

## LIVING IN ANTICIPATION OF GLORY (Part 2) - by Rev. Tom Aicken

A beatitude is any saying which begins, “Blessed are...,” followed by a description of these people, and often followed as well by a statement of why it is they are so blessed. Many of us are probably familiar with the eight beatitudes of our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, recorded for us in Matthew 5, but we may not be as familiar with the seven beatitudes of the Book of Revelation. Let me draw your attention to the fourth of these, Revelation 19:9, “Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.”

It might help us to understand this text if we know that it was written at a time of severe persecution for the early Church. God’s people were being tortured for their faith, the faithful had been separated from their families, John himself (the apostle who wrote these words) had been exiled to the island of Patmos, and every indication was that things would go from bad to worse, especially for all who lived a godly life in Christ Jesus. The Lord Jesus, however, had announced to His disciples, in John 16:33, “In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” In a sense, it might be said that the entire Book of Revelation rests on that one verse; it tells the faithful to be of good courage, that we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. This comfort was not only for Christians who suffered such persecution in the first century, but is for the benefit of all who suffer faithfully for Christ in any way right down to our own day, and it is written to show us how God works all things (even the worst calamities) for the good of those who love Him and have been called according to His purpose. A case in point is Revelation 19:9. Are you going through a particularly difficult time, believer? Does it seem as if everything has turned against you, and that even the Lord Himself is too far away to hear your plaintive cries? Perhaps you are grieving the loss of a loved one and the pain of this separation is sometimes overwhelming. “Cheer up,” the angel tells us in effect, “the marriage of the Lamb is coming, the supper to celebrate it is at hand, and blessed are all those who will partake of it!” Clearly, this timely message is meant to overturn all the believer’s anxieties and fears of the present world, and, for him who is seeking those things which are above, where Christ is, to put everything he sees here in the perspective of that great hope.

Ah, but how are these privileged guests so richly and incomparably blessed? They are so in two remarkable ways.

First, they are blessed in that, despite their present struggle against sin, and despite all the fears and troubles which may overwhelm them every day, still, they may live

their lives, here and now, in joyful anticipation of this coming glory. Blessed are those who have been effectually called of God in the gospel, who have heeded the command to embrace this Christ so freely offered to them in it, and, if they will but look up and consider it, it will be their future state (their living in the anticipation of it even now), not their present problems, that will constrain them day by day. Do you see, believer, how this is intended to support you, to keep your head above water, when sorrows like sea billows roll? The Lord has not forgotten you. He is not far away, as in your moments of deepest, darkest trial you may begin to think. Here, in the midst of your troubles, the Lord reminds you of what it is you have to look forward to, and, in thinking about it, that you might with the troubled saints in every age be refreshed anew to realize that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall yet be revealed in us! The more we focus on this hope, beloved, not only does it help us to see our troubles here in perspective, to view them as a light and momentary affliction, but it helps us to see as well how God is making those very troubles work for us, if we endure them faithfully, a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory! If we look only at the things which are seen, our sometimes depressing circumstances, this is what makes them more difficult to bear and causes us to stumble; but if we focus on those things which are not seen, on those things which are eternal, then will we eagerly wait for them, and we will do so with perseverance.

Secondly, the people here described are so greatly blessed in that they are more than invited guests; they are, together, the bride herself, and this wedding feast is for her! How frequently the Scriptures speak of the Church as the bride of Christ - and, oh, how beautiful, and how precious, is that imagery! It brings to mind that lovely scene in the garden where Adam took Eve to be his wife. "Therefore," we are told, "shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." What an amazing alliance is this, a mystery whereby two distinct people, a man and a woman, are said to become (at least for the course of their life here) one flesh. From that moment on, their lives are so intertwined, not only physically but emotionally and in every other way, that we can no longer think of either one without bringing to mind the other also! There are joint ventures and corporate mergers, and they all have legal status in an earthly court of law, but there is no coupling so binding, or so intimate and indivisible, before the courts of heaven than the union of husband and wife, and this is what God has chosen to portray the mysterious union and intimacy of Christ and His Church.

It has been said that the Song of Solomon is a manual for lovers, showing the love and respect that they are to have for one another, and to some degree that is true. Yet much more than that, this Song is also an allegory which is meant to portray the love

of Christ for His Church, and to illustrate as well, believer, what our love and devotion should be to Him!

The fact is, however, that Christ Jesus is not yet our husband. When you and I were first converted, believer, we became engaged to Him. By His giving us the Holy Spirit, which He did at that time, we even became partakers of the divine nature, that is, we began drawing from Christ what we need to be gloriously transformed into His likeness, to be at last the help meet for Him. This is described in the Bible as His sanctifying and cleansing the Church with the washing of water by the word, and so preparing her that He might present her to Himself at last a glorious Church, a radiant bride, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. Now as wonderful as this engagement is, beloved, do you not look forward to the marriage itself, to this blissful union consummated in heaven, and to all the joys of which our present fellowship with the Lord Jesus, as sweet as that may be, is but a foretaste of that coming and inexpressible glory? Does it not seem at times that Christ is far away? We long to see His face, to hear His voice, to feel the warmth of His embrace. We turn to His Word, the inspired Scriptures of the Old and New Testament - we cry out to Him in fervent prayer - with the psalmist, we say, "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?," and, constrained by His love, we feel the gnawing pains of this present separation even more. Ah, but then we remember that the wedding feast is at hand. We know that it is our sin, and the fact that we are yet unprepared to meet Him, not any indifference on His part, that keeps us from Him. And so it is with gladness and rejoicing that we seek all the more to make ourselves ready to see Him, and with the Shulamite maiden we sing, "Draw me, we will run after You."

A day is coming, dear Christian, and every day brings it closer, when we will no longer have to look for Christ, or wait for His appearing, but we will stand faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. We will be separated from Him never again - think of it, never again! - and we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Meditate on that, let it sink into the inner recesses of your heart and soul, and live every day of your life anticipating such glory until the things of earth become strangely dim and lose all their former appeal. Those who can say from their heart, "For to me to live is Christ," can also say, "and to die is gain," because they know that they are on their way to see Him, and that the best is yet to be! "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." And, to strengthen the believer's weak faith and failing heart, the angel assures him, "These are the true sayings of God."

