

The Marriage of the Lamb

Three of our four daughters have been married over the past few years. We think the world of our three sons-in-law and are now eagerly looking forward to a fourth! All three weddings were very lovely and, as is usual, took lots of planning.

In this article, I would like to discuss marriage preparation and, more specifically, the marriage of the Lamb of God, which we often think about during the Fall Holy Day season.

Many "marriage" scriptures ran through my mind as our daughters' weddings were coming together. One of them – a somewhat sombre one, considering the subject – was Matthew 24:37-39:

But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Two major questions arise from these verses. The first is this: What was wrong with marrying and giving in marriage (and eating and drinking) in the days that preceded the deluge?

The strong implication here is that there may have been some people who might possibly have been listening seriously to God's warning message through Noah, but were diverted from doing anything about it, perhaps due to a false belief that God's intervention was not imminent. Some, perhaps, were putting much of their precious time into arranging marriages instead of joining Noah in his preparation for God's intervention. They were eating and drinking – feasting instead of participating in solemn fasts, which would have helped them to humble themselves before God.

Marrying and giving in marriage at the end-time

The second question is this: What will be wrong with marrying and giving in marriage (and eating and drinking) in the days that will precede the coming of the Son of man?

Of course, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with marriage, giving in marriage, or of wedding preparation. Marriage is a very wonderful institution, a great and meaningful blessing given to man by God:

Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge. (Hebrews 13:4)

A wedding should be a well-planned, joyous occasion, especially between two converted people. Every physical benefit God has given us pictures something spiritual of His. The spiritual symbolism of marriage is astonishing when one first hears and understands it. How flabbergasted we all were when we first learned of this symbolism in Mr. Armstrong's books, "God speaks out on the New Morality" and "The missing dimension in sex."

But like so much in today's money-grabbing world, with all the pushing, prodding and chiding of the commercial sector, our weddings can be overdone: "You gotta have tuxedos, you gotta have a candle ceremony, you gotta have a cake cutting ceremony, you gotta have multiple showers for the bride, you gotta have a bachelor night out for the groom, you gotta have limousines, you gotta have a rehearsal dinner, you gotta have a lavish honeymoon," and so on!

Of course, there is nothing wrong with any of these things of themselves, but if the couple and their families try to cram too much into too short a time, the happy occasion can turn into a fiasco. Pressure to include too many confusing details can cause the wedding day and preceding days to be exceedingly stressful to all concerned.

The big question for God's people, however, is this: Are we – collectively the Bride of Jesus Christ – putting the same time, thought, preparation, effort, and detail into our preparations for our marriage to Him as we put into our own family weddings? I am sorry to have to admit that my prayer and study time suffered during the hectic days immediately leading up our daughters' weddings. Other family members have told me the same story. We should be putting more – nay, much more – preparation into the marriage of the Lamb of which all other weddings and marriages, no matter how beautiful, are mere physical symbols.

End time priorities

This question of marriage at the very end of the end times is one of logical priorities:

To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven... A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing... A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)

The recent terrorist attacks in the United States and other places around the world have given us an ominous foretaste that the days, weeks and months immediately preceding the return of Jesus Christ will not be a time to laugh. It will not be a time to dance. It will not even be a time for marital love and embracing. And it will certainly not be a time of peace.

In chapter 1 of the book of Job, we read of the feasting of Job's children, which was so excessive, inappropriate and untimely that that Job felt that it needed to be repented of:

And his sons would go and feast in their houses, each on his appointed day, and would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did regularly... Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house... While he was still speaking, another [servant] also came and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, and suddenly a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; and I alone have escaped to tell you!" (Job 1:4-5, 13, 18-19)

Likewise, the very last days before the return of Jesus Christ will not be an appropriate time for preparation for physical weddings. Despite the recent events in the United States, we still cannot be totally sure how close we are to the end of this age. This being the case, how will we know the cut-off time when marriages and feasting are to end? God's Word reveals that He will make the time very clear to His people – to those who are watching and praying:

Then I will cause to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride. For the land shall be desolate. (Jeremiah 7:34)

For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Behold, I will cause to cease from this place, before your eyes and in your days, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride." (Jeremiah 16:9)

At that solemn hour, absolutely nothing should be taking our valuable time and our minds off our preparation for the most important wedding ever: the marriage of the Lamb to His Bride, the church.

The marriage of the Lamb

Let us take a closer look at the marriage supper of the Lamb. The Bride of Christ is mentioned in Revelation 21:2 and 9 and 22:17, but the main description of the marriage itself is to be found in chapter 19:7-9:

Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. (Verse 7)

When the time of the marriage of Jesus Christ to His Bride has arrived, then will be the time for the resumption of gladness and rejoicing. Not forgetting that it will also be a time for giving additional glory and honour to the great God, this gladness and rejoicing – shared with God the Father, His Son and all the angelic host of heaven – will exceed anything that we have ever experienced. It is very important to note that Christ's Bride will have made herself ready for the wedding. She will not have allowed anything to side-track her from her preparation for this most wonderful occasion.

And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. (Verse 8)

At this wonderful ceremony, the Bride will be given a very special privilege – that of being able to wear a very special wedding gown of fine, clean, white linen. This raiment is so much more beautiful, important and meaningful than even the loveliest of today's physical wedding gowns. A study of fine, clean, white linen in the Bible reveals that this very special fabric was worn by royalty, by God's priests, and was also used extensively in the construction of the tabernacle. A spiritual version of it is the material worn by angels. At the marriage of the Lamb the children of God the Father who make up the Bride of Jesus Christ will become worthy to wear this fine, clean, white linen because, as well as becoming like angels (Matthew 22:30), they will become kings, priests and pillars in God's temple. Here in this verse we see that the fine linen is symbolic of the righteousness of the saints.

Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God." (Verse 9)

It will be one of eternity's supreme blessings to be called to this marriage supper. But who are these blessed ones? Who will be called to the marriage supper of the Lamb? Who will be there? Of course, God the Father and Jesus Christ will be there. They will be doing the inviting – the calling. God's angels, archangels, twenty-four elders and four living creatures will all be there. The Bride of Christ will be there, collectively made up of the resurrected and changed members of God's true church from throughout the generations.

But who will *not* be there? The church members who make up the five foolish virgins will not be there, because they will have not adequately prepared (Matthew 25:1-13). Satan and his demons will not be there. They will have been banned from even visiting heaven as they had been able to do before (Revelation 12:8).

Where and when?

Banned from visiting heaven? Heaven? Will the wedding ceremony and the marriage supper really take place in heaven? A careful study of the timing of the relevant chapters of the book of Revelation strongly suggests that it will. However, this in no way implies that heaven is the eternal reward or dwelling place of God's people.

The first five verses of chapter 14 tell us of a time following the first resurrection and the meeting of Christ and His Bride, but preceding their descent to earth, when God's 144,000 firstfruits will stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion. Not the earthly Mount Zion in Jerusalem, but the one in heaven where God's temple is (verse 17). They are pictured as standing before the throne of God (verses 3 and 5) and as having already been redeemed from the earth and from among men (verses 3 and 4). In verse 2 of chapter 15, they are seen standing on the sea of glass, which is before God's throne (Revelation 4:6).

God's heavenly temple will then be briefly opened to allow the seven angels to leave to pour out the seven last (vial) plagues upon the earth (Revelation 15:5-6). It will then be closed again (verse 8). It appears that the 144,000 will remain in heaven during the pouring out of the seven last plagues and during the suppression of the great whore (Satan's counterfeit bride – otherwise known as Babylon the Great) and the Beast (chapters 16, 17 and 18). Then, in verses 7, 8 and 9 of chapter 19, as we have seen, we read of the wedding and the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Immediately after the marriage supper, heaven will be opened once again (verse 11 of chapter 19). The Bridegroom – His garment dipped in blood, His Bride and His angels clothed in fine, white, clean linen, will then descend to earth (verses 12 to 16).

But how long will the wedding and the marriage supper take? How long will the interval be between the first resurrection and the descent of Christ and His armies? Have we not always understood that the first resurrection and the return of Christ both take place on the same day in fulfillment of the Feast of Trumpets? We must remember that Jesus Christ is not bound by human time. Neither will His Bride be, once we are resurrected or changed to be like He is. If one earthly day can be to Him as a thousand years (II Peter 3:8), then one of His days – His wedding day – may be a thousandth of one of our days – i.e. 86.4 seconds. Yes, He is able to fit the magnificent celebrations of a whole 24-hour wedding day into less than two minutes of earthly time!

The timing and the location of the marriage of the Lamb are interesting details to study and ponder; but the main point for us to remember is that, if we wish to be included in this most wonderful of weddings as part of the Bride of Christ, we must be diligently preparing for it right now. We must not allow Satan to divert us from our preparation.

Just think of it! We are engaged to be married in a ceremony so marvellous that it will pale even the most fabulous royal weddings of Europe into insignificance. We must be spending as much time as we possibly can with our Fiancé every single day, and even more as we see the wedding day approaching.

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