

The Wedding of the Lamb

Insights into Eternity - Session Six

Warm-up Question: Think about the weddings you have attended. What was the most memorable wedding ceremony you have witnessed? What made it special?

Erwin Lutzer tells the fable about a Baghdad merchant who sent his servant to the marketplace to run an errand. When the servant had completed his assignment and was about to leave the marketplace, he turned a corner and unexpectedly met Lady Death. The look on her face so frightened him that he left the marketplace and hurried home. He told his master what had happened and requested his fastest horse so that he could get as far from Lady Death as possible—a horse that would get him to Sumera before nightfall. Later that same afternoon the merchant himself went to the marketplace and met Lady Death. “Why did you startle my servant this morning?” he asked. “I didn’t intend to startle your servant—it was I who was startled,” replied Lady Death. “I was surprised to see your servant in Baghdad this morning, because I have an appointment with him in Sumera tonight.”¹ You and I have an appointment with death, we cannot run from it and we cannot hide from it, we can only face it. Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment (Hebrews 9:27). Thankfully there is a God in heaven who has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). We needn’t face death alone. He will never leave us or forsake us. On my laptop I have Microsoft Outlook, a software program that warns me of upcoming appointments. When I am working on my computer, all of a sudden there will be a little ringing sound and a window will pop up in front of me warning me that I had set a time for an appointment with a particular person, or it will remind me where I have to be for a meeting, or an important errand that needs to be done. This little “pop up screen” helps keep me on track during the day. God has placed within our hearts a similar ‘pop-up,’ reminding us that we need to prepare our souls for the appointment with death. He has placed a constant reminder in our hearts. The scriptures tell us: “He has also set eternity in the hearts of men” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). The French bible translates it this way, “les

pensees d’eternite,” the thoughts of eternity have been placed in all of our hearts. Our spiritual DNA comes with thoughts about eternity preloaded in the software of our hearts. Questions such as “Who am I?” “Why am I here?” “Where am I going?” “Is death really the end?” Somehow we know inside that we are made for more than 60-80 years. These ‘pop-up’ thoughts began to come to me when I had the first brush with death which I spoke about in the first session, (What Lies Beyond Death’s Door? Insights into Eternity, Session One.) All of us have had thoughts of our own mortality come to us occasionally. Some people switch these off and refuse to think about it.

At what point in your life did the thoughts of eternity begin to come? How did you react to them?

We have come a long way over the last 5 sessions exploring what God says about your destiny and where you will spend eternity. You are made for more than this world! You have an enemy that seeks to keep your mind occupied with things of this world alone. That enemy, satan, desires to stamp out all thoughts of another life in Christ, a life that is better by far. He does not want us to focus on the eternal, but wants us to be mesmerized only by the physical, material world that we are in to keep us “duped” and ineffective. The enemy does not want us to consider that we are only passing through this present life, being prepared for another. The Bible tell us that even though a man dies, yet shall he live (John 11:25).

When George Bush senior was Vice President, he represented the U.S. at the funeral of former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. Bush was deeply moved by a silent protest carried out by Brezhnev’s widow. She stood motionless by the coffin until seconds before it was closed. Then, just as the soldiers touched the lid, Brezhnev’s wife performed an act of great courage and hope, a gesture that must surely rank as one of the most profound acts of civil disobedience ever committed: She reached down and made the sign of the cross on her

¹ One Minute After You Die, Erwin W. Lutzer, Moody Publishers, Page 119.

husband's chest. There in the citadel of secular, atheistic power, the wife of the man who had run it all hoped that her husband was wrong. She hoped that there was another life, and that that life was best represented by Jesus who died on the cross, and that this same Jesus might yet have mercy on her husband.² There was the leader of a Communist country trying to stamp out all knowledge of Christ and His word, yet even his wife was a secret believer with the thoughts of eternity in her heart. You can deny the thoughts about eternity, you can tell them to shut up, but that inner knowledge that death is not the end cannot be extinguished. There is a God in heaven that has not given up on you; He calls to you that you may find your way to His home. Jesus said to His disciples:

² 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. ³ 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.** ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going." ⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus answered, "**I am the way** and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:2-6).

He said He would come back and take you to be with Him. Do you believe Him? Have you found the way to His house? The way is not a direction; it is a person, the Lord Jesus Christ. He Himself has paid the penalty for your sin and invites you to receive Him into your life and to receive the free gift of eternal life (Ephesians 2:8-9). You can have the inner confidence that you are home only when you come to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you remember the one commandment of Mary? Yes, Mary gave the world one commandment that is written in the bible, speaking to the servants she said, "Do whatever He (Jesus) tells you" (John 2:5). There is great wisdom in these words and we will do well to heed them. Jesus said, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him" (John 14:21). We show Christ how much we love Him by obeying His commands.

One of my favorite movies is *The Last of the Mohicans*, the star, Daniel Day Lewis, has a girlfriend, Cora, who is captured by a warring Indian tribe. As she

² Gary Thomas, in *Christianity Today*, October 3, 1994, p. 26

is being taken away, more than likely to be killed, Daniel Day Lewis says to her, "I will find you; just stay alive, no matter what occurs! No matter how long it takes, no matter how far. I will find you." Where do you think the sense of romance that we have comes from? From Heaven, that's where! The God of the Universe has been separated from His people by sin (Isaiah 59:2). He calls across the time span of many thousands of years longing to bring His people home to the New Jerusalem, where He may dwell with them. What's His call? "Adam, where are you?" (Genesis 3:9). Adam and Eve, as a result of listening to the enemy, were hiding from the Lord God (Genesis 3:8). So many people today are still hiding from God but He calls to them, longing that they will respond, abandoning their own self-righteousness and come to receive His provision for sin, the righteousness of Christ. No matter how long it takes, no matter how far you are apart from Him, He will find you and draw you to Himself if you will open your heart. "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me **draws him**, and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:44. Emphasis mine). He is the Great Shepherd of the sheep who wanders over the hillsides to find the one lamb that has wandered away (Luke 15:4). He knows and calls His people by name. He has gone to great lengths over time to show man his need of a savior from sin. God's plan called for the most loving thing that anyone could ever do for their beloved. He died for them to set them free from sin and the curse of death and separation from Him. This act of God evokes the strongest, most powerful thing in the universe, the power of love, agape love, love that is self-sacrificing. God has sent His Son into the world to win and woo His bride to Himself, those that are far away from Him. He wants them home.

To show us just how special we are to Him, Paul in writing to the church at Corinth deliberately speaks of those that are born again believers (saints) in terms of being prepared for a wedding with Christ Himself:

² I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him (2 Corinthians 11:2).

Paul's job is to prepare the bride so that she may be pure and spotless in God's sight. No matter what you have done, no matter where you have been, the Bridegroom can make you clean, pure and spotless, clothed

with a robe of righteousness that He bought for you at Calvary's tree. He is calling for His bride to come home. Paul is not alone in using this analogy of a marriage relationship. The prophet Isaiah, also speaking under the inspiration of the Spirit wrote:

⁵ as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you (Isaiah 62:5).

When you think of a wedding ceremony, in what way does it symbolize and represent the relationship between God and His church?

One of the first things that speak of this heavenly union in a wedding ceremony is that of the bride leaving her father and mother, and the new couple becoming one. Paul, the apostle, writes about this concerning marriage: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery -- but I am talking about Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:31-32). Paul is speaking on two levels, about a man and his wife's relationship but also about the heavenly union between Christ and His bride, the church. The second thing that comes to mind is that the bride is named after her husband. We are known as "Christians," and we will bear His name on our foreheads (Revelation 22:4). The name is symbolic of the nature of Christ and our foreheads also symbolize our thought life, our minds. What does a ring symbolize I wonder, perhaps the ring speaks of eternal life, similar to the way in which a ring is never ending. Everything that the Bridegroom owns also belongs to the bride. In the same way, the resources of heaven are given to the church, the bride of Christ. All we need to do is ask him, for He has promised, "I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father (John 14:13). He has withheld nothing from His bride. The bible tells us that he will give us ALL that pertains to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). The bride also wears white, which speaks of purity just as the bride of Christ on her wedding day will wear fine linen, bright and clean:

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. ⁸ Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints (Revelation 19:6-8).

In Middle Eastern weddings it is also the bridegroom's responsibility to prepare or build the place where the couple will live after the wedding. Let's look together now at the place that our God has prepared for those who love Him:

¹ Then I saw a **new heaven and a new earth**, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was **no longer any sea**. ² I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, **prepared as a bride** beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now **the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them**. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." ⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. **To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost** from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son (Revelation 21:1-7. Emphasis mine).

Don't think that the New Earth means that we will start again with Eden and that we will have to reinvent the wheel. No, a new earth means it will be earth, but a million times better. John MacArthur has this to say about the new heaven and a new earth:

Revelation 21.1 speaks of "a new heaven and a new earth." The Greek word translated "new" (kainos) stresses that the earth God will create will not merely be new as opposed to old, but will also be different in character. Paul uses the same Greek word in 2 Corinthians 5:17 "if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature." The quality has changed. The new heavens and earth, like our newness in Christ, will be glorified, free from sin's curse, and eternal.³

Personally, I don't think that the Earth will be completely destroyed so much that God will give us another planet. I think that would give the enemy too much credit. Why is a new heaven needed? What does

³ Heaven, John MacArthur, Moody Press, Page 43.

it mean by the word *heaven*? Are we talking about the upper atmosphere? Certainly we know that God's residence was called by Paul the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2), so it is very likely that the heaven that will be renewed is the atmosphere around Earth. Will the upper atmosphere be polluted by nuclear explosions on earth—it is very possible. China has already tested anti satellite missiles in space. Modern armies depend heavily on satellites to view what their enemies are doing. Peter in his second letter tells us:

¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. **The heavens will disappear with a roar**; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare ¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about **the destruction of the heavens by fire**, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. (2 Peter 3:10-13. Emphasis mine).

Why would there be no longer any sea on the new Earth? (Verse 1)

To the ancient people of Israel, the sea was synonymous with being lost and with great danger of storms that would come up. Today's ships know sometimes days ahead if there will be a storm, but it was impossible to know such things in the days when the New Testament was written. Men would often go to sea and nothing would be known of their fate for they would not come home one day. I myself had this experience as a boy. My father and my grandfather were commercial fishermen with their own boats. One day my grandfather went to sea and just did not come home. He was lost for three days on the North Sea off the east coast of England. On the third day his boat was seen on a sandbank off the coast of Holland, engine still running. He had a heart attack and died trying to pull up his nets on his own at 65 years of age. It's also possible that having no sea is God's way of saying that no longer will the Earth be so polluted as to need salt water. I'm told that 70% of the Earth's surface is seawater and 5% of the sea is made up of salt. Most of Earth's pollution is cleaned by the sea, rivers take raw sewage into the sea. I believe that there will be plenty of lakes, waterways and rivers and that what is missing will be the salt seas.

The holy city descends from above. Notice that it's not something that we build on earth but something that God has built and descends to Earth for His people. As we read in Peter's writings above, it will be the home of righteousness. It's not New Washington or New London but the New Jerusalem, the place where God has promised to dwell forever. He told Solomon that He had put his Name there forever. "My eyes and my heart will always be there" (1 Kings 9:3). Could that be the reason the enemies of Israel want Jerusalem so much? They want to stamp out the name of the God of Israel from Jerusalem completely.

Verse 2 says that the New Jerusalem comes down prepared as a bride. I can't explain this passage; some explain the sentence by saying that the city itself is the bride. Those that hold to that position remind us that we are being built into a temple as living stones: "you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). Verse 27 says that those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will live there, not that they are it!

We are told that God Himself will live with them. This city will be our dwelling place and God Himself will live with us. Let's read on:

⁸ But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death." ⁹ One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, **I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.**" ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. ¹¹ It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. ¹² It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. ¹³ There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. ¹⁴ The wall of the city had **twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.** ¹⁵ The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. ¹⁶ The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be **12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as**

it is long. ¹⁷ He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using. ¹⁸ The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. ¹⁹ The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, ²⁰ the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. ²¹ The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass. ²² I did not see a temple in the city, because the **Lord God Almighty and the Lamb** are its temple. ²³ The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. ²⁵ On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. ²⁶ The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. ²⁷ Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but **only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life** (Revelation 21:8-27. Emphasis mine).

What things stand out to you in this description of the home God is building for you?

We are told that the size of the New Jerusalem is 12,000 stadia which is the equivalent of 1400 miles. That is an area extending from California to the Appalachian Mountains and from Canada to Mexico. The ground level alone is nearly two million square miles. Don't forget though, the distance is as high as it is wide and long. If each story is a generous 12 feet that would make 600,000 stories. Billions of people will be able to live there with many square miles per person. The dimensions of the city are a perfect cube (21:16). In Solomon's Temple was a room that only the High Priest, once a year, with the sacrificial blood of a slain animal, entered beyond the heavy curtain which kept man separated from the very presence of God. This curtain was the one that was torn at the very time of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross (Matthew 27:51). The room of the Most Holy Place, where God alone dwelt, was a cube of twenty cubits (1 Kings 6:20). The New Jerusalem's dimensions reflect the fact that God wants for Man to live with Him forever. It is a picture

of man being invited into the very presence of God and to enjoy fellowship with Him and His people forever in the Holy of Holies. How wonderful it must have been for John the Apostle, the person who wrote down the Revelation, for He sees his own name on one of the foundation stones (Revelation 21:14). We don't yet know how our efforts for Christ in this world affect others, only God knows, but it is interesting that John gets to see that his life has made a difference for eternity.

Why would the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb (Christ) set up residence in the New Jerusalem on Planet Earth, when God has the whole universe before Him to set up His throne? (Verse 22)

It is the answer to Jesus' prayer in John 17:21, "...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." The New Jerusalem is the place where Christ enjoys eternity with His bride. A place where there will be oneness of heart and mind, where we will live with Him for ever and ever.

⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads (Revelation 22:4).

What a joy that will be! To see the face of Christ, behold His beauty and live in relationship with Him. Are you beginning to see the value that God Himself places on you? "What is man that you are mindful of him?" David said. How special we are to God for of all the places in the Universe for the Lord God Almighty and His Son to live, they choose to live with man in the New Jerusalem. No matter where you are, the God of heaven is looking for you to come to His home and live with Him forever and ever. The invitation is for you and your family. There's nothing you can do to earn it, it is only by grace, undeserved favor. Will you give your life to Him? He wants you to know that Heaven is your eternal home. Prayer:

Father thank you for speaking to me about Your will for my eternal destination. Remind me every day that You are preparing a place for me and that You are preparing me for that place; the life that is to come. Make me ready for my eternal home with you. Amen.

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