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***Revelation 19:1-9. (EHV) After these things I heard what seemed to be the loud sound of an immense crowd in heaven, saying: Alleluia! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, <sup>2</sup> for his judgments are true and just, because he has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and he has avenged his servants’ blood that was shed by her hand.<sup>3</sup> A second time they said, “Alleluia! Her smoke goes up forever and ever.” <sup>4</sup> Then the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures bowed down and worshipped God, who sits on the throne, saying, “Amen! Alleluia!” <sup>5</sup> And from the throne came a voice that said, “Praise our God, all you his servants and you who fear him, small and great.” <sup>6</sup> And I heard what seemed to be the roar of a large crowd or the roar of many waters or the sound of loud rumblings of thunder, saying: Alleluia! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. <sup>7</sup> Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory, because the wedding of the Lamb has come. His bride has made herself ready,<sup>8</sup> and she was given bright, clean, fine linen to wear. (In fact, the fine linen is the “not guilty” verdicts pronounced on the saints.) <sup>9</sup> The angel said to me, “Write: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.” He also said to me, “These are the true words of God.”***

***Alleluia! We will be united with the LORD forever!***

- 1. The enemies of God will be defeated.***
- 2. The people of God will be forever blessed.***

A wedding celebration is a wonderful occasion. It is something that a little girl may dream about her entire childhood. It is a day that makes a grown man a bit emotional as he thinks back to his wedding day and he recalls seeing his bride coming down the aisle to meet him. A wedding day, the ceremony, and the celebration that follows is a priceless moment in time. It is therefore a day of great anticipation. You can easily imagine who a young couple preparing for their wedding day plans with eager anticipation. They endure the trials of putting together the guest list and sending out invitations, because they look forward with such eager anticipation to the day that friends and family will gather for the ceremony and the dinner and the celebration that will follow. And then the day happens. It is most often a day of great joy and happiness. Everything else, to a certain degree is forgotten, shut out from celebration as the couple and the guests bask in the joy of the moment.

On more than one occasion the Lord describes the joys of heaven in this beautiful scene of a wedding banquet. And we are told that Christ and his bride the church not only will experience a day of bliss, but they will enjoy a perfect union that will last for eternity. The bride will be dressed in the righteousness that Christ has given to her. There will be a great gathering filled with rejoicing that has no match and no end. Therefore, as believers we welcome the coming of that day, like an exuberant bride who counts down the days to her special day. As the church we actually pray for this day to come. As the bride of Christ, we pray often *your kingdom come*, and in doing so we not only ask God to send his word out into the world and to bring many more to faith and to keep us in the faith; but we also ask God to bring about the day when the kingdom of heaven would be realized in all its glory, just as he has promised. *“Your kingdom come, your will be done,”* we pray.

But let us consider what that prayer means. Martin Luther once made this rather provocative sounding statement. *“I cannot pray without cursing at the same time.”* What he meant is that if we pray, for example, *your kingdom come, your will be done*, we are not only praying that God would bring many to faith and that God would keep us as members of Christ kingdom of grace until the day that he brings us all to his eternal kingdom of glory, but we are also praying that God’s enemies

would be defeated and those who opposed Christ and his church would be cursed and done away with for all eternity.

At first blush we might be uncomfortable with something like this, to ask for the defeat and the judgment of anyone might seem a bit un-Christian to us. But this is the will of God. Time after time we hear a psalm writer imploring God to vanquish enemies that oppose the servants of the Lord and the people of God. These words of Psalm 5 offer a sampling of this kind of request that is found rather often in Scripture. David writes, ***“For you are not a God who takes pleasure in evil. With you the wicked cannot dwell... Nothing reliable comes out of their mouth. From within them comes destruction. Their throat is an open grave... <sup>10</sup> Declare them guilty, O God! Let them fall because of their own schemes. For their many treacherous deeds banish them, because they have rebelled against you.”*** In such a prayer, the psalmist, asks God to punish and to bring judgment on those who rebel and oppose the LORD.

As those living in these last days, as members of the church on earth, we are well aware that there are those outside and even within the church that do their worst to frustrate the will of God. They work against the gospel as they bring confusion and difficulty and persecution and harm God’s people both in body and soul. Certainly, we long for a day when such harm will be done away with forever.

Luther’s small catechism summarizes this truth of Scripture succinctly and accurately when it says, *“God’s Will is done when he breaks and defeats every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh, which try to prevent us from keeping God’s name holy and letting his kingdom come”*. We pray that God would defeat his enemies and those that bring harm to the bride, to the Church. One of the devil’s most fiendish plans is to attack the Church from within. Throughout the history of God’s people, the devil has teamed up with mankind’s sinful flesh to create division and false teaching within the people of God that leads God’s people away from the LORD. In the Old Testament the devil used false prophets, disobedient kings, and the wayward ways of the people to cause divisions among the people and between God and his people. This included the rejecting of God’s Word outright, the confusion of teachings that led people away from the truth of God’s promises, and even the rejection and killing of God’s prophets. Throughout the history of the New Testament church the devil has utilized the same kind of tactic, even going as far, as establishing within the church, a body that continues to threaten the spiritual welfare of many. Pictured here as a prostitute or harlot, this enemy of the church is characterized in Revelation chapter 18 and 19 as one who corrupted the earth by her adulteries, and persecuted, yes, even killed servants of God. This enemy of the church is characterized as an entity that is more concerned about wealth and power and the things of this world than the true teachings of God. It is a body that has misled and harmed and vexed many people while claiming to be a representative of God on earth. The many false teachings promoted within this body continue to be harmful to individual souls and it has long been the cause of frustration for much of the church on earth.

You may know someone who has a real hard time knowing God because in their opinion, they cannot trust the church. For one reason or another, the confusion of teaching, the abuse of power, the mishandling of wealth, the disharmony, it all just turns them off toward church in general. In this world, we are surrounded by those who are critical of God. Without fear of God, without reverence, they speak against the LORD, and question his wisdom and his love. This kind of talk is only emboldened because those who seem to represent Christ and his Church have so badly misrepresented his name. We ask the Lord that he would preserve us from such attacks!

However, as we examine our own lives we realize that we too have put obstacles between God and others. As members of God’s church on earth, as representatives of Christ and ambassadors of

his gospel, we have not always made a clear testimony about God and who he is to others around us. Perhaps that is because we have neglected the study of his Word, or maybe we have failed to reflect Christ's love. We have caused confusion because, in our sinful hypocrisy, we have lived lives that have strayed from God's teaching and have stood in variance with his ways. We have loved and chased after the ways of this world. We have sought glory and pleasure for ourselves instead of praising God and serving him in all we do. We have caused offense to God and represented his Church poorly. Because of this God should cast us all away, banish us in his justice, for the many ways we have put up obstacles to the spreading of his kingdom. But God in his mercy forgives us. He cleanses us from all such sins, as well as our many other sins. He gives us the righteousness of Christ and he promises to bring his believers safely to their heavenly home. He even works to save others despite us and the obstacles to his kingdom that we, at least in part, help to create and strengthen.

Wouldn't it be great if such obstacles that divide God and his people were removed forever?! Wouldn't it be wonderful if the message of Jesus would no longer be undermined by those who claim to serve the church? Wouldn't it be wonderful to rid God's people of false teaching and misconduct, and anything that would confuse people about who their God is and what he has done for them in Christ? Wouldn't it be wonderful if there was no longer any criticism of God and his Church and instead we would be surrounded by those who acclaim the Lord and forever speak of the excellence and goodness of God?!

God has promised such a glorious reality. At his command there will come a such time, a time that will last for eternity. At his command we will no longer be surrounded by those who criticize and undermine God and his church, but instead we will be among those who join in lifting up the praises of God in unending acclamation and proclamation. What a wonderful scene John describes as that immense crowd shouts: ***Salvation and glory and power belong to our God.*** For our triune God is the one who has saved us by his grace. Not by our works or merit. But by the grace of God in Christ Jesus. The Father sent his Son to achieve for us a life of perfect righteousness. The Son in his goodness and grace leaves the throne of God where in eternity past he enjoyed perfect unity with the Father and yet in his love he comes down to us. He comes down for us as he suffers the agony of the cross of being forsaken by God, separated from his love so that we wouldn't be. He does this in his great love for us his bride, the church. He does this so that we might be with him forever.

The apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians also makes use of the imagery of marriage, of a bride and bridegroom to illustrate this stirring and lovely picture of this rich and wonderous love that Christ has for his church. <sup>25</sup> ***Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*** <sup>26</sup> ***to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,*** <sup>27</sup> ***and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless (Ephesians 5:25-27).*** A more accurate translation of verses 7 and 8 here in Revelation 19 says it this way. ***Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory, because the wedding of the Lamb has come. His bride has made herself ready, <sup>8</sup> and she was given bright, clean, fine linen to wear. (In fact, the fine linen is the "not guilty" verdicts pronounced on the saints.)***<sup>1</sup> God declares us not guilty through his grace in Christ Jesus and our Savior bestows upon us this beautiful garment of salvation, this robe of righteousness that is brilliantly white and pure, and one day we will stand before God and he will present us to the LORD and we will dwell with the LORD in perfect harmony and bliss forever. These are the true and trustworthy words of God and the Spirit works in us the gift of faith so that we believe this wonderful promise. For this wonderful promise, because of God's undeserved mercy and grace and

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<sup>1</sup> Evangelical Heritage Version: Northwestern Publishing House - 2017 (Rev 19:7-8)

favor, we proclaim now and always: ***“Hallelujah! ... Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory*** By his grace. By his underserved favor, because of his forgiveness in Christ, he makes me one of those holy people who will be numbered in that enormous crowd. Together we will speak of his splendor, of his majesty and goodness. Together and for all time we will speak of the excellence of God. These are the true words of God. Alleluia!

And we will join that celestial choir in singing the praises of God for just and right are his judgments. With one voice, we will join, all the church of God, all the angels, and all the in praise of God for all the enemies of God have been vanquished! He will make things right. Those who persecuted and made things difficult for the church will be dealt with forever; and we will dwell with our God in perfect harmony and unity that will last forever - Christ and his bride. Alleluia!

Alleluia! This is a word that we use often in worship. But it is one that is actually quite rare, in the New Testament. This is actually the only place where this word of Hebrew origin is found in the Greek New Testament. Because of the rareness of this word we are given another hint, another taste of how special this is. It will be truly awesome and extraordinary to be a part of this unending celebration of joy. A wedding banquet of unmatched joy, that has been prepared for us by God himself. Halleluia!

In an effort to capture a sense of this incredible reality, the composer George Friedric Handel put together a piece that has become the one of the most beloved choral works of all time. However, Handel’s Messiah and its Hallelujah chorus, even when performed by the finest chorale the world has to offer will always pale in comparison to the thunderous praise when God’s people come together for that special celebration that eternal gathering. Imagine, if you can, the scene that the apostle John struggles to fully describe: ***6 Then I 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.7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready... 9 Then the angel said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”***

There are plenty of frustrations that we must endure as those who belong to the church militant. There will be pressures from outside the church, from within the church, from within our own sinful flesh that will negatively affect our relationship with God. Living in these end times we know that there will be temptations to become critical of God and his church, to become jaded and cynical, and to even give up the hope of heaven as the wait is long as the journey of faith is difficult. But God has given us his word, and these words are true, and our God is supremely worthy of our trust. Like a young girl who holds on firmly to the dream of her wedding day and looks forward to it with great joy, even more so the Church looks forward and holds on with absolute certainty to the sure hope that one day we will be united with God forever, and there will be a celebration of joy, of victory that will not just last for a few wonderful hours but for all eternity. These words are true, and they come from God himself who summons you by name, who calls you to his kingdom, who invites you to this wedding supper of the Lamb and declares you not guilty and righteous through Jesus Christ. Let us worship our God, now as the church on earth and for all eternity as the Church triumphant. **Alleluia! Amen!**