

6. The Wedding You've Been Waiting For.

An Explanation of the Bride of Christ

Insights into Eternity

YouTube Video Link: <https://youtu.be/O3AhS16yyWY>

We All Have an Appointment with Death

Moody Bible Church Pastor Erwin Lutzer shares the story of a Baghdad merchant who sent his servant to the marketplace on an errand. After completing his task and preparing to leave the market, the servant turned a corner and unexpectedly encountered Lady Death. The expression on her face frightened him so deeply that he hurried home. He recounted the encounter to his master and requested the fastest horse to flee as far from Lady Death as possible—a horse that would take him to Sumera before nightfall. Later that same afternoon, the merchant himself went to the marketplace and came across Lady Death. "Why did you startle my servant this morning?" he asked. "I didn't mean to startle your servant—it was I who was startled," Lady Death replied. "I was surprised to see your servant in Baghdad this morning because I have an appointment with him in Sumera tonight."

You and I have an appointment with death. We cannot run from it, nor can we 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 declared, **“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5).** We need not face death alone. Christ has assured us that He will be with us until the end of the age.

When George Bush Senior was Vice President, he represented the U.S. at the funeral of former Communist Russian leader Leonid Brezhnev. Bush was deeply moved by a silent protest conducted by Brezhnev's widow. She stood motionless by the coffin until moments before it was closed. Then, just as the soldiers touched the lid, Brezhnev's wife displayed an act of great courage and hope—an act that must surely rank as one of the most profound instances of civil disobedience ever committed: She reached down and made the sign of the cross on her husband's chest. There, in the citadel of secular, atheistic power, the wife of the man who had led it all hoped that her husband was mistaken. She hoped that there was another life, that Jesus, who died on the cross, best represented this existence, and that this same Jesus might yet have mercy on her husband. The leader of a Communist country was attempting to erase all knowledge of Christ and His Word, yet even his wife was a secret believer with thoughts of eternity in her heart.

We have come a long way over the last five studies that explore what God says about our destiny and where we will spend eternity. We are made for more than this present world. We have an enemy who seeks to keep our minds occupied solely with the things of this world. That enemy, Satan, desires to extinguish all thoughts of another life in Christ, a life that is far better. Our enemy does not want us to focus on the eternal; he wants to keep us mesmerized and ineffective by the physical, material world around us. The Lord would remind us that we are only passing through this present life and are being prepared for another. Jesus said that, even though a man dies, yet shall he live (John 11:25). We can deny thoughts about eternity and tell them to be quiet, but we cannot extinguish the inner knowledge that death is not the end. There is a God in Heaven who is working to draw you to Himself. He calls to you so that you may find your way to His home. **“You**

will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13). Jesus said to His disciples:

²In 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. ³And 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.** ⁴You know the way to the place where I am going." ⁵Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" ⁶Jesus 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 believers to be with Him. Have you found the way to His house? The way is not a direction; it is a person, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He has paid the penalty for your sin and invites you to receive Him into your life and embrace the gift of eternal life (Ephesians 2:8-9). You can gain inner confidence that you are home only when you come to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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 demonstrate our love for Christ by obeying His commands. When you comprehend all that Christ has done for you, you cannot help but fall in love with Him. From beginning to end, from Genesis to Revelation, we see God calling a people for Himself from all nations—a people who come to know God—not just know about Him, but to know Him intimately. Regardless of the country you live in and what you have done, Christ has opened a way for you to know God in a close, intimate, loving relationship.

When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). How does this one commandment help us to fulfill all others?

The Church: The Bride of Christ

One of my favorite movies is *The Last of the Mohicans*. Daniel Day-Lewis has a girlfriend, Cora, who is about to be captured by a warring Indian tribe. Their only hope for reunification is for him to leave her and catch up with her and her sister later. Daniel Day-Lewis tells her, "I will find you; just stay alive, no matter what happens! No matter how long it takes, no matter how far. I will find you." Where do you think our sense of romance originates? Our desire for romance comes from Heaven. The God of the Universe has been separated from His people because of their sin (Isaiah 59:2). He calls across the span of many thousands of years, longing to be reunited with His people and to bring them home to the New Jerusalem where He may dwell with them. What is His call? **“Adam, where are you?” (Genesis 3:9).** As a result of listening to and obeying the enemy, Adam and Eve hid from the Lord God in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:8). Many people today continue to hide from God, yet He calls out to them, yearning for them to respond and forsake their self-righteousness, which is like filthy rags. He invites them to come and receive His provision for sin, namely, the gift of Christ's righteousness. No matter how long it takes or how far you feel from Him, He desires to draw you near if you will open your heart to Him. **“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 added). The mere fact that you are reading these words serves as evidence of the Father drawing you closer.

He is the Great Shepherd of the sheep who wanders over the hillsides to find the one lamb aware of being far from the Shepherd of the flock (Luke 15:4). He knows and calls His people by name and has gone to great lengths over time to show humankind their need for a Savior from sin. God's plan involved the most loving action anyone could ever take for their beloved. He died for them to set them free from their sinful nature. This act of love brings forth the strongest, most powerful thing in the universe—the power of love, agape love. This kind of love is self-sacrificing and inspires a love response from those who receive such grace. God has sent His Son into the world to win and capture the heart of His bride to Himself, seeking out and saving those who are far away from Him.

To illustrate how special we are to Him, the apostle Paul, in his letter to the church in Corinth, intentionally refers to those who are born-again believers as being prepared for a wedding with Christ Himself:

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 the Apostle views his ministry as one that prepares the bride of Christ, ensuring she is pure and spotless for her wedding. No matter what you have done in the past or where you have been, the Bridegroom can cleanse you and make you clean, pure, and spotless. If you are a believer in Christ, you are clothed in a robe of purity and righteousness that Christ purchased for you at Calvary's cross. A wedding ceremony between a man and a woman illustrates what God in Christ has accomplished for His Church, the people who belong to Him. He is calling His bride to come home.

Paul is not alone in using this analogy of a marriage relationship. The prophet Isaiah wrote:

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

When you think of a wedding ceremony between a man and a woman, what parallels can you see in the traditions and symbols that can also represent the relationship between God and His Church?

The Symbolism of a Wedding Ceremony

One of the first things that signifies this heavenly union in a wedding ceremony is the bride leaving her father and mother to become one with her betrothed. The Apostle Paul writes in another letter about becoming one with Christ when he discusses 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 speaks on two levels: about a man and his wife becoming one in a covenant marriage relationship and the divine union between Christ and His bride, the Church. In some mysterious way, when we receive new life in Jesus, we are brought into an organic union with Christ. Didn't He say, "I am the Vine, you are the branches... ⁴Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (John 15:1; 4). Another point to consider is that the bride takes on the last name of the bridegroom. We are known as "Christians," and the Bible states that we will bear His name on our foreheads (Revelation 22:4). The name on our foreheads symbolizes that we are in an organic union with Christ, and His Spirit is in our mind and soul.

What does a ring on the finger symbolize? The ring may speak of eternal life, just as a circle is never-ending. In a marriage, everything the bridegroom owns also belongs to the bride. Similarly, 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, "He has given us everything we need for life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). The bride also wears white, which signifies purity, just as the bride of Christ on her wedding day will wear fine linen, bright and clean:

⁶Then 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. ⁷Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. ⁸Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints (Revelation 19:6-8).

We know that salvation is the gift of God and that He sanctifies (sets apart for Himself) His Church, but what part do we have in our sanctification? How are we to make ourselves ready? (v. 7).

Can you imagine your feelings and thoughts on that day and what it will be like to be part of the vast multitude shouting hallelujah to God? Imagine knowing that the fight of faith is over and that you will soon enter the wedding celebration of the Lamb! How can anyone not desire such a relationship with God? The sound of all those voices was so loud that it resembled "many waters;" similarly, so great will be the joy of the redeemed of the Lord. Can you envision the joy on the face of the Lord Jesus as we gaze upon Him on that day? "For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2). The Lord will look upon you as He sees the result of His sacrificial death; His saving work which He wrought on the cross for His people. I borrow from the words of C.H. Spurgeon:

The marriage of the Lamb is the result of the eternal gift of the Father. Our Lord says, "Yours they were, and you gave them to Me." His prayer was, "Father, I will that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am. That they may behold My glory, which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world." The Father made a choice, and the chosen He gave to His Son to be His portion. For them, He entered a Covenant of Redemption, whereby He was pledged in due time to take upon Himself their nature, pay the penalty of their offenses, and set them free to be His own. Beloved, that which was arranged in the councils of eternity and settled there between the high contracting

Parties is brought to its ultimate end in that day when the Lamb takes unto Himself in everlasting union the whole of those whom His Father gave Him from of old.

Next—this is the completion of the betrothal, which took place with each of them in time. I shall not attempt to elaborate distinctions. However, as far as you and I were concerned, the Lord Jesus betrothed each one of us unto Himself in righteousness when first we believed in Him. Then He took us to be His and gave Himself to be ours so that we could sing— "My beloved is mine, and I am His." This was the essence of the marriage. Paul, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, represents our Lord as already married to the Church. This may be illustrated by the Middle Eastern custom that when the bride is betrothed, all the sanctities of marriage are involved in those espousals. There may be a considerable interval before the bride is taken to her husband's house. She dwells with her former household and has not yet forgotten her kindred and her father's house, though still she is espoused in truth and righteousness. Afterward, she is brought home on an appointed day, the day which we should call the actual marriage. Yet, the betrothal is, to this culture, the very essence of the marriage.¹

The Newly Married Couple's Home

In Middle Eastern weddings, the groom's responsibility is to prepare or construct the place where the couple will live after marriage.

Let's look now at the place God has prepared for those who love Him:

¹Then 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**. ²I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, **prepared as a bride** beautifully dressed for her husband. ³And 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. ⁴He 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." ⁵He 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." ⁶He 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. ⁷He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son (Revelation 21:1-7, emphasis added).

The holy city descends from above. Notice that it's not something we build on Earth but something that Christ has made and that descends to Earth for His people. It's not New Washington or New London; it is the New Jerusalem, the place where God has promised to dwell forever. He told Solomon that in Jerusalem, He had put His name forever. "**My eyes and my heart will always be there**" (1 Kings 9:3). Could that be the reason the enemies of the God of Israel desire Jerusalem so much? I believe they want to erase the name of the God of Israel from Jerusalem entirely and for

¹ <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons35.xxxv.html>

the embodiment of Satan himself, the Antichrist, to sit enthroned on the sacred mount at the center of Jerusalem (2 Thessalonians 2:4).

The New Jerusalem descends, prepared as a bride (v. 2). I cannot explain this passage; some interpret the sentence by asserting that the city itself is the bride. Those who support this view remind us that we are being constructed 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). However, to counter this argument, Revelation 21:27 states that those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will inhabit it, not that they are it! God Himself will dwell with them. This city will serve as our dwelling place, and God Himself will reside with us. Let's read what John writes in the Book of Revelation:

Come, **I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.** ¹⁰And 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. ¹¹It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. ¹²It 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. ¹³There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. ¹⁴The wall of the city had **twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.** ¹⁵The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. ¹⁶The 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.** ¹⁷He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using. ¹⁸The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. ¹⁹The 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, ²⁰the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. ²¹The 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. ²²I did not see a temple in the city, because **the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb** are its temple. ²³The 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. ²⁴The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. ²⁵On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. ²⁶The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. ²⁷Nothing 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 21:9-27; emphasis added).

What catches your attention in this description of the home that God is building for you?

The Dimensions of the New Jerusalem

The wall surrounding the city is 144 cubits thick, which is equivalent to 216 feet. The dimensions of the New Jerusalem are 12,000 stadia, and it is as wide as it is long, measuring 1,400 miles both in width and length. This area extends from California to the Appalachian Mountains in the Eastern

United States and from Canada to Mexico, covering nearly two million square miles at ground level. However, remember that the distance is as high as it is wide and long (v. 16). If each story has a generous height of 12 feet, that results in 600,000 stories, allowing billions of people to live there with many square miles available per person. The city's dimensions form a perfect cube. Within Solomon's Temple was a room that only the High Priest entered once a year, bringing with him the sacrificial blood of a slain animal beyond the heavy curtain that separated humanity from the very presence of God. This curtain was torn at the exact moment of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross (Matthew 27:51). The Most Holy Place, where God alone resided, was a cube of twenty cubits (1 Kings 6:20).

The dimensions of the New Jerusalem reflect that God desires Man to live with Him forever. It illustrates His bride being invited into the very presence of God to enjoy eternal fellowship in the Holy of Holies. How beautiful it must have been for John the Apostle, the one who penned the Revelation, to see his name on one of the foundation stones (Revelation 21:14). We don't yet know how our efforts for Christ in this world impact others; only God knows. However, interestingly, John gets to witness that his life has made a difference for eternity.

It is the answer to Jesus' prayer, "...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" (John 17:21). The New Jerusalem is the place where Christ enjoys eternity with His bride—a place of oneness in heart and mind, where we will live with Him forever.

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

Are you starting to understand the value that God Himself places on you? "What is man that you are mindful of him?" David asked. How special we are to God, for of all the places in the Universe where the Lord God Almighty and His Son could reside, God chooses to dwell with Man in the New Jerusalem. No matter where you are, the God of Heaven is longing for you to come to His home and live with Him forever and ever. The invitation is extended to you and your family. There's nothing you can do to earn it, for it is solely by grace, God's undeserved favor. Will you surrender your life to Him? He wants you to know that Heaven is your eternal home.

To close with a worship song, click the link below or paste the address into your browser. You will need about seven minutes to view and worship:

<https://youtu.be/34ijshZzPu0>

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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