

## UNDERSTANDING THAT WEIRD BOOK OF REVELATION - Part twenty-four

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### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE SECOND COMING

**Revelation 19:1-21** - "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." [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. [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."

As you reach chapter seventeen of Revelation you are really marching toward the wrap up of John's revelation. If you remember at that point in our studies, I said John wraps up his Revelation with a study in **contrasts**. The last six chapters deal with **two women** (the great harlot and the bride of Christ), **two cities** (Babylon and the New Jerusalem), and **two feasts** (the marriage supper of the lamb and the horrifying supper of God that we'll study today).

We've already seen the end depicted several times in the book of Revelation. Remember, each of the sevens (seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls) leads right up to the end of the age. But, while the material in these final chapters isn't brand new, it is the most **expanded** treatment of the Second Coming of Jesus and the final judgement.

Chapter seventeen held forth the prediction of the fall of Babylon. Chapter eighteen gave more of the actual details. Remember, the three great agencies used by the devil (the great dragon portrayed in Revelation chapter 12) are **the beast** (the devil's political activist/organizer, the antichrist), **the false prophet** (representing the **religious** component of the antichrist's rule), and **Babylon** (representing the seductive pull of the world to draw people away from pure devotion to Jesus Christ).

With the beginning of chapter nineteen you witness another striking contrast. Chapter eighteen ends with this dark, dismal **lament** of the merchants of the earth over the fall of Babylon:

**Revelation 18:22-23** - "....and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters, will be heard in you no more, and a craftsman of any craft will be found in you no more, and the sound of the mill will be heard in you no more, [23] and the light of a lamp will shine in you no more, and the voice of bridegroom and bride will be heard in you no more, for your merchants were the great ones of the earth, and all nations were deceived by your sorcery."

It's the feeling of a ghost town. The life is gone. The party is over. A funeral dirge has replaced the sound of the stock market and the cash register. This is where the contrast with the opening verses of chapter nineteen becomes so striking:

## 1) THE CELEBRATION OF HEAVEN OVER THE TRIUMPHANT JUSTICE OF GOD ALMIGHTY

**Revelation 19:1-6** - "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." [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."

That last phrase is almost a shout of surprise. It didn't *look* like He reigned through the last couple of visions John witnessed.

As the followers of the beast and Babylon mourn, heaven is pictured in explosive praise. "**Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God!**" (19:1). The power and glory of God have finally been *manifested*. And the *prayers of the suffering saints* have finally been answered. This is not just the joy of *knowing* that God is, by nature, faithful to His promise. This is the joy of *seeing* God's faithfulness finally prevail over what seemed to be impossible odds - "**...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].

Another important thought is unfolded here: *Those around the throne of God have not lost the capacity to rejoice at the justice of God*. This can be witnessed in words that are almost troubling to some of us: **Revelation 19:3-4** - "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!"

As our world gets increasingly accustomed to the increased numbness of immorality and relativism we are gradually losing our capacity to rejoice over the application of justice to wickedness. In our blind scramble for *tolerance* we indiscriminately embrace wickedness as self-expression. The kings and merchants of the earth *mourn* over the judgment of Babylon. But the pure in heaven *rejoice* at this judging revelation of God's justice. We finally be able to see sin completely *in its relationship to God*. And seeing it as *anti-God* will give us joy in seeing it finally judged.

The Kingdom of God cannot come while the enemies of God triumph. The enemies must be judged first. It is because the creatures around the throne know better than anyone else the glories of the kingdom yet to be finally manifested that they actually celebrate and rejoice as the smoke rises from the burning rubble of Babylon. The smoke rises from Babylon because she has been laid waste by God's judging fire - **Revelation 18:8** - "**For this reason her plagues will come in a single day, death and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her.**"

Even as Christians, we find these words challenging to our sensitivities because we celebrate God's love in this age of grace. But the age of grace comes to a close with the pouring out of God's final judgment. God's justice will be manifested and praised then as His grace and mercy to wrongdoers is celebrated now.

It's hard for us to imagine what the full effect of our completed redemption will mean for our future moral judgments. We can only read prophetically what our hearts will feel when the ultimate measure of virtue is *righteousness* rather than *tolerance*.

## 2) THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB

**Revelation 19:7-10** - "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.”**

It is probably one of the most frustrating quirks of New Testament prophecy that this marriage supper of the lamb is only **announced** in John’s vision. It is nowhere **described** in the Revelation. We are told absolutely nothing about it. This is the reason behind the many wild, varied, and sometimes weird theories about it. John doesn’t tell us **where** this banquet is, nor exactly **when** it takes place. Many descriptions of the end of the age in Revelation leave it out all together. We simply don’t know very much about it.

We **do** know that it pictures a beautiful time of **reunion** and **celebration** with Jesus Christ and those who are already in the kingdom. Jesus actually **prepared** His followers with advanced notice of this reunion while He was still here on earth:

**Matthew 8:11** - “I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven....”

**Matthew 26:29** - “I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

Two things stand out about this future time of reunion and celebration:

- a) **Only those who respond to the invitation can participate** - “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.**” One can’t **earn** his or her entrance to this supper. It is the **response** to divine invitation that is emphasized.
- b) **Yet there is still an element of preparation involved in being ready for the supper** - “....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....”(19:7).

There is such a wonderful balance pictured here. One cannot **earn** entrance, but one must still **prepare** for the coming of Jesus. We learn that **responding** to the divine invitation includes more than many think - **“The bride has made herself ready.”**

The Apostle Paul put it this way: **“Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God”(2 Corinthians 7:1).**

You can **come** as you are. You can’t **remain** as you are. The apostle John agrees with this witness in **1 John 3:2-3** - **“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. [3] And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”**

Everyone who names the name of Christ must work **out** what God has already worked **in**. Those words from 1 John are particularly striking. They force us to think of holiness in a way that we aren’t used to considering - **“And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”**

This is fascinating. I know you believe in Jesus. I know you are trusting in the blood of the cross. John asks yet another question. What are you doing to **purify yourself** in preparation for the coming of Jesus?

We’ll continue with this next week.