

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The Church of Christ: The Bride of Christ

When did you last attend a wedding? Perhaps it was your own? It is worth remembering the occasion. One thing is common with all weddings and that is that everyone is very happy, not just for themselves, but particularly for the bride and bridegroom. Then, at the occasion, the guests will be taking their places, glad to see the bridegroom arrive. How thrilled he looks, it is his wedding day. When all is ready, everyone waits for the arrival of the bride. Do you remember hearing the expression "Isn't she radiant"? Or, again, "Those two are very much in love"! But this is just what you would expect. It is a wedding!

Our subject today is "The Bride of Christ". This is the third statement of Scripture setting out the different aspects of the Church of God. You will remember that we have already spoken of "The Body of Christ" and "The House of God". When we look at the Bible, we turn to a Book, full of helpful and accurate illustrations, describing the truth which is being declared.

In portraying the group of believers on earth as "the body of Christ", it is wonderful to see that the Lord has in mind the harmonious action of all His people together, with Him as the Head, each one being directed by Him for the good of the whole. This is just how the natural body works. But this group of believers needs order. It needs discipline, such as one should find in any household. Again, there is One over the house, the Lord Himself. Each member of the household needs to maintain the discipline of the house and follow the direction of the Head.

When we come to the reference to the Bride of Christ, the great thought behind it is that of the tremendous and persistent love of Christ. This love caused His death at Calvary and through this love He will fully consummate every blessing, already planned and prepared, for His people, His Bride, in the coming day. What more apt description could the Holy Spirit use than "the Bride of Christ"! We have to admit that we fail abysmally when it comes to our part in maintaining the truth of the "Body of Christ" and even in the order we maintain in the "House of God". When it comes to the "Bride of Christ", we have no responsibility in this. It is wholly of the Lord as He expresses His unbounded love for everyone who has seen the pain which He suffered on the cross and has sought His forgiveness from sin. Every such one is included in this title and is a recipient of that divine love of His.

Before discussing "The Bride of Christ" in more detail, let us just sense the excitement in heaven as we read the words in Revelation 19:7: "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready". What a scene!

The central Person is the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus, the Son of God. John 1:29 says, "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world". The next day also, as John was standing, verse 36 tells us, "looking upon Jesus as He walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God". Here is the One, of whom it is now said in heaven, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" (Revelation 5:12). The Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God, was slain upon the Cross at Calvary. He died to take the punishment for our sins. It is for Him a time of great joy and heaven also rejoices when "the marriage of the Lamb is come". This is the time when He is ready to consummate all the bride's blessings. So we note it is the marriage of the Lamb, the title which expresses so clearly His total sacrificial love for mankind. What a day that will be!

Now it may well be thought that Israel will be the bride of Christ. We need to look at the Scriptures. In the book of Hosea, in order to be able to speak with understanding to the nation, the prophet was bidden to take a wife. This wife was unfaithful to Hosea and God used this as an illustration of what the nation had become to Himself. Israel was the nation chosen to be God's people here on earth. Yet He says in Hosea 2:2, "she is not my wife, neither am I her husband." All the promise of a nation committed to Jehovah and His honour had failed. But this is not the end of the story. One day Israel is to be restored. This time is still to come. We read in Hosea 2:16, "It shall be at that day, saith the LORD, that thou shalt call me Ishi (that means, "my husband"); and shalt call me no more Baali (that is "my lord)". Verse 23 goes on to tell us, "I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God". Of the same coming time Isaiah speaks in Isaiah 54:5: "Thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is His name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall He be called". Isaiah 61:10 also comments on this recovery of Israel, "I will greatly

rejoice in the LORD... He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels". Israel is to be restored one day when the King of Kings will rule over the whole earth. We can see from the foregoing Scriptures that Israel's part as wife is when this "Holy One of Israel" is "God of the whole earth". Israel's future earthly blessing is, thus, assured.

By comparing this with the Scripture in the Revelation it will be seen that the marriage of the Lamb cannot refer to Israel, firstly because this marriage is in heaven (Revelation 19:1). Secondly, we have to note that the apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 11:2, "I have espoused you to one Husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ". This could never be said of an adulterous wife, restored in grace. Paul is speaking of the Corinthian church, as part, but representing the whole of the body of Christ. Is it not fitting, too, that where reference is made to "the Lamb", a term descriptive particularly of the sacrifice made by the Lord Jesus, the "bride" is composed of all those for whom He died?

It may be noted that, in the Old Testament, very little is said about the love of God. Undoubtedly He loved Israel and Jeremiah 31:3 reminds us of this. But the emphasis is on Israel loving God as a part of their legal requirement. When we come to the New Testament the emphasis is on what the Lord has done through His divine love for us. This is of tremendous value as we consider the union planned for the Bride. By comparison, what mockery man has made of the wonderful institution of marriage!

We will now look in detail at the Scripture in the Revelation. In understanding the book of Revelation we see, following the Lord's addresses to the churches in chapters 2 and 3, the scene moved to heaven. There follow various judgements but one matter stands out. As the true "church" is taken from the world, a form of religion continues, certainly not of God at all. We learn from Revelation 17 of "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and abominations (that is idolatries) of the earth".

Her profession is that of being true to God but, in fact, is totally opposed to God and seeks to corrupt all that come in contact with her. The language sets this out in fearful detail. This condition provided a barrier to earthly blessing. The whole system must first be judged and this judgement is carried out. At last there is rejoicing in heaven and, at last, all religious opposition to the Lamb has been dealt with. So all is now ready for "the marriage of the Lamb" (chapter 19). How striking to read of this tremendous joy in heaven and honour being given to the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ!

The next thing we read in Revelation 19:7 is that "His wife hath made herself ready". What a privilege to be a bride, His wife, but this occasion is for the bride of the Lamb! Who is this bride? Perhaps your thoughts also go back to Ephesians 5. There we read, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it" (verse 25). He goes on in verse 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". It has to be perfect.

Here is the love of the Lord Himself for the church and expressed by comparison to what our love to one another should be. We can clearly see the "bride" included in this term - the church - which is a real and live body. Now this includes every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, drawn together by the Holy Spirit since Pentecost and until the Lord comes. It includes every believer of whatever race or colour, Jew or Gentile. But notice, as you read through those verses in Ephesians 5, how with each statement, the Lord develops His great desire for His church and seeks to draw us closer to Himself:

- He is dependable - He is the Head of the church.
- He is unique - He is the Saviour of the body. Everything we have and are is through what He has done.
- He is love - He has loved the church to the full extent that He gave Himself - absolutely perfect.
- He will complete all things - He will present the church to Himself.

My fellow believer, this includes you! The wonderful thing is that we do not only hope that one day all will work out. We are already espoused to one whose love is true and sure. We have already referred to 2 Corinthians 11:2, "I have espoused you to one Husband..." In the ordinary course of a human engagement a ring is provided as a confirmation that the marriage will take place. So we are told in Ephesians 1:13-14, "after that ye believed, ye were sealed (with full authority for possession) with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest (the guarantee and assurance) of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession". The Holy Spirit indwells all believers as, amongst other things, an assurance that one day all will be complete, all the blessings of love will be consummated.

Now we come to two expressions concerning the "wife". The first - "hath made herself ready". Certainly this bride was ready when she followed the Lord into heaven. Her title to glory was provided by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus. But the moment has also come, in heaven, when "we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ". There the hidden things are brought to light, the hay, wood and stubble of our testimony on earth is burned - see 1 Corinthians 3:12-15. "Then every man shall have praise of God" (1 Corinthians 4:5).

The second expression is in Revelation 19:8 where we are told, "To her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints". What was this garment which was granted to her to wear? It was clean and white. The robe had been provided but now we also see that it was added to by the righteousnesses, the word is plural, of the saints. This includes all the blessed results produced in the life and service of believers by the work of the Holy Spirit and for the Lord's glory. There is an interesting verse in Psalm 45:14. Speaking of what is called "the king's daughter", we read, "She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee". It is generally agreed that the psalm is speaking of the coming of the Lord to reign on the earth in glory. Now it was the custom that before a marriage the bridegroom provided his bride with a white garment. Before the wedding the bride would work into this with needlework a descriptive pattern of all the glories which she saw in her husband-to-be. At the wedding this is the garment she will wear. What a picture this is of the "bride of Christ" whose garment has, woven into it, all those glories, called the "righteousnesses of saints" which have been part of their testimony to Him while in this world.

We next read, in verse 9, "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb". Now who are these? These are clearly distinct from the bride and form a separate group. We can look upon them as the guests who gladly rejoice at all that takes place. These cannot be angels for these have always been in the presence of God. Those called are privileged to be included and called to the occasion. In Hebrews 12:22-23 we have a further grouping. We do not have the time to go into the detail but that list includes "an innumerable company of angels"; it also includes the "church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven", the complete company of believers. The list ends with the phrase, "the spirits of just men made perfect". The expression cannot refer to members of the "body of Christ" because, at the time of the Lord's initial coming there are still those who are alive on the earth and are not "spirits" in heaven. These are distinct and would indicate that they are the Old Testament saints. We also can go back to John 3:29. Here John the Baptist refers to himself as a "friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice." Again, the Lord Jesus spoke of "the law and the prophets until John" (Luke 16:16). Clearly John was included with the Old Testament saints and had died before the Holy Spirit came after Pentecost. Here, then, are those who are called, Old Testament saints and they are called "blessed" too. They are distinct from the "bride of Christ".

We have now considered those lovely statements of Revelation 19 bringing us into closest union with our Lord, the Lamb, in heaven. We learn also that He is coming as King to reign over the earth. What will be the position of the "bride"? Is she left behind? Let us look at 21:9. We read of the angel that came to the apostle, saying, "Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God..." Thus, the holy Jerusalem, as the Lamb's wife, is not a city of bricks and mortar but descriptive of the whole body of the redeemed, an innumerable company of believers, saints gathered together. The bride is seen coming down out of heaven and having the glory of God. This is her position during the 1,000 years reign of the Lord and she is with Him, not on the earth but over the earth. Time prevents an analysis of the description given. However, briefly we can note that John saw the city as pure gold, typifying the righteousness of God in His nature. Every member of this "city" is now a sharer of that divine nature. The gates were each of one pearl. How descriptive of the "pearl" for which the Lord gave all that He had (Matthew 13:45). The golden street, like unto transparent glass, describes all the ways and walk of that city as righteous so that defilement is eternally impossible. There is no temple there. There is no need for access into the presence of God. "The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple" so that there is free and unhindered fellowship with God and His beloved Son. At this time of the millennial reign that union between "the Lamb and the bride" goes on in wonderful fellowship.

Lastly, let us look at the beginning of Revelation 21. Verses 1 to 8 describe eternity to come, beyond the millennial reign of Christ. We read in verse 2, "I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband". Now, 1,000 years after the marriage, she still maintains her bridal beauty and glory. The new heaven and new earth is to be the abiding place of all the redeemed. All will be pure. There is no longer a great usurper holding power as the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2), but the greatest thing of all is that "God Himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Revelation 21:3). What an air of expectation precedes this event! Oh, wonderful time when there will be everlasting joy, no tears, no death, no sorrow, no pain. All things are new. The final consummation of every blessing is there for the "bride". Can we ever doubt the love of the Lord Jesus towards those for whom He has died? My Christian friend, are you looking forward to that moment of great delight when you will be included in the eternal union of love? How can we cling to all the interests of this world as we think of these things. The hymnwriter, HF Lyte, desired the wonderful blessing of His presence even now, when he wrote:

*I need Thy presence every passing hour:
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who like Thyself my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.*

Let us close by reading the words of Revelation 22:7, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let Him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely". Oh, the great longing on the part of the Spirit of God and the bride that all this may come. Yet it is wonderful to note that the verse does not stop there. An opportunity still exists - right now - for the "thirsty" who have never received the refreshment of salvation to take of the water of life. Where do you stand? "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (verse 20).

Let us pray.

Blessed Lord Jesus, when we view this position of eternal love into which we, as believers, have been brought, what can we say? This love of Thine is more wonderful than we can ever appreciate here. Help us, Lord Jesus, to draw nearer to Thee so that our prayer will be: "even so, come, Lord Jesus".

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