

## A Match Made in Heaven

5<sup>th</sup> Sun. of Easter – 05/15/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Revelation 21:1-7 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 2, [literal translation from the Greek,] **“And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride embellished with honor and ready for her husband.”**

### **Introduction**

✘ Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

✘ When it comes to weddings, have you ever noticed that sometimes, the couple that you see in the wedding ceremony – well-behaved and proper; following decorum and often quite reserved, looks like an entirely different couple at the reception.

➔ It can make you ask, “Which one is real?” Is it the well-behaved bride or the wild and crazy one at the reception that is real? And why such a dramatic change?

✘ Today, as the apostle John is wrapping up his record of the Revelation he received from God, he tells us about a wedding that he sees taking place before the throne of God in heaven.

➔ It’s a wedding in which each one of us here, as Christians, are an intimate part. In fact it’s our own wedding where a dramatic, night-and-day type of change has taken place within us. But before we can talk about that, we need to make sure we understand a little bit about our history.

### **I. Wed to the World**

✘ It’s a history that goes all the way back to the very first wedding ever; to the very first wedding reception as well.

➔ To say that this first wedding was a match made in heaven is the ultimate in under statements. The bride and the groom were actually the only two people on the planet at that time. God literally made Eve, the bride from the side of Adam, the groom; and when he first saw her, he was over the brand new moon with excitement. “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”, he said, ‘she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man’. Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:23-24).

➔ This was the model wedding and marriage; created by God Himself to be a reflection of His selfless and sacrificial love. The man and the woman looked at each other and saw a perfect compliment and extension of themselves; a precious gift from God.

✘ Yet, by the time the wedding reception was done, that marriage was already on the rocks. You see, the cunning serpent; the deceiver, known as Satan thought he should throw this reception for Adam and Eve at the one place God told the two they should not be; at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

➔ And it’s that one meal, consisting of only one piece of fruit that ruined everything. It destroyed their marriage and their relationship with their Creator. Yes, Adam and Eve hid from

God, tried to justify themselves and refused to confess their own sinful part in their marriage conflict by accusing and pointing fingers at each other. Not only was their perfect marriage on the rocks because of that satanically catered meal of the forbidden fruit, but their entire lives were too. God had made it very clear from the start in Genesis 2:17, “In the day that you eat of [the fruit] you shall surely die”.

→ That shows us how dangerous just one sinful act of indiscretion can be to a relationship. It only took one bite each, from one piece of the forbidden fruit to divide that perfect couple. Though Adam and Eve stayed married, their marriage would now have strife, misunderstandings, selfishness, lack of leading on the man’s part, a desire to dominate on the woman’s part, a loss of love, bitter words, and other great shame and vice – where before there was none of that.

✘ And we see the results of that fallen nature in the offspring of their once perfect union as their son, Cain killed his brother Abel. But that’s what life was like after that first corrupt wedding reception at the tree. From that time forth Adam and Eve, and all of their descendants had become wed to the world.

→ Yes, their bond to sin and death became your problem and mine now today. Their new, sinful nature was passed down to every tribe, clan, nation, family, everyone. And you know what that nature has brought you? A divorce; a separation between us and our God because of our marriage to this sin-filled world.

→ The real problem is that by being married to the world and its thoughts, we have become wed to the most domineering and abusive spouse there is – for the devil himself is the prince of this world according to Ephesians 2:(1-3) and he is the main agitator. Our bond to this world ends in domestic violence against each of our souls every day. This abusive marriage brings each of us a life of tears, bitter mourning and grief, pain upon pain, and, ultimately, death – both physical and spiritual.

## **II. Wedding of Jesus - His Bride Announcement**

✘ But listen to what God has given us in our Epistle Reading from Revelation 21 today. His messenger, the angel announces hope for all of us who have been ruined by our nature, and abused by the world. He announces a bond of joy in Jesus. He proclaims healing for our wounds; especially the deep, sin-festered wounds of the soul.

→ The angel announces restoration, love, happiness, and, above all, resurrection and new life from the dead. He proclaims the wedding of Jesus to His Church of all believers. The entire wedding announcement is verses 2-4, “And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away’”.

✘ From the moment of that first corrupt wedding reception, God’s plan to address the damaged relationship went into effect. He promised that His Son, Jesus would come to us, to “dwell with

man". That took place when Jesus became incarnate – that is He took on our human flesh, yet still He remained the divine Son of God.

→ As true God and true man, Jesus came to us sinners, to listen, to love, to rescue – yes, to woo us. Jesus came in search of a bride; not for an earthly marriage, but to find His Church. And He found her, called on her where she was shut up in her room of death and He won her heart. How? simply by His gracious Word and Spirit through the water and Word of baptism.

✘ Now John shows us the bride in His Revelation from God. He describes her as a city; the New Jerusalem, which is God's Holy Church; triumphant over sin and death in glory; dressed as a bride "adorned for her husband" according to verse two. The root word in the Greek for that word that's translated as "adorned" is "κοσμέω". It's where we get our English word "cosmetics". But this word speaks of so much more than just a woman who has put on makeup to look pretty. It refers to a complete transformation, where the bride in this case, has been "properly prepared" for her groom; "embellished with honor and decorum" deep down into her core.

→ When we understand the transformation that occurs in our baptism – how we who are dead in our sin are washed clean by the blood of Jesus and given new life as He robes us in His very own righteousness, we then see that this miraculous difference is accomplished by Jesus our bridegroom alone; by His sacrificial act of giving His life over to death in our place. Why? because of His impenetrable love for us, His bride!

✘ You see, what we have before us in our text today is the perfect description of the spiritual marriage between Jesus and His Church. Like the prophet Hosea, who was commanded to take a prostitute as a wife and to forgive her even when she strayed again in sin, so our Lord took to Himself in us a defiled bride; a sinful bride, a bride with nothing in her that should make Him love her.

→ Yet what does Jesus do? As a new and perfect Hosea, Jesus showers His bride, the Church, with His undeserved love. He wins her heart by His gentle Word and abundant forgiveness. Jesus works a holy separation between His people and their abusive relationship with the world and its ways.

→ So now, when believers come back in sorrow over their sin and in true repentance, Jesus speaks His love to them and restores them undeservedly to Himself.

### **III. The Wedding Banquet – Now, not yet!**

✘ What you and I have then is exactly the opposite of the original wedding that was first a match made in heaven but soon ended up on the rocks because of a corrupt reception. Our wedding of Jesus to His Church begins on the rocks. For who would ever think that a marriage could be good if it begins with the death of the groom?

→ Yet, because Jesus rose from the dead on Easter, there is great joy, and great love for His Church! In fact, with that new life, Jesus fills our lives and our relationship with new hope. You and I have a new and confident hope because we live by God's grace alone, trusting in Jesus, and separated from our former abusive marriage to the world.

- ✘ In fact, we have the promise of a reception that is like no other – the exact opposite of corruption. It is the wedding feast of the Lamb and His Church; a banquet like none other seen on earth. This is a feast where Jesus comes to us even now and gives His crucified body and His shed blood into our mouths for the forgiveness of our sins.
  - ➔ It's a feast that the angels in heaven anticipate on the Last Day where they too will rejoice in the union of Jesus and His Bride. Here in the Lord's Holy Supper He blesses us with a foretaste of that great wedding feast to come in heaven. We get a taste of this heavenly wedding feast; of our own wedding reception early here on earth; at this very altar!
- ✘ It's here that God unites and prepares and embellishes us with honor as we confess together our faith in, and our love for our beloved husband and Savior. And not because we deserve it, but simply because Jesus says so, "Take, eat, this is My body. Take, drink, this is My blood". By His grace the bread and wine become vessels to carry Jesus' true body and blood into our mouths so that we might taste once again of our Savior's love for us.
  - ➔ It's this love that binds us forever together with Jesus. And while we love His sacramental gifts – the refreshing water and Word of baptism that brings us together with Him in grace, and His perfect guidance and comfort in Scripture to lead us each and every day, and the strengthening feast of hope in Holy Communion pointing us to our eternal feast and the glorious celebration with our one true love in heaven, we eagerly, yet patiently wait. We wait in faith for the day when Jesus brings us to Himself as our only Beloved and He gives us that first wonderful drink from "the spring of the water of life without payment" (v. 6) and from that day forward we then live with Him forever in eternal bliss; in our "Match Made in Heaven".
- ✘ Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.*