

THE MARRIAGE OF CHRIST

David Baker, prepared for the Presbytery fellowship word, 10 October 2021

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Introduction

In our next series of studies, we will begin to consider 'The bride of Christ'. This is an important topic for our consideration at present. We will endeavour to take our time, because it does have some very far reaching and important implications for us.

We will begin by introducing our study on 'the marriage of Christ and the church'. Having looked at the marriage of Christ and the church, we will consider 'the motherhood of the church', of which there are two dimensions.

The bringing forth of godly seed in covenant houses

The first dimension is *the bringing forth of godly seed in covenant houses that belong to the church*, which is the bride of Christ.

As we consider the bringing forth of godly seed in a covenant house, we will come to understand the vision, or picture, of 'the woman' who is described in Revelation 12, and travails to bring forth a 'manchild'.

The manchild has often been shrouded in mystery; or has appeared to be mysterious. Once we understand the divine nature in a house, however, it becomes a very simple and straightforward proposition.

The evangelistic ministry of the church and to all nations

The second dimension of the motherhood of the church is *the evangelistic ministry of the church*. In this past season, we have been rejoicing that the Lord is restoring and revealing to us 'the gospel of sonship'. He has been doing this for a number of years now.

Consequently, we are rejoicing in the knowledge that the gospel of sonship is *the gospel of the kingdom*. This is the gospel that needs to be 'in our heart and in our mouth', as the Lord is calling every one of us to join 'the Elijah ministry', where we are preparing the hearts of sons of men to receive Christ. Luk 1:17. This is a public ministry, but also an initiative from house to house.

Jesus was very clear that the gospel of the kingdom, which is the gospel of sonship, must be

proclaimed as a testimony in all nations. It is the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom, by the church, which will bring a great harvest. It will bring 'the great multitude from every nation, tribe, people and tongue' into the kingdom of God in the time of the end. Rev 7:9.

The end of the age

In this session, we will begin by considering the marriage of Christ and the church. As I said, this will only be an introduction. In our study of 'The Seventy Weeks Prophecy', we briefly considered the significance of 'the wedding feast', or 'the marriage supper of the Lamb', which will occur at the end of the age.

In our final session on the Seventy Weeks, we identified that the last half of the seventieth week, which is three and a half years in length, is the period of time when Antichrist will reign over the nations of the world. At that time, the Lord will pour out the fullness of His wrath upon Antichrist and his kingdom, by way of seven vials. Rev 15:7.

Significantly, those vials will be poured out in 'the first hour' of his reign. As soon as Antichrist comes to power, therefore, he and his kingdom will be already under judgement and on their way to perdition. Rev 18:10.

The church, the bride of Christ, protected and nourished in the wilderness

It is important to note that these judgements will not have any impact upon the church. During this same three and a half-year period, the church, as the bride of Christ, will be protected and nourished in the wilderness. During this time, we will be enjoying the wedding feast, or the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Speaking of this time, the prophet Isaiah made a declaration concerning the wilderness – and this is a location; it is more than a metaphor.

'The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing.' Isa 35:1-2.

In this location, we see a harbinger of the millennium, when the whole natural creation will

be set free because of the liberty of the sons of God. Rom 8:21.

The three and a half-year period is time of the wedding feast, or the marriage supper of the Lamb, for those who belong to the church as the bride of Christ, and who are alive and remaining during this time.

It will include a very large number of people, as it is expected that the Lord will harvest at least half of the earth's population at the end of the age. This then will be a celebration involving probably over four billion people.

A thousand years of rest and celebration

The physical return of Christ and the first resurrection is the time when every son of God will receive their immortal and incorruptible resurrection body.

Significantly, following the first resurrection, the wedding feast will then continue for *a further thousand years of rest*, with all the saints from all ages.

This is where Adam and Eve, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, David, and all the Old Testament saints who have died in faith will celebrate together. This will be a thousand years of rest, before the work of multiplying the life of God, and of sonship, begins for the new heavens and new earth.

You may think of the three and a half years as something of 'an entrée' in relation to the wedding feast, before we are then joined by all the saints from all ages for the 'main course', which will continue for a thousand years.

The marriage has taken place; the Lamb's wife preparing for the wedding feast

In the book of Revelation, the apostle John recorded that he heard the voice of 'a great multitude like the sound of many waters' saying, 'Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.' Rev 19:7.

When we read this verse in many of our English translations, it infers that the great multitude are announcing that the marriage has finally arrived.

However, the great multitude in heaven – and this will include the saints from the entire church age – are rejoicing that *the marriage has already taken place*, and the Lamb's wife is now *ready* for the wedding feast, or the marriage supper.

It is helpful to note that the literal translation of this verse is all in *the past tense*. It reads, 'Let us rejoice and let us exult and we will give glory to Him, because the marriage of the Lamb *came*.'

We are making the point that the marriage occurred at the point of Christ's death at Calvary.

The bride is now prepared for the wedding feast

'The marriage of the Lamb came, and His wife prepared herself.' She is now *ready* for the wedding feast, or the marriage supper.

She has prepared herself because she has *washed her robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*.

She has also received the initiative of Christ through His messengers, expressing His headship in the church. She has received *the washing of the water of the word*.

The white robes are both garments of priesthood and wedding garments

'And to her it was given [or granted] to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.'

These white robes are the *priestly* garments. They are the same priestly garments that John saw with the great multitude who had washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

These 'priestly garments' are also the 'wedding garments' of the bride.

The white robes are both the garments of priesthood for individual sons of God in the Father's temple; and they are the wedding garments for those who belong to the corporate bride of Christ.

The angel who was speaking to John then highlighted that the focus here is the *readiness* of the bride of Christ for the marriage supper. So, he heard the voice of the great multitude. He then saw that they were clothed in white robes.

The angel who was speaking to him then said to him specifically, 'Write: "Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God".' Rev 19:9.

We need to be ready for the wedding feast

Jesus used various parables in His ministry to highlight the need for us to be ready for the wedding feast. For example, He used the parable of

the five wise and five foolish virgins to highlight the need for every local congregation to maintain their direct relational *connection to the apostolic administration of Christ in a presbytery*.

This is because it is the apostolic administration of Christ in a presbytery that supplies fresh 'oil' for every congregation. They proclaim the mystery of God.

It is not sufficient for a local congregation to seek to borrow or share resources with another congregation. They need to be directly connected to those who are supplying the fresh oil in the anointing of the word proclaimed.

In a similar manner, Jesus also used the parable of the wedding feast to highlight the importance of *responding to God's invitation* when it is given to us; and the need to be walking blamelessly in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, so that we are clothed in white robes. Mat 21:1-13.

In this parable, the king sent messengers out to gather all of the wedding guests. However, many people made light of the invitation to join the wedding feast.

According to this example, we must not be ambivalent to the word.

The people were preoccupied with their own farms or businesses, or whatever they were doing in their daily existence in society.

Then there were others who persecuted and killed the messengers whom the king had sent.

The king, therefore, sent messengers to go into the highways. And he gathered a great multitude such that, it says, the whole house was filled with guests. This is 'the great multitude which no man can number from every nation, tribe, people and tongue'.

We are to be more than the friend of God

The king then went into the wedding hall, and he saw a man with no wedding garment. He said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?'

This is a significant statement, as we consider the various steps of salvation, particularly those steps that belong to wayside ground, under the prevenient grace of God.

In the end, it will not be enough to be reconciled to God as His friend.

We need to be *born as sons of God*.

As well, we need to *join the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings* so that we have 'a wedding garment' which has been washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb.

Jesus was highlighting our need to be *ready* for the wedding feast through these various parables.

The marriage precedes the wedding feast and the bringing forth of children

The book of Revelation clearly identifies when the wedding feast, or the marriage supper, will take place at the end of the age.

This raises an important question for us. We know when the wedding feast will happen. We also know that the wedding feast is after the marriage.

The key question, then, is: 'When does the marriage of Christ and the church take place?'

This is an important consideration, because we do need to identify the marriage of Christ and the church before we can proceed to consider the motherhood of the church, and how the church brings forth sons of God.

The marriage *precedes* the motherhood and the bringing forth of children.

The Day of Atonement was completely fulfilled by the offering of Christ

In previous years, we have associated the fulfilment of the Day of Atonement with the marriage of Christ and the church, and we have particularly looked for a future fulfilment of the Day of Atonement.

For a little while now, we have been considering that the Day of Atonement, and every element of it, was *completely fulfilled* by the offering of Christ, *on His journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross*.

The blood that was shed from His physical body, as He experienced the seven wounding events from Gethsemane to the cross, was the fulfilment of the seven times sprinkling of blood upon the mercy seat that belongs to the Day of Atonement.

The marriage of Christ and the church

Once we have recognised that the Day of Atonement has been fulfilled, the question is: 'When was the marriage of Christ and the church?'

Are we still looking for a future marriage in the time of the events of the book of Revelation; or has the marriage already taken place?

We have often connected the marriage of Christ and the church with a passage in the book of Revelation which concerns 'the great multitude which no man can number'.

'Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" And I [John] said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

'Therefore they are *before the throne of God*, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And *He who sits on the throne will dwell among them*".' Rev 7:13-15.

The literal translation of this verse is, 'He sitting on the throne will *spread His tabernacle over them*.'

Historically, we have linked 'the spreading of the tabernacle' to 'the spreading of a wedding garment'. For example, Ruth referred to the spreading of the wedding garment when she said to Boaz, 'Take your maidservant under your wing.' Rut 3:9.

That timeframe was where we previously placed the marriage of Christ and the church.

The Father spreads His tabernacle over the great multitude

However, it is important to recognise that the great multitude are said to be 'before the throne of God'; and that is *the throne of the Father*.

They are serving the Father, day and night, as priests in His temple. It is the *Father* who is *seated on the throne* and spreads His tabernacle over the great multitude.

As we have been considering, it is recorded in the book of Revelation that the Father *takes His seat in His throne*. Rev 4. That is the event that will initiate all of the events that belong to the time of the end.

Then Christ, as the Lamb, will stand up with His administration and proceed to receive and possess the kingdom, for the sake of delivering it to the Father at the end. Rev 5.

So, at this point, the Father is seated in the throne, and Christ is standing. The One who is seated,

spreading His tabernacle over this great multitude, is *the Father*.

The emphasis in this passage is the protection and the nourishment of *sons of God* who are serving day and night as *priests in the temple*, which is *the Father's house*.

The emphasis is *not* the marriage of Christ and the church.

The 'great multitude' become part of the bride, and are included in the motherhood of the church

We know that this great multitude is then also 'caught up', and they become *part of the bride of Christ*.

However, before they become part of the bride of Christ, they are the fruit of the evangelistic ministry of the church, as the bride of Christ, in the time of the end.

They are, firstly, the 'fruit' of the evangelistic ministry of the church. They are 'the *children*'; and then they are caught up and they become part of the *bride*.

Therefore, they are then included in the *motherhood* of the church.

John the Baptist announced that Christ is 'the Lamb of God' and 'the Bridegroom'

In relation to the timing of the marriage of Christ and the church, it is helpful to begin with the ministry of John the Baptist.

We know that John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah, and he came to prepare the way of the Lord. He prepared the hearts of men to receive Jesus Christ. Luk 1:17.

He was the messenger who was sent before the Messenger of the Covenant; and he understood that Jesus Christ is the Messenger of the Covenant. Mal 3:1.

He also proclaimed that Jesus Christ is 'the Lamb of God'. His ministry was one of turning people to meet Christ as the Lamb of God. Joh 1:36.

Significantly, John the Baptist also announced that Jesus Christ was coming, as the Lamb of God, to be 'the Bridegroom'. He was coming as 'the Lamb', and He was to be married to a wife, who would then be known as 'the wife of the Lamb'. Joh 3:29. Rev 21:9.

It is important to remember that the ministry of John the Baptist, in the spirit and power of Elijah, was solely focused on *preparing the way* for the *earthly* ministry of Jesus Christ.

Because John the Baptist had the mandate to announce the coming of Christ, the Scripture recorded that there was 'no-one greater born among women'. Luk 7:28.

The ministry of Jesus Christ culminated with His offering as the Lamb of God.

This is an important point because, when John the Baptist proclaimed that Jesus had come as 'the Bridegroom', he was not referring to a future event at the end of the age. He was specifically referring to the *earthly* ministry of Christ, which culminated with His offering on the cross.

With this in view, John the Baptist likened himself to 'a groomsman', as he announced the coming of 'the Bridegroom'. He called himself 'the friend of the Bridegroom'. Joh 3:29.

Interestingly, in the region of Judea where John the Baptist ministered, a significant part of the role of a groomsman was to *announce the coming* of the bridegroom to the bride.

When the Jews asked John about Jesus, and why His disciples were baptising believers, 'John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.'

'He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but *the friend of the bridegroom*, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled".' Joh 3:27-29.

The joy of John the Baptist was being fulfilled, or made full, because he was able to announce Christ as 'the Lamb of God', and then also as 'the Bridegroom'.

Jesus proclaimed that He had come to be 'the Bridegroom'

During His earthly ministry, Jesus Himself also proclaimed that He had come to be 'the Bridegroom'.

When He was asked why His disciples did not fast, even when the disciples of John the Baptist were fasting, Jesus said, 'Can the friends of the Bridegroom fast while the Bridegroom is with

them? As long as they have the Bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come when the Bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.' Mar 2:19-20.

Of course, He was foretelling that, once He, as the Bridegroom, had returned to heaven, there would be a work of travail that the friends of the Bridegroom would be involved in, or joined to, in terms of a travail over local congregations.

The formation of the church from the body of Christ - a helper comparable to Him

To understand the marriage of Christ and the church, it is helpful to consider the *first* marriage.

The formation of the church is from the body of Christ, to be 'a helper comparable' to Him.

If we are to understand this, it is helpful to consider the way that the woman, who was later called Eve, was made to be a helper comparable to Adam, in the beginning. We know that Adam was a type of Christ, and the woman, Eve, was a type of the church.

We recall that, when no helper was found who was comparable to Adam, and the whole of heaven and earth was searched, the Lord God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep.

'And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones".' Gen 2:21-23.

When Adam said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man,' right there was the marriage of Adam and Eve.

This was the quote that Paul 'picked up' in the book of Ephesians, and he applied it directly to Christ and the church. This 'operation' foreshadowed the way that the bride of Christ was brought forth from the body of Christ, through His offering on the cross. Eph 5:30-32.

The river of the water of life - the fountain for sin and uncleanness, cleansing and equipping His son-priests

When Christ's offering was complete on the cross, and He had committed His Spirit into the hands of

God the Father, His physical body fell asleep in death.

The centurion then pierced the side of Christ with a spear; and water, blood and a spirit of grace and supplication gushed from His side as an everlasting stream.

This *fountain was the river of the water of life*. It flowed through Christ's physical body on the cross, from the throne of God, where Christ was seated. Joh 19:34. Rev 22:1.

Obviously, as he was standing at the foot of the cross, John witnessed this event. John saw the river of the water of life.

Then, in the book of Revelation, he recorded that he was shown the river of the water of life. He saw that it was flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. Rev 22:1. So it was flowing from the throne of God through the physical body of Christ on the cross.

We know that the river of the water of life, which contains the water, the blood and the Spirit, is the 'fountain for sin and uncleanness'. It *cleanses and equips* a great multitude of sons of God to *serve as priests in the Father's house*.

And this equipping is, of course, happening in *the fellowship of Christ's offering*.

The sanctification and cleansing of the church by the washing of the water of the word

The river of the water of life is also the *full provision* for the *sanctification* and the cleansing of the church as the bride of Christ. Jesus Christ *sanctifies* and *cleanses* His wife *by the washing of the water of the word*.

The apostle Paul used the marriage of Christ and the church as the example for every Christian marriage.

As we read the following passage, and consider the way in which Paul referred to the marriage of Christ and the church, it is very clear that Paul was identifying that this marriage had already taken place – *the church is already married to Christ*. She is not waiting to be married.

'Husbands, love your wives, just as *Christ also loved the church*.' Eph 5:25.

So, it is, 'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ [as a husband] loves the church [as His wife].

'And [He] gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.' Eph 5:25-27.

We know that Jesus Christ has *finished* our sonship, and He is now, as our great High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, *ministering to us our participation in His finished work*.

In the same way, He has *perfected* the church as His bride through His offering. And now, as the Husband of the church, He is *sanctifying and cleansing* the church by the washing of the water of the word.

It is *not* as though the church needs to be perfected – *then* married to Christ.

The church is *married* to Christ and is now *being* perfected within the context of the marriage union, or the marriage covenant.

The marriage covenant is the context for the process of perfection for the church.

'That He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.'

The cross, or the offering, of Christ, as He laid down His life for His wife, reveals Christ's travail for, and with, an imperfect bride.

At the same time, the cross also reveals the full provision for the perfection of the church as His bride, or His wife.

Paul then continued, 'So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.' Eph 5:28-29.

So the church is His own flesh, and He is nourishing and cherishing the church, as His wife.

Paul then quoted directly from the book of Genesis to clearly establish that the church is married to Christ. He said, 'For we are members of His body, *of His flesh and of His bones*.' Eph 5:30.

This means that *we are married* – the church is *married - to Christ*.

Paul quoted directly from the words of Adam, concerning the woman, in the beginning. As we have already read, Adam said, concerning Eve, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' Gen 2:23.

In the same way that the first woman was taken out of Adam, the church was formed to be a comparable helper for Christ, from His body, through His offering on the cross.

Paul then continued, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.' Eph 5:31-32.

The New Jerusalem; the bride city coming down out of heaven from God

On the day of Pentecost, we actually begin to see the 'New Jerusalem [as the bride city], coming down out of heaven from God'. Rev 21:2.

Peter preached the word of the cross on the day of Pentecost, and there were many who were pierced to the heart. They turned in repentance and were born as sons of God, and then baptised into Christ.

When they were born again, or born from above, and baptised into Christ, they were *raised and seated with Him* in heavenly places. Col 3:1. The temple of His body became the context of their priestly work.

And this is where we present ourselves as living sacrifices to prove the good, acceptable and the perfect will of God. Rom 12:1-2.

That great multitude was raised and seated with Christ. They now had a priestly ministry and service in the temple of God, which is the Father's house.

However, they also became part of the bride of Christ as they 'drew near to Him with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having their hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and their bodies washed with pure water'. Heb 10:22. The fountain of the water of life is the fountain for sin and uncleanness, which flows from the side of Christ.

The multitude who received Peter's ministry on the day of Pentecost became members of the church in Jerusalem, which was the local expression of the bride of Christ.

Significantly, they were no longer citizens of the natural Jerusalem, which the apostle Paul described as 'Hagar, the bondwoman', whose children were in bondage under the Old Covenant. Gal 4:22-25.

The New Jerusalem, the mother of us all; the vessel for multiplying sons of God for eternity

They were now citizens of the *Jerusalem from above*, the bride of Christ, who is *the mother of the sons of God*.

This is the same city that Paul described in his letter to the Hebrews. 'You [we] have come [this is now] to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God [which is], the heavenly Jerusalem. Heb 12:22.

It is the Jerusalem from above which is free, and she is the mother of us all. Gal 4:26.

In the book of Revelation, the bride of Christ is identified as the New Jerusalem which descends out of heaven from God.

'Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you *the bride, the Lamb's wife*."

'And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, *the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God*.' Rev 21:9-10.

John saw here the final revelation, or the full manifestation, of the New Jerusalem, as *the vessel for multiplication* of sons of God for eternity.

And the administration of the bride city will not be complete until the day of resurrection, because it includes all of the Old Testament saints who died *in the faith of Abraham*.

Abraham looked forward to his participation in the bride city – which has foundations

We know that Abraham looked forward to his participation in the bride city.

'By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for *the city which has foundations*, whose builder and maker is God.' Heb 11:9-10.

Abraham was looking for this city, and he also understood that this city has *foundations*.

The foundation for the New Jerusalem was already laid on the day of Pentecost

Significantly, the apostle John saw these foundations when he saw the New Jerusalem.

He saw the bride city coming down out of heaven from God, for the new heavens and the new earth.

‘Now the wall of the city had twelve *foundations*, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.’ Rev 21:14.

This is a most remarkable point. It does not imply that the twelve apostles will become the foundation of the New Jerusalem after the day of resurrection.

It means that *the foundation* for the New Jerusalem, which is an eternal administration, was *already laid on the day of Pentecost*.

There were three thousand people added to the church in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost alone. They were *already being built upon that foundation of the twelve apostles* in that day.

We will continue with this theme in our next session.