

ECCLESIOLOGY:  
The Doctrine of The Church:  
The Church in the Book of Revelation

INTRODUCTION: In 2004, on Pentecost day, I began a series of messages on the doctrine of the Church. I did that because Pentecost is the birthday of the Church. The Church is now almost 2000 years old. Remember, it began the year Jesus was crucified. I believe Jesus ministered for just over 2 years. There is evidence for two years of ministry and there is not evidence for the commonly held view that it was three years. If He ministered three years, we have no record of what happened in the second year of His ministry. Nothing or at best, very little would be recorded of that one year. Now it is held that the Gregorian calendar is out by from 1-4 years so that Jesus was born, possibly in what we have as 1 to 4 BC. So, if Jesus was 32 when He died, the Church was born in AD 28 - 32 AD. So we are now nearing 2000 years of the Church's history.

In these messages, and it would be nice to get them all on CD, we first of all identified the Church. We stated very clearly at the outset, that the Church is not Israel, or a replacement of Israel. Nor is the Church a political entity. The Church is that company of God's people, saved people, from Pentecost to the rapture. After the rapture takes place, God will complete His work with the nation of Israel. That is Daniel's seventieth week, which we know as the tribulation time.

Then we looked at the history of the Church in the Gospels, where it was foretold. Then in Acts, where the Church was born and grew into a much larger company. Here the Gospel began to go to the ends of the earth. We looked briefly at the Church in the Epistles. The Epistles are that body of inspired writings most directly addressed to the Church. The last two messages I did were with regard to the Church's relationship to the Sabbath.

We are now to look at the Church in the book of Revelation. This will complete our look at the history of the Church as revealed in the NT. A study of the Church in the book of Revelation is a most fascinating study.

D. In Revelation

Intro: So, let me introduce to you the book of Revelation. We turn to Revelation 1:1 (read). The question regarding the phrase, 'the revelation of Jesus Christ' is, does it speak of revealing Christ or is it the revelation which came from Christ? I hold to the latter, though the former is true to some extent. Now notice in this verse that God gave it to Jesus. So here is the process of this revelation. God had it. He gave it to Jesus. He gave it to Him in order to show to His servants things which must shortly take place. Thus it is a prophetic book. Jesus then gave this revelation to an angel. The angel took it to the Apostle John, who was imprisoned on the Island of Patmos. And John wrote all this revelation down on papyrus, and he sent it to the seven churches of Asia. These are churches, and they copied and recopied this book and sent it on, and it went on until it has come down to us.

Now let me say something here about the Bible. There was a time when there were no books. Then the Old Testament was written. The first dates we know are the writing of the Torah, or the Pentateuch, or as we know it in German, the five books of Moses. They were written some 2500 years after creation. Then, for the next 1100 years the other 34 books of the OT were written. So the OT was written over a time period of 1500 years. However, the NT was written in a brief span of 50 years. But though the NT books were written, they were not all accepted by the Church. Over the next 400 years the Church debated which books should be in the NT. Some books were accepted immediately, others were not. Revelation was one of those books that was not universally accepted for quite some time. However, it gained a place in the canon of Scripture and has been there ever since.

Now our subject is the Church in the book of Revelation.

### 1. The Church's appearance in the book

The Church appears in this book first in 1:4 (read). Here we are told the fact that John is writing this letter to the seven churches in

Asia. These are seven local churches, but like the epistles, we gather that they have the broader purpose of addressing the Church universal in general as well. As a matter of fact, many see the addresses to these seven churches as having several purposes.

a. The historical purpose

The first purpose is what I call the historical purpose. In other words, the address to each church was meant for that church in its historical setting. The letter to the church of Ephesus was addressed to the Christians in Ephesus, etc...

b. The typical purpose

Then there is what I call the typical purpose. That means each of these seven churches typifies what any church in church history might be like. For example, the message to the church of Laodicea, the lukewarm church, is a message to any church that is lukewarm today. So it is viewed that each of these seven churches pictures seven categories that any church might fall into, and so every church throughout church history finds a special message to it in one of these seven churches. So each of these seven churches typifies any church at some stage of that church's life.

c. The prophetical purpose

Then there is the third, and last, purpose and that is that the first church addressed, Ephesus, speaks of the first time period of the Church age. The second church of the second time period etc... So, today we find ourselves in the Church in general to be in the Luke warm stage. It is viewed that these seven churches speak prophetically of the church age.

We do not have time this morning to explore this other than to say that very clearly we find the Church in chapters 1-3.

d. The individual purpose

There is also a sense in which each of us as individual Christians might find ourselves. We may be in a godly spiritual church but be lukewarm ourselves, so that the message to the last church becomes a message to us as individuals. After each church is addressed, it says, "He that has an ear to hear, let him hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches."

So, we the church makes its appearance early in this book and is the subject of chapters 2-3.

2. The Church's disappearance in the book

But go with me now to 4:1 (read). From here you will read up to Revelation 22:16 before the Church is mentioned again by name. However, though the Church is not mentioned by name until 22:16, she is mentioned in chapter 19 and we will see this later. So in Revelation 4-6 we have an introduction to heaven, where John is transported to. In 6-18, the major portion of the tribulation time is described and the Church is not mentioned one single time. She is not even hinted at or alluded to. Now no matter how you slice this matter, that is a conspicuous absence.

So, it is held by some that 4:1 is a picture of the rapture, that is John is caught up to heaven, picturing the rapture. With the Church being absent in the discussion of the tribulation in chapters 6-18, there is some ground for that. There is further evidence for this in the last clause of this verse. John is told that he will be shown, "... things which must take place after this." The phrase 'after this' is the Greek, 'meta tauta', which means 'after these things.' The nearest antecedent to 'these

'things' is the things of the previous chapters, dealing with the Church. So it is possible that the idea here is, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after the Church age."

So, the disappearance of the Church in this book at 4:1 is very interesting to say the least. It is a matter that those who hold to a mid trib or a post trib rapture view must answer satisfactorily, and that is a challenge.

Now, I mentioned earlier that the Church does not reappear in the book by name before chapter 22. But the Church is pictured earlier. So, let us look at the Church's reappearance in this book.

### 3. The Church's reappearance in the book

In chapter 18, we have the destruction of Babylon the great. It is a scene on earth that magnifies what happened at the Twin Towers. Babylon the great is destroyed in one hour (18:19). The destruction of Babylon is a scene on earth. However, the scene then shifts to a scene in heaven. Now I want you to see how heaven feels about the destruction of Babylon (read 18:20-19:4). Such is the rejoicing in heaven over the destruction of Babylon the Great. You see, in heaven, the perfect place, they are not shy to rejoice over the death of the wicked.

Now let us go to verses 5-10 (read). Verse 7 says the marriage of the Lamb has come. We know who the Lamb, capital L is. It is none other than the Lord Jesus. Though some argue there is not evidence that the Church is the bride of Christ, I believe she is and the evidence is sufficient. The bride of Christ, here the wife of Christ is none other than the Church. And here, just before the close of the tribulation we find her, not on earth, but in heaven! And she is married already! She is in heaven and married! It says, "His wife has made herself ready!"

Now, maybe you say, "Just a minute. Not so fast. It says in verse 7 the marriage has come. How can she be the wife if the marriage has just now come." Furthermore, you might say, "When it says 'His wife', in the original it says 'His gunee', 'His woman', referring to His bride, not His wife." So, you might say to me, "Slow down and be honest with Scripture."

I answer like this: That is a Gentile argument. One must understand the Jewish wedding to understand what is happening here. I have just recently received Chuck Missler's latest news letter. His wife, Nancy, has a section in the news letter and writes an article on the Jewish wedding. This is what she writes, "The Marriage Ceremony is an area not well understood, so be as the Bereans -- get into the Word and check out everything that is shared (Acts 17:11). The word *marriage* in the Greek is *gamos* (Strong's #1062), and can mean either a 'wedding ceremony' or a 'wedding feast.' This is where the confusion comes in. In other words *gamos* can be used for either the 'wedding ceremony' itself or the 'wedding feast' which happens at a later date" (pg. 33 Update/May 2011).

So, our question is, does the word 'marriage' in verse 7 refer to the wedding ceremony, or the marriage supper? Well, we are told in the context. So look at verse 9. It says, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!" It is the marriage supper that has come, not the marriage ceremony. This marriage supper is what will take place on earth, when the millennium in chapter 20 begins!

But, by saying that we have come to the marriage supper, that means the marriage ceremony has occurred earlier already! Now I ask you, when, and where did the marriage ceremony between Christ and the Church take place? If we have come to the marriage supper in Revelation 19, then the marriage ceremony must have taken place earlier. There can be no doubt about that.

So, let me take time to explain this, though I have done so a number of times over the years. Nancy Missler does a very good job of explaining this whole procedure, so I will read it for you. She writes, "The first part of the Jewish wedding ceremony was the *betrothal*, which was called the *erusin* or the *Kiddashin*. This is where the groom gave his bride-to-be an object of value such as a ring, money, or a deed of intention, which was symbolic of a promise providing a legal tie between the two. The father of the groom usually paid the bridal price. This was a true legal document, having no immediate effect on their personal stake, but just a promise for the future (Deuteronomy 20:7). Cohabitation was forbidden at this time and the bride must remain a virgin, using this time to prepare herself for her marriage. If she was found not to be a virgin, she could be rejected (Matthew 1:19). This in-between time was where the bride must make herself ready for her coming groom (Revelation 19:7). This preparation meant making her own wedding gown, getting ready for her new role, transferring her allegiance from her father to her new husband, going from the familiar to the unfamiliar, from depending on family to depending upon her husband for everything, learning to love him, and setting her mind on how to please him. During this 'preparation period,' the bride is referred to as 'consecrated,' or set apart (or sanctified). She always wore a veil, so it was apparent to others that she was engaged. This veil was symbolic of a pledge or a commitment.

"The second part of the Jewish marriage was called the *nissuin* or the *marriage ceremony* itself. The groom often surprised the bride by his unexpected or early return. All Jewish brides were said to be 'stolen or caught up, or snatched up by surprise.' The bride was then led to the groom's house by a wedding procession of women carrying lighted lamps, similar to the Parable of the Ten Virgins... Lamps were a part of the bride's preparation in case her groom came at night. The bride was arrayed in *fine linen, clean and white*. The wedding ceremony itself was

held at the groom's father's house and usually included only a few invited guests. At this time a series of benedictions are made and the couple were finally husband and wife.

"The wedding ceremony was then followed by seven days of celebration, great rejoicing, and finally, a *marriage feast*. This occasion was often held at a different place and many people were invited" (pgs. 33-35). End quote.

Our subject is the Church. Today we are commemorating the birthday of the Church. In the book of Revelation we are looking at the appearance, disappearance and reappearance of the Church. In chapter 19, we have the reappearance. Our question now has been this, if 19:7-9 speaks of the marriage feast, when did the marriage ceremony take place? We know it has not happened up until now, because we are still the bride, not the wife.

From the picture of Jewish marriages, I want to give us now a panoramic view of the whole thing and show where the marriage ceremony will have taken place. In Jewish marriages, there was first the selection of a bride and then the betrothal and the dowry price. The Bride God chose for His Son was the Church. She was paid for by the blood of Christ and betrothed to Him. So let us go to Ephesians 5 (read 25-27). The Son has gone back to His Father's house to prepare a place for His bride. Turn to John 14 (read 1-3). The bride, in the meanwhile, is preparing herself. She is being sanctified so that she will be without spot or wrinkle (Eph. 5:27).

Then, unexpectedly, the bridegroom, Jesus, will come for His bride (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Then she will be taken to His Father's house (John 14). Here, at the Father's house, the marriage will take place. This we learn from the picture of Jewish marriages. Now, when the private marriage has taken place in the Father's house, with a few invited guests which I propose are the OT saints who have gone on to heaven, we come to

Revelation 19. So let us read verses 7-9 again (read).

Now the marriage ceremony was held at the Father's house. In our picture of Christ and the Church, this takes place in heaven. If that is so, that gives very strong implications for a pre tribulational rapture. A mid tribulational rapture might work in this picture but a post tribulational rapture does not fit at all.

But, the marriage supper, according to Nancy Missler was often held at a different location than the marriage ceremony. Now I can tell you where it will take place. We learn this from Revelation 19. You see, this chapter is just very important to the doctrine of the Church. So, let us read 19:11-16 (read).

So, we are told that the marriage supper has come. Christ then returns to earth with His bride. In the Ascension Day service, just 10 days ago, I told you what happens when Jesus returns in like manner as they then saw Him go. You see, He prepares this earth for the marriage supper. So let us read Revelation 19:15-21.

Here the Church comes down with Christ from heaven, and here the Lord Jesus goes to work in destroying the Yassar Arrafats and Saddam Hussiens and the Hitlers of earth. The antichrist and the false prophet are then captured and cast alive into hell.

Now let me make one more brief point. Look at Revelation 19:9 (read). Here is my question for you: Who are the invited guests to this wedding? And you may think, "Well, that is the Church." But the Church is the bride and you do not invite the bride to a wedding supper. I believe these guests are those who come through the tribulation alive and they will be the guests to the wedding.

At the Last Supper, just before Jesus was crucified, and He had had a drink of the fruit of the vine with the disciples He said, "But I

say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26:29). I am wondering if it is not at this marriage supper that He once more drinks of the fruit of the vine.

CONCL: Well, let us conclude this message on the Church, on the Church's birthday, as the Church is presented to us in the book of Revelation. The Church makes its appearance early in the book. And in Chapters 1-3 it is seen numerous times. I expressed agreement with the view that the letters written to the seven churches of Asia in chapters 2-3 were written for at least three reasons. First, the message was to the historical churches themselves. Second, any one of these seven churches picture any given church at any given time. That church may be like the church of Ephesus, or Smyrna etc.. Third these churches picture the universal Church throughout the Church age.

But then, in chapter 4 the Church disappears and we do not meet it again until we meet her in heaven, just before the end of the tribulation. Here she is pictured as already married and the wife of Christ, but the marriage supper has not yet taken place. She is then pictured as coming down with the Lord Jesus on white horses, to earth. Here I believe, the marriage supper of the Lamb will be conducted.

So, in these Pentecost messages, we have looked at the history of the Church as given in the NT. Next message, Lord willing, we will consider the Church after the writing of the NT. Here we will look at what is prophesied of the Church according to Revelation 2-3.

Let me emphasize here, the importance of the work of God and Christ and the Holy Spirit in the building of the Church. And the building of the Church is God's greatest work on earth today.