

4,15,21 The Bride of the Lamb

I'm going to read some passages that lay the foundation for what we will be studying. We'll look at them, individually, in more depth later.

(Rev. 19:7-8) "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."

(Rev. 21:2) "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband."

(Rev. 21:9) "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, 'Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.'"

There's an author, Frederick William Robertson, who wrote this about Truth;

"It's not the number of books you read, or the sermons you hear, or the number of Christian conversations in which you engage, but it is the frequency and earnestness with which you meditate on these things until the truth in them becomes your own, and part of your being. This is what ensures your growth. Truth lies in character. Christ did not simply speak the truth; He was the Truth, for truth is a thing not of words but of life and being."

We have our theology, our knowledge, but we don't want to lose the fact that it's Life, not just knowledge, that God is after.

For each of us, based on circumstances and gifting this will be different, and it's not an issue of perfection or for guilt through failure (which can feel constant), it's an issue of willingness and response to the Lord's leading as it comes to us.

What's He asking today; maybe nothing major. But even in the smallest things, what's our response?

Last week, Nikki told us about her brother Robbie's story.

He had reached a very low place in his life and decided to surrender all he was, all he had, to God. He was serious, no strings attached.

Of the events that followed over the next weeks and months, one involved the Lord telling him to wear a certain hat he owned to Walmart (but he didn't want to wear it – it was far from his favorite hat).

But when you've told God He has the right to use you for anything, and you're willing to obey Him, you go for it.

So, he went to Walmart and while he was at the checkout, a clerk saw him and started crying and rejoicing. She was a Christian seeking God's will as to whether she should return to South America and continue to minister there (as she'd done in the past) or stay in America.

Robbie's hat not only had the country in South America written on it, but even the name of the town she was from.

This is the Book of Acts. Restfully available and instantly obedient.

The Lord leading His disciples to do remarkable things, but those things nearly always involved actions that the disciples themselves would never have thought of.

By faith, they obeyed anyway and we can read the results of that kind of discipleship in action – the Roman world being reached with the gospel, and the Church growing spiritually.

I want us to look at what's really behind all this – what is it that causes this kind of life? We'll start with a couple familiar verses and then break it down.

(Matt. 16:24) "Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

(Phil. 3:10) "I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to Him in His death."

I'll share some thoughts by Sparks on this;

"The Lord Jesus said 'I am the true Vine,' and it was prophesied of Him that He would tread the winepress alone. The Cross was His winepress. He was crushed and broken, but out of that breaking has come the Life which you and I have, and which so many in all the nations have received. That is true, in a measure, of His Church. It was out of the breaking and crushing of the

Church that the Life came to the world. And that is true of every member, every branch of the vine. If we are to fulfill this true, living ministry, it will only be through suffering, through the winepress. Paul said: 'We were pressed out of measure, above strength' (2 Corinthians 1:8) – but look what Life has come out of that man's pressure. It is like that. This is not unique to Paul. A Christian who has never suffered deeply will never minister Life. This may not seem a very pleasant outlook, but it is true. The best doctors and nurses are those who know something about suffering themselves. Some are just professional, treating you as a case – you are just a case number. But there are others who treat you as a person (a human being) - doctors who care for you. If you ask why, you may find that they have a background of suffering themselves. They know just a little of what you are going through. We have read in the Letter to the Hebrews: 'We do not have a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted as we are... He is able to come to the aid of those who are tested' (Hebrews 4:15, 2:18). He has been the way of the winepress and we have received the benefit."

The power of Christ's resurrection is only experienced by being conformed to His death. To say that another way, the measure of our conformity to the death of Christ is the measure of our experience His resurrection life.

As with Robbie, life in the Spirit is begun by a breaking, a crushing of us, followed by a progressive conforming to the death of the natural man.

The willing denial of the self-life in order to know the Christ life.

Paul was broken on the road to Damascus. Then, and only then, he *genuinely* said to the Lord, "What will you have me do?"

He told the Corinthians that he was constantly being delivered unto death, so the life of Jesus could be made manifest through his mortal flesh.

He also said, "death works in me, so life can work in you."

For Robbie life opened up and we can see by his actions, that he 'died' to himself and his wants and desires, as often as the Lord needed him to do so.

What death is, in practical terms, is full unquestioning surrender to the will of God at the expense of anything and everything in our lives that would interfere with that.

We are willing lose everything and count all of it as refuse to gain Christ.

Anything that God wills for us is designed to enable us to reach maturity, where life and service are undergirded by inner strength and spiritual effectiveness.

It doesn't matter whether what He brings into our lives 'feels' like that or not. No discipline seems joyous, but grievous, nevertheless, *afterward* it brings the fruit of righteousness.

And we must never make the mistake of comparing ourselves among ourselves, because God's preparation of us is totally different for each person - our needs are totally different.

The only way life can be brought to others is if death is working in us. But are we willing to pick up the cross every day to reach that goal? Do we want His life in us to be expressed and brought to others?

The cross embraced is our release into spiritual life.

Now, we're going to look at the bride of the Lamb.

(Rev. 19:7-8) "Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him the glory. For the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready. She was given clothing of fine linen, bright and pure. For the fine linen she wears is the righteous acts of the saints."

On the spiritual side of things, we've been looking at how the bride made herself ready. She surrenders to the Lord's training and follows His lead – and the result is righteousness; not the imputed righteousness of Christ that all believers receive at salvation, but the "righteous *acts* of the saints", which they do in this life and are 'clothed with' in heaven.

Whatever He asks of her, she does in His strength under His guidance. And if she fails a thousand times, she doesn't give up trying to do the thing He's asked until it's done. Because this is the way we learn how to live by the power of the indwelling Spirit.

In this trial-and-error process of spiritual growth she learns about her own insufficiency, as well as discovering the Lord's sufficiency, because her faith is being progressively shifted from herself to Him.

(Jn. 14:10) "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words I say to you, I do not speak on My own. Instead, it is the Father dwelling in Me, performing *His* works."

(Jn. 14:9) ". . . He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father. . ."

Now, let's transfer that to the church.

(2 Cor. 4:11) "We who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh."

The righteous acts of the bride are not *her* works, but the Lord's through her. Just as to see Jesus was to see the actions of the Father; to see a spiritually mature believer is to see the activity of Christ.

This is also the meaning of the gold, silver and precious stones, versus wood, hay and stubble in 1 Cor. 3. It's the difference between *His* life expressed through us and *our* religious works done for Him. Those are called "dead works" in Heb. 6:1.

Here's a commentary on 1 Cor. 3:13. "The fire will test the quality of each man's work."

"I have no doubt that you love the Lord. I am not raising any question about that. But we are involved in a great system which is a very complicated thing, and a great deal of it is not of the Lord. It is something that man has brought in. Man has put his hand upon the things of the Lord, and man has made things according to his own mind, and therefore a great deal has come in which is of man and not of the Lord. And when we say that, we are not only thinking of Christianity in general, we are thinking of ourselves. This is true of ourselves. We have all come into something called Christianity, and we have all taken on something of Christianity, and there may be a great deal that we have to get rid of, and come back to the simple fundamental reality. And the fundamental reality of all realities is the presence of the Lord. We have got to know that the Lord is with us, and that the Lord is with us in all that we do, that this did not originate in our mind. It did not

originate in our will; it did not originate in our emotion. It did not come from our soul; this thing has come from the Lord in every detail. Just like our Lord, in every detail it has to come to us from God. That ought to send us back to our knees – to examine all our work. It may be necessary for us, from time to time, to stand back and ask the Lord about all that we are doing. 'Is this out from God, or is it something out from ourselves? Is this way of doing things the mind of God, or is it our mind? Is the Lord in this, or have we come into it?' You see, that is a great deciding matter. Make no mistake about it. Everything that is only of man is going to perish. Sooner or later, it will be shaken. Every man's work shall be tried in the fire, says the Word of God."

This next part is something I've mentioned in the past that I was going to work on and even though I still have more research to do, because of the context of this study I'm going to give you what I have so far.

1 Thess. chapters 3 & 5 give us some unique insights into what is developing in the remnant up to the rapture.

As I read these passages, I'll be commenting on some of the more technical parts to make it as clear as I can.

(1 Thess. 3:13) "He (will) establish your hearts blameless before God, even our Father, in the coming (the parousia) of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints."

Prior to the rapture, the Lord will establish us in a state of blamelessness.

Right now, the formation of the righteousness of Christ in us is progressive, but eventually, it will be completed (as much as is possible this side of heaven), in a condition or state of blamelessness.

Parousia refers to the coming, presence or appearing of Christ in glory. This is also shown in 1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 5:23; James 5:8; 1 John 2:28.

Paul amplifies this in 1 Thess. 5:23-24;

“May the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at (not ‘after’) the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The word ‘preserved’ is in the singular, meaning that spirit, soul and body are *all* to be included as one completed ‘wholeness’ - to be brought into a state of what the original calls ‘unimpairment’.

So, the Lord will establish us as spiritually, morally and physically (spirit, soul and body) ‘unimpaired’ at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Not perfection as in heaven, but there will be nothing in us that in any way hinders the Lord’s full expression of His life through us.

The passage ends with, “He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.”

And as I mentioned, the noun indicates a “state” of wholeness, not something progressive. At this point the goal of *ongoing* sanctification in time reaches its goal and intended purpose in the end time remnant.

This is also called, “Christ fully formed in us” in Gal. 4:19.

Until this is completed, we are to have the same mindset that Paul had in Phil. 3:12-14

“Not that I have already obtained this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brethren, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

He says something similar as an exhortation to the Corinthians in 2 Cor. 7:1;

“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

Perfecting holiness is the goal in this life.

Not everyone has this purpose in life. Not everyone is interested in pursuing full obedience to the Lord as His disciple.

(Dan. 12:10) "Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand, but the wise will understand."

The Lord will complete the sanctification of the remnant here and will finalize their perfection by giving them glorified bodies as they are taken up to Him.

Now, we're going to move back to the bride. There is a direct connection to the characteristics of the bride and the throne.

(Rev. 21:2 & 9) "I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband . . . 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 . . ."

We've already seen in past studies that Jerusalem represents the governmental center of the New Creation; the place of the Messiah's rule, where He will reign on the throne of His father David forever.

What exactly does the image of the bride represent in terms of intimacy?

(Rev. 2:17) "To the one who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it."

This was the challenge given to the Church at Pergamum.

I'm going to read from Walter Scott and Joseph Dillow so we can see the bridal aspects in this promise.

Walter Scott;

"Here the overcomer is promised a white stone and a new name written thereon, which none knows save the happy recipient. It is the expression of the Lord's personal delight in each one of the conquering band. It is by no means a public reward. There are common and special blessings now; there will be public and individual joys then. The Lord's approbation of, and

special delight in, each one of the triumphant company will be answer enough to the rejection and scorn heaped upon the faithful witness now. The new name on the stone, alone known to the overcomer, signifies Christ, then known in a special way to each one, and that surely is reward beyond all price and beyond all telling. . . It is a secret communication of love and intelligence between Christ and the overcomer, a joy which none can share, a reserved token of appreciative love."

Now, from Joseph Dillow;

"The giving of a 'new name' was a Jewish custom of assigning a name at a point in life which characterizes the person. In the early church James was called 'camel knees' because of the calluses on his knees from so much kneeling while he was praying. Simon was called 'Peter, which means 'rock' signifying his future as a rock of stability in the Church. Joseph, a Levite, was called 'Barnabas, which means 'son of encouragement'. . . Christ will give to each overcomer a new name, a name of honor. Each overcomer has his own particular life message, his own particular history of struggle and demonstration of God's life in his. It will be a name which in some way signifies an outstanding characteristic of that person's life. The secrecy of the name implies a special relationship between Christ and each overcomer (as in the intimacy in the relationship of husband and wife).

These heavenly realities, if pursued, work in us an eternal weight of glory. In other words, throne-union with Christ in time and in eternity.

If this is where our heart and mind are, this will be the result – as this author puts it;

"The point is that you and I must contemplate the Lord Jesus in spirit, and be much occupied with Him. We must have our Holy of Holies where we retire with Him. We must have a secret place where we spend time with Him. And not only in certain special seasons, but we must seek, as we move about, ever to keep Him before us. Looking at the Lord Jesus, contemplating Him, we shall be changed into the same image. The Holy Spirit will operate upon our occupation. You become like that which obsesses you, which occupies you. You see what people are occupied with, and you can see their character changing by their obsessions. They are becoming like the thing which is obsessing them; they are changing; they are becoming different. Something

has got a grip on them; they can never think about anything else or talk about anything else. Now Paul said, 'For me to live is Christ – being occupied with Him.' It may be the wrong word to use, but nevertheless it would be a good thing if (the Bridegroom) became our 'obsession'.

Now, I want to approach this from the angle of "the rest" in Hebrews 3 & 4.

We are told that the Jews didn't enter Canaan because of unbelief. Canaan not only represents an inheritance; it also represents the sabbath rest of being fully assured of God's provision in grace.

Christ is our Canaan and our Sabbath.

Hebrews doesn't say that if you 'hang in there' you will come to Mount Zion, it says we have already come to Mount Zion. The writer is trying to convince them of this, because if you're under the Law you know don't realize that; you're striving to gain something you've already gained.

For the Hebrews, the challenge is to achieve the spiritual maturity necessary to know full assurance of the already provided rest in Christ, not returning to a condemned religion where there is no rest.

Gratitude drives the believer who understands his position in Christ, just as guilt under the Law drives the believer who does *not* understand these things.

Not entering the rest through unbelief is the same as refusing to *grow in grace*, to increasingly understand what we have in Christ; which provides a grace-based (not law-based) motivation for spiritual advance.

When we understand grace, that knowledge leads us to genuine spiritual maturity, because true spiritual advance is simply growing in our understanding of what we possessed at the outset of our life in Christ – all was given to us the second we placed our faith in the Lord.

(Col. 2:9-10) "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him."

The rewards of eternity that we've been looking at have nothing to do with whether our salvation (our positional righteousness), is complete or not – it is.

They have nothing to do with whether we are accepted in the Beloved, or secure for all eternity, or loved with an everlasting love.

There is not even a hint of whether some people will be happy in heaven and some will be miserable. Heaven is heaven for everyone who, by God's grace, is included in the redeemed of all ages.

There are simply people in this life who care more about what the Lord desires than about what they desire. And there are people who don't.

You can guess which group has always been in the minority, which is why this group is called a "remnant" in the Old Testament and "overcomers" in the New Testament.

Rewards are based on our willingness to sacrifice of *our* will out of love for *His* will and purpose.

Listen to Spark's comments on Gal. 5:1: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

"The picture in the original is of those who have escaped from slavery and are breathing free air. That is a fine picture, a fine portrait for Overcomers – that which has escaped from slavery and is breathing free air. Some of us, even in our Christian lives and histories, know what it is to escape from slavery; the old bondage of the Christian system and order, expectation and demand, all the rules and legality. Not only to be raised with Christ, but to have the grave clothes taken off and to be breathing the free air of the spiritually emancipated! That is in the hearts of the 'remnant'. It is exactly what you find at the beginning with the Church. The Lord had cried in the midst of a burdened, tyrannized, religious nation – 'Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.' (Matt. 11:28-30). What is the old yoke, the old burden, which has harassed and worn these people so that they are weary to death, drawing out His compassionate appeal? It is the old yoke and burden of legalistic religion. 'They bind heavy burdens,' He said, 'and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves will not move them with their

finger' (Matt. 23:4). And this word for 'remnant' means those who have escaped slavery and are breathing the free air. You find them in the beginning of the book of the Acts. Overcomers are those who go back to the beginning in experience. It is the primal freshness and fullness of Christ that Overcomers represent."

When we talk about the necessity of being obedient, of surrendering, of pursuing holiness and the interests of the Lord, we aren't talking about doing these things to gain God's love or acceptance, or to make it to heaven.

We are talking about understanding, that because of what He has done for us at the Cross and by His placing us in union with Him at the right hand of God, we now have an intelligent purpose and direction for our lives – a means to show Him our gratitude and love in return. 'We love Him, because He first loved us.'

When Paul said he was a "bondslave" of Christ, being a bondslave with no rights of his own wasn't something he *had* to do; it was something he *wanted* to do.

Overcomer status in the Kingdom of Heaven is not given to those who serve a Person they believe is a hard taskmaster, but to those who have put the effort in to learn the truth of our "so great salvation" and especially of the *Author* of that salvation; so they see service as an incredible privilege and honor rather than a religious obligation.

I really hope this somehow, eventually, dawns on us, because this life as a Christian only becomes something we look forward to if we are serving from a foundation of knowing our full, irrevocable acceptance in Christ, rather than from a foundation of doubt and legalistic obligation to an impossible religion.

Grace secures our assurance of salvation and the guarantee that we will spend eternity in heaven.

The obedience of discipleship determines our rewards and position when we arrive.

Discipleship is *also* undergirded by His strength through grace, or none of us would reach the goal no matter how willing we were.

Which is why even those who receive the crowns of kingship will throw them at the feet of the One Who made this possible for them.

Of all those in heaven, it will be the overcomers who have the greatest understanding that this has all been grace from day one.