

Here Comes the Bride

Thy Kingdom Come – Part III

Revelation 19:7-10

Introduction

There are few events on the planet more special than a wedding. And there is no event more special than your own wedding day.

For men and women who are married, certain details of the wedding process will never be forgotten. All the details, the planning, the praying, the purchasing, the stress, the family members – did I mention stress? Finally, however, the day arrives. The groom is anxious and the bride is nervous.

One bride I read about some time ago was so nervous she just knew she would faint walking down the aisle. Her dad leaned over and gave her some quick advice – the key was concentration. He said, “When we start out, just focus on aisle. As you get halfway down the aisle, focus on the altar, and then as you get near the front, focus on him.”

The moment arrived and she began to walk down the rose-petal-strewn path. People were a bit startled when she passed their pew because she was muttering under her breath, “Aisle . . . altar . . . him. Aisle altar him!”

This is not bad advice. Most men are in desperate need of alteration.

I have had the privilege of performing many weddings over the years and have never seen a bride anything less than beautiful and the groom anything less than joyful.

One of my favorite wedding pictures, now twenty-eight years old, was when the photographer captured the moment that my bride descended the stairs of the balcony at the back of the sanctuary; her father was waiting at the foot of the stairs to escort her down the aisle. As she was descending the stairs, the photographer took a picture. If you look closely at that photograph, however, you can see that Marsha’s eyes were actually looking toward the front of the sanctuary where I was standing. My heart rate was at 120 and it never slowed down until after the wedding cake.

One of our funniest memories was after the wedding. Marsha and I sped away to her childhood home where we were going to change clothes and

take off on our honeymoon. It was only after we got to her parent’s home that we realized we had forgotten the key to get in. The church was twenty minutes away – and this was before cell phones.

We walked around the house to try the back door, which was locked, but we noticed the bathroom window was open. It was about eight feet off the ground. I had Marsha put her foot in my hands and I hoisted her up far enough that she was able to pull herself in through the window – wedding dress and all! I would love to have a picture of *that* memory.

Frankly, throughout human history, wedding ceremonies, wedding attire, and wedding celebrations have been a highlight for the human race.

For Jewish young men and women who did not have arranged marriages, the rabbis taught for centuries that the woman must never seek after a husband, but that the man should seek out his wife. They argued that this should be the rule because man was formed from clay, but woman came from man’s rib; therefore, when a man is looking for his wife he is merely looking for what he had lost.ⁱ

The rabbis also taught – and I thought this was funny – that man was made from soft clay and woman was made from a hard rib bone, which illustrates why men are easier to get along with than women.ⁱⁱ

Actually, I did not think that was funny at all. I cannot believe those rabbis.

If you have not discovered it yet, the plan of salvation is a love story. J. Vernon McGee referred to it as the “romance of redemption”.

God the Father refers to Israel as His bride. God the Son is called a Bridegroom and the church is called His bride.

It is no surprise then that as human history changes forever with the second coming of Christ, the language shifts to a wedding scene. The return of Christ is the coming of the Bride-groom, and the church, with Him, is called His bride.

We could easily entitle the first section of Revelation chapter 19, “Here Comes the Bride”.

It is impossible to capture the significance of this moment apart from the wedding customs in biblical times. There were at least four significant events wrapped up in the Jewish wedding culture during the days of Christ. These are:

- the betrothal;
- the presentation;
- the ceremony;
- the wedding feast.

The Wedding of the Lamb

1. The betrothal.

In America we have the little children's rhyme that goes something like:

Johnny and Susie sitting in a tree,

K – I – S – S – I – N – G.

First comes love,

Then comes marriage,

Then comes baby in a baby carriage.

This is not a bad progression of events, except for the kissing in the tree part. That is for the record.

"First comes love, then comes marriage." This was not the case for the average Jewish couple in Bible times. For them, it was, "First comes marriage, then comes love." First, it was, "I do," then came, "I love you."

Why? Because their marriages were arranged by their parents; that is, their parents decided who they would marry – which I think is a brilliant idea.

I have daughters – and I will be happy to arrange this. In fact, *I'll* alter him.

There could literally be many years between the Jewish betrothal and wedding ceremony. This is because a Jewish boy and girl could be betrothed without ever meeting.

This was the system and culture in the days of Christ. It still is in many cultures around the world.

It has been a delight to add to our church deacon fellowship a godly man named Raj. He and Anna, his wife, are originally from India and they recently celebrated their seventh wedding anniversary. It was an arranged marriage by their parents. Raj met Anna on the day they were engaged.

I have asked this couple a number of questions about the process. How did it work?!

This was their culture; their believing parents' arrangement; a system of honor that they respected.

They both love Christ and have learned to love each other, now in their eighth year of marriage.

This is the culture of the patriarchs.

Isaac and Rebekah, in Genesis chapter 24, are an example of this. They had never seen each other until the day they married. Moses records,

. . . Isaac . . . took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her . . . (Genesis 24:67)

First came marriage, then came love.

In the arrangement of the marriage betrothal, both sets of parents would meet each other, along with witnesses, and negotiate the betrothal contract.

In the days of Christ, betrothal was legally binding. It was much more significant to the Jewish people than the engagement period in the western world.

During the betrothal period, the man and his future bride were referred to as husband and wife.ⁱⁱⁱ

If the man were to die, in fact, the woman would be considered a widow.

The two young people would be faithful to one another, even though they were not fully married and the marriage had not been physically consummated.

It was a time when the bride-to-be was observed by family and friends for her purity and diligence in preparing herself for marriage. The man would be busy building onto his father's homestead a place where he and his bride would live.

The betrothal period, which usually lasted a year or so for the average Jewish couple, was a time of joyful anticipation and preparation.

This is the reason it was so devastating to Joseph to learn of Mary's pregnancy during the time of their, what? Matthew records the devastating news,

. . . when . . . Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child . . . (Matthew 1:18)

In other words, at this critical time in the marriage process when Mary was effectively married, the time when she was supposed to be revealing the purity of her life and the commitment of her heart as she prepared for her home with her betrothed husband, she was found to be expecting a child.

Everything was now shattered. It is little wonder that it took the appearance of an angel to keep Joseph on the path of marrying his betrothed.

We, the church, the bride of Christ, should live with joyful anticipation and pure devotion to Christ as His betrothed.

The apostle Paul used this same wedding language to exhort the church in Corinth when he wrote,

... for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.

But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

(II Corinthians 11:2-3)

Another aspect of the betrothal was the dowry. This was the price paid by the groom for the bride.

In this culture, the women were very involved in the running of a household – managing everything from crops to cattle. Because of their productivity to the family enterprises, the loss of a daughter, one Hebrew scholar wrote, was viewed as the diminishing of efficiency for her family and the increasing of efficiency of her husband's family. So the groom had to pay the price of a dowry to compensate for the loss.^{iv}

I think that is a great idea too!

As we have already learned from our last session together, Revelation 19 is about the coming of Christ to earth with His bride. I find it fascinating that verse 7 opens with a reference to Christ that can easily go unnoticed. Note what the apostle John records,

Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come . . .

He is coming as a conquering sovereign Lord. Why is He referred to in this wedding scene as “the Lamb”?

He will be described later in chapter 19 with the supreme title,

... “King of Kings and Lord of Lords.”

Why refer to His title of suffering and death? Because it was the dowry He paid for His bride.

What did the bride cost Him? His life (Ephesians 5:25).

. . . you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God with your body. (I Corinthians 6:20)

So the bride is seen with her Groomsman, and He is called the Lamb.

After the betrothal period was over, and it was never a set time, the groom would send a message

that he was on his way to the bride's home to collect her. What happens next is the second phase of the wedding process.

2. The presentation.

At this stage, the bridegroom comes to take his bride back home to prepare for the wedding ceremony. He would typically walk to her home and return with her to his father's house.

There was a brief time of festivities before the actual ceremony took place. Depending on the wealth of the groom, this time of presentation could last as long as a week as the bride is introduced to the groom's family and friends.

So, in the imagery of an ancient wedding, the rapture marks the time when the Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ, takes His bride back to His Father's house. During the Tribulation, the raptured bride has been presented in heaven (in fact, we have watched periodically through our study as the church appears, represented by the elders, worshiping and singing to their Lord). The presentation of the bride in heaven has now lasted for seven years.^v

Now it might seem odd to have such a long period of time for the presentation of the bride – roughly, seven years – while the Tribulation takes place on earth. However, consider the fact that the betrothal period has already lasted some 2,000 years. In addition, the bridal party is not yet complete. Perhaps today, the last member of the bride of Christ will accept the Lord as sovereign Savior and the rapture call of the trumpet will make its announcement.

This is the next event on the prophetic calendar for the church today – the presentation – the sweeping away of the bride.

We have been betrothed to Christ. In the wedding imagery, He is preparing a place for us at His Father's house. We are waiting for the moment when He will come for us and take us to be presented in the Father's house for a brief period of time before the wedding ceremony takes place.

This is the exact imagery of Christ's words to His disciples, and to us, when He said to them,

In My Father's house are many dwelling places [we could render this apartments or rooms]; . . . I go to prepare a place for you.

. . . I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.

(John 14:2-3)

This is His promise to His bride – He will come for us and take us to His father’s house where He has built on to the family homestead, so to speak, a place for us to stay. And just wait until we see the place He has prepared!

The third stage of the wedding is now ready to take place.

3. The ceremony.

A Jewish wedding, much like a western wedding, would involve vows, prayers, and the exchange of rings. We are not given wedding ceremony details between Christ and His bride, the church, although we can put some clues together that refer to the awarding of rewards.

I personally believe that many of the promises made to the church in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 will be a part of the wedding ceremony.

Let me give one example. When my wife and I were married twenty-eight years ago, I gave her something that she had never owned before. I am not thinking of the wedding band; I am thinking of my name. All her life her name had been Marsha Gladney, but on that day, as our wedding ceremony came to a close, we were introduced for the first time as Mr. and Mrs. Davey. From that point on, her name was changed from Gladney to Davey.

Christ promised the faithful believers in chapter 2 verse 17 that He would give them a precious gem of some sort with a new name written on it. He is giving a new name to be used for the rest of eternity. This is a special, unique name given by the Groom to His bride.

Now, as in most wedding ceremonies, the wedding attire is magnificent. The Groom, who is described for us later in chapter 19, is dressed as a king.

This was also the Jewish custom for the groom. He dressed in as much finery as he possibly could. The couple literally dressed as a king and queen, borrowing jewelry and clothing to play the part as best they could in this festival.

It was traditional for the groom, during the days of Christ, to wear a gold crown, if he were wealthy enough. In Jewish tradition, the groom also had his garments perfumed with frankincense and myrrh.^{vi}

We most often think of the wise men’s gifts of frankincense and myrrh to young Jesus as symbols of His impending death because these fragrances were often used in burial.

These three items – gold, frankincense, and myrrh – were the items worn by the groom who had come to receive his bride.

So, even from the time of His childhood, these gifts not only spoke of Jesus Christ’s death, but of His delight. These elements not only signified His burial, but His wedding to His bride.

John provides for us a look, not only at the Bridegroom, but at the bride. He writes in verses 7 and 8,

for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.

It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean . . .

We are given three descriptive words about her bridal dress.

- The first descriptive word is translated *fine linen*.

This was expensive and beautiful cloth.

Joseph, the prime minister of Egypt, wore it (Genesis 41:42), as did King David (I Chronicles 15:27).

This was the fabric of the wealthy.

- Her bridal dress is also referred to as *bright*.

The word “lampros” (λαμπρος) is used, which can be translated as not just “bright,” but “shining”.^{vii}

There is a brilliance, a glow, a radiance about the bridal garment.

- Finally, the bride is also dressed in a *clean garment*.

This word is the word translated “pure”.

We have been robed in garments, John writes, that have been given to us.

Theologically understood, our righteous purity and radiance must come from God who credits to our account the righteousness of Christ (Philippians 3:9).

However, notice the last part of verse 8 in Revelation 19.

. . . for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

In other words, there is both the gift of Christ in our wedding gowns, as well as the responsibility of the Christian which will evidently be apparent to everyone else. There is both a corporate sense to this wedding ceremony and a personal, individual sense to it as well.

This is the full picture of Ephesians 2:8-10.

For by grace are you saved through faith . . . not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Since good works do not get a person into heaven, many have wondered what difference good works will make in the future kingdom. These verses give one indication of a unique display of holy living.

Many evangelical scholars place the Bema seat during the Tribulation. This is the time of which Paul wrote in I Corinthians 3 and II Corinthians 5 when the people of God are rewarded for their faithful, good works. This is not to determine if we will be in the bridal party – everyone at the Bema is a believer.

However, it will determine your position in the coming Kingdom and, according to this text in Revelation 19:8, it will affect the look of your own wedding garment.

I like to think of this as a graduation robe. All the graduates have one, or they would not be in the line. Some are simple and plain, while others have embroidered work signifying honors. Some have medallions hooked to their robe indicating highest honors. There are those among the faculty who have stripes and gold embroidery denoting their distinctive study and their degree.

When I march in my robe at Shepherds Seminary's commencement I have stripes of red velvet on the arms of my gown signifying my degrees and another stripe denoting my position as the president of the seminary. Fortunately none of it reveals my grade point average while going through college and seminary!

This is the point of the bridal gown. It will not be negative – informing people of something we did not do – but will reflect what we have done for Christ.

Elders will have special crowns for having faithfully shepherded the sheep; martyrs for Christ will also wear unique crowns for their testimony; those who persevered under severe trials will be uniquely rewarded; those who pursued a holy lifestyle will also be uniquely marked.

When the bride marches in the bridal procession, the gown will simply reflect the glory of God that we allowed, by our obedience, to work through us while on earth.

I cannot help but wonder what my wedding garment will look like. What will yours look like?

One author wrote,

How true it is, we weave on earth what we wear in heaven. Sometimes the reality of that has not sunk in, that how we use the gifts God gave us on earth will determine the way we are presented with the Bridegroom when He comes. This is a challenging thought. It reminds me of the familiar lines, "Only one life, 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last."^{viii}

Now we are not told whether the wedding ceremony takes place in heaven after the rapture of the church and the subsequent Bema seat or on earth as the Millennial Kingdom begins.

John's vision in Revelation 19 seems to indicate that the wedding ceremony has just taken place in heaven. This is because of the fact that when Christ returns to earth and the bride with Him, we are already dressed in our wedding garments.

By the way, this is a strong argument for a pre-tribulational rapture. How else would the bride of Christ – the church – descend from heaven with Christ if they are on earth going through the Tribulation as it comes to a close?^{ix}

It is interesting that the church has not been mentioned since chapter 6 when the Tribulation began. And now that Christ is returning from heaven, guess what? The church is clearly mentioned again – and she is with Christ in His return.

The church has obviously been presented in the Father's house for some time. Already rewarded at the Bema seat, already clothed in the garments of the bride, each of us, members of the bride, will be overwhelmed with gratitude, for none of us will have reflected on our wedding garments all that we wished – and we will have all the more reason to praise our Lord for His amazing grace.

We are in the wedding party and the wedding march has begun. "Here Comes the Bride" is playing throughout the universe.

It is fascinating the way the progression of prophetic scripture reflects the romance and ritual of a Jewish wedding during the days of Christ.

Now we are heading for the final stage of the wedding. It is time for the fourth event in the wedding of Christ and His church.

4. The wedding feast.

Notice verse 9.

Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" . . .

I do not suppose one can have a wedding without a wedding reception – a wedding feast. And in order to prepare for the right amount of food and beverages, there must be a guest list.

John writes a special blessing to all those invited to participate in the wedding feast – a celebration that will last for a thousand years of Christ's Kingdom on earth.

So, who are these who have RSVP'd for the wedding reception?

It cannot be the bride – the bride is not invited to her own wedding reception.

The wedding feast guests include:

- Old Testament believers – Matthew 8 and Luke 13 both refer to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as being in the kingdom;
- all the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11;
- John the Baptist, who described himself as a "friend of the bridegroom" (John 3:29);
- all who accepted Christ during the Tribulation – entering the Kingdom to serve in their mortal bodies;
- Israel, who converted to Christ, their Messiah, during the Tribulation.^x

John Phillips writes,

In they come, rank after endless rank – the patriarchs, the prophets, the princes, the priests, the scribes and the sages – all those whose names are written down in glory. They greet the Groom and the bride; they take their places at the table; they are full of joy and they are blessed of God. And this is Christ's wedding feast.^{xi}

Ladies and gentlemen, this wedding feast will last a thousand years and culminate in the new earth and the new heaven.

John the Apostle is so overwhelmed with the fulfillment of all of this he falls at the feet of the angel and starts praising him.

The angel says to him, in verse 10,

. . . "Do not do that . . . worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

What does this angel mean? He means:

- prophecy is, at its core, about Jesus;
- Christ's coming, both the first time and the second time, is the content of prophecy;
- Jesus Christ is the culmination and climax of prophecy;
- we cannot go any higher than Him;
- we cannot speak of anyone greater than Him.

This is why the book is rightly named after the first few words in Revelation chapter 1 verse 1 – this book is,

The Revelation of Jesus Christ . . .

Prophecy finds all of its delights, joys, and fulfillments in Him.

Wedding Blessings

There are two more insights from Jewish weddings that we find fulfilled in the coming of Christ with His bride.

As a part of the orthodox Jewish wedding, the ceremony concludes with the delivery of seven blessings; seven statements are delivered. The seventh blessing is this prayer: "In this seventh blessing, we pray for the time when Messiah will come to redeem us from exile so that peace and tranquility will reign over the world."

This is exactly what is happening in Revelation 19. The final blessing has come true at the close of this wedding ceremony.

However, there is more. In a typical Jewish wedding, as the wedding feast is about to begin, the bride and groom drink from a cup of wine. This is done as a sign of their rejoicing.

Think of this – as this grandest of all wedding ceremonies comes to an end and the feast is about to begin, Jesus Christ will fulfill His promise made long ago to His disciples, commemorated by the church every time we lift that little cup to our lips in remembrance of Him.

Jesus Christ told us that He would not drink of the fruit of the vine until He drank it new with us – where?

. . . in [the] kingdom. (Matthew 26:29)

So now, as He lifts to His lips the new wine, He fulfills with His bride this promise, now 2,000 years old.

At this time, it finally happens. The wedding feast and the reign of Messiah begins at last.

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- ⁱ Alfred Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life (Eerdmans, 1984), p. 146.
- ⁱⁱ Ibid.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Kendell H. Easley, Holman New Testament Commentary: Revelation (Holman, 1998), p. 349.
- ^{iv} Fred H. Wight, Manners and Customs of Bible Lands (Moody Press, 1953), p. 128.
- ^v John MacArthur, Revelation: Volume 2 (Moody Press, 2000), p. 202.
- ^{vi} Wight, p. 130.
- ^{vii} Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 855.
- ^{viii} Sam Gordon, Revelation: Worthy is the Lamb (Ambassador, 2000), p. 388.
- ^{ix} Robert Thomas, Revelation: Volume 2 (Moody Press, 1995), p. 366.
- ^x David Jeremiah, Escape the Coming Night (Word, 2001), p. 222; MacArthur, p. 204.
- ^{xi} John Phillips, Exploring Revelation (Loizeaux Brothers, 1991), p. 230.