

A wedding can be a truly remarkable event. But it doesn't just happen. A newly engaged couple and their families make all kinds of preparations for the wedding day. They must book a pastor to officiate; find a church that will host the ceremony; book a venue for the dinner; compile a guest list; send out invitations; get a wedding dress or have one made; find bridesmaids and groomsmen; plan the wedding menu; make seating arrangements; plan the ceremony; get decorations and flowers and on it goes. The bride, groom and their families put in great effort to make a wedding into a meaningful and joyful celebration.

But those invited also need to prepare. First they must respond to the invitation. They must communicate that they plan to attend. Then they must make preparations to attend. This may involve making travel plans. Arranging accommodation. Budgeting some money. Booking time off work. Purchasing a wedding gift. Putting clothes together to wear to the wedding. Actually showing up.

Then the day arrives. All the dreams, plans and preparations come together to form a special day hopefully for everyone. The people show up in their wedding clothes. The bride wears her specially made or purchased wedding dress – the flowers bloom in all their colors – the music plays – the vows are exchanged – the pronouncement is made – the people rejoice – the guests share in the joy of bride and groom. Then everyone gathers for a feast and time of celebration. A wedding can be a remarkable event.

But there is a wedding coming that tops all the weddings that have ever been held or will be held. Arrangements are already underway. The invitation to attend has been issued to you and me. Have we responded to it and are we preparing for it? This wedding invitation comes from God himself. He promised way back before the time of Christ to hold a banquet for His people when they come to live with Him forever. It will be the most tremendous banquet held in all of history. It will celebrate the end of death, sorrow, evil and sickness. It will be the greatest reunion of family and friends ever held. It is the marriage supper of the Lamb, Jesus, and His bride, the church. **For God invites us to join Him forever. His invitation requires our response and preparation.**

The next chapter in Revelation reveals this wonderful banquet to us. I pray that you will be encouraged with all that God does to prepare for that great day. But I also pray that God will inspire and empower us to see how we can prepare now in our everyday lives for our attendance at that banquet.

So would you please find Revelation 19 in your Bibles or on your devices? We will be taking this chapter in pieces to discover how God prepares for our joining with Him forever.

Revelation 19:1-5 (ESV)

19 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,

² 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.”

³ Once more they cried out,

“Hallelujah!

The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.”

⁴ And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, “Amen. Hallelujah!” ⁵ And from the throne came a voice saying,

“Praise our God,

all you his servants,

you who fear him,

small and great.”

Chapter 19 starts off with 5 verses that should really be attached to chapter 18. The Bible did not have chapters and verses when originally written. So later on, someone added them to make it easier to reference. For the most part, they did a great job. But sometimes they divided up passages meant to be together. That’s the case with the first 5 verses of Revelation 19.

We saw the fall of Babylon in chapter 18. Remember how there were three sets of people who mourned Babylon’s fall – the kings; the merchants and the sea-faring people? We also saw a brief moment of rejoicing in heaven in Revelation 18:20. Then the chapter concluded with the angel throwing the great millstone into the sea symbolizing Babylon being thrown down to rise no more.

The first 5 verses of 19 provide us a fuller account of heaven’s response to Babylon’s fall. Just as 3 groups mourned Babylon’s fall, 3 groups celebrate it in verses 1-5. First there is a great multitude in heaven in verse 1 who sing a song of celebration. They praise God for His true and just judgments. He has brought down the great prostitute Babylon. But he has not only judged her, He avenged on her the blood of his servants. God will visit perfect vengeance or repayment to those who have done wrong and not repented for it.

Then in verse 4, you see two other groups rejoice in heaven over Babylon's fall – the 24 elders and the four living creatures. We met them early on in Revelation. They fell on their faces when the Lamb went forward to take the scroll from the right hand of God in Revelation 5. Now they fall on their faces before God worshipping Him for His just judgment. This is their last appearance in Revelation.

Finally, a voice from God's throne calls all God's servants to praise Him. This is likely the voice of one of the four living creatures since God would not say of Himself, "Praise our God." Notice the invitation extends to all servants small and great. There is no priority in praise. There are no earthly qualifications that set some servants above others in worship. All are called to Praise God for His just judgment. So verses 1-5 complete the scene of Babylon's fall and the responses to it. Now we come to the wedding.

Revelation 19:6-10

⁶ 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.

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;

⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure" —

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

⁹ 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." ¹⁰ 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 to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God." For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

This passage provides the first answer to the question **"How does God prepare for our joining with Him forever? God invites us to the marriage supper of the Lamb and His bride.** This will be the most far-reaching and supremely-satisfying wedding banquet in all of history. John hears a very loud voice in verse 6. It seems he has trouble describing it. It seems to be the voice of a great multitude. But it also sounds like rushing water or a mighty waterfall. And if that isn't enough, it also sounds like peals of thunder.

This very loud voice proclaims "Hallelujah." This is a Hebrew word meaning "Praise the Lord." So "Praise the Lord." Why does the voice call for the Lord's praise? Because at the end of verse 6, the Lord God Almighty reigns. But isn't He

already reigning? Yes believers in God recognize that He reigns over the universe right now. But it's not a visible reign to the whole world. At the end, the Lord's reign will be established on earth in a special way. Then the power of evil will be destroyed and the kingdom of God becomes a visible reality.

Then in verse 7, the voice announces the upcoming event – “For the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready.” In Jewish circles, there was expectation of a great banquet for God's people with the Messiah when He came. Listen to Isaiah 25:6-8 (ESV):

⁶ On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,
of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.

⁷ And he will swallow up on this mountain
the covering that is cast over all peoples,
the veil that is spread over all nations.

⁸ He will swallow up death forever;
and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces,
and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken.

So they expected a magnificent banquet. Jesus talked about it in a parable back in Matthew 22. A king prepares a wedding banquet. Many are invited but they all come up with excuses to not attend. So the king strikes them down and then invites people from anywhere to come to this wedding banquet.

It helps us to understand this image more if we remember a couple of details about ancient Jewish marriages. The marriage involved two major events, the betrothal and the wedding. These were separated by a period of time kind of like our engagements and wedding day. During betrothal, the couple was already considered husband and wife.

Then came the actual wedding. It began with a procession to the bride's house by the groom and his attendants. This was followed by a procession with bride and groom returning to the groom's house for the marriage feast. To apply this to Christ, in some ways His first coming and our acceptance of Him by faith is like the betrothal. We are already to consider ourselves one with Christ. Now the church awaits the second coming of Christ, the groom. Then he will come for His bride and bring her to His house for the marriage feast.

But remember all the preparations that need to happen before a wedding takes place? How does the bride prepare for the actual wedding ceremony? Does she just show up in jeans and a t-shirt? Maybe in some case. But for most weddings, the bride adorns herself so she looks beautiful and she puts on her wedding dress.

At the end of verse 7 it states, “his Bride has made herself ready.” Then verse 8 – “it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure’ – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.” So here you’ve got the bride, God’s people, (you and me) getting dressed for this marriage supper. We wear bright and pure fine linen, our righteous deeds.

Now I’m going to deal with the questions “righteous deeds” raise in a moment. But notice first the contrast in clothing between the bride of Christ and the great prostitute or Babylon in Revelation 17. She wore purple and scarlet. Christ’s bride will wear bright and pure linen. So this is the picture of a wonderful wedding ceremony between the Holy Lamb Jesus Christ and His bright and pure bride, the people of God.

The angel declares to John in verse 9 “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” So how can we respond to God’s invitation to this great wedding banquet?

First, we need to **Accept God’s invitation**. If you got a wedding invitation and never responded to it, how would the bride and groom know you were coming? How could they prepare for your participation in their wedding dinner? If you don’t accept the invitation, there will be no space for you at the banquet. God has put out the invitation to His great wedding banquet to everyone in this room. Have you accepted it? Have you said “Yes, I am coming? Yes, I will join with you forever and live the rest of my life in preparation for our life together in eternity? If you haven’t done that or aren’t sure if you have accepted God’s invitation, I invite you to come to the front following the worship service or talk with someone you know is a Christian to ensure you accept God’s invitation before it’s too late.

The second way we can respond to God’s invitation is **“Receive the Bridegroom’s love who cherishes you.”** Think about how much love God displays in preparing this wedding banquet and using the image of marriage with us. Marriage is supposed to be a deep intimate relationship between loving husband and wife. So in using the image of marriage, God communicates to us His deep love for us. He desires to be in a close relationship with us that will go on forever. God prepares this banquet to celebrate the beginning of our relationship in His very presence. Perhaps Jesus’ meals with sinners were a foretaste of the messianic banquet. When partake of the Lord’s Supper, it is a foretaste of our future blessing. But one day we will share a great feast prepared by Him out of His great love for us. So receive His love.

A third way we can respond **“Receive God’s gift to get your wedding clothes.”** So God not only invites; He not only loves us, He provides for our cloths. The voice declares that the Bride has made herself ready by clothing herself with

fine linen. But it's not actual clothes. The fine linen is made up of righteous deeds of the saints. When I first read that a little more carefully, a red flag went up. Is this saying that we can do good deeds and make ourselves ready for the wedding feast? Do you see the problem there? It almost seems like it says that if we do good works we make ourselves ready or worthy. But none of us is perfectly holy in their own actions or thoughts. This goes against the Gospel which says we can't make ourselves worthy. We have to depend on Christ's work.

Thankfully, there are three words at the beginning of verse 8 that reconcile this. "It was granted her to clothe herself." So the bride, the people of God, you and me are given or granted what we need to clothe ourselves – the righteousness of God. This was talked about way back in Isaiah 61:10 – "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; . . . for he has clothed me with garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels." Isaiah understood that to actually be in God's presence, His people had to be pure. We receive the status of purity or holiness when we come to Christ. We are clothed in Christ's righteousness. God takes the filthy rags of our own righteousness off and gives us Christ's new robe of righteousness.

But coming to Christ not only results in us being declared holy. We are on a journey to become completely holy in our behavior and everyday life. The growing Christian should see ever increasing holiness in their behavior. We grow in holiness by cooperating with the Holy Spirit's work in our life. We read God's Word, we pray and ask the Spirit to help us overcome sin. Then we eventually leave that sin behind.

Every step of this holiness process works towards this wedding banquet. Each time we grow in righteousness and holiness; each time we leave behind some sinful habit or practice by the power of the Holy Spirit, it's like we receive another piece of our wedding clothes. Here again we see the great work and love of God. He helps us by giving us our wedding clothes. We can't buy these clothes because they are priceless. Yet, He grants us the ability to live righteously transforming our hearts and minds so that we will be completely righteous on that day. Then when the banquet arrives, we will be able to say "God gave us His gift of power to grow in righteousness."

So to prepare for the great marriages supper of the Lamb, we must accept God's invitation, receive God's love and receive from God the gift of our wedding clothes. But there's one problem that follows every wedding banquet I've been to – especially if it's a joyful and uplifting wedding. It ends. Wedding days and banquets are special. They are unusual

compared the ordinary days of the year. During the wedding and celebration, we can forget about our problems for a while. But when it ends, we have to go back to work or school or life including its joys and hardships. But God or more accurately Jesus is going to do something that will ensure we won't have any fear or sorrow or dread at the end of the initial wedding banquet. It's found in the rest of this chapter.

Revelation 19:11-21 (ESV)

¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

¹⁷ Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, "Come, gather for the great supper of God, ¹⁸ to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great." ¹⁹ And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. ²⁰ And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. ²¹ And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

What does this passage reveal?

19:11-21 - Jesus will decisively defeat His and our enemies forever by the word from His mouth. Heaven opens and John sees one sitting on a white horse. He has eyes like flames of fire so nothing is hidden from him. He has many crowns on his head symbolizing His authority over many nations. He wears a robe dipped in blood – either his own or that of His enemies that he will destroy. He is followed by the armies of heaven dressed in fine linen, white and pure. They also ride on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword indicating the power and penetration of His Word.

Who is He? John gives us four names. He is called Faithful and True. Here true means reliable. He will certainly carry out what He is about to do – judge and make war. He has a name no one knows except Himself. So He can never be completely understood by creation. He still is part mystery to those unequal to Him. He is also called "the Word of God," a striking parallel to the first verses of the Gospel of John. There John called Jesus "the Word." On his robe and thigh is written the name "King of kings and Lord of lords. This is none other than Jesus Christ, the Heavenly Warrior who is about to engage in the final battle with evil.

Then surprisingly we are told of another supper. But those invited to it and the menu served will be very different. An angel calls out in a loud a voice to the invited guests which are birds. The feast will be the enemy army. In verse 17,

the angel says “Come gather for the great supper of God.” This feast will consist of everyone in this army – every rank; slave or free; great or small. They followed the beast. But unlike believers who are invited *to a feast*, the beast followers *are the feast* for the birds.

The beast leads his armies to make war against the one who sits on the horse. But there doesn’t appear to be a battle. Or if there was, it happened so quickly that it was not worth a mention. For in verse 20, the Lamb captures the beast and false prophet. They get thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. So unlike the sea like glass before God’s throne, they will suffer in the lake of fire away from God’s throne. In verse 21, the rest of the massed armies are struck down simply by a word from Jesus’ mouth.

Jesus will decisively defeat all His and our enemies at this last battle. Satan and Death will be defeated in Revelation 20.

Therefore, we need to praise Him and worship Him with all of our hearts and lives. Jesus is the all-powerful One, who will carry out final justice. Although we must work for justice and mercy, only our omnipotent Lord will settle these matters completely when he returns. In this world, we do not win all the battles. But when our Lord comes, nothing can stand against him. He is the only one who can prepare the great wedding feast, provide us with our wedding clothes and defeat all our enemies so we never have to face them again.

So let us respond in praise and worship of our beloved God now.