

**SI:** The bulletin says Hebrews 11.

That's what I had planned to preach on and make some application for new year. But Allison made a comment to me Friday at lunch after the bulletin was printed.

She said, You've had this sermon series on feasting with Jesus, what about the wedding supper of the Lamb? Aren't you going to preach on that?

When the preacher's wife tells him something like that, what choice does he have? So I tossed my sermon notes on Hebrews 11 and started over Friday afternoon.

But I didn't tell her until just now because I know it would have made her worry. Thank you, Allison! You were right, as usual.

Please open your Bibles to Revelation 19.

Eating and drinking with people was a big part of Jesus' incarnational ministry.

He used meals with people to show them who he was and why he came.

We looked last Sunday Jesus' last meal before his ascension—

his breakfast on the shore of the Sea of Galilee with some of his disciples.

But that's not his last meal in the New Testament.

All followers of Jesus will eat with him at the wedding supper of the Lamb.

Let's read about it.

**INTRO:** Our oldest daughter Adrienne got married last summer, June of 2017 and Eliza, our middle child got married this past summer, August, 2018. We spent a lot of time planning those weddings and the wedding receptions. Allison and I had a whole list of prayer requests.

We prayed they would be joyful occasions, that they would honor the groom's family, that they would honor all of our Cullman and Christ Covenant friends, we also prayed it would be a little foretaste of the wedding supper of the Lamb. That's the phraseology we used when we prayed.

Lord, we pray this wedding reception we are planning will give everyone there a foretaste of the wedding supper of the Lamb.

When I read Revelation 19 this past Friday afternoon the thing that struck me was how the chapter as a whole is much more solemn and much less celebratory than I expected it to be. It's not really like a wedding reception at all.

Four times the multitude in heaven shouts, Hallelujah!

The first time they shout Hallelujah,

they praise God for his condemnation of the Great Prostitute.

The Great Prostitute is a symbolic figure who appears earlier in Revelation.

She's dressed in purple and scarlet and covered with glittering gold and pearls—and she's riding on the dragon who is covered with blasphemous names.

She represents the power of worldliness and idolatry.

And how the Devil uses worldliness to destroy people and oppress believers. So the multitude in heaven shout Hallelujah and praise God that the smoke of her destruction goes up forever and ever.

That's a pretty solemn preface to a wedding, someone burning forever.

Then they shout another Hallelujah when they see the Bride of Christ.

Of course, she's also a symbolic figure. The Bride of Christ is the church.

She's contrasted with the Prostitute. She's wearing fine linen, bright and clean.

Then an angel says:

Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb. Verse 9.

It's such a wonderful-sounding phrase: The wedding supper of the Lamb.

As a Christian, how does that make you feel when you hear it?

The wedding supper of the Lamb.

It makes me feel happy. Like I'm anticipating something beautiful and grand. When you read it you feel sure the rest of the chapter will describe the wonder and joy and feasting of our eternal life with Jesus in the new creation.

You expect the rest of chapter 19 to echo those passages in the Old Testament

prophets that speak of God's banquet on his holy mountain, a banquet of the finest meats and the finest wines and the mountains flowing with wine.

Dancing and celebration and music—

That's what's supposed to happen at wedding suppers.

But that's not what the rest of the chapter is about at all.

Instead it's about Christ making war on the nations, striking down his enemies.

And it concludes with his judgment of his enemies and the lake of fire

and the birds gorging on the flesh of those who have resisted Christ to the end.

It's pretty sober stuff.

This was not what Allison and I had in mind when we prayed that prayer for our daughters' weddings.

So what's the faith lesson from this chapter?

What effect should the wedding supper of the Lamb have on your life—

especially as you stand here on the cusp of a new year?

This may sound strange,

but I think its chief effect is to make your life more difficult.

Because it shows how absolutely different from the world you must be

if you are going to attend the wedding supper of the Lamb.

And it's not easy to be different from the world.

All of us by nature hate to be outsiders and hate to be considered strange or odd.

Every thoughtful Christian will admit this about himself or herself.

For example, the greatest obstacle we have to sharing our faith with unbelievers

is fear of what they might think about us—they'll think we're strange, or they

may dislike us for making them feel uncomfortable talking about sin and salvation

But if you want to feast with Jesus forever, you have to be different today.

And the beginning of a new year is a good time to remember that,

and to recommit yourself to being different.

Let's look at this under three points. I'll give them to you as we go.

**MP#1 The wedding supper of the Lamb requires you to make obeying God's commands the most important commitment of your life.**

Revelation is different from the other books of the New Testament in two ways. The literary style is different. All the strange visions and symbols.

A prostitute riding a red dragon, for example.

And it's also different in its theological emphasis.

Specifically, Revelation puts huge emphasis on obedience.

From the very beginning of the book the accent does not fall on what Christ has done for the believer, but what the believer must do for Jesus Christ.

The emphasis is on the believer's righteousness, his steadfastness in the faith, her loyalty to Christ through thick and thin.

And this loyalty is expressed in obedience to the Lord's commandments, no matter how much difficulty and persecution may result.

Revelation starts with seven letters to seven churches.

Over and over, through all the letters, these Christian congregations are called to do things in obedience to the Lord and they are forbidden to do other things.

Jesus tell them over and over: I know your deeds. I know your deeds.

He calls attention to their obedience or their lack of it.

He promises them that if they overcome, they will be vindicated and rewarded.

By overcoming he means remaining obedient until the end.

Here in this chapter about the wedding supper is this theme of obedience.

The bride of Christ makes herself ready for the wedding.

How did she make herself ready? Fine linen bright and clean given her to wear.

And then the symbol of the fine linen is explained.

Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.

That's not the way we usually think of the white robe of righteousness, is it?

We are used to saying that our righteousness before God is not our own.

It's not the righteousness of our own obedience. Righteousness of faith, of God. We talk about the righteousness of Jesus Christ credited to us by faith.

That's Paul's language in his letter.

But Revelation talks about clean, white clothes being our obedience.

It starts in chapter 3 in Christ's letter to the church in Sardis. The Lord says: You have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. So white, clean clothes stand for refusal to compromise to the world's way of life

and steadfast obedience to Jesus Christ. They are a reward for righteousness. You can't help but be taken aback by Revelation's emphasis on the believer's obedience and heaven as its reward.

Don't misunderstand me, other books speak of obedience. Paul does. And Revelation is crystal clear that we don't save ourselves. Christ redeems us. He's Lamb who with his blood purchases men for God from every tribe, etc. The very last paragraph of Revelation gives a Gospel invitation:  
Whoever is thirsty, Come! Take the free gift of the water of life.  
Salvation is not earned, it's gift of grace.

But Revelation is emphatic that true Christians must be obedient servants of the King of kings. And this is what makes them different from the world. The bride has made herself ready for the wedding by her obedience. And in the next chapter and then again in the very last chapter we are told that the Lord is coming with his reward in his hand and he will give to everyone according to what he has done.

Even within the world of God's grace, even within the salvation of Jesus Christ, those obey God and make his commands their priority earn a reward. That reward is a place and a station in the heavenly kingdom to come.

There are many motives for obeying God.

Love is a motive. If you love me, you will keep my commandments, said Jesus.

Gratitude is a motive. Peace of conscience is a motive.

But here's another motive.

You'll prove yourself worthy to walk in white at the wedding supper of the Lamb. Knowing that doesn't make your life easier. It makes it harder.

Because it means the most important thing for your future happiness is not your happiness now, not pursuing your dreams, not your personal fulfillment, not making a comfortable life for self—it's obeying God every day from the heart.

It's hard to live that way. To make obeying God the most important thing.

Christians struggle to think that way. Unbelievers never do.

So they won't admire you for it. They'll resent you or pity you.

Here's a New Year's resolution: In what part of life strive to be clothed in white? Commit to thinking about your life in terms of your obedience to Jesus Christ.

Why? Because you'll prove yourself worthy to walk in white at the wedding supper of the Lamb.

**MP#2 The wedding supper of the Lamb forces you to be deadly serious about human life and its ultimate end**

In this chapter there are two ends described for all humanity.  
All people will either be on the receiving end of God's wrath,  
or they will dine with Christ in the wedding supper of the Lamb.  
If you really believe that, it will make you different from people in the world.  
You'll be deadly serious about life and see everything through this eternal lens.

There's been a fascinating international news story over the past month.  
It's about a church in China called the Early Rain Covenant Church.  
This church is in a capital city of one of the provinces in western China.  
The pastor's name is Wang Yi.

The Chinese government attacked this church on December 9,  
arrested the pastor, elders, deacons, and other members,  
raided the homes of members, closed the church.

One of the issues that lead to this action was the church's refusal to allow the  
government to install cameras with facial recognition technology in sanctuary.  
The Chinese communist party wants to force compliance through a social credit  
system, so they want to know where people are and who associating with.  
It's a big brother is watching you scheme.

Anyway, this pastor Wang Yi knew he would be arrested at some point so he  
had written a paper that was to be published online when it happened.  
It's called *A Declaration of Faithful Disobedience*, and in it he gives  
a theological defense for disobeying the state.

I want to read you a portion of it because you will hear the voice of a Christian man  
who is deadly serious about human life and the ultimate end of all people.

On the basis of the teachings of the Bible and the mission of the gospel, I respect the authorities  
God has established in China. For God deposes kings and raises up kings. This is why I submit  
to the historical and institutional arrangements of God in China . . . At the same time, I am filled  
with anger and disgust at the persecution of the church by this Communist regime, at the  
wickedness of their depriving people of the freedoms of religion and of conscience. But  
changing social and political institutions is not the mission I have been called to, and it is not  
the goal for which God has given his people the gospel.

For all hideous realities, unrighteous politics, and arbitrary laws manifest the cross of Jesus  
Christ, the only means by which every Chinese person must be saved. They also manifest the  
fact that true hope and a perfect society will never be found in the transformation of any earthly  
institution or culture but only in our sins being freely forgiven by Christ and in the hope of  
eternal life . . . My firm belief in the gospel, my teaching, and my rebuking of all evil proceeds  
from Christ's command in the gospel and from the unfathomable love of that glorious King.  
Every man's life is extremely short, and God fervently commands the church to lead and call

any man to repentance who is willing to repent. Christ is eager and willing to forgive all who turn from their sins. This is the goal of all the efforts of the church in China—to testify to the world about our Christ, to testify to the Middle Kingdom about the Kingdom of Heaven, to testify to earthly, momentary lives about heavenly, eternal life . . .

At this point he talks about the sovereignty of God over the nations and explains that his aims are not political, so he has no fear of human governments.

It's very powerful. I urge you to read it. Here's how he ends.

Those who lock me up will one day be locked up by angels. Those who interrogate me will finally be questioned and judged by Christ. When I think of this, the Lord fills me with a natural compassion and grief toward those who are attempting to and actively imprisoning me. Pray that the Lord would use me, that he would grant me patience and wisdom, that I might take the gospel to them. Separate me from my wife and children, ruin my reputation, destroy my life and my family – the authorities are capable of doing all of these things. However, no one in this world can force me to renounce my faith; no one can make me change my life; and no one can raise me from the dead. And so, respectable officers, stop committing evil. This is not for my benefit but rather for yours and your children's. I plead earnestly with you to stay your hands, for why should you be willing to pay the price of eternal damnation in hell for the sake of a lowly sinner such as I? Jesus is the Christ, son of the eternal, living God. He died for sinners and rose to life for us. He is my king and the king of the whole earth yesterday, today, and forever. I am his servant, and I am imprisoned because of this. I will resist in meekness those who resist God, and I will joyfully violate all laws that violate God's laws.

The Lord's servant, Wang Yi

There are two ends for all people.

One end is described as defeat in battle, corpses shredded by birds of prey, the lake of fire, and the smoke of their burning going up forever and ever.

The winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.

That's one end. That's one destiny.

The other destiny is to hear an angel's voice saying:

Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

If that doesn't make you serious about life, what will?

A New Year's resolution: To reinvigorate your view of heaven and hell as the ultimate destiny of every person you meet, and to allow that view to express itself, especially when you know it will make you stand out as very different.

The wedding supper of the Lamb requires you to make obeying God's commands the most important commitment of your life.

The wedding supper of the Lamb forces you to be deadly serious about human life and its ultimate end

### **MP#3 The wedding supper of the Lamb demands that you proclaim salvation is found through Jesus Christ alone**

I've been a volunteer chaplain at CRMC for 21 years.

Shortly after we moved here the hospital chaplain, Tony Tidwell, wanted to develop a volunteer chaplain corps and I was in the first class, and have done it ever since.

The hospital administration has changed, there's a different chaplain,

but one thing I marvel at, and this will make you glad, whenever I go to chaplain meetings, the focus is on the person of Jesus Christ.

The chaplain, Delbert Freeman, believes heartily that salvation is found in no other name than the name of Jesus and Jesus is coming to judge the quick and the dead.

The reason I marvel at this is before we moved here, I was a volunteer chaplain at the hospital in Naples, Florida. And one of the things emphasized in training was that you were not to present an exclusive message of Jesus Christ.

That was considered offensive. If you discovered the person was a Christian and wanted to talk about Jesus, that was ok. But never bring him up yourself.

And worse than that, I was in a ministerial association.

It planned a community wide prayer breakfast, which was kind of strange because there was an inspirational speaker and just one prayer.

I was elected by the ministerial association to pray that one prayer.

Almost immediately I had several members of the ministerial association telling me that I better not pray in Jesus' name at this community event.

Do not say, In Jesus' name, Amen. That is exclusionary.

There will be Jews there and non-religious people there. Don't do it.

I knew this retired Episcopal bishop. He wasn't in the ministerial association.

But he sought me out and he said:

Some people are telling you not to pray in Jesus' name, aren't they?

I said, how did you know? He said something funny like, I know the type.

And then he reminded me that Jesus Christ is the only way to God, he's the only mediator between God and man, and that I should be as warm and gracious as possible, but do not hide Jesus' name for fear of offending people.

Of course I had already made up my mind, but I deeply appreciated his words.

We might not face such overt pressure in Cullman, but all of us have sensed at times that the Christian message that there is only one way, one truth, and one life that God will except offends people.

But this is the emphatic proclamation of this passage.

Jesus Christ must be our central focus because he's both Savior and Judge.

We've just celebrated Christmas.

And we've pondered again the mystery of Christ's incarnation.

We've thought again about how he came in weakness and gentleness as a child.

We've looked these Sundays of Advent at Jesus eating with people.

What could be more approachable than that?

He's the dinner guest, the sympathetic friend, the kind healer of suffering people.

The most lowly and marginalized people were drawn to him,

which shows how approachable and open-hearted Jesus was.

He had a message of grace and forgiveness for anyone who would listen.

That same Jesus is the one described in this chapter.

Jesus in the manger seems a very different figure than a warrior on the battlefield

leading an army and crushing his enemies.

Jesus on the cross seems a very different figure than the rider on the white horse

with eyes like blazing fire, striking down nations with the sword of his mouth.

But this is the same person.

And if you are going to join him at his wedding feast, he demands the same

absolute surrender of your heart as king and judge as he does as savior.

Jesus Christ is the essential figure in human life.

Every person's posture toward him determines that person's eternal destiny.

He is the only one who can save sinners and he is the one coming to judge

the human race. God has made himself known in one person, his Son.

And he demands that we worship and serve his Son.

So a New Year's resolution: Renew your commitment to make known the

exclusive name of Jesus. Some people around here will nod politely and

probably feel offended, but not say so. Maybe you'll encounter some people

who actually gnash their teeth at you for mentioning his name.

But remember Jesus is coming again and his reward is with him.

And how wonderful it will be to hear:

Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.