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The Marriage Supper OF THE LAMB

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GOD IS PLANNING A WEDDING

Just imagine as a newly engaged woman, you went to a bridal fair. You entered all the free drawings—free honeymoon, free photographer, free manicure, free wedding bouquet, free thank-you notes, anything they were giving away. Then at the end of the day, the wealthiest restaurateur in your town drew your name for a free wedding reception and dinner at the finest venue with a five-star chef and a full orchestra. We're not talking about just cake and punch. This is sit-down, white tablecloths, fine china, six courses, real flowers, filet mignon and lobster. And our extravagant dinner pales in comparison to the wedding supper God is planning.

GOD LIKES WEDDINGS

In 2024, the average cost of a wedding in the United States was \$33,000. In my state, Tennessee, the average cost was only \$28,600. Still, according to my calculations, that amount is more than three months' gross income for the average household—a lot of money, planning, and sacrifice.

But a young woman's wedding day is the highlight of her life. She wants to look her very best; she wants all her dreams to come true. She and her parents want to gather friends and loved ones to celebrate the new family.

Every detail is important—from the hard-to-book venues to the dresses, flowers, reception, photographer, invitations, and favors. Brides and grooms enjoy the spotlight. Dads and moms review budgets. Moms and daughters butt heads (and future mothers-in-law are required to keep their mouths shut). But all are focused on celebrating the union of the bride and groom.

Throughout Scripture, God has celebrated weddings—the official union of man and wife. He designed and blessed marriage. Jesus attended weddings and used them as the basis for His parables.

Scripture uses the metaphor of marriage to picture God's intimate relationship and sacrificial love for the Church.

For Discussion:

What are some of the "wedding stories" from Scripture you know about? (Check out Adam and Eve, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Hosea and Gomer, Boaz and Ruth, and others.)

When are weddings mentioned in the New Testament?

NEW TESTAMENT WEDDINGS

The marriage ceremony of Bible times looked different from ours in the twenty-first century. Marriage was celebrated in three phases. More than an engagement, the first phase of a marriage was a contract. The bride's father met the groom's family and arranged the marriage. The dowry was paid; the commitment was made. Legally, the couple was married, though they had not physically consummated their union. Only a legal divorce could break this marriage covenant. The bride continued to live with her family, the couple was chaperoned when they were together, and the groom began the work of preparing his home for his bride. This is the phase of betrothal, familiar to us in the account of Mary and Joseph (Luke 2).

In the next stage of marriage, the bridegroom came for his bride. He "came down the aisle" (or street) for her, to return with her to their home. Generally not a surprise to her, the exact timing was uncertain. She gathered her bridesmaids to wait for his arrival. This phase is featured in Jesus' parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1–13). Usually, proof the bride was a virgin was presented to the groom's family, and in their new home, the marriage was consummated.

In the third phase, the party started. And it was quite a party. The guests were invited, the food was prepared, and the banquet began, often continuing for a full week. When Jesus turned the water into wine (John 2:1–2), He was attending this part of the marriage. The parable of the wedding banquet in

Matthew 22:1-13 was this part of the marriage He referenced.

For Discussion:

If you have been married, what was your favorite part of your engagement and wedding?

Mothers of the bride sometimes adopt the adage, "It's not about the wedding; it's about the marriage." Why is the wedding an important part of marriage? What is the purpose of the wedding?

DRAWING THE PARALLELS

In those three phases of marriage, we can trace Christ's relationship with His Church. The betrothal covenant involved a pledge and a payment. Jesus Christ vowed His love for His bride, the Church (believers), and laid down His life to pay the price to buy her for Himself (Ephesians 5:25-32).

One day, the Bridegroom will return for the Church, as the groom came for his bride in the second phase of the ancient marriages. Christ will rapture believers to the heavenly home He has prepared for them (John 14:3).

And God is planning the party (third phase)—the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6-10). All who put their trust in Him are included. All expenses are paid. All you need has already been provided. What a banquet it will be! Remember that wedding reception we imagined earlier? It can't even begin to compare with what God is planning. "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him (1 Corinthians 2:9 NKJV).

For Discussion:

As the Church, the bride of Christ, we are still in the waiting-for-the-Bridegroom phase. How do you feel about waiting? What is your attitude about waiting for Christ's return? Is it even on your radar for upcoming events? In what ways might our daily activities crowd our perspective on His return? What are some valuable practices we should be doing as we wait?

THE WEDDING DETAILS

THE INVITATION

All of Scripture is our invitation to celebrate the New Covenant—the completion of all God has promised. God's love story is spelled out on every page. He invites us again and again—to fellowship with and enjoy Him intimately. He wants to adopt us as part of His family. He has sent His servants to the byways and hedges to include everyone in the invitation—there is room for all who will accept Him.

For Discussion:

What are the invitations in the following verses?

Isaiah 55:1-3

Matthew 11:28

John 7:37

John 21:12

Revelation 3:20

Revelation 22:17

THE BRIDEGROOM

Yes, in our culture, the focus is generally on the bride. But that's not true about Heaven's wedding. The spotless, reigning Hero of the occasion, the Bridegroom headlines His special event. The hosts of Heaven rise in praise for the Lamb that was slain before the creation of the world. He is altogether lovely as He comes for His Bride (Song of Solomon 5:16). He has paid the ultimate price to purchase His bride (1 Peter 1:18-19), and He has prepared a place for her (John 14:2-3).

For Discussion:

How does Revelation 19:11-16 describe the Bridegroom?

THE BRIDE

The bride is the Church. In this instance, we are talking about the universal Church—all believers from all over the globe from all time. Yes, your local

church family of believers should be included in that glorious throng, but this word picture is bigger than that. The capital-C Church is the collective gathering of believers, joining the Bridegroom for the never-ending celebration in Heaven when the Devil is defeated and the victory is won. God has prepared for us, and we must prepare for Him. Note that the Church makes herself ready for the Bridegroom by dressing in robes of righteousness. In Revelation 19:7, the fine linen of her garment is described as the righteous deeds of the saints. Imagine, with each good deed you do as an act of gratitude to the God who saved us, weaving a beautiful wedding dress. Here, add this bit of lace with your kindness to your neighbor. Here's a pearl button, fashioned when you gave generously to the needy. These are the good works prepared for us (Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 2:12) by our loving Father.

For Discussion:

What quality does 2 Corinthians 11:2 emphasize about the bride of Christ?

How does Ephesians 5:25-27 relate to Revelation 19:7-8?

THE GUEST LIST

Cue the "Hallelujah Chorus"! Multitudes are gathered to celebrate this wedding supper in Heaven (Revelation 19:1-6). As the bride and the guests of this spectacular culmination of history, we join in with the armies of angels and the hosts of Heaven to worship Jesus Christ. Like an ocean, like the sound of thunder, we unite our voices with the chorus singing praise forevermore. Each person is there because they have put their faith in God, and because someone has shared the good news of Jesus Christ with them. Do not grow weary in inviting others to be part of that joyful celebration.

For Discussion:

Who will be at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb? Check out part of the list in Revelation 5:9.

Why not get a little practice now? Stand up and read (together, if you're in a group) Revelation 19:1-6.

WHAT TO WEAR

Good news! Not only are you invited to this wondrous, fanciest-of-all-fancy weddings, but your clothes have already been selected for you. Unless you wear the garment provided, you can consider yourself uninvited. These Designer gowns are priceless, bought with the precious blood of Christ. They are without spot, blemish, or wrinkle. Our own righteousness is as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6), but He has provided the wedding garment of salvation (Isaiah 61:10). Revelation 7:9 describes the symbolic white robes the multitudes will wear, accessorized with palm branches to wave in praise. We'll all be "dressed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne."

For Discussion:

What did Jesus teach about the wedding garment in the parable in Matthew 22:11-13?

How can we be dressing for Heaven even now? (See Colossians 3:12-14.)

THE MENU

"Come and dine!" The table is set, but no candles are lit because the Light brighter than the sun illuminates the banquet. The crystal river flows, deep and pure. The twelve fruits grown on the tree of life are beautiful and delicious, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:1-2). The Bread of Life is warm and aromatic, and no one will hunger. No one will be needy. All are satisfied with the Bread of Heaven, feasting in the presence of the Bridegroom.

DATE AND TIME

We are tired and live in such uncertain times. We feel convinced that His coming must be soon, and many of our loved ones have already gathered in Heaven. The wait seems inordinately long, but even the Bridegroom doesn't know when the wedding will begin. No one knows. We are watching, ready and waiting, with our lamps trimmed and bright, extra oil stashed in our pockets.

Until He comes, let's purpose to be aware that it may be any day, to daily choose those activities that will prepare us for His return. We need clean hearts and busy hands, as we are about our Father's business now, readying for His kingdom to come. Maybe, like me, you are praying, "Keep me burning, burning, burning, till the Lord shall come."

Waiting for the Lord to come again,
Watching with our lamps all trimmed,
Working for the kingdom until then,
We're waiting, watching, working for Him.

For Discussion:

Read Jesus' parable about the ten virgins in Matthew 22:1-14. From examining your daily activities and choices, which group would someone place you in? What can you do to be certain you are prepared for the Wedding Supper?

WEDDING GIFTS

My limited wealth will not make it past the pearly gates with me. I have nothing to bring of my own. My efforts are unacceptable. My talents are meager. So what can I give to my King? Revelation 4 speaks of casting our crowns at His feet, but I'm not sure I'll even have a crown. Certainly, all I can give Him is what He has already given me. I want to willingly start now, laying up treasures in Heaven that will not rust out or wear out or be eaten away by moths or inflation.

For Discussion:

Reflect on David's prayer of praise in 1 Chronicles 29:11-19. How did David describe God? What did he note about what we can offer to God? What did David ask of God?

Far beyond what I can fathom right now, I will give Him praise—endless praise. He is worthy of all our praise, and with a pure heart and unflagging strength, we will spend eternity giving it to Him.

The only other gift I can bring will be the ones I've brought to Jesus. Only my children. Only those children in Vacation Bible School. Only those friends and neighbors I've shared the gospel with. Only those missionary efforts that my offerings have funded, my prayers have supported. I want the wedding supper to be crowded with those dear people, won by God's grace.

This is the best wedding you've ever been to. Even if you always cry at weddings, don't bring your handkerchief to this one. God will wipe away all tears. You know those weddings where the photos take so long, and you feel like the reception is never going to be over? In this one, the party is going to last for eternity. And in Heaven, we'll all live happily ever after. *W*

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