

HEAVEN:
The Place of Everlasting Paradise!

Message 12

Scripture: Ephesians 5:22-32

INTRO: In our last message we looked at a very serious matter that will take place, we believe, in heaven; and that is the judgment called the judgment seat of Christ. It is a judgment that we should keep in mind, as we live our life here. If we die among the faithful or meet the Lord in the air, we will stand before the Lord to be judged. This is a very sobering fact.

But this morning, I want to share a most wonderful subject with you that will take place in heaven as well and that is the marriage of Christ and the Church. There is going to be a wedding celebration in heaven never equaled here on earth.

So, this morning I want to first give an understanding of the Jewish wedding and then show how it relates to Christ and the Church. Then we want to see where and when this wedding takes place and what all this has to do with the experience of those believers who make up what we call the Church. And in all of this, remember, as you look at the outline, we are looking at what heaven will be like after the resurrection. And in light of that, you may wonder, how is it that the Church is resurrected before Israel? Well, let me remind you from Daniel 9, that God's program is not quite completed with regard to that nation. One more, of the seventy sevens prophesied by Daniel has to take place after the Church is resurrected. And so let me take you briefly, to a passage that speaks of the exalted position of the Church with regard to Israel (Matt. 19:27-29).

Now after we consider the marriage of the Church we will take a look at an event that takes place in the middle of the tribulation and how heaven gains two more resurrected believers.

B. After the Resurrection

3. The marriage of the Church

The very first matter we want to take care of this morning is to gain an understanding of the Jewish wedding. I have covered this subject a

number of times, but for those who are not familiar with it, let me give at least a brief explanation of Jewish weddings and then show how this relates to Christ and the Church. The first step in the Jewish wedding was the selection of the bride. This used to be done by the parents. I understand that sometimes a couple who may be good friends decided even before they had children, that their children would marry if God blessed them with children of the opposite genders. Sometimes parents might make this arrangement between a young daughter and an older man. Then a dowry price was agreed on, that would be paid for the bride. Such a couple was at this point betrothed.

Usually the betrothal took place about a year before the wedding. The young man would go back home with his father and begin preparing a place for his wife to live with him in this prepared place which was at his parents place. The bride did not know exactly when her bridegroom would come but during that time she began to prepare for his return. Then one day, a shout would sound, and she knew her bridegroom was arriving. Hastily she would gather her things together and prepare to go with him back to his father's house. When they arrived back at the bridegroom's parents place, the private wedding would take place and the marriage would be consummated.

After the private marriage, came the marriage supper, the time of celebration. It was to this that the guests were invited. This celebration could last for days.

Now I have told you before that I believe, and many others believe so too, that this is a picture of the marriage of Christ and the Church. The Bridegroom is God's Son. The bride is the Church universal. The Father, of course is God. The Father's house, is the temple in heaven, in that 1500 mile cubed city. The price for the bride is the blood of God's own Son. The Son has been betrothed to the Church and He has returned to prepare a place for his bride. The bride is being prepared at this time. The bridegroom may

return at any time and the bride is to be ready at all times. Some day the Son will come and take His bride home and the marriage will take place. That is our subject this morning.

Now let me mention something I believe I have not mentioned in earlier messages. The Jewish bridegroom had, a 'Shoshben' in Hebrew or a 'Paranymp' in Greek. He was somewhat like our 'best man', only he had considerably larger responsibilities. He was involved from the time of betrothal and on until after marriage at times. If this couple experienced difficulties in their marriage, they might call on him. Ellicott says this in his commentary on John 3:29 that this friend, and I quote, "...was charged with the preliminaries of the marriage. He arranged the contract, acted for the bridegroom during the betrothal, and arranged for, and presided at, the festivities of the wedding-day itself. It was a position of honor, in proportion to the position of the bridegroom himself, and was given to his chief friend." And so, what we want to do now is to show how this relates to the experience of the resurrected believers of the Church.

So we want to first see the fact that there will be a marriage like this. We begin by considering this 'Shoshben'; best man. Turn with me to John 3 (read 22-30). John likens himself to the 'Shoshben' here, the friend of the bridegroom. So clearly he is referring to Jesus when he said, "He who has the bride is the bridegroom." We do not know at this point yet who the bride is, but we have both the friend of the Bridegroom and the Bridegroom here. That the Bridegroom refers to Jesus becomes even clearer in later Scriptures. In Luke 5:35, Jesus said this, "But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast." He is referring to Himself as a bridegroom.

Now that the Church universal is the bride is most clearly given in the epistles. Let us go to Ephesians 5 (read 22-33). The relationship of Christ and the Church is here pictured as that of a betrothed couple not yet married. And the

desire of the Lord is to have a bride that is without spot or wrinkle.

Now I want to show you that this wedding will take place in heaven. Turn with me now to John 14 (read 1-3). Do you remember when I spoke to you earlier about these mansions that I said I might destroy something precious to you and then I told you what the original word meant? Do you remember what that was? Listen to a quote from that message, "The original word in our text is 'monee'. It comes from the Greek verb, 'meno' which means to remain or stay or abide. So 'monee' means a place to stay or remain or abide and so on. There are numerous meanings, but the Dictionary of NT Theology says, "But perhaps the meanings which come closest to the 2 instances in the NT are a place of halt on a journey, an inn..." (III:229). Albert Barnes says, "It is applied by the Greek writers to the *tents* or temporary habitations which soldiers pitch in their marches. It denotes a dwelling of less *permanency* than the word *house*." I must add, however, that there are those who say that in secular Greek it had a variety of meanings such as abiding, tarrying, persistence, continuance and permanence (III:229.)"

Later we will see why this is a temporary dwelling place. For now we settle for the fact that this wedding will take place and this place is in heaven. Let me show that from one more passage in Revelation 19 (read 7-9). These verses are given in a context that speaks of a time just a short while before the tribulation comes to a close on earth. And verse 7 says 'the marriage' has come. The part of the marriage in view is the marriage supper, or the celebration stage of a wedding. We find this in verse 9 (read). So all the other parts of the marriage have been completed which means the private actual marriage is already past. The part of the wedding yet to come is that part that Jesus attended with His disciples in John 2.

Furthermore, the bridegroom, and now husband in this marriage is given to us in verse 7 as the

Lamb. We need not question who that is. And the woman in this marriage is now referred to as his 'wife'. In the Greek that is expressed as his 'woman'. If she were not yet married, she would be referred to as his *numphee*, his bride. So we can but conclude that this marriage takes place in heaven.

Let me make one more point from this passage. If Christ is the husband here, and the Church is the wife, and I can see no other alternative, then it gives some very important information on the timing of the rapture. It does not say that the rapture happens before the tribulation, but it does give clear evidence that before the end of the tribulation the Church is already in heaven. And so, while the tribulation goes on, on the earth and the 70th week of Daniel which is determined on Israel and Jerusalem, the Church is enjoying marital bliss with Christ in heaven.

And that brings me to another point and that is the reason why the relationship of Christ and the Church is likened to a marriage. The event that is about to take place in Revelation 19, called the marriage supper, follows the private marriage and the consummation of the marriage. It is that private marriage and the consummation of the marriage that the Church experiences with Christ in heaven before the event of Revelation 19 and this is important. You see, in the consummation of the marriage, husband and wife get to know each other intimately. In the Bible, in physical marriage it is called 'knowing' each other. Genesis 4:1 says, "Now Adam knew his wife..." It is for this reason, I believe, that the Church's relationship to Christ is likened to marriage. We will get to know Christ, in new and deeper ways that we could never experience here on earth. This will not be a physical, but a verbal getting to know.

I suppose that here, because of the close relationship of Christ and the Church, we will be able to ask those questions we could never get answered on earth. Because it is a husband/wife type relationship, we will not need to be afraid

to ask anything we wish. And Christ will rejoice to answer our questions. And when He answers us we will say, "Oh, wow. Oh, wow. Oh, now I see. Oh I am so thankful You did not do things the way I thought they should be. Oh, glory to God, those circumstances I so wished were otherwise now make so much sense. Now I understand. Oh, I am so glad I trusted You though I could not understand what was going on." And I suppose we will listen to other Christians asking their questions and as they are answered we will say, "Oh, wow Lord. You were doing all that while I was taken up with my own little world. Oh Lord this is so incredibly good. Tell us more. Tell us more."

And all the while, maybe He is showing us around this immense city. And as we behold sight after sight we simply cannot fathom how incredible God is. And maybe we begin to see why it will take eternity to learn all there is to learn and see all there is to see.

Let me take you to this city for a moment. Turn to Revelation 21 (read 9-21). Maybe I will comment on verse 9 in a later message. If there is any passage in the Bible one might find difficult staying with a literal interpretation, it is this one. It would not be so hard to believe such a city if it were not for the size. Verse 16 gives us its size and if you translate it into English you get a cubed city of some 1500 miles! If you calculate that, it amounts to 3 trillion, 375 billion square miles. Tim LaHaye writes, "My friend and colleague, Dr. Henry M. Morris, an expert engineer and author, has done the math on this and concluded that given the estimated population of possibly twenty billion residents each person would enjoy a block of space of approximately one cubic mile..." (pg. 363).

So I have read some who say that size alone tells you this city cannot be literal. So I ask you, do you find this city hard to believe? Then I ask you, do you also find it hard to believe that God could create everything in 6 literal days? This city is a piece of cake in comparison, do you not

think? And if you spiritualize this city, you run out of rules as to what each part means and the best imagination is the best interpreter, and we can never know what it means. No, as for me, I will stick with the literal. This is the city Abraham looked for. This is the city that will last for all eternity.

Now let us say we are in this city for those seven years of the tribulation as I think we will be, how much do you think we could get to see in that time? If we were to put West Edmonton Mall into this city, it wouldn't even show up! It is measured in square feet, not miles.

Now the marriage of the Lamb and the Church will take place in this city. What do you think that will be like? Then we will spend time getting to know Him. You will remember the story of Jacob and how he met Rachel in the OT. And Jacob went to work for Laban, Rachel's father. And Laban said, "Because you are my relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what should your wages be?" And Jacob said, "I will serve you seven years for Rachel, your younger daughter." This was the first of many agreements Laban did not keep. But, Jacob was under the impression that he would get Rachel and Scripture says, "So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her." I propose to you that the time we spend with the Lord until the end of the tribulation will seem but a few hours.

3. The resurrection of the two witnesses

Now there is one particular event that will happen on earth during the tribulation that will affect those who are already in heaven. I have wondered sometimes just how much the Church in heaven will know of what is happening on earth during the tribulation. I do not know. But we learn something very interesting in Revelation 6:9-11 (read). First, we learn that those who are being martyred on earth and arrive in heaven wish to have their deaths avenged. But what is interesting is that they are informed without

hesitation that many of their fellow Christians will yet be killed. They are in heaven and they know their brothers and sisters on earth will die as they have. And no doubt, they meet them when they also die and arrive in heaven. In light of that, I do not find it difficult at all to believe that the Lord Jesus will inform the Church as to what is going on.

But there is one event in particular I believe will be publicized all over heaven. Turn with me to Revelation 8 (read vs. 1). Now if there was silence in heaven, no doubt, for this half hour the Lord Jesus and the Church both wait in silence. And what is so significant? Well, both heaven and earth have reached a very momentous time in the history of mankind. I believe that when this $\frac{1}{2}$ hour of silence takes place, we have reached the mid point of the tribulation. It is the time when the antichrist sets himself up as god on earth. It is the time the number 666 will go into force, and it is the time another captivating scene will take place on earth.

Let me show you what will happen. We go to Revelation 11 (read 1-6). We do not know who these two witnesses are but it is believed they will be either Enoch and Elijah or Moses and Elijah. In verse 3 we learn that God empowers these two witnesses to witness for 1260 days, or verse 2, 42 months. Both are the same amount of time. And they will witness for God in Jerusalem and win multiplied thousands upon thousands of converts. The picture I have is that they are so successful that the antichrist, who wishes the worship of mankind, becomes infuriated to such an extent that he is about to lose it. Every time he has sent someone to finish them off, they die and he cannot harm these two. The more successful they become, the more infuriated he becomes.

In Revelation 7 we find that in the tribulation 144,000 elite Jewish evangelists were sealed. That most likely happens through the witness of these two. Israelis turn to God by literally thousands upon thousands. They get saved! And they in turn evangelize the Gentile world so that

later in the same chapter, we meet a mass of saved and martyred people who come out of the tribulation and stand before the Lord. You can read the chapter.

Furthermore, these two witnesses strike the earth with plagues as they wish and mankind suffers because of them. And like John the Baptist, one day their ministry is finished. God has accomplished that which He desired. Now look at verse 7, as to what will happen (read). And I believe it is at this moment that heaven falls silent. And then, the antichrist enters the Jews holy temple and sets himself up as god. Look at this in 2 Thessalonians 2 (read 3-4). He commits the ultimate sin for the Jews. And when he has done that, he then enforces the worship of man through the number 666.

But there is something else important that now happens that will impact those who are in heaven, and no doubt the Church as well (read 11-12). You see, another part of the first resurrection takes place as these two witnesses are resurrected. And not only are they resurrected, but they ascend into heaven. I wonder, don't you, what eruption of praise and honor and glory to God will take place when these two witnesses enter the presence of those in this city!

What do these two individuals do after they are resurrected? We are given no further information. But along with the martyred saints we met under the altar, I propose they too are told to rest a little while longer until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren are killed as they were was completed.

CONCL: As we conclude this morning, and we think about that which we commonly refer to as heaven, we see that heaven is a real place with real experiences and it is much different than many of us have thought. This morning we have considered the marriage of Christ and His bride, the Church. It is a very special occasion for the Church. The Church will get to know the Lord in ways far surpassing anything they have experienced in getting to know Him while they were on earth. I have no doubt that the Church will

also experience this city in their resurrected bodies in a way not possible before. It will be an experience glorious! But it is only the beginning!

Also, we saw this morning, the resurrection of two more individuals. And so by the mid-way point of the tribulation heaven gains two more resurrected saints! While on earth, things are getting worse and worse, and the worst is now to come; in heaven it is getting better and better and the best is yet to come.