

A Glimpse of the Bride

REVELATION 21:1-8

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. ² Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. ⁴ And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

⁵ Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.”

⁶ And He said to me, “It is done!^[c] I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. ⁷ He who overcomes shall inherit all things,^[d] and I will be his God and he shall be My son. ⁸ But the cowardly, unbelieving,^[e] abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

We now reach a major turning point in our study of this final Book of the Bible. To understand what is being spoken of here we need to deal with a few misconceptions before moving on. You see, There is a major interpretive school that believes the key to interpreting the whole Book of Revelation can be found in Revelation 1:19. Revelation 1:19 gives instructions to the Apostle John where he is commanded to, “Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.” This school of thought then proceeds to divide the entire book into 3 sections.

- A. The things which you have seen (The past) – Interestingly enough, these people usually conclude this to be what is written in the first chapter.
- B. The things which are (The present) – This is, according to this interpretive framework, what makes up chapters 2 and 3. Remember, the 7 churches of chapter 2 and 3 were actual historic churches. This group of people, with absolutely no reason for doing so, other than they can make it fit.

makes these churches representative for Church ages. For example: The First Church Ephesus, becomes the Post Apostolic Church, and the final church, Laodicea, becomes the apostate Church right before the rapture of the Saints.

- C. And the things which will take place after this (The Future) – They make this everything from Chapter 4 and forward. Remember they see the rapture of the Church in Chapter 4:1 When John hears a voice say “Come up Hither.” According to their way of reading the Book, everything from 4:1 to the end is future.

Well, one of the problems with this, is that often when there are disagreements about conclusions, people often think these disagreements are only matters of timing. I believe very strongly, that this approach to interpreting the Book of Revelation causes people to miss the entire meaning. Let me say it clear, If the first century context of the Book of Revelation is missed, the meaning of the Book is largely missed.

As we have shown up to this point, the Book of Revelation is a Book about Christ’s present victory. It is about His defeat of Satan, His ascension to the throne on high, and His present ruling and reigning with His Saints. It is about His defeat of His enemies, specifically, apostate Jerusalem, and one of the major focuses of this Book is about His Bride. She is described as a bride adorned for her husband, and she is described as a glorious city. Here in Chapter 21 we get a glimpse of that bride.

I have had many people talk to me about the Book of Revelation, and one of the things I have heard from those who “agree” with me “somewhat,” is that they might say they believe the Book of Revelation is fulfilled prophecy right up to the last two chapters. Well, the Book of Revelation is prophecy that is fulfilled, but what we see in these last two chapters is a prophecy that is being fulfilled.

In our last message on this Book, I assigned a home work assignment. If you did that great, if not the good news is there is always this week. The assignment was to read Ezekiel 40-48.

The Bible is a story, and it is a wonderful and beautiful story. As the prototype for all great stories It is a story that continuously builds upon its previous details.

One of the details in this story is the portrait of God as the warrior King, who raises a people from death, defeats His enemies, and takes for Himself the spoils of War and builds His house. This is the story of the Exodus, where God takes His enslaved people and leads them from captivity to the promised land. This is the story of the warrior Joshua who leads these people across the Jordan River and into the land of promise. Over and over we see this pattern repeated, but in the last chapters of Ezekiel, which John uses extensively in this final Book of the Bible, we see this pattern repeated again.

In Ezekiel 37 Ezekiel sees a valley of dry bones. This is a picture of the state of Israel as they are scattered throughout the nations. They are dead, they are powerless, and they are without hope. Ezekiel begins to preach to these bones. Now, I have heard of dead crowds before, but I believe this one takes the cake. Truthfully, many people speak of speaking to the dead, but here is the ultimate example of this in the Scripture, He speaks to these bones, and not only do they come to life, they actually become “an exceeding great army.” It is immediately after this once dead army comes to life, that Ezekiel presents us with the battle that is often referred to as Armageddon. Gog, from the land of Magog comes and makes war with this resurrected army, and is destroyed by fire from heaven. In chapter 39 the armies that oppose Israel are devoured by birds from the air. And then we get to chapter 40 through 48 where the glorious temple and its effects are described.

Over our last couple of messages in the Book of Revelation we have looked at this battle, we have seen the enemies of God and His people ultimately defeated, and now beginning here in Chapter 21 we are going to see a close up look at the Bride. We are going to finally perhaps a little more than a glimpse of the New Temple of God. Before I go into that though I want to read a Scripture to us from 1 Corinthians Chapter 2 beginning in the 6th verse:

However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. ⁷ But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, ⁸ which none of the rulers of

this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

⁹But as it is written:

*"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man
The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."*

¹⁰But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

Well today, we are going to look into the Scriptures and see what eye has not seen nor has ear heard. We also learn that the full glory of what God has prepared has not entered into the mind of man. This is the reason our message is titled, "A Glimpse of the Bride."

The text begins with the now familiar words, "And I saw." This is the 8th appearance of this phrase in the Book of Revelation. John's use of the theme of the number seven throughout this Book is something that we should pay very careful attention to. Seven as we have discussed often in the past is the number in the Bible which means completion. But here, we see the end of the old and the beginning of the new, is the 8th reference to the phrase, "and I saw." Eight is a number in the Scripture that has to do with resurrection and regeneration. It is the first day of the New week. What does John see? He sees a new heaven and a new earth. The reason for this is clear, because the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.

The Greek word here for new is not *neos* but the word *kainos*. *Neos* is used for chronological newness, whereas *kainos* indicates a newness in kind or of a superior quality. Think of an infomercial where the spokesman says, "new and improved," except in this commercial he really means it.

Remember, the Bible is a story, that consistently builds upon itself. In the very first chapters of the Bible, Adam is given a task, and that task is to take dominion and to subdue the earth. We know he fails, but what we are seeing now, is the completion of that task. The old earth, the old heavens are passing away. The Old covenant system of type and shadow is done away with. Another interesting aspect of this passage is we are told that there is no more sea. The land and the sea are two distinct areas in the Scripture, The land represents God's people

Israel, and the Sea, represents those who are outside, it is also the abode of the devil and his angels. Here in the first verse of our chapter we see a new heaven and a new earth and the sea is no more. Part of the reason for this is because Satan has been bound from deceiving the nations. One of the difficulties many people have here is that they are seized by a sense of incredulity. How is it possible that the enemy is bound? Just look around they say, is it not obvious that what you are saying is completely off the rails? Well, generally people who say this have very limited understanding of history and of the progress of the Gospel of the Kingdom. Yes there are still major problems in this world, but the story of the Bible is not a story of a general slide into apostasy and calamity and suddenly there is a cataclysmic event and the world is saved. No, the story of the Bible is a story of God's ultimate salvation of the World, but as David Chilton puts it, "that which is to be absolutely and completely true in eternity, is definitively and progressively true, NOW."

The promise of the Kingdom of God as presented in the Scripture is not solely future. It came into the World at the first advent of Christ and it has gained a foothold, and it is growing, and it will never ever let go. What has too often happened is that we have read the promises of the Kingdom of God as though they are solely future. We read passages about growing apostasy and judgment and we apply them not to the period they were intended but to today, or to our future. When we do this, we miss the blessings that are replete regarding the Kingdom of God.

2 Peter chapter 3 is one of those texts that people often confuse as to speaking of some future last days.

that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior, ³ knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, ⁴ and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." ⁵ For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, ⁶ by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. ⁷ But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

This is shocking to many, but the last days spoken of in this passage were the last days of the old covenant economy. The temple system, the old earth, and the old heavens were being ready to be done away with.

Our Lord Jesus could not have been more clear during his first advent. In Matthew 24 he warned his disciple in the Olivet Discourse, that all of the things He was speaking of to them, would take place within that generation. The prophet Daniel had warned that the Kingdom of God was coming within 70 sevens. With the coming of this Kingdom the old would pass away. The scoffers that are spoken of in 2 Peter are not mere cynics, they are clearly covenant apostates. “Where is the promise of His coming?” They knew that Jesus has promised that he would come in that generation. They know he promised He would rebuild the temple within 3 days.

As those who were waiting missed His first coming, so many have missed the significance of our Lord’s coming in judgment where the old order of things was done away with. The physical temple of brick and mortar was done away with and Immanuel, or God with us, begin to dwell in the midst of His people.

John Owen, the great English theologian, when discussing this text asks a question that so many commentators and prophecy experts never ask about this passage. Where had God promised to bring in a new heaven and a new earth? The answer is in the last two chapters of Isaiah. The last two chapters of Isaiah are not pictures of the eternal state, but they are a glorious picture of the period of the gospel which is brought in by the work of Jesus Christ during His first advent.

In Isaiah 66:22-23 we read the following:

*²² “For as the new heavens and the new earth
Which I will make shall remain before Me,” says the LORD,
“So shall your descendants and your name remain.
²³ And it shall come to pass
That from one New Moon to another,
And from one Sabbath to another,
All flesh shall come to worship before Me,” says the LORD.*

One of the things that I believe is super problematic in much reading of prophecy today, is that people miss the forest because of the trees. We look at individual trees, and we do this by taking verses out of their context and we ask questions that cause us to miss the fact that the glorious and prophesied Kingdom has come upon us. I will certainly admit, that righteous does not yet dwell on the earth in an

absolute sense. And it will not dwell on the earth in that absolute sense until, the final enemy, which is death will ultimately be defeated. There is a book that I read many years ago, which was called, "Tyranny of the Urgent." The message of the book was a simple one, Often we let urgent matters, take us away from what is really important. Well, in many ways our modern age, is an age where we believe everything is urgent. A certain "prophecy expert" wrote a book almost 40 years ago where he called "our generation" mind you "our generation" was 1976, anyway, he called our generation, "The terminal generation." These books and many that have polluted Christian Book stores for the last 50 years misplace the promises of God's Kingdom, they have us looking to our future for the new Heaven and the New Earth, but the Scripture is very clear, the New Heaven and the New Earth were inaugurated at our Lord's First advent.

And there is another danger inherent in the view that see's these events as fully future. This danger is a more subtle one. The Scripture, as we have pointed out is clear. God definitively defeated his foes at his first advent, and yet, we still see in the New Jerusalem enemies to be defeated. Yes, I know they are already defeated, but now those who are Christ followers are required to take the Lord at His Word, and live in the victory He has won. In the 8th verse of this chapter we also get a glimpse of those who are not in the city. These are they who according to the text, "have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." There are a few words that describe who these are. I have always found it interesting that the first word describing those who are not part of the city is the word, cowardly. What is a coward. Well, I think one of the prime examples of cowardice in scripture is found in Numbers 13, where Moses sent 12 spies into the Land that God had promised them. We read here,

²⁵ And they returned from spying out the land after forty days.

²⁶ Now they departed and came back to Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the children of Israel in the Wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. ²⁷ Then they told him, and said: "We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. ²⁸ Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large; moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there. ²⁹ The Amalekites dwell in the land of the South; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the mountains; and the

Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan."

³⁰ Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, "Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it."

³¹ But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we." ³² And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, "The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. ³³ There we saw the giants^[d] (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."

You see these people heard God's promises, but were afraid to lay hold of them, rather than focus on God's word of victory, they focused on the obstacles. They were cowards, and they were leaders amongst God's people, and their cowardice was infectious. It is common today for people in churches to follow after not the Word of the Lord, but the word that tickles their ear. God has called his people to victory, but this does not mean that it is an easy task. They must stand against all the wiles of the enemy. I think it is also interesting that cowardice is the first sin listed here in a rather comprehensive list.

Unbelief is # 2 on this list. What is entailed in unbelief? Belief is when we hear God's Word, incredible as it may seem at times, and we go forth acting upon it. Often times, I have heard people excuse unbelief using the Words, come on now, be a realist. Well, when ever we disregard the Word of the Lord that is not realism, it is unbelief.

Other items on this list of those excluded are sinners, abominable, murderers, fornicators, scorcerers, idolaters, and all liars. It is common today, far more than it once was to hear people preach a sort of universalism. But even in the face of our Lord's glorious victory there are those who remain impenitent and belong not to the Lord but to the dragon, and they will share his part in the lake of fire.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 warns us:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals,^[a] nor sodomites, ¹⁰nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

By our nature, we were all children of wrath, but the ones who are redeemed turn from that wrath, they are washed, sanctified, and ultimately they are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This chapter, which we have only introduced today is about the glorious age of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is about the glorious City New Jerusalem which descends from Heaven. It is about the tabernacle of God dwelling with man. It is about the Kingdom of Emmanuel, God with us. It is about the age that we presently live in. The Old earth and the old heaven has been done away with. Christ now dwells with His people. Ephesians 2 tells us that we have been raised into the heavens and seated with Christ Jesus. All things, we are told are being made new. The terminal generation was the generation that witnessed Christ's ultimate victory over death, hell and the grave. They are the generation that saw the passing away of the old covenant order, and because of that victory, we are living in a new earth, that is definitively and yet progressively seeing every one of our Lord's enemies done away with.

Christ ultimately did away with the old order. It is no more, and it is never to return. He has made everything new, Psalms 110:1 says, "The Lord has said to my Lord sit, at my right hand, until I make all your enemies my footstool." May we be witnesses to our Lord' continuing triumph.