

Introduction

I begin with a question. How many of you have been married for 40 years or more? That isn't very long, compared to Herbert Fisher and his wife Zelmyra at least who are in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for the longest marriage – almost 87 years when he died in 2011. That's incredible isn't it? It appears to back up the claim of a relative of theirs that it was, from the beginning, **"a marriage made in heaven."**

We all know that idiom, **"a marriage made in heaven,"** and what it suggests. A man and woman who seem to be made for each other get married and thrive. Joy prevails in their life together.

But today, I'm going to preach about a marriage made in heaven that makes the joy of all the rest, including the Fisher's, pale in comparison. That marriage is yours and mine to Jesus in Revelation 19:6-9. Turn there in your Bible's please.

Wedding Day

Let me make an observation. Many sincere Christians have misconceptions about heaven, that is, eternal life after Jesus comes again. A Christian attorney-duffer I know, for instance, believes that there will be golf in heaven. I tell him there won't be though and explain why. It's because there won't be any lying, cheating, or swearing there. So how can there be any golf? I also tell him jokingly that the other place, with its **"weeping and gnashing of teeth,"** sounds more like a place where golf is played. Misconceptions about heaven are common.

To avoid those, we must grasp something. It's that some of what Revelation reveals about it is symbolic. An imaginary assignment explains why it is. It's to go back in time and explain to a first century person what a jet airplane is. This person doesn't have any idea what computers, engines, hydraulics, and so on are. So how would you explain it to him? You'd have to use things he knows by experience as symbols. You might say, for instance, **"It's like a giant metal bird**

that flies through the air without moving its wings.” That’s the way it is with heaven. Revelation uses the very best first century symbols that can be used to describe it.

To avoid misconceptions about it, therefore, we must interpret the symbols figuratively, not literally. C.S. Lewis made just that point. He wrote: **“All the Scriptural imagery – harps, crowns, gold, and so – is of course a symbolical attempt to express the inexpressible. People who take these symbols literally might as well think that when Christ told us to be like doves, he meant that we were to lay eggs.”** He was right. Consequently, we interpret the symbols Revelation uses to describe heaven as just that, symbols. We interpret them that way by doing two things.

First, we determine the reality of heaven that the symbol expresses. We identify in what way heaven is like the symbol. We ask and answer, **“What is true about the symbol that is true about heaven?”**

Second, once we’ve done that, we remind ourselves that the reality of heaven that the symbol expresses is far better than the symbol itself. Going back to the giant metal bird that flies through the air without moving its wings, that symbol doesn’t begin to do justice to the technological wonder it represents. It’s the same with heaven. The symbol is woefully inadequate to convey the wondrous nature of the reality it represents. The reality is far better than the symbol.

We now know how to interpret symbols. Let’s do just that in our text.

Verse 6 sets the scene for us. A mighty chorus of angels announces that **“the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.”** It doing so begins what is called **“the consummation,”** that is, God entering His reign over all creation. This occurs at the Second Coming of Jesus.

Two metaphors follow the announcement. The first, in verses 7-8, is a wedding. The groom is **“the Lamb,”** Jesus. The bride is **“the saints,”** those who follow Jesus. The second metaphor, in verse 9, is a **“marriage supper”** or wedding reception as we call it. The host is **“the**

Lamb,” Jesus. The guests are the saints, those who follow Jesus.

You can quickly see that the metaphors are related. Both are about a wedding day and that’s the symbol. John is saying that heaven is like a wedding day. Let’s learn in what ways it is by interpreting the symbol.

Joy in Heaven

First, we determine the reality of heaven that a wedding day, as symbol, expresses. We ask and answer the question, **“What is true about a wedding day that is true about heaven?”**

I’m going to show you three power point slides of grooms responding when they see their brides walking down the aisle. Notice their expressions as I do and tell me when I’m done showing the slides what they’re experiencing. What are they experiencing? It’s what we would call **“sheer and unadulterated”** joy.

Those slides illustrate one reality of heaven that a wedding day, as symbol, expresses. It’s joy. Joy will be a foundational condition of life in heaven. Revelation reveals two other conditions that will also be foundational, love and peace. But here it’s joy. C.S. Lewis famously said, **“Joy is the serious business of heaven”** and that’s true. Every sane human craves joy. The good news is that we’ll have it in heaven.

Now that we’ve determined that reality of heaven that a wedding day, as symbol, expresses, we do a second thing. We remind ourselves the reality is far better than the symbol. Going back to this groom’s expression, consider this. Our joy in every single moment in heaven will be fuller than his joy is there in that moment. Every single moment for us in heaven will be better than that single moment for that groom.

That then is one reality of heaven that a wedding day, as symbol, expresses. It’s perfect fullness of joy, uninterrupted and never-ending.

Relationship with Jesus in Heaven

But there’s another reality it expresses. It’s relationship with Jesus. Think about the meaning of a wedding day. It’s found in the central

component of the wedding ceremony itself, the vows, **“to have and to hold from this day forward.”** **“To have”** means **“to receive you completely and without reservation.”** **“To hold”** means **“to give myself to you completely and without reservation.”** That is a profound experience. As I tell couples in pre-marital counseling, it means that you’re entering into an utterly unique human relationship. You will act upon and interact with each other in a way that you *will not* with any other human because you *cannot*. Biologically and psychologically, you’re capable of the intensity and intimacy this relationship requires with only one person, which is one reason polygamy is destructive and wrong.

Now, the meaning of a wedding day, as I just defined it, expresses a second reality of heaven. It’s an intense and intimate relationship with Jesus. We will **“have”** and **“hold”** Him.

Dwight L. Moody had an illuminating encounter with God. He described it this way: **“One day, in the city of New York – oh what a day – I cannot describe it. I seldom refer to it. It is almost too sacred an experience to name. I can only say that God revealed Himself to me, and I had such an experience of His love that I had to ask him to stay His hand.”** He went on to say that he felt as if he was going to be crushed and killed by God’s presence and would have been had God not stayed His hand.

The lesson is this. We’re constrained in our relationship with Jesus now. Going back to the wedding vow, we can only partially **“have”** or **“receive”** Him now. That’s because we’re fallen and flawed biologically and psychologically, which in turn significantly limits the degree to which we can experience His presence.

But we’ll be un-fallen and flawless biologically and psychologically in heaven. We will, as a result, have dramatically increased powers to **“have”** and to **“hold”** Jesus. We’ll be able to give to Him and to receive Him far more richly and deeply than we’re able to now. We’ll experience His presence with a degree of intensity and intimacy far beyond what

Moody did and not be crushed.

Now that we've determined that reality of heaven that a wedding day, as symbol, expresses, we do a second thing. We remind ourselves that the reality is far better than the symbol. The Song of Songs, a book in the Bible, records the courtship and wedding day of two lovers. 8:6 refers to the part of the wedding day we call "**the consummation of the marriage,**" and implies this. The most intense and intimate of all human acts is consummation between a bride and groom who have and hold each other. In spiritual and psychological terms, the intensity and intimacy of our relationship with Jesus in heaven will be greater than that.

Grasp what that means. Relationship with Him is the primary source of our joy in heaven. I'd explain it this way. If the only experience we had in heaven was relationship with Him, it would still be heaven. If we had all the other astonishing experiences in heaven but not relationship with Him, it would be hell. I say that to say this. The ultimate source of our perfectly full joy in heaven is the intensity and intimacy of our relationship with Jesus. That relationship alone makes heaven heaven.

Be Married to Jesus

We now know the message of our text. It's that's we will have perfect fullness of joy in heaven, the primary source of which is our intense and intimate relationship with Jesus. That's our glorious future and we need to prepare for it by incorporating it into our present. We do that in a simple yet profound way. Be married to Jesus.

I recently read that some Catholic nuns wear a wedding ring. They do so to show their status. They're married – to Jesus. In a similar vein, someone asked a young single attorney, a follower of Jesus, "**Are you married?**" "**I am,**" he answered, "**To Jesus.**" Those nuns and that attorney are married to Jesus – and we can be too.

I referenced a prepositional phrase in the wedding vows, "**to have and to hold.**" A second prepositional phrase follows shortly thereafter, "**to love and to cherish.**" That's how we get married to Jesus. We vow

(make and carry out the decision) to love and cherish Him.

“To love and to cherish” Him means something specific. In our day-to-day life, we make Him the primary object of our affection and concern. Affection means that we feel most deeply about Him. Concern means that we think most frequently about Him and that we act most reliably *upon* Him and *for* Him. Let’s make Jesus the primary object of our affection and concern. We’re married to Him if we do.

When my wife Jill was diagnosed with cancer, her welfare was my second concern. That Jesus be esteemed and pleased through our response to her cancer was my first concern. That may seem awful to you but it’s the truth. I dearly love and cherish my wife, more than I can describe. But I love and cherish Jesus more – more than anyone or anything else. I’m married to Him in other words.

I hope and pray that you are too. Why? It’s because what will be true someday in heaven is true now on earth. Marriage to Jesus is the source of joy now. Make and carry out the decision to love and cherish Him. Joy will prevail in your life if you do. It won’t if you don’t.

Conclusion

In 1983, Mother Teresa wrote a meditation titled **“Who Is Jesus to Me?”** Listen as I read an excerpt from it in closing: **“Jesus I love with my whole heart, with my whole being. I have given Him all, even my sins, and He has *espoused* Himself to me in tenderness and love. Now and for life, Jesus is my spouse.”** Her words prompt a question. Is Jesus your spouse for life? Are you married to Him? I hope so because **“it’s a marriage made in heaven”** if you are.





