

# The Apocalypse | Finding Composure in the Unveiled Christ

## “Wedding and War”

Revelation 19

7.4.21

*After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; <sup>2</sup> BECAUSE HIS JUDGMENTS ARE TRUE AND RIGHTEOUS; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and HE HAS AVENGED THE BLOOD OF HIS BOND-SERVANTS ON HER." <sup>3</sup> And a second time they said, "Hallelujah! HER SMOKE RISES UP FOREVER AND EVER." <sup>4</sup> And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!"*

*<sup>5</sup> And a voice came from the throne, saying, "Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great." <sup>6</sup> Then I heard something like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. <sup>7</sup> "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." <sup>8</sup> It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.*

*<sup>9</sup> Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God." <sup>10</sup> Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."*

*<sup>11</sup> And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. <sup>12</sup> His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. <sup>13</sup> He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. <sup>14</sup> And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. <sup>15</sup> From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. <sup>16</sup> And on His robe and on His thigh, He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."*

*<sup>17</sup> Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, "Come, assemble for the great supper of God, <sup>18</sup> so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great."*

*<sup>19</sup> And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. <sup>20</sup> And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. <sup>21</sup> And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.*

**This is our twelfth sermon in *The Book of Revelation* (two more) a spoiler alert: it has a happy ending. It turns out; it's a comedy (in the classic sense of that word). In the classics, a tragedy ends in a death; a comedy ends with a wedding. *Revelation* is the latter.**

Today we begin the upturn and we move in the direction *of the happy resolution to the book* and to the good destiny of the planet and of human history.

Last week we saw the judgment on the Great Harlot, Babylon the Great. If our interpretation is correct, this is a huge plot-twist – a shocker! Unbelieving Israel, embodied in the whole Temple complex and religious system of 1<sup>st</sup> C Jerusalem *had descended into such spiritual decay* that she became the world-wide promoter of karma-religion and idolatry.

This week – the Church, made up of Jews/Gentiles from every nation who believe in Jesus Christ, the Church, relieved that the “other woman” is out of the picture and now, the Bride, is ready for her wedding.

Then, there’s all this celebration and serious joy and ecstasy and grandeur and glory (so much so that John gets carried away and worships one of the guests, an angel – because we were temporarily lower than the angels but no more! 1 Cor 6.3) and then, *we go right from a wedding ... to a war*. It’s jarring...like it doesn't fit. Aside from the adage that says, “All is fair in love and war” what does a happy wedding have to do with a gory battle?

I was helped this week by a chapter I read by the late, Presbyterian minister and writer, Eugene Peterson IN WHICH he wrote, “St John’s salvation vision is composed of two elements, a meal and a war. The meal and the war *represent the polarities of salvation*... John’s salvation images of the meal and the war are the devices by which he will draw us *as deeply as he can* into the country of salvation.” (*Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination*; 1988, pp. 155 & 160)

And I remembered what we said last week about the grim spiritual danger of losing the wonder of grace. I thought, “We need help to maintain the AWE and here it is!” Salvation is a wedding and a war. The Christian life is lived between these two poles and if we can see that, we may be more amazed...less likely to get bored or presume that we’ve “been there – done that.”

So let’s look at this chapter so happy and so heavy – full of glory and also GORY and see if we don’t come away a bit more excited and thrilled by God’s grace:

- 1) The Two Poles (wedding and war)**
- 2) How the Tension Leads to Practice**

The Bible began with a wedding. There’s a long love-song in the middle of the Bible and now the Bible ends with a wedding (as it began). It was AT a wedding that Jesus Christ did his first miracle (a very significant one). *Revelation* ends with the marriage of God and His Bride, the Church.

Oftentimes in the Bible the life of true spirituality is likened to the marital relationship. When we read in the very literal King James, Genesis 3 and 4, “And Adam *knew* his wife again; and she

bare a son" (Gen 4.25) and then we read Psalm 139, "O LORD, You have searched me and *known me.*" (also Jer 12.23) It makes you wonder...and it's right to conclude that to be brought into right relationship to God is an invitation to the deepest imaginable intimacy and joy.

And we're headed for a wedding and a feast. The prophets were given glimpses of it. God told Hosea, "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, bring her into the wilderness, and speak to her heart." (Hos 2.14) Today's "Call to Worship" (Isa 25.6) - aged wine and the most lavish banquet: a celebration of love/joy.

Salvation means to be rescued from enmity with God. That's a Christian word for HATE. Most of us are very uncomfortable admitting that we ever HATED God so we say, we were at "enmity" with God (sounds a lot nicer than hate). Truth is that to break God's good commands *is an act of hatred toward Him...* "If you love Me, keep My commands" and we can deduce, "if you hate Me then break My commands..." *And we do...break His good commands...* and that puts us in an antagonistic relationship with God (at enmity).

And to be reconciled to God is not simply to have that record or guilt expunged/deleted and to be given a second chance but to be embraced and to be brought into tenderness and intimacy with God.

I've heard people say at funerals – "Well, Dad died but now he's with Mom in heaven." And that's fine but you do realize that Mom is not going to be the Big Show in heaven...right? Not being unromantic just looking at the Divine Romance as the Big Story.

*"Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready... And he said to me, 'Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'"* *And he said to me, "These are true words from God."* (7,9)

We go from enmity to intimacy. If you are in Christ and Christ is in you, you are already (as a branch grafted into the True Vine) already in union and being allured into a love relationship with God like you've only glimpsed here on earth.

Again, when John saw the end-game and heard *'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'* He didn't know how to respond and he fell down and worshiped the messenger!

And then we read of the Groom at this wedding who comes riding in on His white horse. He's called, "Faithful and True". In righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire. (Is that love and passion for His bride or X-ray vision into the hearts of all the people He will judge... or both?)

He comes with the Bride-people now pictured riding white horses of their own, an army following Him.

He has a sharp sword from His mouth. He wages war with His words (His only weapon). He rules with an iron scepter and treads the winepress of the angry wrath of God. His blood-soaked robe has written on it "*King of kings and Lord of lords.*"

It's the final showdown. The wedding has faded into a battle. Intimacy one moment and combat the next.

And it's a blood bath. The flesh of kings, flesh of commanders, flesh of mighty men, flesh of horses, and flesh of all men, both free and slave, great and small. That's a lot of flesh! You get the idea than when the birds have done their worst, all that will remain is a huge valley of bones. (And we *may* hear the question: "*Can these bones live?*")

Then the Battle finally comes (we've been waiting and wondering "WHEN?") But when it finally happens, it's over in an instant (not a good movie!): the beasts are seized/thrown alive into the lake of Fire and those who worship the beasts were killed with the mouth-sword... and that's it. The birds eat their fill. Over!

But the reality behind this gory picture *is an aspect of salvation that every Christian knows every day*. There are moments of intimacy and ecstasy in the spiritual life... and moments of intense battle.

The three constant and chronic enemies of the spiritual life – the world, the flesh and the devil *just seem to NEVER let up*. Even when I have known God's grace and the new identity that came to me as pure gift – still the world tries daily to force me into its mold (Rom 12.1-2) convincing me I have to earn it, prove it, flaunt it, grasp for it, signal it – it's all up to ME!

My own heart fights me so I do what I don't want to do and don't do what I WANT to do (Rom 7.15ff) – this principle that's too much for my willpower.

And this "ancient foe who seeks to work us woe" – the Satan, tempting, accusing, prowling, advertising – it's all exhausting. It's constant warfare that will one day be over... *But for now* I'm living between a wedding and a war.

I love the book about marriage by Dan Allender and Tremper Longman called, *Intimate Allies*. The title says it all – because you never see those two words together. The Christian marriage is two intimate allies. Two intimates who sort of put their backs together and face these three enemies as allies in a life and death struggle against spiritual powers.

And I find it – not just in marriage and not just in the whole of the present experience of salvation – *but I find it in the way the Bible describes salvation in many other places.* We are, until the *Last Battle*, we’re living in the tension of intimacy and battle, love and war, a fantastic meal and brutal adversity.

“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies” (you see it there in that beloved Psalm).

Or how about this verse (Phil 2.12) “work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”

God is taken up residence in you and is actually alluring you to want what He wants and energizing (ἐνεργῶν) you to actually do it... AND it’s a battle where you’re working out with trembling and fear like your life depended on it. That ONE VERSE (Phil 2.12) perfectly describes the two poles and the tension.

Or even in this very passage: did you see it? In v.8 John portrays the wedding dress: *to clothe herself in fine linen i.e. the righteous acts of the saints* (looks like do-it-yourself) *but then we notice earlier in that same verse, “it was GIVEN to her to clothe herself”.* It’s a gift AND it’s her good works...and it’s a gift.

On commentator wrote, “She clothes HERSELF, the righteousness of her clothing is her own righteous acts, *but the linen AND those righteous acts are sheer gift.*” Well, which is it – her deeds or His gift, her battle/service or His intimacy and grace? A: yes.

This is it. People who know God’s rescue, His salvation, are saved by grace alone. Jesus Christ, the Lion of Judah, the Warrior who tread the winepress of God’s wrath for me – He DID it all! He lived the perfect life of truth, beauty and goodness that NO OTHER HUMAN BEING had ever lived.

He died under the downpour of justice that I deserved to fall on me. And when the Holy Spirit opened my eyes to that *and freed me to see and believe that – and MOVED in to the house*, He put a fighter in me. He became my definitive Intimate Ally, the Helper.

And my good works – my own struggle to do good in the world... even when my motives are messed up, still, Jesus Christ, the Warrior-Groom, He purifies those good deeds. He makes them holy before God.

I’ll be rewarded for His works *FOR me and IN me.* Ephesians 2.10: “*We are His workmanship (ποίημα) created in Christ Jesus so we can do the good things God planned for us long ago.*” I can be curious and inquisitive – “Lord, what do You have for me today?”

And this leads us into a practice of praise – the word, “Hallelujah” occurs *only in this chapter in the whole NT* but four times. We’re being invited to join in the chorus of those in the Church Triumphant. *If we’re living in this tension, we’ll WANT to sing LOUDLY about what Jesus Christ did to rescue us and how the Holy Spirit intimately allied with us to work it out.*

Ask yourself if praise and celebration are an important practice for you – *if not*, you may be seeing salvation as ONLY war or ONLY wedding – you may have left the tension!

We also practice praise among the nations. Not only are we hoping to see people come to Christ in distant lands but right here. *We want to brag on God’s work in Christ right where we live.*

We’re recognizing that Jesus is on the move like His namesake Joshua. Yeshua is also a General but the sword He uses extends from His mouth – His words are destroying the flesh, flesh, flesh (5x) and raising dry bones to new life. We want to conquer cities – by the Word of Good News, telling all people, great and small, about the Lamb who bled for us (tender, intimate) and the Lion who fights for us, in us and through us. He deserves for everyone to know! And we want to help and bless the people around us.

“Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”