

Revelation 22:1-6, 12-20 "Come, Jesus, Come"

May 8, 2016

Someone asked me a question the other day about what we believe about the rapture. The topic springs from a couple of places.

1 Thessalonians 4 ... on the last day, *"We who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord."*

-Matthew 24 ... *"So will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left."*

Confusion arises in some circles when people try to understand when this "taking up to heaven," or "rapture," will happen. Is it on the last day, when Jesus comes back as judge and king or is it something else? Is it a rising to heaven before the last day ... get out of Dodge City before sundown? In this understanding, the hope is that as time goes on and conditions on earth go from bad to worse, as persecution of God's church goes from bad to worse, as natural disasters grow in frequency and severity, God will launch a secret rescue mission ahead of time, so that His children will avoid those dark days that are still coming upon the earth. The poor unfortunate unbelievers will be left behind. The technical term for this line of thought is pre-tribulation rapture.

Now, we do live in worrisome times and it is very easy to let ourselves become overwhelmed with all the negative going on around us. People read the book of Revelation and see all this negative stuff ... sickness, hunger, despair, people wanting to die, plagues, wars, economic collapse, earthquakes, floods, and fires. You watch the images from Fort McMurray and you start to wonder, are we in the end times? You see the ongoing devastation from war in the Middle East and you ask, "What lies ahead for the world, for you and me?" What lies ahead for our children? Should we let all the evil in the world frighten us? What should all this evil in the world cause us to do?

In Luke's Gospel Jesus says: *"When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."* We should not fear; we should be glad! Time and again Scripture reminds us that the day is nearer now than when we first believed. It reminds us that like little Liam today, our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. And that evil has already met its match in Jesus. And that the "mother of all battles" has already been fought. Its place is marked by a cross and an empty tomb because death has been defeated and Jesus has risen from the dead.

You have to understand what the book of Revelation is for. It is written for our hope, so that our faith might endure. It is written so that we might know that evil will have its end. Man may rise against man and nation against nation, but God's people are all sealed and marked by the Holy Spirit. We are preserved in faith by Word, Spirit and Sacrament. We are protected by God's mighty angels and kept safe unto eternal life. Angels are not little soft and cuddly cherubs with tiny wings and pudgy cheeks. God's mighty angels are avenging warriors committed to the defeat of the devil and his hordes.

Revelation tells us that believers are the bride of Christ. That's you and me. It's everyone who believes in Jesus as their Saviour. Through faith in Christ, we are part of a great circle of believers that spans every generation. It spans every country. It even spans heaven and earth. John describes it this way: *"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in*

their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Each day of worship we join in that song, for it is not confined to heaven. It is not confined to the future. In the midst of an uncertain world, you have a certain salvation in Christ. You are one called to be a saint, you are forgiven. You are the bride of Christ. Now, if you have a daughter who is about to be married, what would you want to know about her husband-to-be? What would you want to ask him?

How much do you love my daughter?
 Are you willing to defend and protect her?
 Are you prepared to provide for my daughter?

Each of these questions can help us get a clearer picture of Jesus, our heavenly bridegroom:

1. How much does He love you? You are married to the Lamb. Your name is written in His book of life. He is the Lamb who was slain for you. The only man-made things in heaven will be the marks made on His body when He died for you. The scars on His hands and side are a reminder of how much He loves you. Jesus wants you for His own, so much that He was willing to sacrifice himself for you. We remember the measure of His love every time we say, "*for you*" in the Lord's Supper. This is my body which is given *for you* . . . this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed *for you* . . .

At one church, it is the custodian's job to change the message board on the sign each week. One week, he put up the line, "*This church is for sinners only.*" A letter came to the office later that week which expressed the shock of one of the members. "*I've been a member of this church for 24 years and I never realized that I was not welcome.*" The next week, they changed the sign to read: "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*"

It is Jesus' sacrifice for your sins that has turned you and me from sinner to saint. It is the cleansing power that Jesus brings to baptism that washes away Liam's sins and makes him a child of God, a saint in God's sight, and an heir of heaven. We are saints in Jesus, and only in Jesus. If you are trying to get yourself clean, all you are doing is smearing around the dirt. Now and on the day of judgement, our wedding white is Christ's righteousness, covering us by faith.

2. I would ask, are you willing to defend and protect her? It is a scary world, a world full of sin and suffering and pain and death. Every husband who loves his wife rises to her defense when she is threatened. He makes every effort to prepare and provide a safe home for her. Our Lord Jesus stands nearby and at the ready to defend His bride, the church. In John 17, Jesus prays: "*While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.*"

In Matt 28:20, Jesus promises His bride, "*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*"

In John 16:33 He tells His beloved, "*I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*"

Scripture is full of such promises:

Romans 7:24-25 "*Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God-- through Jesus Christ our Lord!*"

Galatians 1:3-4 - "*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father*"

What does Scripture say of our world and of life this side of heaven? 1 Peter 5:8: "*Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*"

Romans 8:36: *As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*

2 Timothy 3:12-13: *"In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived."*

1 Corinthians 7:31: *"For this world in its present form is passing away."*

The world hasn't changed. It is still as full of wickedness and sin as it has been since the fall.

Genesis: *"Every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil all the time."*

What has changed? It is our "dream world" that has been shattered. We become so easily dependent on earthly things and earthly power. If the earthly has become our foundation and our security, then, yes, everything seems to have changed. But it really hasn't. It's never been a good idea to rely on yourself instead of Christ. Jesus is our heavenly bridegroom and He is with us to protect and defend His bride, the church. He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

3. I would ask my daughter's husband-to-be - are you prepared to provide for my daughter? Can you pay the hydro bill? In our heavenly marriage, *"The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of the Lord gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp."* Just think, no utility bills . . . that must be heaven! Our heavenly bridegroom has provided for us an eternal inheritance in heaven that can never perish, spoil or fade but does He provide for us now? He provided for Israel in the wilderness - manna from heaven and water from a rock. In the midst of drought and famine He fed Elijah. He fed the multitudes. He promises to care for us. Matt 6:25-33 *"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?"* ... *"So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."*

But don't we need more than physical provision? Don't we need more than our physical needs looked after? Our bridegroom does more than care for our physical needs. He gives us a place among God's people. He gives us a heritage and a future. The hymn writer says that He calms our fears and dries our tears. He comforts and sustains. He carries us. He is there to meet every spiritual, emotional and physical need.

We should add a final question: how long do you expect this marriage to last? Earthly marriage is for this side of heaven. It lasts until death parts or the Lord returns. But our connection with Christ, the heavenly bridegroom goes on forever. The saints are the bride of the Lamb. The saints live forever with Jesus. They join with the chorus of heaven to sing: *"Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"*

We rejoice in Christ our bridegroom and in the eternal kingdom He brings. We are saints. We are the bride of Christ and we celebrate with the saints already in heaven. We are part of one glorious circle, gathered with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven ...to praise His name forever.