

Introduction:

- A. Illus.: I saw a picture of a famous Russian painting titled, “The Boyar Wedding Feast.” The bride’s veil has just been removed and both her groom and the Matron of Ceremonies are trying to get the shy girl to look at her guests. The guests are holding out their cups. The explanation says that they are shouting, “*gor’ko, gor’ko*,” meaning “bitter, bitter,” a reference to the wine, which has supposedly turned bitter. It’s kind of like our tradition of clinking our silverware on our glasses till the bride and groom kiss. Here, the newlywed couple must kiss to make the wine sweet again.
- B. The wine on the night at Jesus’ Last Supper was kind of like that. The taste may not have been bitter but the occasion certainly was. That night Jesus “*took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.’*” [Matt 26:27-29]
- C. Over the summer we’ve been studying various passages about God’s grace. We looked at some which reminded us of how Christians learn grace and then other passages about how we dispense grace. Today we conclude with the bright hope that “*grace will lead me home*,” or as Jesus put it, “*Many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.*”
- D. Turn to **Rev. 19**. The word *Hallelujah* appears only here in the New Testament and it appears here four times. As

George Frederic Handel has so often told us: “*Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! For the LORD God Omnipotent reigneth.*” Here the celebrations of heaven reach their climax. The context is that just before this, in his vision, John saw the destruction of the Great Prostitute, Babylon the Great. Now **chap. 19** turns up the volume on the celebration of heaven: **vv.1-4....**

I. WE WILL CELEBRATE GOD’S GRACE THAT ENDS ALL THAT’S WRONG WITH THE WORLD (19:1-4)

A. We are stepping into the dramatic end of a love triangle.

“*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.*” But stepping in between God and the world he was wooing came a prostitute named Babylon. She seduced the world into thinking they could *buy* what mattered, that peace or intimacy or happiness could be purchased in some market and she has been so good at her seduction that she has “*corrupted the earth by her adulteries*” (v.2). The world loved her for it all. She has reigned as the Queen of kings and the Whore of lords. She wiggles her hips and waggles her finger at the paupers and the power brokers and they all come to her embrace. Servants of God who resisted her, she persecuted and killed, so that she is not only guilty of cosmic adultery, but also has the blood of God’s beloved people on her hands, a heinous crime which God “*has avenged.*” **Rev 18:20** commands “*Rejoice over her, you heavens! Rejoice, you people of God! Rejoice, apostles and prophets! For God has judged her with the judgment she imposed on you.*” And *rejoice* is exactly what they do! Because this is a wonderful victory of God’s grace.

- B. Listen again to what they shout in vv.1-2, “*Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments.*” Pause on each of those words.
1. We will shout over **God’s salvation** because, when it came to the allure of the Great Prostitute, we did not need to merely be *wooed* away from her. We needed to be *saved* from her clutches. And God through Jesus Christ our Bridegroom has done just that.
 2. We will rejoice in **God’s glory** because as long as *she* was around people mistook her glitz for glory. We were so dazzled with Babylon’s scarlet and purple, her diamonds and pearls, that we forgot to look at the Lord God Almighty, robed in light and seated high above the earth, attended by thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly. The world was so taken with her that they missed *the Pearl of great price*. They made no provision for treasures in God’s everlasting heaven. They ignored the inestimable value of the salvation God offered to us all in Christ. So when God destroys her and her distractions, we celebrate!
 3. And we exult in **God’s power**, for Babylon thought she was invincible and unassailable, but in one *hour* God brought her down, subjecting her to her own plagues of death, mourning and famine. The kings of the earth with all their dalliances with the scarlet Harlot, have lost their power. And that gaudy old prostitute, who thought she could never be touched, is nothing but an eternal smudge pot. There are no other kings! No one else holds the scepter. “*For our Lord God Almighty reigns! Hallelujah!*”
 4. “For true and just are his judgments.” It might seem strange to rejoice at such terrible judgment but this is

God's grace—keeping his promises to set the world right, to keep his covenant of love with his people.

Illus.: Have you ever seen on a news program that moment when a slippery and diabolical criminal is found guilty and the victim's family cheer and weep? Do not cringe at the harshness of God's judgment. No! Cheer with the great multitude in heaven! "*Amen! Hallelujah!*"

Illus.: Years ago, while I was at our church in Pennsylvania, people were gathering one Friday evening for a wedding rehearsal. A father came in carrying the flower girl who was maybe three. She looked long and hard at the ceiling of our very plain foyer. She was confused. "*Where's God and the angels?*" she asked. Well, we'll have no trouble finding them at this wedding!

Here in our text, after the victory shouts, there seems to be a dramatic silence. **Vv.5a...** "*from the throne.*" This is either God the Son or his angelic herald, a great voice carrying over the vast multitude. **Vv.5b-8...**

II. WE WILL CELEBRATE GOD'S GRACE IN FINALLY BRINGING US TO OUR BRIDEGROOM (19:5-9)

A. "*Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!*" Why?

Because the mightiest and most loving act of Almighty God was his matchmaking—the infinitely expensive marriage he arranged of his beloved Son to a redeemed people as his Bride. Nothing so displays his glory as this!

Imagine being finally united with Christ, not seeing him from afar but being his *bride*! No more settling for imagined pictures. No more poring over his treasured, dog-eared love letters. No more singing our love songs alone. No more long-distance prayer talks. On that day we will "*rejoice and be glad*" because the long wait is finally over.

And we aren't the only ones rejoicing. Isaiah writes (62:5):
"As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you."

- B. *"For the wedding of the Lamb has come."* It is a strange and unfamiliar expression: *"the wedding of the Lamb."* But it was the Lamb—Jesus, who died in our place—who won our hearts and secured our salvation. The Lamb is our hero.

And now, even more than our own, this is his wedding. This is the moment *he* gave his life for, that *he* has waited and prepared for. Because Jesus loves his people. He adores us. He cherishes us. He thinks of us far more often than we think of him. Jesus would happily speak of us in ardent love for us in these words: *"Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like the very flame of the LORD."*
[Song 8:6].

- C. Weddings always raise, at least from this man's point of view, the mystery of the dress. There is nothing in the whole wide range of male experience akin to a woman's wedding dress. Never in all our lives will men wear anything that matters or means so much as a bride's dress. And that will even be true when Christ meets his bride. All eyes will turn to *the dress*. **V.8**, *"His bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.)"*

When we came to Jesus we were clothed in beggars' rags, stained by sin. But **Rev. 7:14** explains what happened: *"they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."* The only way anyone is clothed in white in God's presence is if Jesus' blood has cleansed us. Not only have our filthy clothes been bleached in the blood

of Jesus, but our reborn hearts have fallen in love with Jesus, and we who love Jesus learn to obey him. So our *“bright and clean”* wedding dress is both the gift of Christ to us and the beauty of our *“righteous acts”* as *“God’s holy people.”* When you and I do what is right and gracious we are complementing the beauty Jesus has brought to our lives. Remember what we studied a few weeks ago in **Col 3:12-14**, *“As God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience... and over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”*

Christ’s cleansing and our righteous acts is how we as his bride *have made ourselves ready* to meet Jesus. Eph. 5 says Jesus will present us to himself *“as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”* **Then we will be perfectly beautiful, we will complete with Christ, and we will be home.**

- D. **V.9**, *“Then the angel said to me, ‘Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’ And he added, ‘These are the true words of God.’”* At his last supper, as Jesus passed his disciples the cup of wine, he said, *“I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”* So for 2000 years, Jesus’ people have passed the bread and cup, and dreamed and waited. Every time we take Communion, we have a foretaste of the wedding supper of the Lamb. Every time, we should think, *“Not much longer!”* *Gor’ko, gor’ko.*
- E. In Matt. 22 Jesus told a story that began, *“The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son.”* But when the invitations went out, incredibly, many made excuses. So to fill his banquet hall, the king

sent his servants to stand on the street corners to invite *“anyone you can find... the bad as well as the good.”* So that’s why we encourage each of you to have a “Guest List,” people whom you seek to invite to their own wedding with Christ.

- F. That’s how we got in—we who are now the beloved of Christ. That’s how you can come in, too. Here is Christ, on his knee, saying to you, *“Will you marry me? Come spend the rest of your everlasting life with me?”* And he waits for your answer. Don’t delay. The Hallelujahs will soon begin.