

All heaven praises the Lord for his righteous judgment of immoral seducers and corrupt persecutors of his faithful Bride. In reply, the Bride (Christ's Church) must join heaven in worshiping God and glorifying her Bridegroom: the King who delivers, justifies, vindicates, glorifies, and loves her forever.

Introduction - Why does Cinderella continue to grip the hearts of millions?

I. Starting at the End of Love

A. Praise the Lord for the judgment of the Great Prostitute (vv. 1-5)

Here at the end of the Bible's story of Love there is a corrupt and immoral enemy threatening to destroy the love between God and his Church. The book of Revelation calls that enemy Babylon the Great Prostitute. She has been the downfall of many who were seduced by her corrupt use of money, sex, and power. God has rightly judged her, avenging on her the blood of the Bride that stained her hands. She was the last obstacle standing between the Lamb and his Bride.

B. Praise the Lord for the marriage of the Lamb and his Bride (vv. 6-10)

The last time the Bible mentions marriage is in this passage. We hear thunderous praise in heaven because, finally, the wedding day of the Lamb and his Bride has arrived. And the timing couldn't be better! God Almighty has vanquished all his enemies, he has rescued his Bride from the hand of Babylon the Great Prostitute, and through her trial of testing she has prepared herself for the wedding. The most extravagant royal wedding on earth would pale in comparison.

II. What is the Story of Love?

A. Act One: Creation

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. It was glorious, and God loved his creatures. But there was something that was not good. In the Garden of Eden, the first man could not find a mate, a helper, a lover suitable for him. So God created and presented the first woman Eve to the man Adam as his wife. In a mysterious way, the marriage of the first man and women was a shadowy picture of how they were married to their Creator. God as the cosmic Royal Bridegroom chose his people as his cosmic Bride (Deuteronomy 7:6-8; Isa 62:5; Jeremiah 2:2; Ezekiel 16:8; Solomon 1-8).

B. Act Two: Fall

But tragically, God's chosen people chose to spurn his love. In an adulterous act of betrayal, they gave their love to their sworn enemy the Serpent. In righteousness he judged their sin, but he was also merciful. In love he granted them clothing to cover their nakedness and shame. Then he sent them away from his Garden home until the day he would rescue them from their captivity to the Serpent, the evil suitor who had wooed their hearts away from their one true love.

C. Act Three: Israel

Most of Adam and Eve's children did not want to be married to God. The rest of the Old Testament is the story of Israel repeatedly returning to the Lord, her Bridegroom, only to betray his love again and again. Eventually God sends his wife away into exile from his home, just like he sent away Adam and

Eve. Even so, the Bridegroom promises that one day, he will come to rescue his beloved Bride once and for all. On that day she will begin longing for her Bridegroom with all her heart, and he will strengthen her faithfulness through trial and temptation by his heart-transforming love for her. He will move heaven and earth to win her back, even if it costs him his life.

D. Act Four: Jesus & the Church

In the fullness of time, God came to earth to rescue his Bride (John 3:16). She sought to be with him, to live with him, to share in intimate relationship with her one true love. Meanwhile the enemies of the Bridegroom succeeded in executing him on the cross. But they did not realize his death and resurrection was God's sacrifice of love to win his Bride back to himself. True love cannot die! And so with his Bride forgiven and restored, Jesus the Royal Bridegroom returns home by ascending to his throne in heaven. And God will continue to strengthen the Bride to overcome her enemies, to resist temptation, and to remain faithful until her Bridegroom the King returns.

E. Act Five: New Creation

When the day of the royal wedding finally arrives, Christ the cosmic Bridegroom will return for his cosmic Bride, the Church, whom he loved from age to age, beginning to end. He will deliver her from all his and her enemies, and take her to himself in marriage. And they will live and rule together, happily ever after for all eternity.

III. Why the Story of Love?

A. To remind us what is glorious about love in marriage

1. *The plotline of the story is glorious.* He is a valiant warrior who has stormed the gates of the castle where his beloved princess is held captive. She is tormented for refusing to love her captor. She is tempted to give in to the seductions of her evil suitor. She is threatened, persecuted, and even killed for her faithfulness to her true love. Someday her King will come. He will rescue her, and she will stay faithful to him until he comes.

2. *The symbolism of the characters is glorious.* Christ and his Bride will be King and Queen of the new heaven and new earth, ruling together over a glorious kingdom of truth, justice, and peace - she submitting to him in love forever, he protecting and providing for her in love forever. Their marriage is built on the one complementing the other. He is her head. She is his glory.

B. To stir us to praise and worship the God who loves us

The praise and worship coming from heaven begins as a great roar and keeps getting louder. This heavenly roar erupts from all the saints who have passed from this life into glory (cf. Revelation 7:9-10). John is so stirred he foolishly falls down to worship the messenger! Every time you remember the story of Love it should bring you to your knees, worshipping God and his Christ.

C. To strengthen our faithfulness to Christ our Bridegroom

Her adornment of righteousness is a gift from her beloved. Righteousness is a gift from God to those who trust in the righteousness of the Bridegroom Jesus Christ on their behalf. Her adornment of righteousness vindicates her faithfulness to her beloved while she was tested in trial and temptation.

The story of Love gives you strength to keep waiting for Christ's rescue, and to resolve again to stand fast in your love for your Bridegroom.

Conclusion - Opposition and temptation are God's means of preparing us for the eternal marriage, as we ready ourselves through faithfulness for our wedding day. Be strengthened knowing there is a purpose in your faith being tested. For all those who hold to the testimony of Jesus the Bridegroom: Take heart, be strong and courageous, for someday your Prince will come!