

## The Bride

### Revelation 21:9-27

As we begin this morning, we need to set the historical context. In Revelation 21 we have come not only to the end of this world, but the beginning of the world to come.

And just as this earth began with a wedding, so too the new earth. The Bible ends as it began – with a sinless groom and a spotless bride bound together in the bonds of holy marriage in the presence of God.

In every wedding ceremony there are two highlights, two moments that are eagerly anticipated and appreciated by all those who have gathered. One of those moments is the exchanging of the wedding vows followed by the first matrimonial kiss. It is often accompanied by cheering. What is the other moment? It is the entrance of the bride.

You've seen it many times. All the guests are seated. The musicians are playing. The candles are flickering with a warm, soft light. The bridesmaids and groomsmen are arrayed up front in their best attire, surrounded by magnificent bouquets of flowers. The pastor and the groom have taken their place mid-center. The anticipation is palpable. And then, the music swells, the doors are flung open, the audience rises as one, and...*here comes the Bride*. She is beautiful – robed in white, beaming, with tears of joy glinting in her eye. She floats down the aisle to meet her groom. A hush falls on the audience as though they were in the presence of something holy, which, of course, they are.

Last week, John showed us the new heaven and earth, the place Jesus has prepared for his bride. This morning, John shows us the bride herself, in all her resplendent beauty and glory as she is presented to the King.

The text before us is apocalyptic literature at its finest as John weaves images and colors and many OT references together to show us the bride.

#### I. The Contrast

**Rev. 21:9-10** *Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." <sup>10</sup>And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.*

The revelation begins with a stark contrast between two women – the harlot and the bride. To see the contrast, we need to turn back to chapter 17 where we find nearly identical language, as John is shown the harlot.

**Rev. 17:1-3** *Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters,<sup>2</sup> with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk."<sup>3</sup> And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns.*

*Great similarity – the texts are nearly identical.*

- The identification of the angel: "One of the angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues"
- The invitation of the angel: "Come, and I will show you..."
- Both revelations have to do with a woman and her final destiny – and here we see that all the similarities in the text serve only to highlight the profound difference between the two women.

*The vast difference in their appearance and their destiny.*

#### **The harlot – Rev. 17:3–4**

*And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns.<sup>4</sup> The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality.*

The harlot, of course, stands for the people of this world, drunk with sexual immorality, opposed to Christ, followers of the beast, marked with his mark, belonging to the Devils' kingdom, and destined to receive the Devil's judgment.

**The bride** – How vastly different is the bride of chapter 21, the church of Jesus Christ. Here she is revealed in all her beauty, security, honor, and joy, being presented to Christ Jesus to live with him forever in the presence of God in the new heaven and earth. Chapters 17 and 21 both deal with the final day. For the harlot, it is the day of her damnation. For the bride, it is her wedding day.

## **II. The Bride**

The verses that follow are absolutely packed with symbolism and OT Testament references, and I won't possibly be able to address them all. But there are 3 primary attributes of the bride being revealed here: splendor, security, and sanctity.

### **A. Splendor**

**Rev. 21:10-11** *And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, <sup>11</sup> having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.*

The bride shines with a dazzling light. Why? She is radiating with the "glory of God." John grasps for images in an attempt to describe it: "its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal."

This language reminds us of chapter 4, where John saw one sitting on the throne who "had the appearance of jasper, and at his feet there was a sea like glass, like crystal" (4:3, 6). That was Jesus! Here we are being told that the Bride looks like the Lord! In verse 18 we see that the walls of the city are built with jasper "while the city was pure gold like clear glass." She is radiant with God's glory!

The bride-city is full of the light of the glory of God, so the sun is unnecessary.

**Rev. 21:23** *And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.*

(Notice, the text doesn't specifically say there won't BE a sun or moon, but they won't be needed for light.)

Notice here the distinction between the Father and the Son. The glory of God the Father gives light, and the Lamb is the lamp. In other words, as we see in all the rest of Scripture, the glory emanates from the Father but is revealed and magnified and manifested through the Son. It is in Jesus that we see the radiance of the glory of God.

But what Jesus wants us to see here is the dazzling beauty and resplendent glory of the bride as she shines with the glory of God. Were we to see the church now, as she will be on that day, we would be tempted to worship her!

That is extremely important to remember as we live **as** the church and **in** the church today. Because the church doesn't really look like this today. And Jesus is well aware of it! Remember, this book began with letters to the 7 churches of Asia Minor. What did those letters reveal? The church as it is – full of warts and blemishes and weakness.

The church in Ephesus was good at theology, but they had lost their love for Christ and his mission. Their orthodoxy had made them insular and cold.

Thyatira was much more warm and loving, but squishy on truth and purity. They tolerated a woman who was a false teacher and led people into sexual immorality.

Sardis had a great reputation for vibrancy, but was actually dead and worldly.

Laodicea had a great building and wonderful programs, but was full of pride and self-sufficiency with very little engagement with the surrounding lost world.

Only two of the 7 churches receive only commendations, but they were so small and weak and poor.

**Kevin DeYoung:** "Revelation has the most exalted view of the church in heaven and the most realistic view of the church on earth."

This is the church as it is. The church today has all the same blemishes, weakness, and warts – even Harvest church. We do some things well. And we struggle like every other church in other areas. We have a fair grasp on theology. But we struggle to love people who aren't like us. Prayer and evangelism are a constant uphill climb. And hurtful things happen. People fall through the cracks. Others have a hard time fitting in. Singles can easily get overlooked. Cliques get formed. Even Sundays can be hard – there's so many kids and not enough space and the music is too (fill in the blank). So, when people complain about Harvest church, about the people and the pastor, it isn't that they are necessarily wrong. They are often exactly right. They're just not seeing the whole picture.

Of course, the church has flaws. We are still in this world and made up of deeply flawed people – like you, the one complaining. But the wonderful encouragement of Revelation 21 is that this flawed, imperfect church is the bride of Jesus Christ and will one day glow with the glory of God. As long as the church holds fast to the groom, as long as we remain faithful to his teaching, abiding in his love – no matter how weak and flawed we seem today – one day we will be beautiful, without a single flaw or weakness!

## **B. Security**

The second thing to see is the magnificent stability, security, and safety of the church. We see this in the description of the gates, foundations, and walls.

**Rev. 21:12, 14** *It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed... <sup>14</sup> And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

In verse 16 and following we are told just how tall and great this wall truly was. The angel had a measuring rod and he measured the city. It was 12,000 stadia in length, width, and height. The 12,000 stadia translates to about 1,400 miles, so think of the distance from here to Colorado Springs, or Fort Lauderdale, Florida. And 1400 miles up would take you into the orbit of satellites.

Now, remember, these numbers are symbolic. The number 12 is the number of the church reflecting the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles. The number "12" is all over this "city." The city represents the church, the bride. And the image of great walls is not meant to communicate size as much as stability and security. In those days, the security of a city was dependent entirely upon its walls. That's why kings of those days would devote a great deal of their treasury to building up the walls of a city. Unfortunately, in the course of history, every city built by man was conquered. The security failed.

But not this city. This city is absolutely, perfectly impregnable. These walls cannot be breached. There is no enemy left to breach them.

Furthermore, the walls will never be shaken or fall. That's the point of the foundations. A wall is only as sturdy as the foundation upon which it stands. This wall has 12 foundations!

Notice that "on them were the 12 names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." On the 12 foundations were the names of Peter, James, John, Matthew, Bartholomew, etc. Why? Because the teaching of the apostles, as they bear witness to Christ, is the foundation of the church of Jesus Christ. Paul speaks of the church in Ephesians 2:20 as a temple that God is building "on the foundation of the apostles and prophets." The church of Christ is built upon the truth of Jesus Christ in all his saving work and person. "The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord." And because that truth is eternal, the church will stand and flourish forever!

There are 12 gates, but each gate has a mighty angel standing guard. The gates never close – there is no need! And night never falls (vs. 25). Again, I'm not sure that is meant to be taken literally. Nighttime is the time for deception, for murder and stealing, and sexual immorality. But there won't be any of those things. In other words, there is never any danger of any sort in any way at any time in all of the new heaven and new earth.

### **C. Sanctity**

The final defining characteristic of the church is that of sanctity, holiness. That word has two aspects – moral purity and being set apart. The best illustration we may have is marriage

itself. There is something uniquely holy about marriage, particularly the marriage bed. The intimacy and joy of the marriage bed only works in the context of sanctity, in both aspects of the word.

- It only works when there is **moral purity** – when the husband or wife introduces perversion into the marriage bed, it is a deep wound to the marriage.
- It only works when there is a **separateness** – in other words, when the couple is faithful to keep themselves, to keep their bodies and their sexual experiences for each other and each other alone. A wife's body belongs to her husband, and vice versa. There is a "holiness" to the marriage bed that is beautiful and must be honored.

The bride of Christ is holy in both these senses – we will be morally perfect and gloriously set apart for the intimacy of communion with God in Christ.

Let me point out those truths from the text.

**1)** Moral purity – the many jewels and pure gold of the city express the beauty and splendor of holiness. In verse 19 we have a list of 12 precious jewels, the same jewels which were found on the breastplate of the high priest in the Old Testament. The jewels stand both for the 12 tribes and for the proposition that God's holy people should reflect the beauty of his own moral perfection.

Even the gates and streets of the city are beautiful.

**Rev.21:21** *And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.*

The imagery communicates perfect, spotless moral purity. In verse 27 we are told that "nothing unclean will ever enter into it." Can you imagine being a part of this radiant beauty and spotless purity? Imagine what it will be like to belong to this company of perfected, radiant saints who glow with the perfect beauty and holiness of God.

**2)** But as wonderful and compelling as that is, the other aspect of holiness is possibly even more stunning. We will be set apart to God and for God in perfect communion and intimacy with him. This image could easily be missed, but is reflected in the cubed nature of the city. It is a cube – 12,000 stadia in length, width, and height. There is only one other cube in all of Scripture. Do you know what it is? It is the found in **1 Kings 6:20**, where we read of Solomon building the temple:

*The inner sanctuary was twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and twenty cubits high, and he overlaid it with pure gold.*

The only cube we find in Scripture is the most holy place, the inner sanctuary of the temple. The place where God was present in a unique way. A place so holy that no could ever enter it – only the high priest, and just once a year. But Jesus is telling us in our texts that, not only will his bride be allowed into the most holy place – the bride IS the most holy place. The church is the place where God dwells, where God is present. We become the place of glory and intimacy, the place where Christ and his bride commune in the bliss of eternal love.

### III. The Purpose

Now, why would Jesus tell us these things?

Jesus wants us to know who we are as the church right now. We are the precious and betrothed bride of Christ, waiting for our wedding day.

He wants us to know what we shall one day be like. One day, by the infinite grace and power of God, this will happen to us. This is our destiny. Jesus, our bridegroom, is coming soon. But Jesus doesn't tell us these things simply to encourage us. He tells us in order to motivate us.

**Gregory Beale**, in his commentary, points out that this text serves the primary purpose of the whole book. The point of the book is to exhort God's people to remain faithful:

"The primary point of the contrast between the whore and the bride (and the primary point of the book as a whole) is to exhort the faltering church, plagued by compromise with the whore, to stop compromising and increasingly reflect the facets of their coming consummated excellence in anticipation of it."

This morning we come to the table of the Lord. Why do we do this? Because our Lord Jesus commanded us to do it. Why? So that we remember him. "Do this in remembrance of me." It isn't simply to remember what he has done for us in the past, but to remember all that means for our future and all the significance of that for our present. This is Christ Jesus, our bridegroom, calling us to prepare ourselves to meet him. To put away any compromise with the world. To repent of our sin, to cling to his gospel. This is Jesus, reminding us of his infinite love for us, and assuring us that he is coming back, to take us to live with him forever in the place he has prepared for us.