

No More!

Heaven on Earth – Part II

Revelation 21:2-4

Introduction

No matter where we travel or what culture we study, we discover the world's fascination with weddings. I did a little research on cultural customs of weddings and found more than I have time to repeat.

There is the Armenian tradition that on the night before the ceremony the groom's family brings beautifully wrapped boxes to the bride's family. The boxes contain the veil, the shoes, perfume, and even chocolate candy.

You might have heard of "jumping the broom" in a wedding ceremony. This is a tradition that traces its roots back to the days of slavery when slaves were forbidden to marry. They created a ritual to represent the beginning of their new life together that was tantamount to an exchange of rings that they could not afford. "Jumping the broom" was binding.

In the Czech Republic the tradition began that the bride and groom were to wear something old, something new, and something borrowed. This supposedly prepared the couple for a life in which they would no doubt have to borrow some things, be able to buy some new things, as well as put up with some old things.

A Czech wedding reception starts with someone in the wedding party breaking a plate at the feet of the bride and groom. The newlyweds have to sweep up the broken pieces to show their willingness to work together.

I discovered that the traditional German ceremony does the same thing as the Czechs, but goes further and breaks a number of dishes and bowls into pieces at the wedding reception. They believe this prepares the couple for the trials of life – either that or for a really big argument in the kitchen.

Towards the middle of the reception party, returning to the Czech Republic, all the groomsmen will kidnap the bride. The groom must then find her within a specific period of time or give the groomsmen money to buy her back. This symbolizes the fact that he will give everything he owns to take care of her.

At the end of the wedding reception, following the traditional national wedding song, the bride's veil and the groom's shoes are carried around by the best man and maid of honor so that guests can put in money for the couple. I think this money ought to go to the parents.

I found it funny that on the night before a traditional Irish wedding the groom is invited to the bride's house where he is served a cooked goose. In America this would not have a positive meaning as the expression "your goose is cooked" is anything but positive.

One traditional Swedish custom seemed bizarre. During the wedding, the bride and groom enter the church together and the head of their future household is determined by whoever can say "I do" the loudest. This makes a lot of sense!

I learned of a Latin American custom in which the groom is not allowed to see his bride before the wedding day, and it is the father of the bride's job to actually keep her hidden before the wedding. The father then brings her to the wedding ceremony to give her away. He could also keep his daughter hidden and never give her away – okay, I made that part up, but someone should start this custom.

One custom I have actually had the privilege of seeing is an Asian custom that was incorporated into a wedding stateside. A young man I knew was marrying a missionary's daughter who had grown up overseas. They incorporated the custom which included a ribbon tied across the middle aisle of the church in a beautiful bow. When the father and his daughter came down the aisle and the pastor asked, "Who gives this woman to be married to this man," the father responded, "Her mother and I," and then untied the bow and escorted her past the ribbon to her waiting bridegroom.

Notice that this includes the moment everyone loves to see at a wedding. It is that moment when the bridal procession begins and the bride starts her walk down the aisle. Every head is turned and every neck is craned to catch a glimpse of the beautiful bride being escorted down the aisle.

- What a sight all of us who are married men can well remember. Amen?
- We can all remember that moment. Amen?
- Every bride is beautiful, and yours was the most beautiful ever. Amen?

It is true that every bride makes a beautiful appearance at the wedding.

The traditional American wedding has the bride and groom dressed as royalty. No matter what their station in life, this is the moment when they appear in public as royalty; they are a princess and a prince.

During the days of Christ, the bride and groom would borrow from their wealthiest associates and friends to dress up in a way that allowed them to play the role of king and queen for a day.

Jesus Christ spoke to His disciples with wedding imagery when He promised them, and us, “I am going away to my Father’s house and I’m going to prepare a place for you.” (John 14:3 paraphrased)

God the Father is the Father of the bride – believers are called the “children of God” (John 1:12).

God is pictured as the one who gave life to the bride – He brought her from death to life; from sin to salvation.

The believer is the beloved bride of God the Son. Christ is our Kinsman Redeemer. We, as believers, are Ruth, and He is Boaz. We were foreigners and destitute strangers, but He loved us and bought us by paying the redemption price of His own life blood.

In Revelation we have already read of the marriage of the Lamb to His bride – the redeemed (Revelation 19:7).

Now as the new heavens and new earth are created and the eternal state is about to be entered by God and His beloved redeemed, all of human history literally culminates in wedding imagery.

In Revelation chapter 21, “Here Comes the Bride” takes on new and eternal meaning. I invite you back to this great chapter that introduces us to the glory of God and His heaven.

I want to make three major observations in our study today:

- First, heaven’s permanent relocation;
- Secondly, heaven’s primary relationship;
- Thirdly, heaven’s profound reversal.

Heaven’s Permanent Relocation

Let us get a running start at Revelation 21:1.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away . . .

There may be some confusion as to the reference to heaven in this verse, especially because it appears as a singular noun. The Greek word is “ouranos” (οὐρανός), and it is used throughout the New Testament to refer to one of three places. There are three heavens, so to speak.

1. The first heaven could be called “the home of the sparrows or the birds”.

The first heaven is the atmosphere around us.

Jesus Christ used this same word that John used in Revelation when He said in Matthew 6:26,

Look at the birds of the air [“ouranos” or literally, the heavens] . . .

James used this word when he referred to,

. . . the sky [heaven] poured rain . . . (James 5:18)

This first heaven is the atmosphere – the sky – which for us is Carolina blue.

We could refer to the first heaven as “the home of the sparrows”.

2. The second heaven could be called “the home of the stars”.

This is the astronomical heaven – the outer universe of stars, planets, and galaxies.

Jesus Christ predicted the coming tribulation when the power of heaven will be shaken – the sun darkened and the stars falling, as it were, out of their orbit (Matthew 24:29).

The book of Hebrews uses this word in the context of Jesus Christ, the Creator, when we are told that He laid the foundation of the earth and created by His hands the heavens (Hebrews 1:10).

These references to “heavens” are the same word “ouranos,” only in these instances it is referring to the universe – the heaven which happens to be the home of the stars.

We have “the home of the sparrows” and “the home of the stars”.

3. The third heaven could be called “the home of the saints”.

This is the place of God’s throne where the spirits of deceased believers are immediately transported.

This is the heaven that was in mind when Christ said in Matthew 5:16,

Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

The apostle Paul is transported and given a tour that he writes about afterward when he says he was taken up to the third heaven and was so enraptured by the tour of heaven that he did not even know if he had a body or not (II Corinthians 12:2).

We have:

- the first heaven, which is “the home of sparrows”;
- the second heaven, which is “the home of sun, moon, and stars”;
- the third heaven, which is the biblical description of God’s home and the home of the believer, the saints.

When John uses the word “heaven” in verse 1 of Revelation chapter 21, he is referring to “the home of the sparrows” and “the home of the stars”.

God effectively creates a new universe – a new earth and a new first and second heaven.

The reason I want to point this out is because John will use the same word in two verses and these verses will refer to different heavens.

In verse 1, John will refer to the first and second heavens; that is, God will create a new earth and a new atmosphere and universe. In other words, the first creation is passed away and there will be a second creation.

In verse 2 of Revelation chapter 21, John will use the word “heaven” to refer to the third heaven; that is, “the home of the saints”. Notice John’s words in verse 2,

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God . . .

This informs us that God does not replace this third heaven with a new one. Instead of replacing it, it is actually relocated when the new Jerusalem is brought down to the new earth.ⁱ

This is the heavenly city that Abraham looked for...

. . . which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. (Hebrews 11:10)

Hebrews 12:22-23 says,

But you have come . . . to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels,

to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect

This new Jerusalem comes from the third heaven. It is the golden city in which God occupies His throne and, with His saints, displays His glory. It is seen by John descending and literally becoming the capital city of the eternal state on a new earth surrounded by a new universe.

We have been singing about this for years, without even realizing it, most likely, when we sing the hymn text:

This is my Father’s world,

The battle is not done;

Jesus who died shall be satisfied,

And earth and heaven be one.ⁱⁱ

This is all about the sovereign Lord. This is all about the supremacy and satisfaction of Jesus Christ in His new creation! It is glorious.

Note the way John refers to this city in verse 2.

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready . . .

Stop at this point for a minute.

The city is “made ready”. The Greek word for this means “prepared”.

This is the same word used by the Lord Jesus when He told His disciples,

. . . I go to prepare a place for you. (John 14:2)

Hebrews 11:16 says of the saints of old,

. . . they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

This uses the same word for “prepared”.

The apostle Paul uses this word when he says of heaven,

. . . Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. (I Corinthians 2:9 KJV)

All the saints of all time now experience the finishing touch as this city literally touches down and rests on a new earth.

Heaven and earth are one – the eternal state officially begins, and it will never end.

Now notice the way John begins his description, which will become very specific later on. He writes in verse 2,

. . . I saw the . . . new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

The word “adorned” is the Greek word “cosmeo” (κοσμεω). We get our English word “cosmetics” from this. It refers to the bride who has put on her cosmetics. The word means “to adorn, to decorate, to make beautiful”.ⁱⁱⁱ

Throughout the Bible, the beloved of God is referred to as a bride. Israel is called the bride of Jehovah; the church is called the bride of Christ.^{iv}

As John describes for us the permanent relocation of the city, the focus is on the beauty of the bride. John effectively says, “Here comes the bride – beautifully adorned and readied for her beloved.”

He will know us by name, for we will have trusted in His name alone. Even now, we are members of this everlasting bridal party as the bride of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

By the way, if the name Jesus Christ is not the name of your Bridegroom, you will not be a member of the bridal party. The name matters.

I found this out in the most embarrassing way possible. Years ago, I remember making the worst of mistakes – I called the bridegroom by the wrong name.

The groom’s name was Richard. However, I had performed a wedding a few months earlier and the groom’s name was Robert. To save time as I prepared my wedding notes, I cut and pasted the vows – and forgot to change the name from Robert to Richard. The moment came for the wedding vows and I looked at the bride and asked her to repeat after me, “I, Suzanne, take you, Robert, to be my lawfully wedded husband.”

The bride just froze and stared at me. The color drained from her cheeks. I looked down and realized what I had done, but then got flustered. I scanned my notes – was it Robert, Richard, Richard Roberts, or Robert Richards? “Do you want him or not?”

Have you ever seen the airplane commercial that asks, “Want to get away?” “You bet – quickly!”

I realized my mistake and finally got the bride married to the right man.

Let me tell you, the name mattered.

In the same way, the name matters with our eternal Bridegroom.

- . . . ***there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)***
- . . . ***Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved. (Romans 10:13)***
- . . . ***what must I do to be saved?***
. . . Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved . . .
(Acts 16:30-31)

The name of your bridegroom matters.

[We are] looking for that blessed hope and the appearing of . . . our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus (Titus 2:13)

You are going to be left at the altar if you have put your hope in another bridegroom. You will be a jilted bride if you have put your trust in another.

However, Jesus Christ will keep His word. He said,

. . . I go to prepare a place for you.

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

(John 14:2b-3)

Count on this.

John says, “Here He comes and with Him comes His bride.”

John focused for a moment on the beauty of the bride in verse 2. Now, in verse 3, John will focus on the Father of the Bride as we move from heaven’s permanent relocation to another aspect of heaven.

Heaven’s Primary Relationship

Notice Revelation 21:3.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is

among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them

The glory of heaven is the glory of God.

We – as believers, the bride – are nothing without Him.

The stunning aspect in John’s revelation is that God dwells permanently with His beloved.

The Bible gives us an interesting record of the dwelling places of God. First, God walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Then He dwelt with Israel in the tabernacle, and later the temple – His glory filling the holy of holies. Later, Jesus Christ came to earth and made tabernacle among us (John 1:14). Literally, He came and pitched His tent among mankind. Today, God does not live in man-made temples (Acts 7:48), but in the bodies of His redeemed – we are the temple of God; He also dwells in the assembly of His church (Ephesians 2:22).^v

It is literal, yet invisible. We worship Him whom we cannot see.

This will change, however. Note the emphasis of John’s words when he writes at the end of verse 3,

... God Himself will be among them

God Himself.

We cannot understand what this is going to look like, but we are told that we will experience the glorious manifestation of the triune God upon His glorious throne.

The greatest miracle of this new universe, our new bodies, and this new earth will be the fact that we will individually have physical access to the glory of God, seen through Jesus Christ.

Jesus prayed to His Father in the high priestly prayer,

Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory ... (John 17:24)

Our eyes will see Him, our ears will hear Him, and we will behold His glory – the glory as of the Father.

Heaven’s greatest treasure will be our access to the throne of God and face-to-face fellowship with the physical embodiment of God – Jesus Christ our Bridegroom.

Jesus Christ said,

... I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am ... (John 14:3 NIV)

Jesus Christ promised His disciples that He would eat with them in His kingdom. This will be a foretaste of His physical presence with all the redeemed in fellowship so unique and so personal that we cannot imagine it. However, this is what makes heaven truly heaven.

Going to heaven without Jesus Christ would be like a bride going on her honeymoon without her groom.^{vi}

It would be like a bride moving into a new home built by her husband, but on moving day finding out that her husband has decided to live in a house in another country.

There would be no joy for the bride in the Father’s house – this golden city – spectacular as it is, without the Bridegroom.

There we, the bride, will see Him as our feeble faith is turned into perfected sight, and ...

... we will see Him just as He is. (I John 3:2b)

John reveals a permanent relocation of heaven, and with great joy he emphasizes the primary relationship in heaven with our Lord. He will now reveal a profound reversal in heaven.

Heaven’s Profound Reversal

Our focus moves from the beauty of the bride and the Father of the bride to the future of the bride.

Notice Revelation 21:4.

and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain ...

John describes the joy of heaven by telling us not only what will be there, but what will not be there. In fact, things in heaven are so difficult to describe, some of the first details given to us by John are things that are not there.

One author commented on this passage by saying, heaven will be the place of “no more”.^{vii}

No more death, sadness, crying, or pain.

It is as if God shouts in triumph and the believer with Him, “That’s it! We’ll have none of that in here. No more!”

Notice again the first statement in verse 4.

... He will wipe away every tear from their eyes ...

One of the first corrections we need to make in our thinking about heaven is that many take this statement out of context and assume we will never weep again; that our emotions will be so transformed that even tears of joy will not be shed.

I believe, along with a number of authors who have reminded me of the context of this passage, these are tears related to the events of life that bring sadness. In other words, we will not shed even one tear ever again because of death, sadness, or pain.

However, this does not mean we will not weep for joy or be moved by the glory of God and weep over the thrill of His grace. In fact, I am looking forward to having my emotions perfected so that I can weep more.

John is saying that God is going to wipe out disappointment; He is going to wipe out sadness and not one tear will fall – the Greek language emphasizes – because the context of sadness and pain will be forever gone.

There will be no tears of misfortune, tears over lost love, tears of remorse, or tears of regret.^{viii}

Notice that John specifically mentions four “no mores”. The first mentioned is,

... no [more] ... death ...

When Adam and Eve fell in the garden, the first intrusion into a fallen world was death.

At the outset of fallen humanity and to this very day, the promise of God has been kept – You sin and...

... you will surely die. (Genesis 2:17b)

In heaven there will be no more death. This has vast implications, from the animal kingdom recreated by Christ to the very cellular structure of our bodies. Not even one cell will die – there is nothing of death in His new creation.

This means we will never feel fatigued. Nothing of our bodies will need replenishing.

This is, indeed, eternal rest.

However, this does not mean inactivity. This is not the rest of a rest home where tired people sit, too exhausted to walk very far. This is not the people outside Cracker Barrel who fill up all those rocking chairs so *you* cannot sit down and play checkers – of all the nerve.

Heaven is perpetual, ongoing, never-ending, never-dying, even at the molecular level of life. Your body and mine will be as active as God commands, but it will never experience fatigue or wear and tear.

This means no more weakness, disease, or decay – not even a cavity – and the coffin, the funeral, and the grave will be things forgotten. The word “goodbye” will never be heard again.

John goes further and writes,

... there will no longer be any mourning ...

This can be translated “sorrow”.

In the late 1800s, Pastor and educator J. C. Ryle wrote,

Our worldly goods are taken from us and we have sorrow; we are encompassed with difficulties and troubles and we have sorrow; our friends forsake us and look coldly on us and we have sorrow; those whom we love and we have sorrow; our own hearts are frail and full of corruption and that brings sorrow; we are persecuted and opposed for the Gospel's sake and that brings sorrow; we see those who are near and dear to us refusing to walk with God and that brings sorrow. Oh, what a sorrowing, grieving world we live in.^{ix}

In heaven, however, there will be no sorrow. God will say, “Enough!”

There is another “no more” in this text. John writes,

... there will no longer be any ... crying ...

You might ask, “Isn't this redundant?”

This reference to crying is another Greek word entirely – it is the word “krauge” (κραυγή), which refers to “shouting” or “screaming”. This is literally someone crying out in either grief or anxiety, whether real or imagined.^x

This word is used in Greek literature in a number of contexts: this is the cry of anguish; this is the scream of anger; this is the lamenting cry of the guilty; this is the weeping of the condemned on their way to their execution; this is the cry of the mob as they rush to kill Stephen in Acts 7; this is the cry of a woman in labor; this is the sobbing of the depressed; this is the anguished wail of captured inhabitants of a defeated city as they are taken into slavery.^{xi}

No more! There will no longer be any cause for this kind of crying.

John writes further,

... there will no longer be any ... pain ...

Again this takes us back to the curse of Adam and Eve. Eve was promised multiplied pain in childbirth (Genesis 3:16); Adam was promised a stubborn earth to plow that would grow painful thorns (Genesis 3:17-18).

This fallen couple soon experienced the shock and sadness of the death of their son by the hand of their other son. Ever since, pain has become a passenger on every train and in every compartment of life.

We cannot outrun it; we cannot erase it; we cannot hide from it; we cannot shelter ourselves away from it; we cannot be vaccinated against it. Pain is part of life.

Job said it well when he lamented,

. . . man is born for trouble, [just] as sparks fly upward. (Job 5:7)

We experience not only physical pain, but emotional and mental pain as well.

No more pain means no more asylums, no more triage, no more prosthetics, no more hospitals and emergency rooms, no more fever, no more arthritis, no more broken hearts, no more arguments, no more fights or hurt feelings, no more shattered dreams or missed opportunities, no more damaged relationships . . . [No more fearful anxieties, no more painful consequences, no more prison sentences, no more painful memories.]^{xii}

God says, “No more pain – of any kind!”

This is the last time we read the word “pain” in the Bible.

John writes at the end of verse 4,

. . . [these] first things have passed away.

In other words, this was the old order of things; this was the old way of life, the old earth, and old world system.

This is all gone forever. Do you grasp the significance of this?

The apostle John is actually describing the reversal of the effects of sin and of the curse.

Heaven is *the great reversal!*

Death into life

Sorrow into song

Crying into the consolation of Christ

And pain into pleasure.

Do you know what this means to the believer? This means no matter what we might have gone

through in the past, or what we might be going through today, it is not the last word.^{xiii}

It is not the last word!

This is the last word! God has written the final chapters! God will have the final say. And what He says is glorious.

ⁱ Randy Alcorn, Heaven (Tyndale House, 2004), p. 253.

ⁱⁱ Maltbie D. Babcock, The Worship Hymnal (Lifeway, 2008), p. 46.

ⁱⁱⁱ Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 857.

^{iv} Donald Grey Barnhouse, Revelation: God’s Last Word (Zondervan, 1971), p. 400.

^v Warren W. Wiersbe, Revelation: Be Victorious (Victor Books, 1987), p. 146.

^{vi} Alcorn, p. 181.

^{vii} Ray Stedman, God’s Final Word: Understanding Revelation (Discovery House, 1991), p. 338.

^{viii} John MacArthur, Revelation: Volume 2 (Moody Press, 2000), p. 269.

^{ix} John MacArthur, The Glory of Heaven Appendix Four: J. C. Ryle (Crossway Books, 1997), p. 259.

^x Rienecker and Rogers, p. 859.

^{xi} Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Volume 3, ed. by Gerhard Kittel (Eerdmans, 1965), p. 898.

^{xii} Sam Gordon, Worthy is the Lamb: Revelation (Ambassador, 2000), p. 424.

^{xiii} Philip W. Comfort, Life Application Bible Commentary: Revelation (Tyndale House, 2000), p. 256.