

Getting Ready for the Wedding

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Preacher: Nick Louw

- [0 : 0 0] Hello everyone, good to see you this morning. We're going to tackle Revelation 19 together with God's help. So keep your Bibles open there. Well, I'm sure many of you know the amount of work it takes to prepare for a wedding, right?
- Who's been involved in the preparation of a wedding, maybe recently? Well, actually, if it's been over the past year, it's just sending an invite on Zoom. But I'm talking about pre-COVID, you know, when you actually had people come to a venue and you had to plan meals and you had to prepare the venue.
- I remember our wedding, we had our wedding reception in Simonstown Golf Club, which was also a squash club. You may have been there. It's a lovely view over the ocean.
- It was a nice place, but it needed some preparation the day before. You know, the wedding venue let us in the day before and the families came. I mean, we had to sweep around a bit and we had to clean up a bit.
- It was an active sports club after all, clean up a few bottles and then put the decorations up. It wasn't too much cleanup, but there was some preparation required before this great and amazing wedding we had the next day.
- [1 : 1 3] But I want you to imagine for a second that it was a little bit worse than that. Imagine we had arrived the day before to that wedding venue and we had found that it had been turned into a drug den.
- And there were gangs of druggies snorting drugs in the corner. And there were prostitutes hanging around there, plying their trade. Now, in that situation, me especially as the groom of the wedding, if I had arrived to that, I would have done everything I could to get rid of anyone who doesn't belong there so that they don't risk spoiling the wedding.
- Well, that is pretty much the situation our world is in. And that is what God feels about it. Because God has a wedding planned and this world is the wedding venue.
- And the Bible actually describes the coming of God's kingdom down to earth. Often it describes it as a wedding. And it's a very accurate description.
- And it describes it so in our passage this morning as well. Revelation 19 verse 7. If you look at that, Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory because the marriage of the Lamb has come.
- [2 : 2 5] And so, here, the picture of God's future plans for this world. When His kingdom comes and heaven and earth unite is depicted in the Bible as a wedding here and elsewhere.
- And it's very appropriate because think of a wedding. A good wedding is one of the happiest occasions that you can be at, right? It's joyous.
- It's a celebration because it's a uniting of two people in their lives who love each other very much. And it's the beginning of a new life together. And it's just filled with joy and celebration.
- Well, in the same way, the picture that the Bible paints of the plans God has for this world are given to us in the picture of a wedding. Because God has a new age planned for this world.

When heaven and earth unite in a new society of love and joy. Never to end. It's a wonderful picture the Bible gives us of what God has planned for this world.

[3 : 30] But, first, He needs to get rid of everything that threatens that wedding from taking place. And that's what we're reading about here in Revelation. That's what this whole section of Revelation, if you're confused about the language and what we've been reading so far.

And who isn't confused from time to time reading Revelation and all these symbols and these pictures. But this final section that we're in now, which kind of stretches from chapter 17 right up until the wedding itself.

We read right at the end of Revelation, this great wedding where the church, God's people, are presented as this glorious bride. And heaven and earth are united to start God's new age for this world.

But before that, what we're reading about in this section, chapter 17 to 20, is God cleaning up the venue. He's cleaning up the wedding venue before the wedding can take place.

That's, I think, the best way to understand what we're reading about. And we started last week looking at how He cleaned away Babylon. And we're going to look this week at how He continues to clean up in preparation of this great wedding.

[4 : 47] And I think as we're reading these, it's helpful to know that I don't think we're reading them in a chronological order. That He's first going to do this, then He's going to do that, then He's going to do that. But I think what we're doing, John's giving us this vision of different aspects of what will happen when God comes, when Jesus returns.

It's all going to happen at once, I think. But John is isolating these different aspects and these different things that God is dealing with in order to make this world what He's always intended for it to be.

And so, let's have a look at chapter 19 and first see the response of God's people to Him clearing up the wedding venue, which we saw last week.

Just how He has started to clean up. Now, the passage opens with a great multitude praising God for taking down Babylon. Now, you'll remember that Babylon, the great prostitute, represents immoral, ungodly lifestyles, typically that we see in the cities of the world, in the societies of the world.

The societies and the ungodly nature and just the immorality that goes on behind the scenes in our cities, in our modern societies. That's what Babylon represents and it has in every age.

[6 : 06] But God is now taking down Babylon. He has a plan to take it down and we saw the description of that. And this is the response. Look what God's people, how they respond to Him taking down Babylon from verse 1.

After this, I heard something like a loud voice of a vast multitude in heaven saying, Hallelujah, salvation, glory, power belong to our God because His judgments are true and righteous because He has judged the notorious prostitute who corrupted the earth with her sexual immorality.

And He's avenged the blood of His servants that was on her hands. I mean, isn't it going to be great when God actually removes all the muck from this world?

All the immorality, all the things that we know is wrong. When He judges it, when He brings justice. Isn't it going to be great? And yet, let me ask you, how many modern worship songs praise God for His judgment and His vengeance?

Can you think? If you had to list them. Or how many Christians are eager to talk about God's judgment? How eager are you to talk about God's judgment to your friends?

[7 : 18] I think we hesitate, don't we? We hesitate to talk. We're happy to talk about the love of God and the grace of God. But when it comes to His judgments that we've been reading about in Revelation, and we see throughout the Bible, we kind of hesitate.

We almost feel a little bit shy or ashamed to talk about God as a God of judgment. But what we need to realize, and I think what this passage is here to remind us, is that God's judgments are good.

They are amazingly good. They are true and righteous. And you know why? Well, because if we read in this passage, we realize why God's judgments are so good, because they are needed before verse 7 can happen.

Look down. You see, at the beginning, you've got God's people praising Him for His judgments on all that is bad, clearing up the venue. But then, verse 7, we read why?

Because let us be glad and rejoice, because the marriage of the Lamb has come. You see, that marriage could not come unless God prepares the world for it first. And that is why He judges.

[8 : 23] Not because He is nasty or mean, but because He is incredibly loving and He has a wonderful plan for this world. We should praise God for His judgments, just like the saints are depicted doing here in Revelation 19.

We should praise Him for His judgment, as well as for His love and His grace and all His attributes, but His judgment and His righteousness. And the fact that He will bring that righteousness to bear on this world and its cities and societies are a good thing.

Don't ever forget that. His judgments and His love are actually two sides of the same coin. You know, we're happy, if you think about it, we're happy to share with our friends when we see justice done in our country, for example, in our world, when some corrupt politician is found out and brought to book.

We celebrate, don't we? We tell our friends. We say, look, look, they finally got Him. We're so happy when justice is done. It's good news when justice is done, right? It's good news.

Except, of course, for the people who are benefiting from that corruption. They don't want to hear it. That's bad news for them. But it's good news for the rest of us. And just because it's bad news for them, doesn't mean we're not going to be excited about it. Well, we should be equally keen to share the good news of God's judgments on this earth.

[9 : 48] The reason we hesitate, of course, is because so many people around us are caught up in Babylon. And so it doesn't sit well with them when they hear about the inevitable judging of Babylon and the lifestyles and the immorality of this world.

But that's our message. You see, that's the good news of the Bible. One of the things we need to understand is that the good news of the Bible is not God has a wonderful plan for your life.

That's not the good news. The good news is God has a wonderful plan for this world, for His creation. And you can be part of that through Jesus Christ.

But to bring that about, He must first judge this world. And that is good. And you know what? Like the saints in Revelation 19, we should celebrate that.

Even before it comes. Because it's so certain it will come. And that's why we've been given this prophecy. So we can know it will come. And Jesus' resurrection from the dead. As Paul says in Acts 17.31, And God has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the man He has appointed.

[10 : 58] And He has given proof of this to all men by raising Him from the dead. We know this is coming. And so we should celebrate it and look forward to it and be excited about it. But are you willing to do that?

Are you willing to praise God for His judgments like these people in Revelation do? Like this great multitude of saints do? Are you willing to praise Him for it? As we remember it and celebrate it in our songs when we do.

And in our liturgy, especially our Anglican liturgy is actually full of the judgment of God. And it's seen as a good thing. That's why we say these prayers from the prayer book. Because if we didn't and we just prayed what was on our hearts all the time, we would forget to celebrate things like this.

That's why we have good liturgy that reminds us what we should be celebrating. What we should be praising God for. But are you willing to do that? Do you see His judgments as a good thing?

And are you willing to praise Him not only inside the church, but outside the church as well? Are you willing to talk about God's plan to fix this world and the judgments and the justice and the righteousness He will bring to it, which is good?

[12 : 10] Are you willing to share that with others? So that's the first thing we learn about in Revelation 19. The goodness of God's judgments as He starts to clean up the wedding venue.

But the next thing we read about is the arrival of the groom Himself. Because it turns out, the prostitutes and the druggies are not all that needs to be dealt with at the wedding venue.

What we've read about last week, Babylon and the corrupt societies and the immoral way of life that God is going to bring an end to when He comes down, that's not all that needs to be dealt with because there are also at the wedding venue ferocious beasts stalking around, preparing to devour the wedding guests when they arrive.

And we've read about the beasts already, right, in Revelation. And the beasts represent the false religions and the structures and the worldviews that are set against the truth of God, which underlie and inspire the immorality and the messed up societies.

That's why the prostitute was riding on the beast last week, because it's these structures and these worldviews and these false religions that cause people to have mixed up views and cause them therefore to live in mixed up ways.

[13 : 42] And so these beasts need to be dealt with as well. Not just the corrupt societies, but the beasts underlying them.

And so when do they get taken care of? When do those beasts get what's coming to them? I'll tell you when. When the bridegroom arrives to check out the wedding venue.

When Jesus comes from heaven back to earth. And oh boy, does He make quite an entry. Look at verse 11 to 16. Then I saw heaven opened and there was a white horse.

His rider is called Faithful and True and he judges and makes war with justice. His eyes were like a fiery flame and many crowns were on his head. He had a name written that no one knows except himself.

He wore a robe dipped in blood and his name is called the Word of God. The armies that were in heaven followed him on white horses wearing pure white linen. A sharp sword came from his mouth so that he might strike the nations with it.

[14 : 49] He will rule them with an iron rod. He will also trample the winepress of the fierce anger of God the Almighty. And he has a name written on his robe and on his thigh. King of kings and Lord of lords.

And so here comes the groom and his entourage. I was looking out the window this morning. It was quite warm in bed and cold outside.

And so I stayed a few minutes in bed looking out the window and just thinking what it will be like when Jesus comes back. Imagine it just for a second. I don't think we can imagine it. I think when Jesus returns to this world it will defy all our categories.

What is going to happen and what that's going to be like. And the descriptions in the Bible are therefore highly symbolic. They're trying to give us a poetic and symbolic description of what it will be like when Jesus comes back.

And this particular description in Revelation 19 is really a combination, an amalgamation of a whole lot of Old Testament images. We don't have time to go into each of the Old Testament passages.

[15 : 54] But that's what we're reading here. All of these visions we're getting are drawn from the Old Testament. And each time it's a passage that is describing God's ultimate destroying of evil in this world.

So the Old Testament and the prophets, they do talk about God's ultimate bringing of justice to the world. And they use these various images. And they're all amalgamated together in this image that we have of Jesus.

And so God is going to fulfill all those promises that He's been making for thousands of years. That He's going to fix the world. He's promised us. I'm going to fix it. It's going to get better.

I'm going to bring justice. And what we read in Revelation is that when Jesus comes back, that's when God's going to do all of that. That's when God's going to fulfill all those promises. And one interesting description here is that the rider, did you notice, is on a white horse.

You know the significance of that? In the ancient world, you would only ride a white horse after you've won the battle. It was the white horse that the conqueror would ride in the city on.

[17 : 07] And here he's going to war, but on the white horse. It means he's already won the victory. It's already done and settled. He's got victory already before the war even starts.

Nobody will be able to stand against him when he comes. None of the beasts will be able to defy this bridegroom when he comes to the wedding venue to prepare it for the wedding.

Why? Why is his victory already secured? I'll tell you why. Because he brings with him the one weapon that the beasts can't fight. Did you notice his weapon? I'll tell you what it is.

It's the truth. Verse 15. A sharp sword came from his mouth. Now again, it's symbolic. But it's symbolic for his word.

And the truth about God and about this world that he will bring when he comes. And that is what will slay the beasts. And that is what will slay all the lies and the confusion of this world.

[18 : 09] Because that's the beasts power, isn't it? We've seen in Revelation so far the beasts, these underlying worldviews and structures and false religions which deceive people.

All of their power lies in mistruth. In deceiving people about God and about the nature of reality.

And they continue to do it today. Every day. In the news. In social media. The beasts are deceiving. The beasts are getting people to think wrong thoughts about God and about the world.

But when Jesus comes, they cannot do that anymore. Because when Jesus comes, he will bring with him truth that nobody can ignore. Truth about himself. Truth about God.

It will all become clear. And when he comes, therefore, and the truth is made known, the beasts will lose all of their power. That's why in verse 20, they're captured before they can even fight.

[19 : 11] Did you notice that? He comes. You're expecting this great war. It's the battle of Armageddon described in another way. And each time this battle or this conflict or this gathering against God and his anointed is described in Revelation, the battle never happens.

They're gathering against him. He comes. And the next thing, they're captured before they can even fight. Because they can't stand when Jesus comes back and he brings the truth about things.

You see, the beasts, the beasts keep people in the dark. It's like we're in this big, dark room and people are just walking every which way, bumping into each other, bumping into stuff, not really knowing where they're going.

And the beasts are the ones who have cut the electricity. The beasts are the ones who keep people in the dark. And that's where they flourish. That's where the beasts flourish. When people don't know what they're living for and don't know where they're going and don't know what life's about.

And some people, Jesus says in John chapter 3 when he's talking to Nicodemus, you might remember it, he said, you know what, people prefer the darkness. That's why they react.

[20 : 18] He was explaining to Nicodemus, he says, the light has come and people prefer the darkness. And that's why people were so hostile to Jesus, because when he came, the first time he brought light, even a little bit of light into the world, and people preferred the darkness.

They liked to get away from the light and go and hide away in the dark corners, and they still do. People prefer the darkness because when you're in the darkness and you don't know the truth about God, it justifies you to live how you want to live, and that's why people prefer the darkness.

That's what Jesus said, they prefer the darkness because their deeds are evil. But when Jesus comes back, you know what he does? He switches on the lights, and there are no dark corners left, nowhere to hide.

That's what's going to happen when he comes back. Lies, the deceptions that people have followed and lived by are going to be exposed to open disgrace. The picture that's given here is corpses lying in the battlefield with birds gorging on their flesh.

The most disgraceful, dishonorable thing. And that's what's going to happen to all lies and all who followed lies and all who preferred the darkness.

[21 : 34] All those who supported those structures and those immoral worldviews and preferred the darkness will be exposed as guilty before God. And there's nowhere they will be able to hide when Jesus comes back.

And that's a good thing. It's a good thing when the groom comes to clear up the wedding venue. Because remember, whenever we read about the judgments of Christ, the judgments of God, we must read it in light of the wedding that he's preparing for.

That's why he brings these judgments. That's why they're good. And also, just as when he comes ultimately and slays the beast with his word, and defeats the lies of the world with the truth, ultimately on that day to come, he also is doing now in individual lives.

Look at verse 10. So Jesus is already using the sword of his mouth before that day. Verse 10, something weird happens. Then I fell at his feet to worship him.

This is the angel. And he said, don't do that. I'm a fellow servant with you and your brothers and sisters who hold firmly to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God because the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

- [22 : 55] What he means there is just that the testimony of Jesus is the way that you bring truth about God to the world. Now, just as the prophets did in the Old Testament, they shone lights in the darkness. The testimony of Jesus now, those who talk about Jesus and share who he is, what they are doing in this dark world is that they are shining torches in the darkness to help people get ready for when Christ does come and turn on the lights.

That's what Christians do when they share Jesus with others. They're switching on little lights, guiding people in the right way to get ready for the coming of the bridegroom. And that's what we are called to do in preparation for the wedding.

To praise God, to share the testimony of Jesus. But there's one more thing that God's people are called to do in preparation of the wedding. And that is to prepare the bride for her wedding.

Go back to verse 7 and 8. Let us be glad and rejoice and give him glory because the marriage of the Lamb has come and his bride has prepared herself.

See, there's a vision of the future. The bride is prepared. How was she prepared? Verse 8, This is describing the wedding dress.

- [24 : 19] Now who, of the girls at least, who doesn't want to know what the wedding dress looks like? You know, on that great day of the future wedding of heaven and earth, of Christ and his people.

Well, this is what the wedding dress looks like. And now every bride wants to look good for her wedding day, right? I've not met a bride who doesn't care about her appearance on her wedding day. I mean, the groom as well.

But there's only so much the grooms can do. It's the bride that really is the focus. And she wants to look the best. And sure, you know, she'll watch what she eats for a few months before the wedding.

She'll invest a lot of money, as much as she can, and a lot of time and thought into the wedding dress and what it looks like. So she will look the best she can on that day.

Well, the same should be true of God's people who are looking forward to the wedding. They should be preparing to wear the best clothes they can for that day.

- [25 : 21] Shouldn't they? You know what those clothes are? They are the righteous works that we do now. Look at verse 8 again. At the end of it.

The fine linen represents the righteous acts of the saints. How we live now is going to be our clothing that we wear on the great wedding day.

And you know what? When Jesus comes and he comes in all his glory and his splendor as the great bridegroom, you don't want to be wearing your t-shirt and its coffee stains and your schluffy pants, do you?

You want to be wearing the best clothes you can be wearing. And that is what we do now in preparation. How we live. How we invest in the kingdom in the world around us.

How we live. But also, look at this. Look at the beginning of verse 8. We are given those clothes to wear.

- [26 : 22] That's a very important thing to notice as well. she was given fine linen to wear bright and pure. And that tells us that living true holy lives is not something we can earn by our own efforts.

But it's a privilege that we get to do while we wait for the bridegroom. Good works, holy lives is not something we have to try to conjure up within ourselves, but it's something that God through His Spirit gives us the privilege to start living now through His power if we would rely on that.

And that is also why it is possible for you, no matter who you are, no matter what your background or your history or the baggage that you carry, it is possible for you to be part of that great wedding day to come and to be dressed in pure linen as well.

not because of what you do, but because of what the bridegroom has already done when He died on the cross to cleanse His bride, His people from all their sins.

But also what He will still do when He finally and decisively destroys all that threatens His bride and all that prevents this world from being what God intends for it to be.

[27 : 50] And that, both what Jesus has done to cleanse His bride and prepare her for the wedding day, as well as what He will do to cleanse and prepare this world for the wedding day, that is what we are called to praise Him for and make known, both inside, here in the church, and outside, there in the world.

Will you do that? Let's pray. Lord, we thank You for this great vision of the wedding day to come, the plans You have for this world, how wonderful they are, and we thank You that we can understand the context of Your judgments, that they're good because they are what bring that wedding day about.

Lord, I pray that You would help us at St. Mark's Church to be a light shining in the darkness, to use the Word of Christ and the testimony of Christ as a way to bring light before the great and the glorious day the Bridegroom comes to claim His world.

Help us to be ready for that and to prepare others for it and to praise You for all that You have done and are going to continue to do in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.