

A Match Made in Heaven

Revelation 21:1-7

The very first wedding was a match made in heaven. But by the time the wedding reception was over, that marriage was already on the rocks. God gave the woman He had formed from Adam's rib to the man as his bride. The cunning serpent threw a wedding reception for Adam and Eve at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That meal ruined everything. It destroyed their marriage. Adam and Eve hid from God, tried to justify themselves, and started pointing fingers. Not only was their perfect marriage on the rocks because of that meal. But their lives were too. God had said, "*In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die*" (Genesis 2:17).

Even though Adam and Eve stayed married, their marriage was now full of 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. We see the results of that fallen nature in their children. Cain killed his brother Abel. That's what life is like after that wedding reception at the tree.

Adam and Eve have passed down their legacy to all of their children, including you and me. Divorced from God and married to the world, your nature is sinful to the core. Married to the world and its thoughts, our fallen human nature is married to the most domineering

and abusive spouse there is. The devil himself is the prince of this world. The wedding of man's fallen nature to the world ends in domestic violence to the soul every time. This abusive marriage between the world and the soul brings with it tears, mourning and grief, pain upon pain, and, ultimately, death, both physical and spiritual.

But listen to what Revelation 21 says. For the angel announces hope for those ruined by their nature and abused by the world. The angel announces joy in Jesus. The angel announces healing for all wounds, and especially the deep wounds of the soul. The angel announces restoration, love, happiness, and, above all, the resurrection from the dead. The angel announces the wedding of Jesus and His Church of all believers.

"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.'"

Jesus dwells with man, and man with God. The Son of God takes on our human flesh. As true God and true man, Jesus came to be numbered with sinners, to listen,

to love, to rescue, and to woo. Jesus came in search of a bride. Not for an earthly marriage, but to find His Church. And He found her, called to her, and won her heart to be His, by His Word and Spirit.

The new Jerusalem, God's Holy Church, is dressed as a bride adorned for her husband. It is the perfect description of the spiritual marriage between Jesus and the Church.

The prophet Hosea was commanded to take a prostitute as a wife and to forgive her when she again went astray. Similarly, our Lord took to Himself a defiled bride, a sinful bride, with nothing in her that should make Him love her. Yet what does Jesus do? As a new Hosea, Jesus showers His bride, the Church, with undeserved love. He wins her heart by His gentle Word and teaching of forgiveness. Jesus separates His people from their abusive former relationship with the world's ways.

Jesus, like the ideal husband, gave everything He is and has for her good. He laid down His life on the cross. If believers depart from His grace, but then return in shame, guilt, and confession of sins, Jesus speaks love to them and restores them to Himself by His Word of absolution.

The first wedding began as a match made in heaven, but by the time of the wedding reception, their marriage had hit the rocks. It is exactly the opposite for the wedding of Jesus and the Church. The wedding of Jesus to the

Church begins on the rocks. No wedding ever seems to be good if it begins with the death of the groom. Yet, because Jesus rises from the dead on Easter, there is great joy, and great love for His Church! With new life comes new hope.

There is new hope for the marriage of Jesus to His Bride the Church because Jesus is risen. And there is new hope for the Church itself, who lives now by God's grace alone, trusting in Jesus, and separated from its former abusive marriage to the world.

And don't forget the feast! There is no better feast than the wedding feast of the Lamb and His Church! This is a feast where Jesus gives His crucified body and His shed blood into our mouths for the forgiveness of our sins. At the Lord's Holy Supper, we get a foretaste of that great wedding feast in heaven. Mere bread and wine become vessels that carry Jesus' true body and blood to our mouths, that we might taste our Savior's love.

Jesus comes as the heavenly Bridegroom for His bride, the Church.

We give thanks, O Lord, for this wedding made in heaven, of the Son of God in human flesh to His holy and purified Church. Thank you for making us His beloved bride. Guard and keep us by your Word and Spirit, and by the foretaste of that feast to come in heaven. Amen.