

The Marriage of the Lamb

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT the Church is called the Bride of Christ. I think that sometimes we gloss over this fact, but it's worth noting that the Bible describes the relationship between Christ and the Church in *romantic* terms. Jesus is described as being much more than our Savior; He is also our Husband-to-be. It's an astounding thought! There is a degree of closeness, intimacy, and steadfastness there that I think is too easily overlooked. Christians are not in a master/slave relationship with Christ; they are in a *romance*.

(Now, before you get too excited about that, let me temper this by saying that Christ is marrying the Church as a whole, not each believer individually. In the Old Testament God described Himself as Israel's husband [Isaiah 54:5], so this is not something entirely new. If you think that Jesus is your personal boyfriend then your perspective is wrong. If you want some idea as to how this is going to work, study the Old Testament and look at the way God interacted with Israel. The prophets had a lot to say about this relationship.)

The first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Jesus *loves* us with an awesome passion and He wants us to love Him back with everything we have. Nothing less could possibly work. *He wants our heart*. He wants to be our deepest love, our greatest joy, and the earnest desire of our heart. Jesus wants us to love Him deeply, passionately, and eternally. Some have called the relationship between Christ and the Church “The Great Romance”. I think there's a lot of truth in that.

David Baumann, a friend of mine, was once asked to summarize the Bible into three short sentences. This was his ten-word response: “Boy loves girl. Boy loses girl. Boy gets girl back.” It is so easy to get caught up in works and obedience (both of which are very important) and lose sight of the fact that *we are loved* – tremendously and passionately. Not because of what we've done but because the Lord has chosen to delight in us. How many times do we end up trying to earn His love instead of just resting in it?

It is worth noting that Jesus referred to Himself as the Bridegroom:

Matthew 9:14: “Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?

15 And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.”

There is an interesting thing about being called a groom: it means that you are destined for a wedding *that is still in the future*. Christ is destined for a wedding with His Church. It hasn't happened yet but it will happen one day. At that point Christ will be the Husband and the Church will be the Wife.

Christ's love for His Bride can clearly be seen on the cross, where He suffered and died in our place. He loved us so much that He *gave His life* for us. Why? So that He might wash away our sins and make us pure and holy:

Ephesians 5:25: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

His desire to purify His Bride and wash away her sins was so great that He *died* for her. Paul expanded on this, saying that part of his ministry was driven by the desire to help get the Bride ready for her Husband:

2 Corinthians 11:2: "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."

I realize that this concept of a heavenly marriage can be difficult to understand. That might be why God gave us the institution of human marriage. Some may say that calling the Church the Bride is just a bit of symbolism, but I think it's actually the other way around. I believe that the marriage union between a man and a woman (as blessed as it is) is actually symbolic of the future union that will exist between Christ and His Church. It offers us a starting place to begin to understand the kind of relationship that we will eventually have with God.

In other words, human marriage is like a shadow. We can look at shadows to get an idea of what the real thing looks like, but the shadow alone can never provide a complete picture. Likewise, we can look at human marriage to get a glimpse at what our relationship with Christ is going to be like in the future. Human marriage is the symbol; the union between Christ and the Church is the real thing.

Paul called this a great mystery:

Ephesians 5:31: "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church."

John the Baptist also spoke of this. Interestingly, he did not consider himself to be a part of the Bride. Instead he believed that he was simply a friend of the bridegroom:

John 3:28: "Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him.

29 He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled."

The reason for this is because the Church did not begin until the day of Pentecost. Since John the Baptist died before that day came, he was never a part of the Church. The only believers who will be a part of the Bride are those who lived during the Church Age. The saints who live before and after that period are still saved, but they are not part of the Church.

All of this raises a key question: when does the marriage take place? I believe Revelation provides the answer. In chapter 19 we read this:

Revelation 19:6: "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is

come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints."

When does this happen? Well, let's back up a bit. In Revelation 4 we read that the apostle John was asked to come up to Heaven to witness "things which must be hereafter":

Revelation 4:1: "And after this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter."

After this a great many things take place – things that happen in chronological order. First we're told that the Lamb is worthy to open the "book". This is sung by a great crowd of people who were redeemed by the blood of the Lamb:

Revelation 5:9: "And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;
10 And hast made us unto our God kings and priests; and we shall reign on the earth."

After this the seals are open. Revelation 6:1 has the opening of the first seal, 6:3 has the opening of the second seal, 6:5 has the third seal, and so on. In Revelation 8:1 there is a moment of silence in heaven, followed by seven angels that blow seven trumpets. In Revelation 13 we are told of a beast and his war against the saints:

Revelation 13:7: "And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.

8 And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world."

More events happen, and then the famous Mark of the Beast appears:

Revelation 13:15: "And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.

16 And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads:

17 And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name."

After this there are plagues and vials of wrath. Babylon is judged, and falls:

Revelation 18:1: "And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory.

2 And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.”

We're almost there! In the next chapter we read this:

Revelation 19:1: “And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God:

2 For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.”

In verse 7 of this chapter we read of the “marriage of the Lamb”. What all of this means is that the Marriage of the Lamb occurs *at the end of the Tribulation* – after the judgments are poured out, after the Mark of the Beast appears, after Babylon falls, and after the Beast is judged. The place of the marriage is *Heaven*, where the Church (the Bride) was brought when the Rapture happened, which took place before the Tribulation period began. The marriage happens *before* Jesus returns to Earth at the end of the Tribulation.

This is a very long quotation, but look at all the things that happen *after* the marriage of the Lamb:

Revelation 19:11: “And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood; and his name is called The Word of God.

14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

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19 And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.

20 And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshiped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.

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20:1: And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,

3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

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10 And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever.

11 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

21:1: And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.”

The Marriage of the Lamb happens in Heaven toward the end of the Great Tribulation. On Earth there is great suffering under the reign of the beast and the false prophet, but in Heaven there is great rejoicing because “the marriage of the Lamb is come”. After the marriage has been made the Lord will return to Earth with the armies of Heaven to crush the beast and the false prophet, bind Satan, and reign on Earth with His saints for a thousand years.

When the thousand years have expired Satan will be set free for a season, but his final attempt to defeat God will be crushed. He and all his followers will be cast into the Lake of Fire, where they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. The Great White Throne judgment then takes place and death itself is defeated once and for all. The old universe will then pass away and the Lord will create a new one – a perfect world. At this point (and notice all the events that happen before this promise is made!) we are given this awesome promise:

Revelation 21:3: “And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

One thing I would like to point out: if the Marriage of the Lamb takes place in Heaven during the end of the Tribulation then *the Church must be in Heaven when that happens*. After all, the marriage cannot take place without the Bride! The Lord only returns to Earth to crush the beast and the

false prophet *after* the marriage. This is more evidence that the Rapture happens well before the end of the Tribulation – after all, if the Church was still on Earth then there could be no wedding.

I would like to leave you with a final question: are you looking forward to this coming Marriage? If you are a follower of Jesus that is alive during the Church Age then you have much to look forward to! The day will come when your relationship with Christ will change dramatically. Right now we can now only get a glimpse of what our future will hold, but I do know that it will be beyond any hope or expectation that we can possibly have. We have something tremendous to look forward to! Let us not forget that promise in the stress of our everyday lives. After all, this world might offer many joys but none of them can compare to the day when the Bride will become the Wife.