

PILGRIM'S PROGRESS: 4b
The Incredible Journey
Of The
Church Age Believer
Dec. 28, 2003

INTRO: We have come in our series to phase two of the Church age believer's incredible journey. We saw the believer meet Christ in the air at the rapture, and we speculated that one of the first events to take place is the judgement seat of Christ where the believer will be rewarded for his or her life here on earth. We saw that some lose their rewards. We saw the believer crowned, some with several crowns.

What happens after this? I believe that the next thing that will happen is that the Church, made up of all believers, and Christ will be married and have a seven year honeymoon.

Marriage is one of most beautiful and one of the most important relationships on earth. The marriage relationship offers a relationship not possible any other way. There are many people in our world who by-pass marriage and they will never discover that which God intended for them. When one lives promiscuously one damages any following marriage relationship. Only that marriage lived in light of God's requirements can grow in the way God intended it to.

Marriage is a life-long time of learning. How is your marriage? Let me encourage you, study and obey the Bible and it will help any marriage. It helps poor marriages improve and helps good marriages get better. Marriage, can be the next thing to heaven on earth, and it can be equally bad.

In this part of our messages we are speaking of a bride and bridegroom becoming husband and wife. I would like to take one moment to speak to parents and young people on this very important topic. I have never given a message on the home. Somehow I feel one is not qualified to instruct until one has been proved, and that is not until one has done with teenagers. For those of us who are married, we have grown up in one of the most dangerous systems of taking a wife I know of. It is the system of dating. Dating has many treacherous shoals, and hidden reefs where almost all young people will briuse and hurt each other.

I would like to encourage you to something if your children are not yet dating. And if they are, you might still help them. If

you are married, I need not tell you how dangerous dating is for things that ought not happen before marriage. I would encourage you, for husband and wife to sit down together and decide what you will allow and will not allow. Then when your son or daughter wants to start seeing someone, you say that you must first sit down with us. In our home we give the instructions to never date for the fun of it. How many people do not ruin a good part of their life right there? Only see someone you would seriously consider for marriage. Second, we set out our guidelines. Like 10:00 is time to be home etc... Explain what is dangerous and what is safe. If you will do this, it will keep your young person safer and save them from dating anybody and everybody they wish to date. I ask parents a most serious question: Will you let your son or daughter stumble through this very important time, will you let them bruise and hurt themselves in areas you know better, and they have no experience in? Or will you close your eyes and tell yourself unrealistically that without instruction they will do things right? Or will you help them by talking to them and setting guidelines for them?

well, let us look at this beautiful picture of Christ and the Church in marriage in heaven, in the continuation of phase two of the believers pilgrimage. It continues after the judgement seat of Christ by:

2. By marriage to Christ

a. The beauty of this marriage

Why does the Bible liken man's ultimate relationship to Christ as one of marriage? It is not because it will be a physical relationship. It is because it will be an intimate relationship which exceeds all other relationships. In Scripture Israel is pictured as God's wife. He had a relationship with Israel which was more special than His relationship to any other people. In Scripture the Church is pictured as the bride of Christ. What relationship is more special than that of bride and bridegroom or husband and wife?

Here is another reason for a pre-tribulation rapture. Israel is pictured as God's wife. The Church is pictured as the bride of Christ. According to Daniel 9:24-27 the tribulation is the seventieth week and this is determined upon God's

holy people Israel. It will be God's judgement upon Israel and through this God will turn the nation to Himself. To have the Church in the Tribulation and have the rapture take place at the end is to mix up Israel, the wife of God, with the Church the bride of Christ. The rapture question is settled as much by ecclesiology as by eschatology. It has as much to do with the doctrine of the Church as it has to do with prophecy.

b. The Biblical basis for this marriage

John the Baptist referred to Jesus as the bridegroom (Jn. 3:27-30). Jesus referred to Himself as a bridegroom (Luke 5:32-35). Now a bridegroom has a bride. And who is the bride of Christ? Well, the Bible tells us that bride for Christ is the Church (Eph. 5:25-28). The clearest passage on this topic though is Rev. 19:6-9. We will look at it later.

c. The order of this marriage

The Jewish culture with regard to weddings gives us the order of this wedding. The marriage of Jewish young people is both beautiful and instructive with regard to the marriage of Christ and the Church. There were three steps to the Jewish wedding:

The first step was the betrothal. In the betrothal stage two things took place. First was,

1) The selection of the bride

The bride was chosen by the parents. Sometimes this was done even before the children were born but usually about a year before they were married. The Church was chosen by God (Eph. 1:3-4). The second thing that took place during the betrothal was,

2) The payment of the dowry

In the Jewish system the father would agree to a price for the girl called the dowry. The Church too was purchased at a price (See 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 1 Pet. 1:18-19).

Pg. 133-134 pgph. 2 (Heaven, Joni Eriksen.)

The second step in the Jewish marriage was the taking of the bride.

The exact timing of the groom coming for the bride was not known to the bride. When she was chosen by the father of the groom she began to prepare for marriage. The groom could appear at any time and usually a year after the betrothal (See Mat. 25:1-13).

After the groom has prepared a place at his father's home he then goes to take the bride from her home to his father's home. Is that not a perfect picture of Christ going back to His Father's house to prepare a place for us? (See John 14:1-3).

When they arrived back at the Father's house, the private marriage celebration was held and then the marriage was consummated.

Read pg. 134 pgph. 3 - 135 pgph. 3

The third step in the Jewish marriage was the marriage supper. It is here that the real celebration begins. It is to this that the invited guests came. It was this part of the wedding that Jesus attended in Cana of Galilee.

Read pg. 135 pgph 4

In the picture of the Jewish wedding we find again that the return of the Lord is at an unexpected time. The betrothal of Christ to the Church has taken place. God chose the Church to be the bride of His Son. The dowry payment has been made. The Church was bought with the precious blood of God's own Son. The Son has returned to His Father's house to prepare a place for His bride (John 14:1-3).

d. The timing of this marriage

When will the Christ marry the Church? Although the Scriptures are not clear as to the order of events

here I believe it will take place some time after the judgement seat of Christ.

I want you to turn to one of the most instructive passages in the Bible on the certainty and timing of this great wedding. This passage deals with the very end of the tribulation. It tells us what will take place in heaven just before the Lord returns to earth at the end of the tribulation (Rev. 19:7-9).

In this passage we are at the end of the tribulation but notice that the Lamb, who is none other than Christ, has a wife, not a bride. At the end of the tribulation Christ and the Church are already married. (NIV has bride in verse 7. Typical NIV error of interpreting rather than translating. The Greek is *gunee* for wife, not *numphee* for bride).

From this text it is nigh impossible to hold to the post-trib position. Notice also that this bride wears white clothes, clean and bright. The judgement seat of Christ has taken place and all that was not right has been righted for this fine white linen represents the righteous acts of the saints and there is niether spot nor wrinkle.

3. By seven years of honeymoon

What do we know of our interim heavenly experience thus far? We will stand before the bema judgement seat of Christ to give an account of our life to God. Then there will come the wonderful wedding of God's Son to the Church.

Before marriage there is the time of getting to know one another. For Jewish men and women they might not get to see each other from the time of betrothal until their wedding day. They would learn what their espoused partner was like from their parents and maybe others who knew them. In our day we go to see this person and we enjoy getting to know that person better. But after marriage you get to know your partner better than you ever could have in any other way. This is what it will be like in heaven those 7 years while the tribulation rolls out its horrors on

the rest of mankind. In Jewish weddings this was a very, very special time. Surely this will be the most blessed 7 years you and I will ever have. The wonders of what we will learn here. Probably Jesus will prepare us for the things that lie ahead.

C. Completed by preparation for the marriage supper

How will this second phase be completed? How does it come to a close? We find this in Revelation 19:11-16. In Jewish weddings, right after the private wedding when the physical union has taken place, guests are invited to a time of festivities. These festivities, depending on the wealth of the father, often went on for seven days. Dr. Harold Willmington says that in NT times the time of celebration depended on the wealth of the father and when God's Son is married, because of the wealth of His Father, the celebration will continue for 1000 years! But this remains to be considered in phase 3. Phase two ends by the newly married wife of Christ preparing herself for the marriage supper. What a glorious time this interim heavenly experience has been! But the journey of the Church age believer is not yet over. Great things still lie ahead.

CONCL: We are not given much information in Scripture of what will take place in heaven after the rapture, during the time when the seven year tribulation transpires on earth. It seems that the judgement seat of Christ will take place there, the rewarding of the saints. It is certain that the wedding of Christ and the Church will take place there.

As glorious as all this will be, the journey of the Church age believer is not over. The third phase of this journey is now about to begin and we will look at that in the next message. This completes phase two of the incredible journey of the Church age believer. Let us close this phase by reading a Psalm that may well speak of this marriage festivity in heaven (Ps. 45).

