

God's Great Tomorrow, part 4
Clairemont SDA Church
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We're taking an overview of God's great and glorious plan for tomorrow. What God has revealed to us is simple, sensible and Scriptural. Jesus returns as He promised, coming in the clouds of heaven. At that time He raises the righteous dead and changes the living saints to immortality and we will rise together to meet Him in the air. Those who have rejected His gift of life are consumed by the brightness of His glory and Satan and his angels are left alone on this planet, clothed with darkness for 1,000 years.

During the millennium the saints are in heaven, among other things affirming the righteous judgments of God. Following the 1,000 years, God, His city and His saints come down from heaven to this earth. The wicked are raised for final judgment. They, under the inspiration of Satan, attempt to attack the Holy City, but fire from God consumes and destroys them forever. The fire cleanses the earth and its atmosphere; God re-creates this planet to the perfect condition that existed before sin. The life of eternal serenity and peace that God always desired overshadows all the pain and suffering of this life, and we will live and serve Him forever. What a plan! We have the assurance that this plan will be fulfilled in that Christ conquered sin, the devil and death by dying on the cross and by coming from the grave. We live in the assurance of His victory today. Praise God!

Why is it important to review this plan and have it firmly rooted in our minds? Because Satan, the master deceiver, has engineered many false teachings regarding God's plan. These deceptions will cause people to be unready and lost. Remember that Jesus' first words to His disciples, when addressing this topic, were "Do not be deceived."

What are some of the deceptions that Satan has developed to mislead people? He's told people that the wicked live forever in a never-ending furnace of hell. Not true! The wicked are consumed and destroyed, but the Bible does not endorse the teaching of a never-ending hell. He's inspired the teaching that God is going to secretly rapture away some of His people and that life will continue on this planet for a seven-year period following the rapture. Not true! When

Jesus comes, it is climactic. There's only one "coming," and when that happens, it's over. Human life will not continue on this planet after He comes, at least until the 1,000 years are over. That's why it's so important that we be ready at all times, and not be lured into thinking that when the "rapture" comes we will have an extension of time in which to get ready.

Satan has told people that Christ will come and set up His kingdom on earth and reign *here* for the 1,000 years in peace. Not true! We meet Him in the air and go to heaven and spend the millennium with Him up there. The Bible does talk about His kingdom on earth and that the meek "shall inherit the earth." But this follows the *third* coming of Jesus, after the millennium, not the *second* coming. Remember that Satan was very successful in confusing the minds of the Jews in Jesus' day regarding what would happen at the Messiah's coming, leading them to believe that promises that pertained to the *Second* Advent would be fulfilled at the time Jesus was born, at His *first* coming. In the same way, he's confused people today, leading them to believe that what happens after Jesus comes the *third* time, like His kingdom being established on earth, will be fulfilled when He comes the *second* time. This is another subtle deception that will lead people to put off their decision for Christ and salvation. Today we'll see that there are a few more deceptions that Satan has been peddling so that people will be unprepared for Christ's coming.

Last time we discussed briefly the great city He's prepared, the New Jerusalem. In John 14 He promised that if He went, He would prepare a place for us. The disciple John later saw this city "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband," and Revelation 21 goes into some detail describing the various gems and precious stones that grace her architecture. It will be something to see! The word "prepare" suggests forethought, planning, attention and love. All of this Jesus has put into the making of this city so that it will be something that will bring eternal pleasure to the redeemed.

So there is the "bride" that is the city, which is "prepared" and "adorned." Put these three terms on the screen of your mind, "bride," "prepared," and "adorned." Those three terms apply to the City. But there's another "bride" mentioned in Scripture, a bride which is also "prepared" and "adorned." What is the other "bride"? It is the church. In this motif, Jesus is the heavenly Bridegroom waiting anxiously for the bride to be ready.

The roots of this imagery go back to the very beginning of earth's history when sin entered and shattered the relationship between God and His people, Adam and Eve. "Your iniquities have *separated* you from your God" we're told in Isaiah 59:2. In our culture, when a marriage is under strain and stress the couple may "separate" and then if reconciliation does not take place, there comes that saddest word, "divorce."

In the spiritual realm, both separation and divorce took place simultaneously. Sin came in and brought the "separation" which was accompanied by the "divorce." Genesis 3:24 says, after God pronounced judgment on Adam and Eve, "So He *drove out* the man" from the Garden. That's the Hebrew verb (*garish*) which would become the common word for "divorce." See Leviticus 21:7, 14, etc. So, sin came in and caused both "separation" and "divorce." But our great God of love has been seeking a reconciliation ever since. He's paid the dowry, His own life blood. Now He's looking forward to the great reunion, the marriage. Someday soon the Church will be His bride.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." II Corinthians 11:2. So the church is the bride also. Allow your mind to contemplate that great passage in Genesis 2 which says "It is not good that man should be alone." You've heard that text before, haven't you? Perhaps it was included in a wedding sermon. Allow me to suggest that there may be another way to look at it. In this context, we can think of the word "man" being capitalized, and refer to the Man Christ Jesus, the heavenly Groom. It is not good that *Man* be alone. That's not a violation of the text, is it? God wants to fellowship with us, His creatures in the closest way possible. He wants to be married to us! That's why Paul wrote, quoting from Genesis 2, "'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.'" This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church." Ephesians 5:31, 32.

When does this "wedding" take place? Does it happen when we get to heaven? No, the Bible makes it clear that the "wedding" takes place *before* Jesus comes. That's when the church and her Master are joined spiritually in an eternal relationship. Is that in the Bible? Yes! Jesus said, "You yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when He will return *from* the wedding, that when He comes and knocks they may open to Him immediately." Luke 12:36. This corresponds to a later parable when Jesus said, "A certain nobleman went into a far country to *receive for himself a kingdom and to return.*"

Luke 19:12. The wedding and Christ's reception of the kingdom (which are the same thing) take place before He returns.

It also agrees with the great prophetic picture that Daniel saw, when he witnessed the Son approaching the Ancient of Days, God the Father in the judgment scene reported in Daniel 7. "I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man. He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him." Daniel 7:13, 14. Some have mistakenly thought that this refers to Christ coming to the earth, but it doesn't. It's talking about Christ coming with the cloud of angels before the Father to receive the kingdom after the close of the investigative phase of the judgment (when the "court is seated and the books are opened") and prior to His return to this earth. That's when the list of the names of those who will be the subjects of His kingdom is finalized.

This reception of the kingdom, which is the same thing as the marriage of the Lamb, takes place before Jesus comes. It is the same thing as the sealing of the saints. It represents the final touch of Christian maturity given by the Holy Spirit so that God's people perfectly reflect the character of Jesus. It is the ripening of Christian character that brings about the harvest. The bride, finally, says "I do" to her heavenly Groom. Christ's promise of Genesis 2 and His prayer of John 17 become reality as "two" become "one." Christ and His bride are "one" in spirit, thinking and character. What then takes place in heaven after the saints are taken there? It is not the marriage *service* but the marriage *supper*, the great celebration that follows the wedding.

Like every other part of God's plan, Satan has injected his false philosophies to confuse and deceive. There are two main ones in this phase of the story, opposite but equally destructive. The first deception is that "I can do it myself." I can get myself ready. I can clean myself up. I can overcome my problems on my own and defeat Satan's temptations. Not true! Satan is much stronger than we are, and he has the benefit of 6,000 years of experience in knowing where the weak points are and how to tempt us. On our own we are no match for his cunning and stealth. Plus, we have the liability of living in sinful nature, which by nature leans toward evil.

But doesn't the Bible sometimes seem to say that "we do it"? Even in this very context of the bride being ready we read, "And I

heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying 'Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and *His wife has made herself ready.*'" Revelation 19:6, 7. Hmmmm. That sounds like "we do it," doesn't it? The bride "made herself ready." And what about many other Bible passages like I John 3 which reads, "Beloved, now we are the children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as he is. And everyone who has this hope in Him *purifies himself*, just as He is pure." I John 3:2, 3. James adds, "Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and *purify your hearts*, you double-minded." James 4:8.

Does the Bible teach that "we do it"? We need to read these passages and others like them, from the perspective of how the Bible views cause and effect. Here's the clue to understanding how to read those statements. Sometimes we are said to "do" what we "allow" or "permit." It is the same with God in the Bible. Because He is sovereign and over all, nothing can happen, in the strictest sense, without His permission. From that angle, He is said to "create evil," in that He gave His creatures freedom to choose and permitted the possibility of sin. See Isaiah 45:7, KJV. He is said to "do" what He "permits." In the same way, we really can't cleanse ourselves from evil or purify our hearts. In the strictest sense, the bride does not "make herself ready." But since the preparation for the bride to be ready cannot take place *without her permission*; because she does play a role in this happening in that she submits to God and allows His Spirit to bring new life, in the Bible way of speaking she is said to "make herself ready." What she "permits" she is said to "do." We shouldn't be too hard on Bible authors who express it that way.

And, in nearly all these Bible passages, a careful reading of the verses before and after make this concept clear. In the James passage, the verse before says, "Therefore *submit* to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." Then it says, "Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded." It's clear that the cleansing of our hands is the result of submitting to Him. In Revelation 19:8, the verse which follows the phrase "His wife has made herself ready," we read a very important comment. "And to her it was *granted* to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." What does the word "granted" mean in that verse? It means that it was a *gift*, not something that was earned. If you're facing high

tuition costs in school, you recognize the difference between a grant and a loan. A grant means that it's free; you don't pay it back. In the same way, the righteousness received by the saints, which is what makes her ready for the marriage, is a gift provided by Jesus. But because we have to consent for this miracle to take place, on some occasions the Bible phrases it as though we are doing it; but only in the sense that we allow it to happen.

The other deception recognizes the untruth of the first approach ("I do it"), but takes it too far. This one acknowledges that "*I* don't do it," but also says "*God* can't do it." How successful Satan has been with this one! Yet the Bible consistently affirms the Gospel promise that He can give us a new heart; that we can have the mind of Christ; that we can live by His faith and overcome in His strength.

Satan would have us believe that perfection of character comes after this life; somewhere between the moon and Mars on our trip to heaven. Not true! This is the field where the harvest grows; this is the quarry where the rocks are shaped and polished. This is where the bride is "prepared" and "adorned."

Heaven is a *prepared place* for a *prepared people*. The bride of Christ undergoes spiritual "preparation" prior to the great wedding. We have an insight into this in the wonderful story of Queen Esther, selected to be among those whom the king might choose to be the new queen. Read chapter 2 of that book carefully, and you will see that great care and attention was put into the "preparation" of these young women before they were brought before the king. You will see the word "preparation" used generously in that story. "Each young woman's turn came to go into King Ahasuerus after she had completed twelve months' *preparation*, according to the regulations for the women, for thus were the days of their *preparation* apportioned; six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with perfumes and preparations for beautifying women. *Thus prepared*, each young woman went to the king." Esther 2:12, 13.

Let that last phrase, "Thus prepared each young woman went to the king" sink into your mind with its spiritual significance. Say it over again a few times and savor each part of the phrase. It's a sermon in itself! The young women, including Esther, were not just haphazardly thrown into the king's presence without proper grooming; there was extensive preparation required to heighten their beauty and make them acceptable.

This contains a spiritual lesson regarding Christ's bride. She also undergoes extensive preparation prior to being taken into the King's presence. But there's a difference! In the spiritual realm, the emphasis is not on outward beauty, as was in the case of Esther, but inner beauty. God wants us to look nice, that's true. Looking sloppy does the Gospel no favor. But that's not where the focus is. His utmost desire is for us to be beautiful on the inside. What did the Lord tell Samuel when He sent him to anoint the new king of Israel? "Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." I Samuel 16:7. So, Jesus is searching for His bride, the one who is beautiful in character; the one whose emphasis is on the inner qualities.

The subtitle for Psalm 45 in my Bible reads, "The Glories of the Messiah and His Bride." There's one verse that stands out above the rest in this beautiful psalm; it's verse 13. I'll read it first the way it reads in the text in the NKJV, but then I'll point out something that makes it even more beautiful. See if you agree with me. The text reads, "The royal daughter is all glorious within the palace." The "royal daughter" is the bride. But notice something about how the last two words are printed (in the NKJV), the last two words being "the palace." They are printed in italics, meaning they aren't part of the original text, but the translators put them in because they thought they were needed.

In this case I wish they hadn't done so! It reads better without them! "The royal daughter is all glorious within." Period. Nothing more needs to be added! The words "the palace" actually detract and don't add to the meaning. The KJV doesn't have those words. It simply reads, "The king's daughter is all glorious within; her clothing is wrought gold." Quite a number of other translations read the same way. The New American Standard reads, "The king's daughter is *all glorious within*; her clothing is interwoven with gold." "All glorious within"; there's another phrase that is a sermon in itself.

What is the "adornment" that Jesus is looking for? It is adornment of His grace in the heart of His bride. Peter speaks to this. He writes, "Do not let your beauty be that outward adorning of arranging the hair, of wearing gold, or of putting on fine apparel; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible *ornament* of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God." I Peter 3:3, 4.

Paul taught, "In like manner also, that the women *adorn* themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with

braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works." I Timothy 2:9, 10. God is looking for His bride to be "adorned" with the ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit, and with good works.

Does the Bible say more about this matter of the inward adorning, the "spiritual jewelry" that Jesus so desperately wants to see in His bride? Yes! The book of Proverbs has a lot to say about it. "My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother; for they will be graceful *ornaments* on your head, and chains about your neck." Proverbs 1:8, 9. In Proverbs 7:3 he says "bind them on your fingers."

Willing obedience to God's instruction and keeping His law will be like wearing a necklace or rings of gold, from God's point of view. Here's a beautiful one! "Let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man." Proverbs 3:3, 4. "There is gold and a multitude of rubies, but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel." Proverbs 20:15. "Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise reprove to an obedient ear." Proverbs 25:12.

What does gold represent, from heaven's perspective? Peter tells us, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your *faith* being more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ." I Peter 1:6, 7. Genuine faith that has been tested through trials is what God counts as gold. We "wear" it when we allow Him to perfect our faith and love through trials. Jesus said, "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich." Revelation 3:18.

In the same way God is looking for the spiritual "pearls" to adorn His bride. A pearl is something beautiful that has been brought about through the introduction of an irritant. Jesus is the "Pearl of great price" in that He became "perfect through sufferings." Hebrews 2:10. He is looking for the reflection of His character in the one He marries. Here's a thought to consider: What is it that disappoints and frustrates Jesus so much? It is when men and women lavish themselves with outward adornment but have no interest in inward beauty. That causes Jesus great sadness. Gold on the outside, but no faith and love on the inside. Costly pearls on the outside, but no inner beauty through trials.

Heaven is a prepared and adorned place for prepared and adorned people. Jesus is now ready to hear the answer to His proposal. The wedding is waiting for the bride to say "Yes." I was at a wedding not long ago (maybe some of you were there also), and when it came time for the minister to read the vow that the bride herself had written, he asked her if this was her pledge of love to her husband and she responded with a very enthusiastic, "It sure is!" which brought cheers from the audience. Oh that the Church, the bride of Christ would be so enthusiastic in her response to Christ's invitation! To be "prepared" and "adorned" as the bride of Christ; what could be a greater privilege! What will your response be to Him?