***The Age of the Church, No. 4

DS9A***

During the church age, a Christian may be filled with the Spirit of God, and he may grow into a life which is something fantastically wonderful and marvelous. He can move into maturity through the learning of the Word of God. It is a life which will prepare him to meet all of the problems; all of the crises; all of the high points; and, all of the low points. Under the condition of spirituality, a believer who lives in the dispensation of grace can produce good works in the Lord's service. He does this through exercising his calling as an ambassador of Jesus Christ, and through exercising his position as a priest. This is the totality of his life--to be the Lord's ambassador and to be the Lord's priest. He does this as the result of the use of spiritual gifts which were given to him at the point of salvation. Some of these gifts that we read about in the New Testament were temporary. Some of these gifts were permanent.

Satan has a way of bringing confusion at this point because he knows that the only way a Christian can serve the Lord and produce divine good is through the Christian exercising spiritual gifts. So the first thing a Christian has to learn is what the spiritual gifts are. What are my spiritual gifts? Then he must proceed to use them. So Satan comes along, first of all, and what he does is he keeps Christians in the dark concerning spiritual gifts. Secondly, in our age, he is giving people the impression that certain gifts exist which are no longer on the scene. These are gifts which did exist in the New Testament, but which do not exist today. So he sends Christians off chasing rabbits, trying to exercise gifts which are no longer operational. Or he keeps us in ignorance of the gifts that are operational, and which it is possible for us to use.

This is a confusion and a deception which is inspired by Satan in order to keep the believer in the dispensation of grace from producing divine good. One day, the Christian is going to suddenly be removed from this earth. This age is going to come to a screeching halt. All of the dead and living believers are going to be removed to heaven. When that happens, the final phase of the dispensation of the Jews will begin a seven-year tribulation period. We have studied how the church will be removed into heaven, and we want to direct our attention to what is going to happen once we are removed off this earth and we're taken off to heaven.

**We Don't Become Angels**

Now all of you who are believers are going to experience this in one way or another. You are going to leave this earth. You are going to meet the Lord out there in space. You are going to pass through the interstellar spaces, and you are going to enter the third heaven. Now what's your condition going to be? Well, when you walk in through the pearly gates of heaven you will not be issued a set of wings. You will not be turned into an angel. Nor will you be given a halo to keep polished. Nor will you be sent to harp class. None of these things are to be your experience.

When the Bible says that we will be as angels, for example, in Matthew 22:30, it does not mean that we will be angels, but it means simply that we will be as angels in our relationship to the Lord in His very presence. Those who were created angels always remain angels, even if they are bad angels--fallen demon angels. Those who are created as human beings always remain human beings forever. Hebrews 12:22-23 mention angels and church age saints, and it keeps them separate. So the first confusion we often have is that somehow good people go to heaven and they become angels. Nor are we involved in the music business. This idea comes from Revelation 14:2 and Revelation 15:2--that Christians sit around in heaven playing harps. This is the tribulation martyrs that are spoken of here, and they are creating music in heaven at that particular point as they wait for their return to this earth and for vindication of the martyrdom that they have experienced. So these are not Christians who are playing the harps. You don't have any place in the Bible where you have a Christian playing a harp.

Now the seven years that we will spend in heaven are part of our eternity. Our eternity as Christians is divided into a seven-year tribulation; the 1,000-year millennium; and, then eternity future. During the millennium, Christians will be enforcing the rule of Christ here on this earth (Revelation 20:6). That will be your primary job--to enforce the rule and the authority of the Lord Jesus all over the earth as He rules from David's throne in Jerusalem. During eternity future, you and I will live in the presence of Jesus Christ in joys that we cannot now begin to imagine, and in activities that are beyond our fondest dreams. We have this taught in John 14:3 and in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. During the tribulation, however, that part of our eternity, we will be in heaven.

The Father told the Son to sit at His right hand until the Son's enemies were made His footstool. We have this in Hebrews 1:13. The image here that the Bible uses is one that was well known in the ancient world. To make your enemy your footstool meant that you conquered him; knocked him to the ground; and, then (Tarzan-like) put your foot on his neck and shouted a cry of victory. That's the image of the footstool. When it says that the Lord God has told His Son to sit in heaven on His throne until His enemies should be made His footstool, that is the point of the comparison. It is Christ coming to a point of conquest over His enemies. His enemies, in this case, are the demons, and they will be with Satan in a position where they will be conquered at the end of the tribulation period. We have this image referred to in Psalm 72:9 and Zachariah 10:5--complete conquest of the enemy. This is going to be done when the Lord returns a second time. He is to remain in heaven until all the preparations for this project footstool conquest have been completed. That is what is going on now, and that is what is going to come to a climax in the tribulation period.

**The Baptism of the Holy Spirit**

The body of Christ will transfer itself to heaven. We have, first of all, the condition of earth, and then we have the condition of heaven. All the believers who are here on the earth are now constituting the body of Christ. We have this spoken of in Ephesians 1:22-23. However, the time is coming when these believers are going to be removed into heaven, and then we are transformed from the body into the bride of Christ. On the earth, we are His body. In Heaven, we become His bride. In this state on the earth as the body of Christ, the Christian is positionally perfect (Ephesians 1:4-6). Right now, all of you believers who constitute the body of Christ (or we may also call it the church), you are positionally perfect. You are, in other words, in Christ, through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and, consequently, you are in God's sight just as perfect as His Son. It is very important to understand the doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This is what takes place at the moment that you are born again. 1 Corinthians 12:13 tells us how all of us--good Christians and bad Christians--have been baptized into the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is strongly resisted. The charismatic movement has been completely deluded by Satan on that doctrine alone. That is why they are constantly urging people to seek both the baptism of the spirit, and the sign of having been baptized with the Holy Spirit, which is speaking in tongues. The two are joined together. Those of you who listened to the radio panel program last week when Dr. Unger was on, one of the things that Dr. Unger stressed so strongly and so admirably was the doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and how it is something that every Christian already has. Therefore, it is not something that you may seek and secure. It is not something that comes after salvation. If you were not baptized into Christ so that you became part of His body, you just weren't saved at all. You could not be born again.

A lady spoke to me on the phone this week, and she pointed out that she had some friends in a Pentecostal church. When Dr. Unger came on, she called the office staff of that Pentecostal church. So they turned the radio on and they listened. After the program was over, she called back and said, "What do you think of that?" The lady that spoke to her said, "Well, Dr. Unger is an intellectual. He doesn't understand the experience that we have with the Holy Spirit."

That remark is the clever way (the stupid way) that charismatics have of taking the Word of God (taking doctrine) and belittling the thing by saying, "Well, it's intellectual. You just want to be an intellectual. You don't have any heart." By that they mean you have to get on a big emotional jag. Don't be distressed when you hear that attack. Just understand that this is a way of trying to dismiss doctrine that the poor charismatics cannot answer.

It is very important to have straight our relationship to the body of Christ. That's what we, as Christians, have on this earth. That's why, in God's sight, you're perfect now. That's why you can never be lost. That's why you're always going to heaven. That's why you cannot change that even if you wanted to change it. If this afternoon, you decided that too many of your friends are going to be in hell so you're going to go there with them, you couldn't do it. You're already hooked. Once you're in the body of Christ, that's all, friend. You're going there whether you like it or not. They're going to drag you screaming and kicking through the pearly gates if necessary. But you are going. So get that part straight. That's the marvel of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. While Dr. Unger, indeed, is an intellectual, what he was talking about was pure solid Bible doctrine. Consequently, that is what guides us in our understanding of this relationship.

The time is going to come when we are going to not only be perfect in our position, but we are going to be perfect in our experience, but never here on this earth. This is another facet of the charismatic movement--the seeking of sinless perfection. They stress the desire to come to the point where you just don't sin anymore. This, of course, is impossible this side of heaven. This is because all the while you're in the body of Christ, you also have the old sin nature right there within your soul. Consequently, you can never come to that perfection. However, the time will come when, indeed, in our experience we will be without sin. But that's when you become the bride of Christ--not when you are simply the body of Christ. Right now on this earth, you have the Word of God as water to wash your soul (Ephesians 5:26). You also have confession of sins (1John 1:9) to bring you into a status of spirituality with God the Holy Spirit.

So Christians here as the body of Christ are going to grow to various stages of maturity, but never to sinless perfection. The grace of God in time is going to transform us into sinless perfection and into flawless beauty, as Ephesians 5:27 says. That is going to be when we become the bride of Christ. Here is why we are going to be transformed into a thing of beauty without any wrinkle and without any ugly spot. We are going to be everything completely beautiful and completely aesthetic, just as lovely as you can imagine.

**Resurrection Bodies**

The first reason that's going to be true is because we are going to receive resurrection bodies as Christ has. Life in heaven requires a different kind of body than life on earth does. We have this in 1 Corinthians 15:51-57. The Christian is going to receive a body just like the resurrection body of Jesus Christ (1 John 3:2, Philippians 3:21). If he has a body that is exactly like that of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Christian's body is going to be minus something that it has now, and that is the old sin nature--that gruesome thing that causes us to sin (Romans 8:29).

So Christians also will be made beautiful because they have a resurrection body like Jesus Christ does, and therefore it's free of the restrictions and limitations of time and space. It can move about rapidly. It can go through solid things. It doesn't need food and sustenance. It not only has the old sin nature removed, but it has a third thing done. That is that all of our human good, that we go parading around, will be removed from us. Human good is an ugly thing in the Lord's site. You will remember that, at the cross, Jesus Christ bought our sins, but he just washed His hands of our human good. He just dismissed it and rejected it as having any value in behalf of our sins. So we Christians are still going around perfectly capable of cranking out human good; that is, doing good things from our old sin nature under the guidance of the demon world.

When we become the bride of Christ, we are going to put on a special kind of garment. Here on the earth as His body, we have the garments of salvation, as we have in Isaiah 61:10. That is the righteousness of Christ, and that's the garment that you and I wear now. However, when we become the bride, we have a different kind of garment. We're told that it's going to be a white linen garment made up of the righteousnesses of the saints (of the believers). Revelation 19:7-8 describe for us the righteousnesses of the saints which is what we are going to wear in heaven. Those righteousnesses are the divine good that we produce here on earth under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

**The Judgment Seat of Christ**

What comes from the old sin nature is hay, wood, and stubble. That's human good. What comes from the workings of God the Holy Spirit is gold, silver, and precious stones. That's divine good (1 Corinthians 3:12). Divine good production will receive God's reward. Human good is going to be burned at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:13-16. So it's going to be at the Judgment Seat of Christ that is going to be the time when we are finally all cleaned up, and we are finally brought into a perfection as the bride of Christ. We're told in 2 Corinthians 5:10 that all of us must stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. We will not stand at that point in order to account for our sins.

This is another favorite preacher verse to scare the wits out of Christians in order to try to get Christians functioning as nice people. Rather than appealing to them to perform through their knowledge of the Word of God, they want to appeal to them on some other human legalistic tactic. So people are told that someday you're going to stand before the Lord, and you are going to account for every evil terrible vile thing you have done. So when somebody does you wrong, you say, "Just you wait until you stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Boy am I going to enjoy that." And they think that you're going to account for this thing that you have done. That is not so. We have been told that all of our sins have been covered at the cross by the Lord Jesus. Therefore, sin is no longer an issue (1 John 1:7, 9). Sin is done with. We are no longer confronted with the problem of sin.

The things that we face at the Judgment Seat of Christ are not our sins. Even unbelievers will never face judgment for their sins. The only thing they will face is the fact that they rejected Christ. The sin of unbelief is the only area that they will be judged on. For Christians, at the Judgment Seat of Christ, it is going to be all of our good works that are going to be judged. Now lest you breathe a sigh of relief and say, "Oh I'm so glad to hear that. I was afraid that all of those things I've been doing for so many years are going to be run up there on a television screen for everybody to see."

Lest you breathe a great sigh of relief, just think for a moment all of those nice good things you've been doing--all these human good things. Those are going to be up there. How are you going to feel about discovering how often you played the fool in what you were doing for the Lord and saying, "This is to the Lord's glory," and never recognizing that you are operating out of the old sin nature? How often on that occasion are you going to discover that you had goals in life that were old sin nature goals? How often are you going to be embarrassed in the Lord's presence to discover that you had tastes and values and objectives and desires that you thought were very commendable, and they were nothing but human good--hay, wood, and stubble?

All that's going to be there, and they're going to bring it in. But whatever trucks the United States does not give to Russia, in order to help take care of our friend, are going to be up in heaven because the United States keeps giving things away to all of its friends. Well, whatever we don't give the Russians are going to be in heaven. They're going to pile all of this human good on it, and all of these big trucks are going to be backing up. When your name is called, there's going to be the dust churning and the trucks roaring, and they're going to come zapping in, and they're going to dump this stuff. There's going to be this huge pile.

Some of you will have a pile as big as your church sanctuary, and bigger. You'll say, "Boy am I going to be somebody in heaven." Then they're going to light a match to it--the judgment of God. The pile is going to start burning around the edges. Pretty soon the pile is going to get smaller and smaller, and then right there in the middle of the field is going to be a small pile. Then an angel is going to come floating down with his wings with a dustpan and a little whisk broom in his hand. He's going to brush away whatever dust of ashes is still there, and there's going to be a little pile of gold, silver, and precious stones. He's going to hand these to the Lord from the whole big chunk.

Now that is going to be embarrassing. So take care. While we are not going to be judged for sins, we are going to be judged for what we did with our lives; especially we who live in the United States of America, the greatest nation that ever existed on the face of the earth: the freest; the kindest; the most generous; and, the one which gives its citizens the greatest opportunity for divine good that any nation ever provided. We should not be guilty and negligent of violating that kind of trust to have been by divine choice born into this nation, and to have had our opportunities of divine good. This will be something to account for if we are negligent of that. So this is what is ahead of us. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, everything is going to be straightened out.

Well, while it will be somewhat embarrassing, it will at the same time be really a relief. It will be a relief to be done and to be rid once and for all of all that human good that comes into our lives that we carry around, and that is so oppressive to us. It is more oppressive than we realize. Certainly, it is more destructive than we realize to our relationship to the Lord.

Well, for that which lasts, the service which we have done in partnership with God the Holy Spirit--that part will receive reward (1 Corinthians 3:9). And I'm happy to say that God never forgets the divine good which we have produced (Hebrews 6:10, 1 Corinthians 15:58). Long after we have forgotten it, He has not forgotten it. The record will be complete and He will reward us.

**Rewards**

So the nature of these rewards is always a matter of some interest to us. What is the reward that I will receive as this dispensation comes to a close? One of the factors of the reward will be in the form of crowns.

**The Crown of Righteousness**

We have, for example, the crown of righteousness that some people will receive (2 Timothy 4:7-8). This crown is given to those who have demonstrated a faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ during their time here on earth.

**The Crown of Joy**

There is also another crown called the crown of joy in Philippians 4:1 and 1 Thessalonians 2:19. This is a crown which will go to Christians who have been functioning in the super grace life. This will be for Christians who have gone on and fully developed their spiritual maturity structure, and then permitted the grace of God to be overflowing in them. As we shall see in our studies in Philippians, one of the things that you do take out through death into the Lord's presence with you is the spiritual maturity structure with which you have clothed your soul. That does go with you. It goes no more and no less than what it was at the point of your death. That will be a source of joy and certainly greater joy or lesser joy according to the status of the structure at the time that you left.

**The Crown of Life**

There is also the crown of life described in Revelation 2:10. This is a crown which is given to those who have effectively used doctrine in the face of temptation, and have been victorious in that confrontation.

**The Crown of Glory**

There is also the crown of glory described in 1 Peter 5 4. This is a crown which is a specialty crown given to pastor-teachers who perform their duties in faithfulness.

**Christ's Commendation**

So crowns will be one facet of the reward. Another facet will no doubt be the Lord's personal commendation. Matthew 25:21 describes the, "Well done" that will be delivered to certain saints. The commendation will be there to be read, and you will be decorated by the Lord Himself for your performance with your spiritual gifts.

**Rulership**

Then another factor in rewards will be the place of rulership. Luke 19:17-19 describe how some of us will be rewarded in heaven by being given very important positions of rulership in the millennial earth. We will actually be guides and rulers, and there will be positions of authority over civil rulers that actually you will be exercising in the Lord's behalf. I don't know whether you can put a claim in, or whether some of you have some particular place that you'd like to be on the earth. Some of you perhaps have some other state that you always thought you'd enjoy living in, and you never got a chance to go there. Maybe you can put in a claim to the Lord that you'd like to exercise rulership in one of those cities or some place that you'd like to be here on this earth. Some of you are going to be doing that.

**Unrevealed Rewards**

And then there is of course much more that we have not been told. This doesn't nearly begin to cover what is involved in this fact of rewards. And it is a fact.

**Preparation for the Marriage of the Lamb**

So the church as the body of Christ is being readied to become the bride of Christ. Here we are the body, and there we will be the bride. Right now, the whole name of the game is to get ready for the trip to heaven. Part of the reason for this, which we have described in Revelation 19:7-8, is that we are headed for a wedding. Anytime that somebody comes along and announces the intention of getting married, and then they set a date, you may be sure that one of the things they are immediately enmeshed in is all kinds of preparation. It involves all kinds of getting ready, and all kinds of looking forward to the day and getting everything set up. So that is actually the situation in which you and I find ourselves at this point in time. We are getting ready for our wedding. We are the body of Christ. We are destined to be His bride.

Now while this is taking place, the church has been removed from the earth. The church is in heaven. The bride is now being readied. The old sin nature is being removed. Human good is being removed. The rewards are being handed out. The church is putting on the clothing of righteousnesses of her divine good production. She is taking the rewards and attaching them as ornaments to her being. The bride is getting ready. We come to the middle of the tribulation period because things are going on down here on the earth while the bride is preparing for the wedding.

**Satan**

In the middle of the Tribulation, Revelation 12:7 tells us that Michael and his good angels do battle with Satan and his demon angels. Now this battle takes place in heaven. It is a battle where there is no killing and no casualties. It is a spiritual combat, but it is a combat that results in the good angels coming to a position where they have completely overpowered the demon angels and Satan himself. The result is that Satan is taken and literally thrown out of heaven.

Anytime Satan wants to go to heaven now, he can just walk in. He has not been restricted from entering heaven. Periodically, he does. Periodically, God calls him in to report just like you have in the book of Job. That's why he was up there. He was called in to give a report, and therefore he had to show up. But the time is going to come, Revelation 12:8-9 describe for us, when Satan loses the battle, and he is thrown out of heaven. And he is thrown out of heaven for good. This is the second fall of Satan. The second fall was even predicted by the Lord Jesus in Luke 10:18. It is that which is described for us in Ezekiel 28:16 where Satan is actually thrown out of heaven. The first fall is the rebellion against God. This first fall is in Ezekiel 28:15 and in Isaiah 14:13-14. That fall came about as the result of the day that he made the decision that he committed himself to the course of action that he was going to be like God.

That is an important point. It is crucial to you and me in the age of grace that we understand that Satan wants to be like God more and more. I am personally convinced that one of the devices of Satan, which is going over big currently, is that Christians are forgetting the fact that Satan wants to portray himself as an angel of light. That is the role that he prefers to play because as an angel of light, he can come and appear to be like God. We are plagued with the notion that Satan wants to be unlike God, and that Satan wants to run around and do all these terrible, vile, evil things. Well, he does do terrible, vile, evil things, and so do his demons. But they prefer to work in a very cultured human good way in order to be able to hook Christians, and even unbelievers, who expect Satan to be a very vile creature. So Satan here has been trying to act as an angel of light from the very day that he decided he was going to be like God--not unlike God.

Well, this is the end of the line for him. When he is defeated in this battle, he knows enough from the Bible to know that this is the middle of the tribulation period. There are only three-and-a-half years to go before the Second Advent of Christ at this point in history. Therefore, he knows that his time is short. However far away the rapture is he does not now know. He doesn't know any more about when the rapture will be than you and I do. He doesn't know whether it's tomorrow; whether it's tonight; or, whether it's 100 years from now. But once he loses that battle; once he experiences that defeat at the hand of Michael and the good angels, then he knows where to hook himself into the time period. He knows exactly how much time is left.

So the result is that he is thrown out of heaven. This is the final expulsion (Revelation 12:10). A frustrated, angry, panic-stricken fury descends upon the earth in the form of Satan and his demons. They come right down to the earth itself (Revelation 12:12). At this point, Satan pulls out all the stops of all the things that he has ever done to oppose God. The tribulation believers are going to be faced with their moment of greatest crises because they will be naturally the prime targets of this fury and vengeance that Satan will now come to rack upon planet earth. They will have the power of salvation. They will also have the testimony from doctrine with which to meet this attack. And they will be able to meet it in perfect joy (Revelation 12:11). Again, they will not experience this joy because something happens to them, such as they happen to get enough food to eat, or they happen to escape the time when the inquisitors came and knocked on their door--the secret police came to look them up. Their happiness is not going to be because something happened. Their happiness is like with Paul in prison because they already have it--because they already have the Word--and therefore nothing can change that. Nothing can affect that.

**The Marriage of the Lamb**

Well, while this is going on here on earth, there is taking place in heaven the marriage of the Lamb of God to His bride. To fully understand this, we have to, once in a while, review New Testament marriage customs. This marriage is described for us in Revelation 19:7, but it is described against the background of New Testament marriage customs. Weddings in the New Testament were great festive events. They would go on sometimes for as much as a week. It depended upon how much money the person had and what his social status was. This the situation of the Marriage of the Lamb that the New Testament world was well acquainted with. They knew what wedding ceremonies and procedures were like. Therefore, as they read in Scripture these descriptions, they could fit things together more readily than we can today because our customs are different.

But the marriage was arranged by the parents. That's one important point (Exodus 2:21, Genesis 24:4). Very often, when the couple was just children, their parents would make a contract. They would make an agreement between them that these two would someday get married. As of that point, they were espoused to one another, and that was the engagement period. So the engagement, consequently, went on for years and years. Now there was a certain value in having parents select the people that you married. Parents know the individuals, and if parents have a chance to know the people who were involved, they could make better selections.

One of the disadvantages of parents being able to give approval or disapproval to the person that your son or daughter is going to marry is that the parents don't know the individual that well. They don't know the person that a son or daughter is interested in. However, if they get to know them well enough, those parents are in a fantastically wonderful position to say, "This is good. This is going to work out. This is compatible." Or, they can tell, "This is going to be abrasive, and you'll make do, but this isn't the best choice."

Now sometimes parents can be wrong. Parents can be ill-motivated. Parents can have a disorientation from their own spiritual frame of reference such that they themselves will not sense what God is indicating, that this is a desirable choice. The problem here was that the engagement period was so long. Marriages in which parents have some strong advisement of choice are usually better marriages. However, engagements should not be extended over so many years. But when they made the custom of putting people together as children, that was, in the nature of the case, necessary. However, there was no courting involved.

Many times, the people who were getting married never saw their partner until the wedding day when they walked into the place. That's when they finally saw one another. Very often, you just didn't see the person until you were on the scene, and it was sign up time. This is why Mary and Joseph considered each other as husband wife, in effect. Consequently, Joseph is referred to as her espoused husband. This is because, in the New Testament times, engagement was tantamount to marriage. And, again, if you get your dispensations wrong, you can easily make wrong decisions.

I had a preacher tell me one time that in his view, anytime a couple was engaged, that was it. They couldn't break off the engagement. So, a couple comes to a preacher and says, "We're engaged. We want to get married." It is a point of wisdom on the part of the preacher that the first thing he should say to them is, "I want you to understand that no deals have been settled yet. So if you have second thoughts, now is the time for you to get out." It's perfectly legitimate to do that in the engagement stage, but not in New Testament times. It was a settled deal. In any case, there was no courting.

Usually the wedding took place at the home of the bride. However, they had no ceremony as we have today. It amounted to this: The bridegroom got up that morning. Now the time had come to fulfill the contract. He put on his best clothes, and then he walked over to his bride's home. He was accompanied by his close male friends. We have this Judge's in 14:11 and Matthew 9:15. Often he would be accompanied also by some singers and musicians (Jeremiah 16:9). The bride meantime had adorned herself in her finery with her ornaments. She was waiting in her home for the bridegroom's arrival. Psalm 45:14 and Isaiah 61:10 tell us about that. She was heavily veiled so that she was covered. She was attended by maidens. These maidens all had lamps, and they were responsible to see that the lamps had oil in them. This was because when the procession proceeded from their home through the streets, this was done at the end of the day. It was going to be dark, and the lamps were necessary to guide the party to the home of the groom.

So as they moved to the home of the bride, they would enter, and the bride's father would take her hand. He put her hand in the hand of the groom. The groom's father would take his son's hand and he would put it in the hand of the bride. And that was it--all signed, sealed, and delivered. There was none of this Mendelssohn stuff or a wedding march or anything like that. That was it. The whole party would turn around; all the maidens would light their lamps; and, they would head out to the streets. All the singers would be there. All the guitar boys would be playing away. The mandolins were playing, and the singers were singing. Naturally, you could hear this thing going through the streets, so they picked up a few extra friends as they went along. Psalm 45:15 and Matthew 25:6 describe this.

Well, what they were doing now is going to the groom's home for the banquet and for the entertainment. They had invited their friends and neighbors, and those people were already there at the groom's home waiting his arrival. The host, the father of the groom, had provided festive robes, Matthew 22:11 tells us. They were there all bedecked waiting to welcome him.

Now once the party started, it could go on for a week or maybe longer, as we have in Judges 14:12. All of this time the bride is under the veil. All of the entertainment is going on, and the bride is still under the veil. Finally, at some point, they come to the place where a halt is called, and a blessing is pronounced on the couple. Then they're led into the bridal chamber to become man and wife, as we have described in Genesis 24:67.

This is the custom of the background of the great Marriage of the Lamb that you and I are going to participate in. The time is going to come when the Lord Jesus Christ is going to set off from His home in heaven to fetch His bride which is the church, which is now on earth preparing herself. The marriage contract has been made and it was paid for. It was drawn up and paid for at the cross (1 Peter 1:18-20). Gifts have been given to the bride, and she awaits the Lord's coming in the clouds to receive her (Ephesians 4:8). During the tribulation, the church (the bride) is going to be in heaven enjoying the preparation for her wedding. That's the time when the human good is removed. She receives her clothing of divine good works and divine good righteousness. She's ready for the festivities.

The invitation to this wedding has gone out throughout the whole earth. This has been what God has been doing in salvation over all the centuries. In all Old Testament times, He was inviting people to salvation. That was, in effect, an invitation to come to the wedding of His Son's bride, the church, which was yet to come in the future. This is described for us in parable form in Matthew 22:2-14. Well, the contract has been made. The engagement period is here while we are on this earth, and we can't see our bridegroom. We don't see Him except as we see Him in the Word (1 Peter 1:8, 1 Corinthians 2:16).

Well, after the rapture (after the bride is prepared), Revelation 19:7 describes for us the time in heaven when the wedding will take place. Then we are joined in a unique relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. No Old Testament saints are there. They're still in the graves. You are there physically in your resurrection body, completely free of an old sin nature, and free of all the old human good. There you are absolutely perfect, and you are joined to Jesus Christ. Nobody through all eternity will have the intimate relationship to the second person of the Trinity that you will have. This is just for you, and you alone, who live in the dispensation of the church. It is a unique age to have been born in.

**The Marriage Supper of the Lamb**

Some of the guests are going to receive this invitation of "whosoever will," but many of the guests (most in the tribulation) will reject it, as we see in Matthew 22:3, 5-6. So the time finally comes when the marriage is completed. The seven-year period comes to an end. There is the termination of the tribulation period. Then the church returns with the Lord. When she returns with the Lord, this is, as in the marriage custom, the bride leaving home and going to the banquet. Where is the banquet going to be? Well, we have the Marriage Supper of the Lamb described for us in Revelation 19:9, 14. And that is going to be here on the earth during the millennium. The whole millennial period is going to be one vast monstrous celebration of the fact that you and the Lord Jesus Christ have become united as one--the body, with Christ our head. That's our role now. But in the time to come, we will be His bride and He, our Lord and our groom.

So that's what is ahead for the church. That's what is the immediate termination of the dispensation of the church. That's what is going to close off this scene. Then things begin to pick up. At the same time, we have the return of Christ (the Second Advent), and the millennial period begins. That's the last dispensation that we will be taking up in the next session.

**The Great White Throne**

Hebrews 9:27 gives us a certain warning that all those who are now being invited to this marriage supper are expected to heed. It says, "And it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this, the judgment." In other words, every person who is on the face of the earth is going to have an appointment with God. 1 Thessalonians 5:9 says, "For God has not appointed us to wrath but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." So you may have your appointment with God at the cross, or (if you reject that), you will have another time where you may have your appointment with God, and that's described in Revelation 20:11: "And I saw a Great White Throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them." This is the point where all unbelievers have been raised and where they are judged. They too are judged on the basis of their good works, and those good works are found not to be enough to meet the righteous standard of God.

So we want to remind you that salvation is the message that has been extended to all of us who live in this age to be a part of that bride; and, to saints in other ages to come and be friends visiting the bride and enjoying the wedding. You will be either meeting Him at the cross, or you'll meet Him at the Great White Throne. The good works will not count, though they will be recognized and found to be short. Only the Lord Jesus Christ, with the divine good which He has produced on the cross, is what is going to count.

So Ephesians 2:8-9 tell us that God has now prepared a grace way for you and me to enter heaven. It is only necessary that we should receive that grace way: "For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works (not of good human works), lest any man should boast." If you have not received the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, now is the time to do it. An invitation to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, to the wedding, and to the wedding feast has been extended. For centuries, from the time of Genesis 3:15, God has been extending this invitation. Most people have rejected it. We trust that you will have been one here tonight who has accepted it. If you have, then it will be your privilege to be one of the participants as the bride of Christ, and one who is going to participate in the marriage supper itself.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1971

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