

PILGRIM'S PROGRESS: 7a  
The Incredible Journey  
Of The  
Church Age Believer  
March 15, 2003

INTRO: In our series called "Pilgrim's Progress: The Incredible Journey of the Church age Believer" we are going to close the third of four phases. Let me briefly run those by you again: Phase 1 begins at the moment of salvation and ends at death or the rapture. Phase 2, begins at death or the rapture and ends with the bride of Christ having become the wife of Christ in heaven. And now she is seated, along with Christ, on white horses, ready to return to earth. Phase 3 begins when she returns to earth with Christ and she reigns with Christ for 1000 years on earth.

We have all heard of, talked about, and thought about heaven. But do we really know what that means? That time we refer to as "heaven" begins at the beginning of phase 2 and goes right through to phase 4, a phase that never ends. But did we think of heaven as including coming back to earth? Did we think of it as reigning on earth with Christ? No, sad to say, for the most part, all Christians know about heaven is that we go up and we are with God forever. But that is so far from the picture of Scripture.

I have wondered as I prepared these messages, how many check out what I am preaching? How many write it off as too fantastic, too fanciful and you say, "Oh well, that's his point of view"? On the other hand, how many simply accept it and say, "Pastor Phil said so, so it must be true". That is cause for concern.

As I prepared for this message, my mind was drawn again and again to an old song that is familiar to our community. It is called, "Where The Roses Never Fade." (Read it. Mention it is on back of outline.) Do you know what city that song speaks of? Do you know what we are singing when we sing that song? Do you know what the Bible has in view when it speaks of that city? (Read Heb. 11:16) To me, there is no doubt that the city of Hebrews 11:16 is the same place that Jesus referred to when He said in John 14, "In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself that where I am, there you may be also." We have met this city earlier in this series. We are going to meet it again in the next phase,

and we are going to see it this morning, at the close of phase 3.

### C. Completed in the heavenly mansion

Now at the end of phase 3, the end of the 1000 year reign of Christ we meet a difficult question: What happens to the Church age believer? Now if you look at Revelation 21:7-9 you will find that after the millennium there is a short season where the devil is turned loose and he deceives the nations. As we read these verses, see if you find the Church or Christ (read). Then in 21:10-15 Satan is judged and so are all the lost dead and they are cast into hell (read and see if you find Christ and the Church). Then in Revelation 21:1-8 we are introduced to the new heavens and the new earth (read and see if the Church or Christ are mentioned).

Now the question that lies before us this morning is: Where is the Church during this time. What happens to the Church at the end of the millennium? It is worth noting that it is not Jesus Christ that deals with the rebels at the end of the short season. It is God (20:9). Then, at the great white throne judgement, all the dead stand before God, not Jesus Christ (20:12a). Interestingly, Christ and the Church are not found (20:7-21:8). And our question is: Where are they? How do we follow the journey of the Church age believer from this point?

Well, in Revelation 21:1-8, we are introduced to the new heavens and the new earth (read). Still we have no sign of the Church. Then in Revelation 21:9, we have this very interesting revelation (read). Oh yes, God has not forgotten about the Church. Now I want you to reason with me for a moment. Prior to Revelation 21:9 we find the Church age believer for the last time in 20:6. That passage indicates that the church age believer reigns with Christ for the entire millennium. Then, after Satan is loosed on earth, we do not find the Church age believer until Revelation 20:9. This is at the beginning of the time of the new heaven and earth. In 21:9 we find the believer ascending from God out of heaven in the new Jerusalem. Now is it not simply reasonable to say that sometime between 20:6 and 21:9, the Church has gone back to heaven? I can hardly see otherwise.

And so I want to propose to you that all believers are taken to heaven to that city where the roses never fade, right after the 1000 year reign and just before the short season? Why? Because in all that time, we do not find them on earth. God Almighty Himself takes care of the rebels and the devil at the end of the short season and they are judged and cast into hell. When that is done, He does some amazing things which we will look at later. The end result is that there is a new heaven and a new earth and the new Jerusalem, containing the Church, ascends onto this new earth.

If I am right, then they have gone once more to the city where the roses never fade! You see, if the bride is in the new Jerusalem, which descends from heaven, as it is clearly implied, then we ask, "When did she go there?" And my answer is that it happened right at the end of the millennium and just before the short season began.

Now I want us to notice something that I have never yet been able to understand. Maybe you can help me. In Revelation 21:9 one of the seven angels spoken of earlier in Revelation spoke with the Apostle John and said these interesting words, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." Now when the apostle sees this spectacular city he gets all caught up with describing the beauty of the city, and the angel seems to forget about the Church. He does not seem to finish what he began to do. Whatever the reason for that is, I am so glad verse 9 is there. If it were not for this verse, a big hole would be left in our understanding of the journey of the Church age believer at this point.

Now I want to add something free of charge this morning. If you will read and study up on this topic you are going to find an alternative view about the city to what I have expressed here. So let me give it to you as well, lest you think I failed in my homework. Some hold that the New Jerusalem is suspended in space, far above the earth, throughout the tribulation and the millennium and that Christ and the Church rule over the earth from that city.

This view sees this city come down into the sky somewhere and that at the rapture the Christian meets Christ in the air in this city. Then during the tribulation and during the millennium this gigantic city is suspended in the heavens above the earth and Christ rules with His Church

from there. Richard DeHaan of Radio Bible Class seems to favor this view (Booklet, *Our Eternal Home*). There is some merit to that view, but I think it hangs on a very thin shreds of evidence.

As I studied the Scriptures with regard to the completion of Phase III I failed to find Christ or the saints on earth from the time the millennium closes. The last mention of Christ and the resurrected saints is in 20:6. I do not find Christ or the Church age saints on earth after the millennium when Satan is loosed for a little while. If we were in a Bible class I would give you an assignment. The assignment would be this, "Trace the existence of the Church in the book of Revelation." If you should do that little exercise you would make some interesting discoveries. You would find Revelation 1-3 laden with references to the Church. Then, in Revelation 4:1-18:24, the time of the tribulation, you will find not one single reference to the Church. Then just as amazingly, in Revelation 19, at the end of the tribulation you find the Church in heaven where she is already the wife of Christ. In Revelation 20:1-6 we find the Church present with Christ in the millennium. In Revelation 20:7-21:8 we do not find mention of Christ or the Church. Where is the Church? Where is the Lord Jesus? It is my understanding that they have gone back to the eternal city at the end of the millennium, thus Phase III of the Pilgrim's Incredible Journey closes with a return of the Church to the city where the roses never fade.

Now let us just take a few moments to look at this very important city, the New Jerusalem. (Read John 14:1-3.) Here Jesus promised that He was going to prepare a place for His disciples and we have no doubt that they are representative of all believers of the Church age. Jesus was preparing a place in heaven in order that the believer who goes to heaven might be with Him in a prepared place. No doubt that at the rapture, when the Church is taken up, that the believer is taken to this city which contains the mansions Jesus prepared for His bride.

Hebrews 12:22-24 also speaks of this Mount Zion, or new Jerusalem as belonging to the Church age believer but it also indicates that it is the home of other groups and individuals as well (read). Now let us notice the description of this place. You see, I believe that in this place, Jesus went to prepare a place for us as John 14

says. And I believe it is this very city that ascends from God out of heaven onto the new earth we have read about. Now notice first that we have come to Mount Zion. That is why we sing, "We're marching to Zion, beautiful, beautiful Zion; We're marching upward to Zion, the beautiful city of God." Now if you look at verse 18 for a moment, you will see that Mt. Zion is contrasted to Mount Sinai. He says we have not come to Mount Sinai, where Israel was challenged to take the promised land. No, we have come to Mt. Zion, the city where the roses never fade.

So it is Mount Zion we have come to. Mt. Zion is where Jerusalem was built. How is it that we have come to Mount Zion? It is the new city of Jerusalem. Notice it in verse 22, we have come to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem. It is this city we are now marching towards. So our first description of this city is threefold: 1. it is Mount Zion 2. it is the city of our God. That is why Jesus called it His Father's house. God lives there. We will see later that God comes to earth in this new city. Fantastic, is it not. 3. It is the heavenly Jerusalem. Now why would this city be called the *heavenly* Jerusalem? Well, it is built in heaven. Its origin is in heaven and it comes from heaven.

I want us to notice second, in verse 22, that we have come to an innumerable company of angels. When I teach the book of Revelation, I have students draw the scene in heaven as described in chapters 4-5. In the very centre we have the Triune God. Around God there is a beautiful rainbow. Seated on thrones around the throne of God are 24 elders. I believe they are representatives of the Church at least, if not of the Church and of Israel. The seven branch candlestick is burning before God's throne, representing the seven Spirits of God. There is also a sea of glass before the throne. And right around God's throne are four living creatures, angelic beings of very high rank. And from Revelation 5:11 we learn that around all of what we have described, is an innumerable host of angels. What a place is this that we have come to?

Now let us look at the next group of people found in this city. Verse 23 says, "...to the general assembly and Church of the firstborn..." Now the Greek word here translated "general assembly", is *paneiguris* meaning either an assembly of an entire people, or a gathering at a festival, a festival convocation. I feel that the word translated "general assembly" and the Church of the firstborn are the

same group. What we have come to is a festal gathering of the Church. What a gathering this will be!

Now notice that this group is registered in heaven. The word, registered is *apographo*. It has to do with being written down or recorded. So we sing, "Is my Name Written There?" What a serious question is that for us this morning. If I slip out of this life, and my name is not written there in the Lamb's book of life, I will not go there. The question for each of us this morning is: Am I registered in heaven?

But that is not all. We go on in verse 23 that we have come to, "...God the judge of all." If you are not saved, I want to tell you that you do not want to face this judge. No. Nothing will get by Him. And if you are not saved, you will not come to this wonderful place we are describing. Oh that I could describe what it must be like to face God without Christ! And for those of us who are saved, we too must face judgement. On the basis of this judgement our portion in eternity will be allotted to us. I wish I had time to describe for you this morning those described in the Bible again and again as overcomers. The victors. Those victorious over Satan's wiles.

Now notice further in verse 23 that this city is home to the spirits of just men made perfect. Who is this group? It is held by premillennialists that these are the OT saints. (It refers to the spirits of these people because they are not yet resurrected. The perfection referred to here may refer here to their completed redemption which took place at the cross.)

So look at the sixth description of this place we're marching to and who is there. We have come to, "Jesus the mediator of the new covenant." He is the mediator who stands between the sinner and God Almighty, described in our passage here as the Judge. The new covenant is the new agreement that we enter when we believe on Him by faith. When we believe, then we enter the benefits of this agreement and that is described as eternal life in John 3:16.

And last, we have come to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel. Well, the blood of Abel cried out for vengeance for murder. The blood of

Christ speaks of forgiveness, cleansing, acceptance. What a difference.

Well, what a description of the city where the roses never fade. This city is the place Jesus said, "In My Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am there you may be also. And Where I go you know, and the way you know." We know where He went. He went to this city, the abode of God. And we know how to get there for He is the way, the truth and the life.

Another reference to this city is found in Revelation 3:12. John writes, "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God."

That this city belongs to the Church is also clear from Revelation 21:14 where we are told that the foundations have the names of the 12 apostles on them. The 12 apostles are the foundation of the whole Church. Paul speaking of the Church and how Jew and Gentile become one during the Church age speaks of the Apostles as being the foundation on which we, believers in Christ, are built (Eph. 2:19-22).

It is almost certain that the tribulation saints who were killed and resurrected and the resurrected OT saints also go to this city in heaven when Christ and the Church go there after the millennium. In Revelation 21:12-13 we find that this New Jerusalem has 12 gates upon which are written the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. How beautifully Israel and the Church are brought together in this city. Eternity will be one beautiful state of harmony between Israel and the Church. Nor should we find it amazing that Israel will be in this city with the Gentile for Israel too has long waited for this city. Look at Hebrews 11, the great hall of faith of the OT. (Read underlined portions of Heb. 11). What hope did these warriors of faith cherish that caused them to bear life's greatest difficulties by faith? (Read Heb. 11:13-16).

This city, this New Jerusalem, was prepared; not only for the Church age believer but for Israel as well. The writer of Hebrews says in 11:39-40, "And all these, having

obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us." The perfection referred to here is likely that of resurrection. Thus the words of Jesus come true, the last shall be first, and the first last.

So, how does Phase III come to completion? It is my conclusion that right after the 1000 years of Christ's earthly rule Christ and the Church and all resurrected saints return to heaven, not to stay, but to await the beginning of Phase IV, the final and eternal phase of the Pilgrim's Progress.

CONCL: As we conclude this third phase of the Incredible Journey of the Church Age Believer let us review for a moment where we have been. Phase I covers from the time I accept Christ until I die or go to be with Christ at the rapture. It is the time of testing. The true Christian meets with many obstacles. You may say, why is my road so rough. Let me say that likely the greatest glory is possible to the one with the roughest road.

Phase II begins at a meeting with Christ in the air, an event we call the rapture. Then begins our interim experience in heaven, a seven year experience. After seven years of almost unbelievable events the believer prepares to return to earth with Christ.

Phase III begins with a horse ride from heaven to earth. Here we will see some of the greatest military action the world has ever seen. The Lord Jesus Christ, dressed in a robe dipped in blood deals with a greedy, murderous world and the implements of war fall silent for 1000 years. During these 1000 years Old Testament saints, martyred tribulational saints and the Church dwell with Christ on earth. Of all the time of this present earth those will be the most blessed years of all.

When those 1000 years are completed, Christ, the Church and very likely all the resurrected saints of other periods will return back to heaven. I do not think that we will be present on earth during the final short season of this world nor during the final revolt of Satan.

This brings us to the 4th final phase of the Incredible Journey of the Church Age Believer which we will begin to consider in the next message.

Where The Roses Never Fade

I am going to a city  
Where the streets of gold are laid,  
Where the tree of life is blooming,  
And the roses never fade.

Here they bloom but for a season,  
Soon their beauty is decayed;  
I am going to a city  
Where the roses never fade.

In this world we have our troubles,  
Satan's snares we must evade;  
We'll be free from all temptations  
Where the roses never fade.

Loved ones gone to be with Jesus,  
In their robes of white arrayed,  
Now are waiting for my coming  
Where the roses never fade.

