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Title: Married To God

Scripture: Revelation 21:1-5

Topic: Bride of Christ

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Married To God

Revelation 21:1-5

James C. Denison, Ph.D.

This is the season for weddings. I've performed three in the last three weeks, with more to come. Fortunately, each of the grooms I've married knew that he was marrying over his head, as I did. Not all husbands are this wise.

For instance, a friend sent me this unfortunate story: "When our lawn mower broke and wouldn't run, my wife kept hinting to me that I should get it fixed. But somehow I always had something else to take care of first--the truck, the car, fishing, always something more important to me.

"Finally she thought of a clever way to make her point. When I arrived home one day, I found her seated in the tall grass, busily snipping away with a tiny pair of sewing scissors. I watched silently for a short time and then went into the house.

"I was gone only a few minutes. When I came out again I handed her a toothbrush. 'When you finish cutting the grass,' I said, 'you might as well sweep the sidewalk.'

"The doctors say I will walk again, but I will always have a limp." As he should.

This summer we've surveyed a number of images and metaphors for the church. We've learned that we are his "saints," called out to belong to him. We are his new creation, the temple of his Holy Spirit, branches on his vine, his "building." Today we learn that we are his bride and he is our Groom. We learn that being ready for our wedding in eternity is the best way to live today. And we learn why.

For those days when you wonder if your life matters much, whether anyone really knows or cares about you, whether you're going anywhere significant or your days are worthwhile, remember this fact: you are the Bride of Christ. Today it is my privilege to show you why that fact is our hope.

Know that you belong to Christ

Have you ever wondered why Catholic nuns do not marry? According to official Church teaching, they *are* married--to Christ. We Baptists may not have known that about nuns. And we may not know that we have joined them--we are married to Jesus as well. We are already the bride of Christ. Our marriage has already been arranged.

In first-century Judaism, marriages were always arranged. Sometimes between a man and his prospective wife's family, sometimes between parents of children. Then the time would come when the couple would enter into a formal engagement. This would last for a year. They were considered to be married in every way except physically. She still lived with her family, and he still lived in his home. If he were to die during that year,

she would be considered a widow, and would in fact be called "the virgin who is a widow."

Then would come the day of their wedding, when they would consummate their marriage and live together for the rest of their lives.

You and I are in the formal engagement period with Jesus. The moment you asked him to become your Lord and Savior, you became his "bride." The New Testament consistently refers to Jesus as the "Bridegroom" (John 3:29; Matthew 9:15). Paul told the Corinthians, "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). You and I are engaged to be married to Jesus. We can belong to no one else. We are completely his. And soon our wedding day will come.

Rejoice that he is preparing your eternal mansion

When it does, everything we have done to be ready will be worth its cost and more. We will move into a new home with our Bridegroom: "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" (v. 1).

No more of this fallen, decayed, corrupted planet. No hurricanes or earthquakes or cancer or AIDS. No more disease or disaster. Not even any "sea," that which had separated John on Patmos from his beloved church in Ephesus. We move out of the rundown old shack where we live today into a mansion with streets of gold and gates of pearl.

Our Groom has a "mansion" he has been building for us in glory. He is a master carpenter. We cannot begin to imagine what our home will be like, for "no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

When this happens, we will be united with our Groom for all time: "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" (v. 3). When we are with him, we will have all that our hearts yearn for today: "In thy presence *is* fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Psalm 16:11, KJV).

We will receive "an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:4).

We will "eat at the feast in the kingdom of God" (Luke 14:15).

We'll have perfect understanding there: "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

We will be in "paradise" (Luke 23:43), the walled garden of the king. The good comes, the bad is gone: "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" (v. 4).

Not a single evidence of our fallen world will be left. Not a single day spent in pain or grief, guilt or loss. All of that is gone. The life we had before is no more. We are now married to God, and will live with him in his mansion for all time.

Be ready for your wedding today

But none of us knows when the time of our wedding will come. Only the Father, the One who has arranged our marriage and is preparing our wedding knows that. Not even the Son, the Bridegroom, knew when the moment would come. And so we must each one be ready, as if it were today. We must use earth to be ready for heaven. We must live every day prepared for it to be our last day, ready for the time when our Groom comes and our wedding commences and eternity begins.

How?

We share our faith, for we want as many as possible to be part of the Wedding. Every person you know will spend eternity either in paradise with God or separated from his blessed heaven forever. You hold the invitation to the Wedding. Why wouldn't you give it to everyone you can?

We do all we can to improve life on this earth, because we want the King who is our Groom to be pleased with his kingdom when he returns. We must do all we can to end racism and war, poverty and disease, environmental and relational sin. We want to show him that we managed his property well, that we took good care of his estate while he was gone, that we loved his people as he loves them.

We spend our days in personal holiness, for we want our Groom to be pleased with his Bride when he comes for us. The Bible describes sin as spiritual adultery, for that is what it is. We want our garments to be white and holy.

Listen to C. S. Lewis: "If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven.

It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this." We want our lives and world to be ready for our Groom when he comes for his bride. If it were today, would you be ready?

So we are to live for the future because this is the best way to redeem the present. We are to live for heaven because this is the best way to live on earth. We are to be ready for eternity because this is the best way to be ready for tomorrow. Why?

Lewis continues: "Aim at Heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in': aim at earth and you will get neither. It seems a strange rule, but something like it can be seen at work in other matters. Health is a great blessing, but the moment you make health one of your main, direct objects you start becoming a crank and imagining there is something wrong with you. You are likely to get health provided you want other things more--food, games, work, fun, open air. In the same way, we shall never save civilisation (sic) as long as civilisation is our main object. We must learn to want something else even more" (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* 118-9).

When I live for heaven and eternity, I am motivated to teach God's word today in a way which will please him, not just to fulfill my Sunday morning responsibilities--and that makes me a better pastor. (God save us from those who preach only because it is Sunday.)

When you live for heaven and eternity, you care more for the souls and eternal lives of your employees than their monetary value to you--and that makes you a better employer. You care more about your integrity than you do your salary--and that makes you a better employee. You care more about the wellbeing of your clients or patients than their ability

to pay you--and that makes you a better lawyer or doctor. You care more about the souls of your friends than their popularity or status--and that makes you a better friend.

When we live for heaven, we live our best lives on earth. All the while, we please and honor our Groom for this time when we are engaged but not yet married. And when the wedding hour comes, we will be glad forever that we were ready.

Conclusion

Are you ready? If our Groom were to come this morning for us, would you be pleased to see him? What would you do differently if you knew it were today?

Never wonder again if your life has value or significance, for the God of the universe, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords chose you for his Bride. He is working right now to prepare your mansion in his paradise. If you will use today to prepare for eternity, you will find your days filled with joy and purpose. And one day, all you have done to serve and follow him will be worth its cost and so much more.

We just celebrated our nation's 231th birthday this week, largely because of the bravery of men and women who have served and died for our freedom across the generations. One example of such bravery is the troops left behind by General Douglas MacArthur when he was forced to retreat from the Philippines in 1941.

MacArthur left Lt. General Jonathan Wainwright in charge and promised to return. Those men he left on the peninsula of Bataan continued to fight for freedom and serve their country. They lived, and some died, as loyal and faithful soldiers.

Two and a half years later, the General returned. In a radio broadcast he issued this statement: "This is the voice of freedom, General MacArthur speaking. People of the Philippines, I have returned." In the meanwhile, their hope made them the best soldiers they could be. It kept them going through the hardest days of war. And it was more than repaid when their General came for them.

Your Groom is coming for you. We're one day closer to the wedding than we've ever been. Are you ready today?