



The Story Of Salvation

NCTM Tuesday Night Studies 2010

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34. The Marriage of the Lord Jesus with His Holy Bride.

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are true words of God" (Revelation 19:6–9).

In chapters 17 and 18 of the book of the Revelation we have a detailed account of the human society as we know it and its demise ("Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!" – Rev 18:2). The "great whore", Babylon (Rev 17:1, 15, 16; 19:2) is the embodiment of human society fully given over to the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life with all that it means and effects. John writes, "all that is in the world comes not from the Father but from the world" and then says that human society and its desire (the world opposed to God) are passing away, "but those who do the will of God live forever" (1Jn 2:16–17).

In contrast chapter 19 tell us of another human society which will endure, never to fall. In the opening verses of this chapter we hear the heavenly court's choirs sing praises for the justice poured out upon "the great whore who corrupted the earth with her fornication". Then a voice from the throne was heard by John authorising God's servants (slaves), both those of great gifts and those less privileged, to join in the praises of heaven. While heaven exults in divine justice, earth celebrates divine love, the ultimate marriage of the Lord Jesus with His Holy Bride.

John hears the church, in verse 6, responding to the summons of verse 5 by lifting up the last great song of the Revelation. The sound breaks upon him and us as an overwhelming, thunderous, powerfully dramatic exclamation of rejoicing. The content of their praises is twofold:

Firstly the kingdom of the Lord our God the Almighty has come in its fullness. God reigns eternally, but here his reign is fully displayed, sweeping all opposition aside and bringing to consummation his redemptive purposes. "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever" (Rev 11:15).

Secondly the Bride of the Lamb is finally prepared for the marriage celebrations. For her there is no more waiting, no more "How long, O Lord?" (Rev 6:10) as faith turns to sight, hope to possession, mundane loss to heavenly gain and momentary sorrow to eternal pleasure.

The church rejoices, more specifically, because the marriage of the Lamb has come¹ and because the Bride (or Wife) has prepared herself, willing to do the Father's will. Unlike the failed marriage of Yahweh with harlotrous Israel, this perfect union brings together a triumphant Lamb and a pure Bride beyond the reach of hell and sin. She has prepared herself

¹ Again we must not see this moment chronologically just before the last battle and final judgment in chapters 19 and 20. John, as seen before, is recording symbols of the ultimate without necessary regard to strict sequence of events.

through faith, repentance and steadfast endurance, “as becomes the bride who with joy awaits the coming of her bridegroom”.² She has been cleansed of all adulterous inclinations and is finally ready to give herself fully to her one Husband, and to no other, for ever.

to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure”—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

This wonderful song is now concluded with the affirmation that the bride was given “fine linen, bright and pure” to wear. “It is not fanciful to say that the bridal gown is composed of all the true works of the people of God”.³ The wedding dress was given to the saints, and not provided by them. Remember that the white robes of the great multitude in Revelation 7 were not provided by any righteous act on the part of the wearers, but were the result of washing in “the blood of the Lamb”. Her Lover has indeed sanctified her, cleansed her and presented her to himself in splendour, holy and without blemish (Eph 5:26–27)

Finally comes the command to John to write these important words: “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb”. Who would not long to be there? What an encouragement and hope to the persecuted church, then and now, to be invited to the great marriage feast of the Lamb. Morris writes, “In the troubled days of persecution it did need emphasis that it was the persecuted saints who were blessed, not their persecutors”.⁴ “The wedding is not to be perceived as an eschatological event in a remote and abstract sense but as a vividly personal experience awaiting and, as it were, beckoning those who have been invited. As they pay a price now for their allegiance to the Lamb, the elect may savour this hope ‘when the trial of the former days are forgotten in laughter and happiness around the table of the Lord’”.⁵

My Son, I wish to give You
A bride who will love You.
Because of You she will deserve
To share our company,

And eat bread at Our table,
The same bread I eat;
That she may know the good
I have in such a Son;
And rejoice with Me
In Your grace and fullness.

I am very grateful, Father,
The Son answered;
I will show My brightness
To the bride You give Me.

So that by it she may see
How great My Father is,
And how I have received
My being from Your being.

² Ortlund Jr, Raymond C., *Whoredom. God's Unfaithful Wife in Biblical Theology*, NSBT No. 2, (Apollos, 1996), p. 163.

³ Bingham, Geoffrey C., *The Revelation of St John the Divine. Commentary and Essays on the Book of the Revelation*, (Blackwood: New Creation Publication Inc., 1993), p. 176.

⁴ Morris, Leon, *Revelation*. Revised Edition. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1987), p.221.

⁵ Ortlund, p.164.

I will hold her in My arms
 And she will burn with Your love,
 And with eternal delight
 She will exalt Your goodness (John of the Cross, 1542–1591)

The New Heaven and the New Earth.⁶

New Creation

On the third day the friends of Christ coming at daybreak to the place found the grave empty and the stone rolled away. In varying ways they realised the new wonder; but even they hardly realised that the world had died that night. What they were looking at was the first day of a new creation, with a new heaven and a new earth; and in the semblance of the gardener God walked again in the garden, in the cool, not of the evening, but the dawn. G K Chesterton

Creation was a good beginning. Creation was only a starting point and not a final point. The New Creation is the final goal of the initial beginning. But even better the New Creation is the real beginning, the new era. The New Creation is far more than the initial creation. That was the necessary stage on which God could begin history with humankind. König writes, “History is a winding road along which occur genuinely new and unexpected events. Though the goal of God’s work was known from the outset in the covenant, human response has been for the most part unexpected, incomprehensible, inexplicable, sinful, and guilty. The onward progress of this history has revealed more and more facets of God’s character, sharply contrasting the brightness of his glory against the dark backdrop of humankind’s faithlessness and sin. Thus is God’s splendour more fully displayed than it could ever have been by life in the garden. And this superlative grace of God, growing richer as sin increased, produced at length the resurrection, the glorification, and the new world—far more than we could think or expect. So we read in Revelations 21 and 22 not merely of restoration but of a new creation which far surpasses the old”.⁷

Therefore we do not look back to the situation in the garden of Eden as it was, hoping God would again bring back the old Eden. That was but a shadow of the real things to come in the new Eden. We look forward to something unimaginably more significant than that!

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9)

In the beginning God built a beautiful garden in which His people were to live and work; for the new humanity he will build a new city on a new earth. In the garden God visited His people; in the new earth He will make his home with His people and dwell with them. The tree of life in the garden becomes the tree that bears fruit not once but twelve times in a year in the garden of God, “To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God” (Rev 2:7). The river flowing out of Eden to water the garden was but a picture of the eternal river giving life to the new earth, “the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb”. And whereas since the creation humankind has been utterly dependent on the sun, that will become unnecessary when the glory of God shines on God’s people and the Lamb becomes our lamp.

⁶ Much of this study comes from: König, Adrio, *The Eclipse of Christ in Eschatology. Toward a Christ-Centred Approach*, (Blackwood: New Creation Publications Inc., 1999), pp. 233–244.

⁷ König, p. 62.

Science has come a long way since the days when it was believed that the world was flat and that the whole universe revolved around this pancake called “earth”. Our views have been considerably enlarged and altered since then. Scientists believe that the present universe is doomed for ultimate destruction either by the expansive force of the big bang or the contractive force of gravity. One way or the other, “the universe is condemned to ultimate futility”⁸ and headed towards total death. A bleak prospect to say the least, although still tens of billions of years away. This view is generally accepted in the popular press; the earth is doomed for destruction. What can we hope for? If there is no hope we will live accordingly. But there is hope! Our hope rests in the ultimate reality, in the eternal God himself. God created us out of the earth, on the earth, for the earth, and gave us a mandate to populate and serve the earth. Because of sin, the human race together with the earth has been cursed. But God is called a faithful Creator (1 Peter 4:19). God will no more abandon the universe than God will abandon us. Because the earth has been cursed through our sin, it must like us be renewed, restored, and glorified. Paul writes,

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:19–23).

And again, “I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:6; cf. Ps 138:8). What is at stake is God’s faithfulness toward God’s entire creation, including us his creatures. Our hope is of the resurrection of the body, hence the importance of the resurrection of Jesus. He is the beginning, the firstfruits of the renewal, restoration and glorification of our bodies as well as the earth. Romans 8:18–25 speaks of the liberation and redemption from decay and futility of the creation *and* humanity. Christ has risen from the dead and so conquered death, the first human being to do so and live forever, never to die, “This Jesus God raised up ... Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God...” (Acts 2:32–33a). Christ’s resurrection is now the guarantee of our future resurrection. This is why even in our present state, death cannot separate us from Christ (Rom 8:38–39). Paul longed to depart and to be with Christ (Phil 1:23), but we need also to see that believers are already with Christ, “for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:3).⁹ Jesus standing at Lazarus’ grave said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (Jn 11:25-26). Others will see us dead, but believers will never die. This truth is wonderfully illustrated in the last page of C.S. Lewis’ “The Last Battle”

Then Aslan turned to them and said: “You do not look so happy as I mean you to be.” Lucy said, ‘We’re afraid of being sent away, Aslan. And you have sent us back into our own world so often’. “No fear of that,” said Aslan. “Have you not guessed?” Their hearts leaped and a wild hope rose within them. “There *was* a real railway accident,” said Aslan softly. “Your father and mother and all of you are – as you use to call it in the Shadowlands – dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning.” And as He spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the

⁸ Polkinghorne, John, *Science and Christian Belief. Theological Reflections of a Bottom-Up Thinker*, (SPCK, 1994), p. 162.

⁹ See also 2 Cor 13:4; Col 2:13, 20.

cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.¹⁰

Resurrection day was also the start of a new creation for the entire universe. But God's children are already called a "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17). They have been born anew into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus (1 Pet 1:3). The New Testament calls Christians strangers and pilgrims in the world, whose citizenship and treasure are in heaven.¹¹ This estrangement between Christians and the world is caused by the fact that they are already (at least partly) renewed, while the earth is still in the power of the evil one (1 Jn 5:19). Our alien status is a temporary one in this "old" unrenewed earth. Hence the expectation of a new earth is a living hope for God's faithful people. There for the first time we will be "home", not just for the fact we will live as renewed people in this renewed earth, but primarily we will be at home in the "Father's house". But we are driven back to God alone as the basis of final hope. It is through the resurrection of Christ which is the anticipation of the great event of a new heaven and earth.

So the most profound link between creation and the new creation lies in Jesus Christ himself. He is the beginning and the end of creation, the first and the last, the Creator and Consummator. In his own person he unites creation and consummation. In him they are not two events infinitely separated from each other in time, but a single reality bound together in him, the living Lord by whose power creation proceeds to consummation and consummation comes forth from creation. All is created by him, and by him all is renewed.

Is this "new earth" an entirely new creation with the "old one" utterly destroyed? Is it again a creation out of nothing? There are indications that this is not so. Would God destroy his creation which God pronounced "good" and "very good"? It is so good in fact that the Creator Himself could become a human being to live with us and being one of us and for us in redemption of us. This one who is now exalted to the highest by God still goes by the earthly name of Jesus (Phil. 2:6-11). This speaks of continuity. In the same way we must also talk of continuity regarding the earth and exclude the notion of an entirely new creation out of nothing. The new heaven and new earth will be made new (renewed, transformed, changed) but not created new (Rev. 21:5). Nothing is lost but everything is brought back again in new form.¹² It will be a new earth, but not a different one. The creation out of nothing is completed in the eschatological creation out of old.¹³

To read the last chapters of the Revelation with the purpose of gleaning information "what it will look like" would be a useless exercise. The images of the last two chapters in the Bible cannot be taken literally, although they are wonderful enough, lest the real glory to which they refer escape us. These images are expressed in the language of the prophet and the poet to unveil truths, which cannot be seen by normal investigation or expressed in any other way. They are much richer in meaning than any meaning we can draw from it.

Technology has also made tremendous strides, especially in the last decades in space exploration. When the first space explorers came back they said that they had not seen God and

¹⁰ Lewis, C.S., *The Last Battle*, (Puffin Books, 1956, 1964), p. 165.

¹¹ Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 2:11; Phil. 3:20-21; Mt. 6:20.

¹² Those who have on their shelf *The Last Battle* may want to read pp. 162-164.

¹³ Moltmann, Jürgen, *The Coming of God. Christian Eschatology*, (London: SCM Press, 1995), pp. 264-265.

by implication not seen heaven. Even this mighty Hubble telescope high above the earth has not yet seen a heaven “up there” and never will. Simply put heaven is God’s dimension of present reality. It is the place¹⁴ where God lives, the hidden sphere of God in the world. It is beyond our earthly imagination; we cannot take hold of it or locate it. We can never speak of heaven apart from God, it is always spoken of in relation to God. It is not merely “the other side”. In biblical language heaven is the sum of the inaccessible and incomprehensible side of the created world. For Christians heaven is the place where God will be seen face to face. Just as God and heaven belong together so there is a connection between heaven and earth. In the “Our Father” Jesus prays for God’s will to be done in heaven and on earth. In Revelation 21 and 22 heaven and earth are kept apart no longer. John sees “a new heaven and a new earth”, but makes no further reference to the new heaven, he only describes the new earth in symbolic language. God’s goal for creation is to dwell with his people and live with them and not just to visit them as in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:8). God sits on his throne among his people and He himself is the temple and the light. No longer will there be a great distance between God in heaven and men and women on earth (Eccl 5:2). Instead he writes about God living with us on the new earth. From our point of view the relationship between God and His people will become fully restored and enriched and deepened and more intimate and direct than ever before experienced. Those who formerly were alienated from God and coming from all the corners of the earth and from every culture are now called saints as they have been ransomed by the blood of the slaughtered Lamb. They have been made royalty, princes and princesses, serving their King on the earth (Rev 5:9–10). But heaven, the place where God lives, is now on the new earth – and has even become one with it. This sort of unification and renewal is absolutely not foreign to God. It is essentially the glorious realisation of his goal for creation: “I shall be your God and you shall be my people”. This covenant cry will be fulfilled to the full (Rev 21:1–4). Because we spoke of heaven in relation to God, heaven will be on the new earth once God lives there with the new humanity. The goal of the covenant is realised.

But not only will the relationship between the Father and His people be fully restored, but flowing from that, human relationships will also be restored and come to its full potential. The author of 2 Peter characterises the new heaven and earth as the place where righteousness is at home (2 Pet 3:13). Only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life will be living on the new earth. Those who are guilty of unrighteousness, or false or foul behaviour, or who disrupt human relationships, are excluded.¹⁵ The Father’s family will consist of true blue human beings, made in the likeness of the Father’s Son.

Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is (1 Jn 3:2).

From our human point of view this seems extraordinarily wonderful and beyond imagination but from the Father’s point of view in the new but normal earth there will be normal people who will live normal lives in contrast with the abnormal lives they are living now in this abnormal world.

Finally the relationship between humanity and nature will be restored. In place of the sea, representing forces of chaos, which menace human life, there is the river of the water of life. The imagery tells us of nature serving its purpose fully (Rev 21:1; 22:1–2). The original mandate of Genesis 1:26ff for humanity to rule over nature will be fulfilled, but renewed and surpassed. We will reign, but as servants and not exploiters (Rev 22:3, 5, 6).

¹⁴ But “Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you” (1 Kings 8:27).

¹⁵ Revelation 21:8, 27; 22:11, 15.