

## 6. The Wedding of the Lamb Insights into Eternity

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

### Finding and Knowing God

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 also went to the marketplace and also 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.”<sup>1</sup>

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. Christ has told 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 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 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, that this life was best represented by Jesus who died on the cross, and that this same Jesus might yet have mercy on her husband.<sup>2</sup> 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.

We have come a long way over the last five studies exploring what God says about our destiny and where we will spend eternity. We are made for more than the way this world is set up! We have an enemy that seeks to keep our minds 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 he wants us to be mesmerized only by the physical, material world in which 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 and being prepared for

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<sup>1</sup> One Minute After You Die, Erwin W. Lutzer, Moody Publishers, Page 119.

<sup>2</sup> Gary Thomas, in *Christianity Today*, October 3, 1994, p. 26

another. Jesus said that, even though a man dies, yet shall he live (John 11:25). You can deny the thoughts about eternity, and 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 Who has not given up on you; He calls to you that you may find your way to His home. You shall seek me and find me, when you shall search for me with all your heart (Jeremiah 29:13). Jesus said to His disciples:

<sup>2</sup>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.<sup>3</sup>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.** <sup>4</sup>You know the way to the place where I am going." <sup>5</sup>Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" <sup>6</sup>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 believers 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 Himself. He 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, the mother of Jesus? Yes, Mary gave the world one commandment that is written in the Bible. Speaking to the servants at the wedding in Cana in Galilee, she said, **"Do whatever He [Jesus] tells you"** (John 2:5). There is great wisdom in these words, and we 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. This is the main thing—to fall in love with the God of the Universe. When you really understand all that Christ has done for you, you cannot but help falling in love with Him. Sometimes, we don't see the obvious that is written in the Bible, i.e. that of a God of love seeking to reconcile fallen humanity to Himself. From beginning to end, Genesis to Revelation, we see God calling a people for Himself from all the nations—a people that come to know God – not just know about Him, but to know Him intimately. No matter in what nation you live or no matter what you have done, Christ has made a way for you to know God in a close, intimate, love relationship.

**Question 1) When asked what was the greatest commandment, Jesus answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). Why is loving God so important?**

### **The Church – the Bride of Christ**

One of my favorite movies is *The Last of the Mohicans*. The star, Daniel Day Lewis, has a girlfriend, Cora, who is about to be captured by a warring Indian tribe. Their only hope to be reunited is for him to leave her and catch up to her and her sister later. 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." From where do you think the sense of romance that we have been given comes? From Heaven, that's where! The God of the Universe has been separated

from His people by their sin (Isaiah 59:2). He calls across the time span of many thousands of years longing to be united with His people and to bring them 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 in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:8). So many people today are still hiding from God, but He calls to them, longing that they will respond and abandon their own self-righteousness, which is as filthy rags, and come to receive His provision for sin, i.e. the gift of the righteousness of Christ. No matter how long it takes, no matter how far you are apart from Him, He wants to draw you to Himself 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 mine). Just the fact that you are reading these words is evidence that the Father is drawing you.

He is the Great Shepherd of the sheep who wanders over the hillsides to find the one lamb that becomes conscious of being a long way from the Shepherd of the flock (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 his or her beloved. He died for them to set them free from sin. This act of love brings about the strongest, most powerful thing in the universe—the power of love, agapé love. This kind of love is self-sacrificing and brings about a love response from the one who receives such grace. God has sent His Son into the world to win and woo His bride to Himself, especially those that are far away from Him.

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

<sup>2</sup>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).

He wants them home. A wedding ceremony between a man and woman is just a picture of what God in Christ has done for His church, the people belonging to Him. Paul the Apostle sees the ministry that God gave him as one who prepares the bride of Christ so that she may be pure and spotless for her wedding. No matter what you have done or no matter where you have been, the Bridegroom can make you clean or has made you clean, pure and spotless. If you are a Christian, you have been clothed with a robe of purity and righteousness that He bought for you at Calvary's cross. 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:

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

Question 2) When you think of a wedding ceremony between a man and woman, of what traditions can you think that perhaps symbolizes and represents 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 with her betrothed. Paul the apostle writes in another letter about becoming one with Christ when he writes about 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. In some mysterious way, we have been brought into an organic union with Christ. Didn't He say, "I am the Vine, you are the branches...<sup>4</sup>Remain 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). The second thing that comes to mind is that the bride takes on the last name of the bridegroom. We are known as "Christians," and the Bible says that 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 on the finger symbolize, I wonder? Perhaps, the ring speaks of eternal life, similar to the way in which a ring is never ending. In a marriage 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 to 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 speaks of purity just as the bride of Christ on her wedding day will wear fine linen, bright and clean:

<sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints (Revelation 19:6-8).

Question 3) If salvation and eternity is totally a gift (and it is), what does it mean that the bride has made herself ready? How do we make ourselves ready?

Can you imagine what it will be like for you who know Christ to actually be in that moment, to be part of the great multitude shouting hallelujah to God? Imagine knowing that the fight of faith is over and that you will soon enter into the wedding celebration of the Lamb! How can anyone not want such a relationship with God as this? So loud was the sound of all those commingled voices that it sounded like "many waters;" similarly, so great will be the joy of the redeemed of the Lord. What a happy day that will be! Don't you think the joy on the face of the Lord Jesus will be great as we look upon Him on that day. He will look upon you as He beholds the result of the work He completed on the cross for His people. I borrow from the words of C.H. Spurgeon here:

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 into 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 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 on 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 oriental custom by which, when the bride is betrothed, all the sanctities of marriage are involved in those espousals. Yet, 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. Afterwards, she is brought home on an appointed day, the day which we should call the actual marriage. Yet, the betrothal is, to Orientals, of the very essence of the marriage.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Home of the Newly Married Couple**

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:

<sup>1</sup>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**. <sup>2</sup>I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, **prepared as a bride** beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>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." <sup>5</sup>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." <sup>6</sup>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**

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons35.xxxv.html>

**give to drink without cost** from the spring of the water of life. <sup>7</sup>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).

The holy city descends from above. Notice that it's not something that we build on Earth but something that Christ has built and descends to Earth for His people. It's not New Washington or New London, but 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 want Jerusalem so much? I believe that they want to stamp out the name of the God from Jerusalem completely and for the embodiment of Satan himself, the Antichrist, to sit enthroned on the sacred mount at the center of Jerusalem (2 Thessalonians 2:4).

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). To counter that argument, though, Revelation 21: 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 what John writes in the Book of Revelation:

Come, **I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.**" <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. <sup>14</sup>The wall of the city had **twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.** <sup>15</sup>The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. <sup>16</sup>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.** <sup>17</sup>He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using. <sup>18</sup>The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. <sup>19</sup>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, <sup>20</sup>the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysopease, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. <sup>21</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>I did not see a temple in the city, because **the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb** are its temple. <sup>23</sup>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. <sup>24</sup>The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. <sup>25</sup>On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night

there. <sup>26</sup>The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. <sup>27</sup>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 21:9-27. Emphasis mine).

Question 4) What things stand out to you in this description of the home that God is building for you? 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)?

The wall around this city is 144 cubits thick. That is equivalent to 216 feet. We are also told that the size of the New Jerusalem is 12,000 stadia and as wide as it is long which today measures 1400 miles wide and 1400 miles long. That is an area extending from California to the Appalachian Mountains of the Eastern United States, 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 (verse 16). 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 dimension of the city is a perfect cube. 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 that 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.

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 where there will be oneness of heart and mind, where we will live with Him forever and ever.

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

What 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, for it is only by grace, God's undeserved favor. Will you give your life to Him? He wants you to know that Heaven is your eternal home.

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

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qSI4INTdhgo&feature=related>

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.

Keith Thomas

Email: [keiththomas7@gmail.com](mailto:keiththomas7@gmail.com)

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