

WITH MIKE TUCKER

When Jesus was on earth He spoke repeatedly of his death, resurrection, and Second Coming. The disciples found it very difficult to understand these things, primarily because they did not fit their pre-conceived notions of who Jesus was and what His mission was. They thought Jesus was to be a military leader and king who would defeat the Romans and run them out of Palestine. He would reestablish the kingdom of King David and usher in a new, golden age for Israel.

But this was never the plan for Jesus. Jesus came to defeat a more important enemy than Rome. He came to defeat Satan and sin. Jesus came to rescue humankind from the penalty of death and reconcile them to the Father.

On one particular occasion, Jesus tried to tell the disciples about this plan. Let's pick up the story in John 13.

### John 13: 33-37

*"Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*

*Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered, "Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later." Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You."*

Jesus told the disciple that He was going away, and then He gave them their marching orders while He was gone. The marching orders were to love each other. Don't pass over this part of the story lightly. This is, in large measure, what it means to prepare for the Second Coming of Jesus. We are to love God and love each other. That is how we get ready for the Second Coming.

But the disciples missed that part of Jesus' statement at this point. Instead, they noticed the part about going away. Jesus was to leave the disciples, and that frightened them.

We now know that Jesus was speaking of His impending death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. But this was unclear to the disciples at this point. They were frightened at the prospects of Jesus leaving, and further, at the prospects of being left behind.

With that in mind, we turn to the next chapter of John's Gospel where Jesus attempts to answer their questions. In order to properly understand what Jesus says about the Second Coming, we must understand the cultural practices of that day regarding weddings.

Weddings were done a little differently in Palestine during the time the Bible was written. First, the groom would go to the bride's house to pay the dowry. Once the father of the bride was in possession of the dowry, the couple was considered married even though the ceremony had not yet taken place. It was more than an engagement but less than an actual marriage, since they did not live together. Then the groom would return to his father's house to prepare the house for the wedding.

Families lived on a plot of land that was passed down through the family for generations. When the son married, he simply added on to his father's house. He built a

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room for his new bride. They would live in the house with the groom's parents until the parents' death, when the entire house would belong to the groom. But that addition to the father's house must be completed before the wedding ceremony could take place.

During the same period of time, the bride would prepare herself for the wedding. Once the work of preparation by both the groom and the bride was complete, the wedding ceremony could begin.

This is the imagery Jesus uses as He speaks to the disciples about His death, resurrection, ascension and Second Coming. Let's read John 14, beginning with verse 1.

### John 14:1-3

*"Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 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."*

This is the language of the bridegroom. Jesus is the bridegroom and His followers are the bride. Jesus paid the dowry with His blood at Calvary. All those who receive the gift of salvation become a part of the group of people known as "the chosen bride." We are betrothed to Jesus, the bridegroom.

After the ascension, Jesus began the work of preparation for the wedding ceremony. He began to build a "dwelling place" for you in His Father's house.

In ancient times, after the dowry was paid and work on the bride's dwelling place was begun, some time might pass. The bride might grow anxious. But the groom would often reassure her by reminding her that his father was a man of integrity who kept his word. Therefore, she could trust that he, too, was a man of integrity. He had paid the dowry. Why would he fail to return for his bride?

Once the dwelling place was complete, the feast must be prepared. Two announcements went out to guests. The first announcement stated essentially, "Keep your calendar open. I'm preparing the feast, and just as soon as it's ready, I'll send the second announcement."

With no means of refrigeration, once the meal was ready it had to be eaten soon. So, meat was left alive until it was time for the feast. Fruits and vegetables were available only in season, so the groom must continue to fatten the calf while watching for the exact moment when the produce he needed was ready. When it was ready, the fatted calf was killed, the food cooked, the banquet hall prepared, and the second announcement went out. "It's time! Come to the wedding feast."

When the guests were assembled, they waited for the groom. The groom would usually make people wait while he and his friends rejoiced and waited for the perfect moment. When they thought the time was right, they made a loud, dramatic procession through the streets of the city toward the home of the bride. The bride would then join the groom and his friends and accompany them back to the home of the father, where they would enjoy the wedding feast and ceremony together.

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This is the picture Jesus is painting of the Second Coming. The Second Coming is a time of great joy! It is the time when the lovesick groom finally gets his bride and brings her to his Father's house. The dowry is paid, the dwelling place is built, and the feast is prepared. Now it is time for the couple to live as one.

This is the imagery John uses in Revelation as he speaks of the wedding of the Lamb. The entire book of Revelation points forward to one consummating event. That event is the wedding feast of the Lamb. Everything points forward to that.

## Revelation 19:6-8

*Then I heard something like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.*

Jesus paid the dowry with His life on Calvary's tree. At that point, the church was married to Jesus, the Bridegroom. Jesus told His disciples that He would "go to prepare a place..." He ascended to Heaven to make preparations for the wedding ceremony.

Those who have committed themselves to Jesus constitute the bride. When you accepted Christ's sacrifice for your sins, you accepted the dowry. You were then married to Christ.

Now, as Jesus prepares a place in His Father's house for the wedding, you are to prepare yourself for this great event. You prepare by adorning yourself with white linen. The white linen is the righteousness of Christ.

Soon, the Bridegroom will return for you to take you to His Father's house so you can celebrate your marriage through the wedding of the Lamb. The Groom returns at what Scripture calls the Second Coming of Jesus. John describes that event:

## Revelation 19:11-13

*And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.*

The One who is "called Faithful and True" is Jesus. He wears many crowns, because He is ruler over all and has conquered all.

Jesus is returning to claim His chosen bride so they can celebrate their marriage. This wedding is the culminating act of everything Christ has sacrificed and done. This has been His sole objective – to enjoy intimacy with you forever!

The Apostle Paul says describes the Second Coming in 1 Thessalonians:.

## 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

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*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.*

Paul saw it as a real event that would be seen by everyone, heard by everyone, and not be done in secret. John the Revelator echoed this thought in Revelation 1:7 where he declares that “every eye will see Him” when Jesus comes again in the clouds.

When we compare 1 Thessalonians with Revelation 19 and other passages, we find that prior to the Second Coming, there are actually four groups of people. There are those who are alive and are ready for Jesus to return, and those who are alive and are not ready for the return. But there are also those who are dead who died ready for the Second Coming, and those who died and were not ready.

When Jesus returns, those who are living and are not ready will be slain by the brightness of Christ’s return. Those who died before the return but were ready when they died, will be resurrected in what Scripture calls the first resurrection, and will ascend to meet Jesus in the air. Those who are alive and ready for the return will also rise to meet Jesus in the air. Those who died but were not ready for the return when they died will not be disturbed by the Second Coming, but will await something we might call the second resurrection.

## Revelation 20:5-6

*The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.*

We will spend a thousand years living with Jesus in Heaven in the Father’s house.

When Jesus ascended to Heaven, He did so to “prepare a place for you.” He also said that He would come again to get us so we could be with Him forever. Now John attempts to put into words the glories of the place the Bridegroom has prepared for His bride.

Remember the wedding customs of the Middle East as we continue. The groom goes to the home of the father of the bride to pay the dowry. Once paid, the couple is thought of as married, but the groom returns to his father’s house to prepare a place for the wedding. The bride remains at her home in order to prepare herself for the wedding. She bathes, anoints herself with perfumes, and puts on fine, white linen clothes. When all is ready, the wedding feast takes place in the home of the father of the groom.

Now let’s read Revelation 21, beginning with verse 1.

## Revelation 21:1-4

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice*

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*from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."*

These final chapters describe the place the Bridegroom has prepared for His bride. Jesus is preparing His Father's house for the wedding feast – He is making preparations for His marriage to you, His church, His bride.

Have you ever wondered why John mentions in his description of the new earth that there was no longer any sea? John was writing of a day of reunion between God and His children, but that also means that there will be a reunion of those children with each other. People you love who have been separated from you by death or distance will be reunited with you. John began to think of all the people from whom he had been separated.

John wrote this book while he was imprisoned on the Island of Patmos. The sea formed his prison walls – it was the sea that separated John from the people he loved. That's why John speaks of there being no more sea. There will never again be separation. You will never again be separated from those you love, and you will never again be separated from Jesus.

Then one of the angels took John to the top of a mountain to show him the New Jerusalem, the city of God. Here is how John described what he saw. We will pick a few verses from John's description of the city.

#### Rev. 21:11b-14

*...Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper. It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west. And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

#### Rev. 21:18-19a

*The material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone...*

#### Rev. 21:21

*And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass...*

#### Rev. 21:23

*And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.*

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Undoubtedly, words cannot adequately describe the glories of that city.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus has prepared a place that is so extravagant? I mean, do we really need gates of pearl, foundations of precious stones, walls of jasper and streets of gold? Aren't these things unnecessary?

Not when you are talking about lovers.

Do you remember the first time you knew you were in love – I mean, really knew you were in love? How much was too much to give to your lover? Was anything too good for the one you loved? Did you ever make yourself look just a little foolish over your exuberance for the object of your affection?

Or what about the first time you looked into the face of your newborn baby? How much was too much to do for that child?

For lovers, there is no such thing as excess – there is no such thing as too much of a good thing. That's what this description of heaven and the New Jerusalem is all about. Jesus is so much in love with you that nothing is too good for you! There is no such thing as excess when it comes to giving to the ones Jesus loves. He is so much in love with you that He just can't help Himself – He gives and gives and gives. He is an extravagant lover.

One of the Hebrew words the Old Testament writers used for love is the word *hessed*. *Hessed* refers to a love that is stronger and more passionate than any earthly love that ever has or ever could exist. It is a love that knows no bounds – a love that borders on insanity. In the Bible, the word *hessed* is used in only one circumstance -- when a Bible writer is describing God's love for His children.

That is how God loves you! He loves you so much that He can never get you off His mind, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year. God is crazy about you!

That's why, when Jesus the Bridegroom went to Heaven to prepare a place for you, His chosen bride, He went more than a little overboard. He prepared a place that is so opulent as to make you blush. He spared no expense and stopped at nothing. Jesus showers you with an embarrassment of riches. I mean, why else would he use pure, transparent gold as paving stones? Why else would He prepare a mansion for you in a city that is nothing more than a collection of mansions surrounding the throne of God? Why else would Jesus make the walls of jasper and cause the entire city to shine like gold so pure it looks like transparent glass?

Why? Because Jesus is a smitten lover! He is a young groom who is embarrassingly giddy over his bride. Jesus can hardly wait for you to see the things He has prepared for you – He can hardly wait to bring you into His Father's house so you can live with Him.

That's the picture John has painted for us. But the description is not finished yet.

Look at chapter 22, beginning with verse 1. Feel the emotion – experience the thrill as Jesus sends us a word picture of what His love has caused Him to prepare for His bride.

## Revelation 22:1-5

*Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for*

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*the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.*

Jesus is the lovesick groom. These passages reveal to us the heart of Jesus. We know His passion – His passion is you! We know His desire, His longing, and His preoccupation. It is all for you, for you are a part of that group of people He calls His bride. Listen to the excitement in His voice.

### Revelation 22:7

*“And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.”*

Jesus repeats Himself in verse 12.

### Revelation 22:12

*“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.”*

And yet again in verse 20, Jesus can scarcely contain His excitement.

### Revelation 22:20

*He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming quickly.”*

It’s as though Jesus is the fiancée who can hardly wait to see His betrothed, so he writes her every day, but says the same thing each time: “I’m coming soon! It won’t be long now, and we can be together. I’m coming soon!”

Feel His passion for you – sense the longing of His great heart. The Bridegroom can scarcely contain His excitement.

But there are those who do not share the Bridegroom’s love. Although the dowry has been paid, and they legally belong to the Bridegroom, there are those who have played the harlot and chased after other lovers. The Bridegroom will never force anyone to accept His entreaties of love. He only wants those who freely choose to love Him back, so He will not force. But He is so lovesick that He cannot allow them to leave without one last plea. One last time, before John ends his book, he shares the Bridegroom’s fervent appeal – John shares the last lines of the Bridegroom’s love letter.

Listen to the pleading – listen to the passion – listen to the lovesick heart of the Bridegroom.

### Revelation 22:17

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*The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.*

If you haven't yet accepted the invitation of the Bridegroom, why not make today the day you accept His proposal? Why not make this the day you surrender your heart to His great love? Why not accept of the free gift of the water of life?

When you do, and when you experience His love, you will share His anticipation of the approaching celebration. You will find yourself scarcely able to wait for the wedding feast of the Lamb. And you, like John, will cry:

Revelation 22:20b

*... Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.*