

Revelation 19:1 – 16 What have I got to look forward to? (28.12.08 am)

Well, the old year is very nearly over – some will welcome the fact, as they look back and see all the things that were wrong with 2008; others may well be sad to see it go because it holds some precious memories. Whichever way – a year to remember, or a year to forget, - either way, it's nearly over.

A brand new year is upon us, and many will make New Year's resolutions, hoping to keep them, at least until the end of the week!

But what awaits us in the New Year? What have we got to look forward to? What have **I** got to look forward to?

The news all seems to have been bad recently doesn't it – financial crisis, economic downturn, banks going to the wall or being bailed out; car manufacturers stopping production; unemployment rising quickly. How will we manage without Woolies? Lots of families are going through difficult times – houses repossessed, jobs lost, not able to afford the things they've got used to enjoying. What **have** I got to look forward to in 2009?

More of the same, the experts say. Another year or two before we see a recovery. Have you noticed on the news on telly, whenever Robert Peston is reporting, it's always bad news – the others don't bring such bad news. And there's nothing we can do. Brighton football club may be relegated to the lowest division - even worse Chelsea might win the Premier League! Nowt to look forward to – we're all doomed! As Fraser used to say in Dad's Army.

I want us to see this morning that there is **good** news - there **is** something to look forward to – something wonderful, something amazing, something out of this world – literally out of this world! And it's something we should have before us at all times, and then perhaps those bad things just might not seem so bad.

I want us to read from the last book in the Bible, John's Revelation from God, and very near the end in chapter 19, starting from verse 1. [Read Rev. 19:1-16] Wonderful passage.

There are so many things in the book of Revelation, the different parts of the message, the different visions, symbols and events. I'm not ashamed to admit that there is a lot that I still need to learn.

Today's message has come from the understanding of these things that God has given me this far – but isn't it great that there's always something **new** to learn from the word of God, and isn't it wonderful when something hits us for the **first time**? God is so gracious in the way he teaches us through his word.

We heard recently in our study of John's gospel how Jesus prepared his disciples for the time he would be taken from them. In chapter 14 he says, "*Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*" John 14:1-3. He said he will come back for his people.

As Jesus was taken up into heaven, as recorded in Acts chapter 1, while his followers watched in amazement, two men in white appeared and asked, "*Why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.*" Acts 1:11.

And ever since then, the whole of creation has been waiting, we read in Romans 8:19-21, "*in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed ... in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.*"

We as Christians believe that Jesus **will** come again, and at that time there will be a new heaven and a new earth, one **not spoilt** by the effects of sin, pollution, corruption and decay. These are the things that John is writing of here in the book of Revelation. God gives him wonderful visions, wonderful pictures of what is to come in the future.

In the introduction to this book in chapter 1, we read the following: '*The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place ... Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.*' Rev. 1:1,3.

John says that this is a revelation from God himself, about Jesus Christ. It is an **urgent** message, because the time of its fulfilment is near. So we are blessed if we hear this message, but we don't just need to **hear** its message – we also need to **take it to heart**.

Here we have an important revelation from God that we need to act upon. With that in mind, let's look at this passage before us, let's see the vision of the things to come, let's try to understand what has to happen in the future.

What have I got to look forward to? From the moment our children are born, we parents are waiting for them to say a certain set of words, and it takes years of waiting, but it's well worth waiting for. No, it's not 'thank you'! We long for that day which brings great happiness and excitement to the family. It's when they say, "There's going to be a wedding!" Mother reaches for the bridal magazines, or the Yellow Pages for reception venues – father reaches for his wallet!

What have I got to look **forward** to? A wedding – there's going to be a wedding! Everyone loves a wedding. The church is packed for a wedding. But this won't be just any old wedding, it won't be a wedding as we know it – this will be the wedding to end all weddings! "*The wedding of the Lamb has come.*" **This** is what we have to look forward to.

It is very important to look at what the first people reading this would have understood by a wedding, obviously different to our practices now. The Jewish wedding would start off with a **etrothal** of two people; this would signal their intention to marry, but would be more than our 'getting engaged'. Betrothal was binding, the terms of marriage were accepted, witnessed and God's blessing was pronounced. From this point on the two were legally husband and wife. There then came an **interval** when preparations were made for the wedding itself, suitable clothing prepared, and the groom paid a dowry, a payment to the bride's parents. Then comes a **procession** when the groom goes to collect his bride and take her back to their new home together. The **wedding feast**, the marriage supper would follow and could last 7 days or more. This is what those first hearers would understand by the word 'wedding'.

I want us to look this morning at when the wedding will be, who it will be for, and what we have to do before the wedding takes place.

Firstly, then, **when is the wedding going to take place?** When is it going to take place?

Before you start reaching for your diaries and pens, I have to tell you that we don't know when it will take place.

The Bible tells us that **only God** knows when these things will happen. But we are told of certain things that must happen before the wedding. Matthew's gospel chapter 24 tells us of things that will happen before Jesus comes again – wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution – but no-one knows the day or hour.

I want us to focus particularly on the middle portion of what we read earlier, verses 6 to 8. [Read again]

In verse 6 we read that John *“heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder shouting ‘Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns.’”* ‘Hallelujah!’ A large crowd singing Hallelujah, Praise God. It must have been absolutely deafening but wonderful to hear. One of the wonderful things about going to the Men's Convention in the Albert Hall, is hearing thousands of men singing praise to our God. Hearing a large multitude of heaven praising God and singing Hallelujah must be an amazing sound.

We read in verse 1 *“After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: Hallelujah!”* In verse 4 we have *“The 24 elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God ... And they cried: ‘Amen, Hallelujah!’”* Representatives of the church and heavenly beings, all joining together, praising God, singing Hallelujah! Why are they singing Hallelujah?

We find the answer in verse 6 - *“For our Lord God Almighty reigns.”* They are worshipping God because he reigns; he is seated on the throne; salvation, power and glory belong to him because he is Almighty God, and he is King.

Verse 2 tells us that God *“has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries.”*

All these multitudes are singing praise to God because the final victory has been won over the evil one, Satan, the devil, here in this vision referred to as the great prostitute. When Jesus rose from the dead after his death on the cross, he won the victory over death and the devil. But we still see the devil's work in the world around us, don't we? The evil one still has his influences for evil in the hearts of men and women – that's why terrorists still take innocent life; that's why they send children as suicide bombers; that's why rulers allow their people to live and die in disgraceful poverty while they live in luxury; that's why a mother can torture her child to death. We could go on. Evil still has power in the world we live in.

But there is a time coming, the Bible says, when all this will come to an end. Evil will be totally vanquished, destroyed, and verse 3 says *“The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.”* Meaning that evil will be destroyed forever – there will be no return, there’s no way that can happen, *“For our Lord God Almighty reigns.”*

Before the wedding takes place, evil will be banished once and for all, God’s **new** kingdom will come. No more evil, no more wickedness, no more pain, no more sickness, no more suffering. *“For the wedding of the Lamb has come.”*

Nobody knows when that time will be. God has not revealed this information to us – no matter what people claim to know about the timing of the wedding, the Bible clearly says that no-one knows – so no-one can argue with God’s Word. Nobody knows when, but before the bride meets the groom, evil will be thoroughly and utterly defeated. God has judged in truth and justice, and evil will be no more.

There’s going to be a wedding – but **whose wedding is it going to be?**

There’s always a lot made of the meeting of mum and dad with the future son or daughter-in-law, isn’t there? Will they be good enough? Will they get on? Will it be a match made in heaven? Or will it be a total disaster? Will he have big ears? Will she have spots?

The wedding we’re talking about this morning is truly, the one and only, match made in heaven. The wedding of the Lamb.

John uses the term ‘*Lamb*’ 28 times in the book of Revelation and so we see that its meaning is important as we seek to understand the message of salvation. The reference is here to the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ.

In John’s gospel we read in chapter 1 of the first time that John the Baptist saw Jesus, verse 29 says, *“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*

Jesus is the Lamb of God. Jesus is the sacrificial lamb. This is a picture of Jesus which refers back to Jewish customs, where a lamb would be sacrificed to remember the time when God’s people were captive in Egypt (we read of it in Exodus 12); and God asked them to sacrifice a lamb and put the blood of the lamb on the door-frames of the house;

God brought judgement on the households of Egypt; but when God saw the blood of the lamb, he did not judge the occupants of that house, but passed over them. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 5, verse 7, *“For Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed.”*

Jesus has taken upon himself the punishment we deserve for our sins – he suffered, he died, for our sins. God does not punish those who believe that Jesus died as a sacrifice for us. Jesus is the Passover Lamb of God.

Peter writes in his first letter, chapter 1 and verse 18, *“For ...it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”*

Jesus was the only one who could save us from the judgement of God the Father, because no-one else is good enough. Only Jesus is sinless. One of the requirements of the Passover lamb was that it was without defect. Jesus is the only one who **has** lived or ever **will** live as a man, who has no defect, because he is also God. **Jesus** is the perfect, pure, sinless sacrificial Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

“The wedding of the Lamb has come.”

And who is the bride? The Bible says the bride is those for whom Jesus **became** the Lamb of God, those for whose sins he died that cruel death. The bride of Christ is his church, the people who have believed and will believe in Jesus’ death on the cross for their sins, and that he rose victorious from the dead. His church is those who look to him alone for salvation, who believe and trust Jesus when he says, *“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.”* John 14:6.

The wedding is to be between Jesus and his church.

So thirdly, **what do we have to do before the wedding takes place?**

Let’s read the second half of verse 7 again. *“For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given to her to wear.”*

This is perhaps the most important part of this morning’s talk. At the beginning we asked, ‘What have I to look forward to?’ A wedding.

But am **I** right to be looking forward to it? Am **I** going to be **involved** in this wonderful event? Can I look forward to it? Am I expecting to be at the wedding?

It's sad to know that someone's getting married, but we're not actually **invited**, we don't make it onto the list of guests. We **want** to be there. We feel we **ought** to be there.

We've said that the wedding is between Jesus and his church. We've said that the church is made up of those who are trusting only in Jesus' sacrifice for their salvation. Does that include you?

Let's remind ourselves of a parable told by Jesus, we read about it in Matthew, chapter 22. We have a slightly different picture of a wedding – where many are invited to the wedding feast, but they have other things they feel are more important. Let's read verses 3 to 5. They were too busy. Not all who are invited are willing to come.

Not all who hear the message of the Christian gospel, respond and put their trust in Jesus. Is this where you stand? Are you still putting off accepting Jesus as Lord and Saviour? Have you been invited but you have decided that you are too busy? Life's great at the moment - it's not important to you right now? Listen, people: We don't know when the wedding will be – don't put it off any longer, accept Jesus' invitation to the wedding feast.

Come back to the parable. The wedding hall gets filled with guests. But there is another problem. [Read verses 11 -13.] You have to be wearing the right clothes. This means you have to come to the wedding in the right way. There's no point thinking that all roads of faith – no matter which "faith" it is – lead to God. They don't – the Bible says there's only **one** way, and that is through Jesus. You can't think that you will get to the wedding on your own merit, because we have all sinned and fall a long way short of God's high standards – we'll **never** be good enough to stand before God on our **own** merits.

To be ready for the wedding, the bride has to be dressed in fine linen. The bride has to make herself look beautiful for her husband-to-be – it takes longer for some than others – and then there's the dress. I can remember it as clear as anything, that day nearly 25 years ago (I know, it's hard for you to believe I'm that old!) that day when Wendy and I got married.

Standing at the front of the church, and I looked round and saw a vision of beauty. Then Wendy came in! No, it was Wendy in that lovely white dress – she looked beautiful! I’ve never seen such a beautiful dress, before or since. She’s still got it. The dress is so important, isn’t it?

The bride is dressed in fine linen, clean and bright. To be ready for the wedding, we have to be clothed in the righteousness of Jesus. In a miraculous way, when Jesus died for our sins, he took the punishment for our sins, and so now, if we believe in him, it is as if we are washed clean. The guilt of our sins has been removed from us. Only believing in Jesus can prepare us for the wedding. Only trusting that his sacrifice has brought us forgiveness for our sins, can prepare us for the wedding.

What do we have to do before the wedding? We have to be prepared. We have to make sure we’re included. Are we counted among the believers in Jesus? Are we members of his church? Jesus died that we might be present at the wedding feast. Will we be there?

We looked earlier at how a Jewish wedding worked; the betrothal - God has his people, people he has called his church; the interval – Jesus has paid the dowry, Jesus is the Lamb of God, who took away the sins of the world by his death and resurrection, he paid the price that we might be prepared for the wedding; the procession and wedding feast – Jesus is coming again to collect his bride and then the feast will start.

When God decides to wind up history, Jesus the Bridegroom will come to take his Bride – the church, the faithful believers from all time, and their everlasting life together will begin. There will be rejoicing on earth and in heaven. There will be loud shouts of ‘Hallelujah!’ Jesus the victorious King of Kings and Lord of Lords will be united with his people. The feast will begin. The feast will begin and it will never end. Will you be there?

What have I got to look forward to? The wedding of the Lamb. If we really understand what is being talked of here, everything else will melt away into insignificance, because believers in Christ are looking forward to Jesus returning and to the day when eternity in heaven, lost in praise and wonder, begins.

Like John, all God’s people say, “*Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.*”