empowered the bride making herself ready. It has empowered the righteous deeds, the good work of the saints, which is how the bride adorns herself for this wedding day.

You know, brides put in a lot of work to prepare themselves for the wedding day. We were in Vegas a few weeks ago to visit some friends from our old church. We were around two families from our old church, and both of the families have daughters who are engaged. And so there was more talk, probably that I cared to listen to at times, about wedding preparation. There's a lot of talk about wedding dress shopping and checking out venues and sending out invitations. And it kind of made me thankful that we have three boys and that we don't have any girls to have to do that with because there's a lot of work that a bride puts in to preparing herself for the wedding day, preparing everything. This is the picture that Revelation is giving us, that the bride, the people of God are preparing themselves through the work that God has called them to, to be ready for when her bridegroom comes back.

Jesus said in John chapter 14, "I'm going to prepare a place for you, but don't you know that if I go to prepare a place for you, I'm going to come back for you so that where I am, you may be also?" That was a picture of an image of a bridegroom going away to prepare the home, but then coming back one day to receive his bride. We as the people of God are waiting for Jesus to return. We're waiting for the bridegroom to return. We know because he's gracious he's going to. We know because he's gracious one day we are going to be perfect and beautiful without any blemish or spot, but that doesn't leave us to again just be passive. It empowers us to begin to live that way even now, to begin to adorn ourselves even now, to ready ourselves. We don't know when the save the date is set for. We don't know when Jesus is going to return, but we know it could be any day. That means we must be ready as the people of God, clothing ourselves in these righteous deeds. You say, "What particularly are righteous deeds?"

I think if you look at the book of Revelation, probably it's speaking about the fact that you would live as people of the kingdom of God rather than as people of Babylon. That everywhere you would live, but maybe even especially in a city like San Francisco, you are surrounded by Babylon. We are surrounded by the cultures of this world, the kingdoms of this world. We are constantly viewing the allurements that this world has to offer. Perhaps feeling pressure maybe sometimes to live according to the kingdoms of this world. The book of Revelation is saying, "Be faithful to the God who is faithful to you. Be faithful to God as you live in a fallen world. Be faithful to proclaim the good news of the kingdom, maybe even if it means persecution. Don't live as if you are people of Babylon. Live as if you are people of the new Jerusalem, even now."

FirstSF, we are supposed to be a city set on a hill. We're supposed to be a community in the midst of a greater community. They're showing people what it looks like to live as the kingdom of God. I think this is the righteous deeds of the saints, to live according to the values of the kingdom, to treat people both within and outside the church as Jesus commanded us to, as would reflect his love and his light. This is what will, I think, prepare us as the bride, and this is what we are called to do as we worship God. That's really the whole point of this passage and the whole point of the Bible, is that we would worship God.

The last part of this kind of glimpse of the future that I want you to see is that all the glory is to God, all to the glory of God. The judgment of sin is to the glory of God. The graciousness to sinners is to the glory of God. The work of the saints is to the glory of God. The saints are, the people of God are living in these righteous ways, adorning themselves, but notice all the praise is going to God. All the attention is on God. I mean, so many times at a wedding, the attention is on the bride, right? She's the one who has put in the most work. She's beautiful on this day. Everybody stands up when the bride enters, and the advice you always give people, especially when they're on stage, is you just always look at the bride. Wherever she goes, you turn, and that's where you'll be right. Most weddings, the bride gets all the attention, but here, actually, all the attention is on the bridegroom.

All the attention is on God and our Savior, Jesus Christ. I mean, you'll notice just all throughout this passage, the attention and the praise is on God. Verse one, hallelujah, salvation and glory and power belong to our God. Verse three, hallelujah. Again, in verse four, we see the elders and the creatures bowing down to worship God. Verse five, they cry out, "Praise be to our God." In verse six, hallelujah for the Lord God Almighty reigns. The whole point of this passage, the whole point of the whole Bible is that we would worship God. In fact, this is what the angel says to John as this part of the passage ends. Kind of the strange occurrence. I mean, in all that John has seen and experienced in Revelation, this moment, what he's seeing here, how magnificent this is, it leads him to worship even this angel, this messenger of God. It says in verse 10, "I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, you must not do that. I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God."

Again, friends, this is the whole point of all of history. This is where all of history is headed, to the worship of God, to the glory of God. What does it look like for us to live as the church now knowing one day we will be perfected and we will be with God forever? It means that right now we worship God. We don't worship Babylon and the things of this world. We worship God. In our individual lives, as you're off at school, as you're at work, you worship God. In our community groups and in our small groups, we encourage one another to worship God. As we gather together corporately as the people of God, we worship God. In the midst of Babylon, we gather together to get a picture of what we're going to be doing for all of eternity and that is worshipping God. Because of that, we are making a statement to what we believe that God is doing. That one day Babylon will fall and God's judgment will come. That one day God will fully redeem us and we will be with him forever and so right now we worship God.

I was listening to a sermon from Pastor John Piper on this text about this idea of worshipping God and he just spoke about his church in such a way that it inspired me. I wanted to share it with you. He speaks here about Bethlehem because that was the name of his church. So maybe we could just substitute 1st S.F. in there. But he says this, "Corporate worship at Bethlehem is the declaration in the midst of Babylon that we will not be drawn into her harlotries because we have found in God the satisfaction of our souls. In his presence is fullness of joy and at his right hand are pleasures forevermore. Corporate worship is the public savoring of the worth of God and the beauty of God and the 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. That 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."

First family this is the vision that God is giving us and I believe it's a vision to empower us to begin to live like this even now. As imperfect as we are we could strive to be the dearest place on earth We could strive to be the dearest place in San Francisco that all who would come here would know of the God that we worship and they too might worship him.