

Session 1 Introducing the Bride

INTRODUCTION

“Introducing the Bride.” In this session our objective is to give a little overview of some themes you’re familiar with if you’ve been around here a while, just so we can bring them together. Then over the weeks we’ll look systematically at each one of these themes and investigate them in a more in-depth way.

Number one: I would like to start off by saying that I believe God’s mission statement in the Word of God to be found in Revelation 19:7. We’ll be looking at this verse in the next session, in the week after next, because we won’t be meeting next week. We’ll be looking at Revelation 19, which is that grand chapter, that fantastic description that the angel gave John the apostle where history ends. It’s where all of human history is focused and headed: toward the marriage of the Lamb. There it is, in verse 7: the people of God are rejoicing with great joy, and the Spirit of God is touching them and the great proclamation: “The marriage of the Lamb has come” (Rev. 19:7)—and I would add, “...has *finally* come.”

GOD THE FATHER HAS PROMISED HIS SON AN INHERITANCE

There’s such a crescendo that comes at this point in time, as we’ll see when we look at Revelation 19. “His wife has made herself ready” (Rev. 19:7b). I believe it’s the guiding principle of all God’s activity: the marriage supper of the Lamb. God’s ultimate purpose and goal of creation is to provide a suitable and equally-yoked bride. God the Father has worked very intentionally to select and train a bride to reign with Him in love. The main purpose of the whole created order is to select, prepare, and train the eternal companion of Christ Jesus for royal authority. From eternity past, in the eternal counsels of the Godhead, for God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit in their planning of history, the central issue on the heart of God the Father was to give His Son an inheritance.

We’ll look at that in a few moments, at a few verses that discuss the inheritance that God has amongst His people. Specifically, God the Father promised the Son an inheritance. This promise was given to the Son before ever the worlds were created. He looked at His Son and said, “I will give you a people whom You’ll totally possess. They will be Yours.” I believe that God spoke this to His Son before the worlds were created. As a matter of fact, He created the worlds for this purpose, to give His Son an inheritance. We can look at it along two different themes in Scripture. It’s providing the Son with an eternal companion, a bride, or providing the Father with a family. Both lines of thought run parallel in the Scriptures: the Father longing for a family, the Son longing for a bride. There are different dimensions to them, but those are the two main themes in the Word of God for redemption.

Again, I believe that God created the stars; He created the atmosphere in order to be able to have an earth that can be inhabited by human beings for the purpose of providing a companion for His Son. That’s what was in His heart from the very beginning. It was planned from eternity. The reason I’m focusing on this is because it does something to us when this thing connects with us. Of course, we know it takes the Holy Spirit for this thing to connect with us, doesn’t it? Intellectually, it’s kind of interesting, but it doesn’t really have the full impact until the Holy Spirit takes it from the mind and reveals it to the heart. Of course, the way He does that is as we meditate on it with our mind, as we bring it back to Him in prayer and in thanksgiving in that dialogue with the Lord of thanking Him, asking Him for revelation, and filling our mind with it. That’s the context in

which He then writes it upon our heart. It's very appropriate and very in line with the Scriptures to fill our mind with the subject that we want Him to write upon our hearts. That's why we're doing that.

This leaves me awed in my heart: that from eternity past He created the galaxies, the sun, moon, and all the stars in order to create an earth, in order to create a human race, in order to extract out of it a companion for His Son. That's why the whole thing is happening. From the very beginning of history, God has declared His intention to have a marriage for His Son. At the very beginning of the human race, God declares the human race beautiful to Him by creating us for a marriage. God looks down on the human race and pronounces us lovely and beautiful in His sight by the very fact that history ends in Revelation 19. In that statement is a declaration of our beauty to God. In that statement is a declaration of His longing for us.

LEARNING TO VIEW OUR LIVES FROM A NEW CORE OF UNDERSTANDING

Number two. Here I basically say the same thing. First, it's from eternity past; secondly, the material and the spiritual created order is for the bride. We're right here in 1 Corinthians 3. Paul the apostle is touching this theme. He's touching the theme of the uniqueness of the people of God. Actually, we'll start in verse 3 to get the context of verses 21-23. It's a verse I've been looking at lately on Sundays.

Paul says, "For you are still carnal" (1 Cor. 3:3). He acknowledges their sin; he acknowledges the brokenness of their life. He says, "There's envy, strife, relational division. There's disaster everywhere in the church here."

He says, "Are you not . . . behaving like mere men" (1 Cor. 3:3b)? His point is that they still had an identity. They still had an image of themselves as mere people, as mere fallen people. They were so accustomed to feeling common, to feeling insignificant, that as Paul was exhorting them through 1 Corinthians, his most difficult challenge was to get them to view their life from a totally different core of understanding. He says, "Granted, you're carnal, but that doesn't change the fact that you're no longer mere people as you've understood the human race. You've been crowned with glory by the Son of God Himself." Of course, Paul had in person discussed the mystery of God to the Corinthians. So they understood even before his writings here.

YOU'VE BEEN CROWNED WITH GLORY AS THE HEIRS OF ALL THE EARTH

He goes on in verse 21 to remind them of the dignity and the destiny and the image of who they were in Christ. He says, "Don't you remember? Everything is yours" (1 Cor. 3:21, paraphrased). He says, "Don't you remember when I taught you that? Everything belongs to you—the eternal city, the galaxies, the sea . . . Everything was made with you in mind. It all belongs to you. You're the queen that God has already established in His divine hierarchy. It's already established in His sight."

He says, "Whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas" (1 Cor. 3:22)—that's Peter, the apostle Peter. "Whether the most famous ministries in the world," is what he's talking about: the most anointed, most famous ministries that had this unique, revelatory ministry operating in their life. He says, "They only exist for you." He says, "God only anointed the apostle Peter and the apostle Paul so that the Corinthians could be benefited in this great plan for which they were created, to be the companion of the Lord Jesus."

He says, "Let's get more specific. It's more than just the anointed apostles. It's the entire world." He says, "Let's get more philosophical. Life itself, the very presence of life in existence, in the created order, exists for you." He doesn't just mean human life; I mean the life of the angels. All of life exists for them. He says, "Even death will serve you. Death will serve you in releasing you into the fullness and removing everything that

hinders this relationship. Even death serves the ultimate purpose of God, things present and things to come. Everything is yours.”

Man, what a powerful statement! What he’s trying to do is to get them to quit living carnally. As I mentioned Sunday, his mode of doing so is not to tell them to grit their teeth and try harder. He’s giving them different information about who they are. Because we can try to motivate people to do better by trying harder, but in the end it doesn’t really work. We can make some kind of changes by plain, old effort. I’m not against saying no when your heart says yes. In the end the way the heart changes is by information under the power of the Holy Spirit. Because that’s the way our heart is held in bondage: by wrong information under the energy of demons. That’s what holds us in bondage.

Again, on Sunday I asked the question, “Are we sinners who try to love, or are we lovers who stumble in sin?” We’re lovers, and we’re lovers who stumble. We’re not sinners who every now and then try to love; it’s totally opposite. We’ve already been crowned in the whole created order as the inheritance of Christ Jesus, as the eternal companion, as the queen who will reign at His side in an indescribable position of privilege and honor at the very right hand of Christ Jesus. He says, “Everything was created for you with you in mind.” The powerful God created it with you in mind so that life on earth could have a certain balance to it. I’m talking about the ocean and the wind and the food and the storms that would create a certain complexity that you would grow in bridal love. The whole point of it was to reveal the love of God and to produce love in your heart.

PRESSURES EXIST THAT WE MIGHT GROW IN LOVE

That’s why the paradoxes of life exist, the collision of good and bad. The blessing and the pressures collide at just the right intensity to bring us forth in mature, voluntary bridal love. That’s the point of creation. Because when the Father ordained this inheritance for His Son it wasn’t just the people who loved Him, but it was people who were in sin who chose, even against some of their own desires, voluntary love. The pressure is present to cause us to grow in this love because we’re headed to a great feast. We’re headed to a position of reigning and ruling with the King. He said, “All these things are yours.” This is a fantastic passage of Scripture. Again, he’s working on their image; that’s what’s going on. Because new information about who they are is what will make them act different. They’ll try harder and be a lot more effective with new information, because new information under Holy Spirit power makes us think and feel differently. But wrong information under that subtle, demonic deception holds us in bondage.

Then he goes on in verse 23 and says, “I’ll just give it to you straight.” He says, “The point of it is, you belong to Jesus. You’re His inheritance. You’re what He’s waiting for” (1 Cor. 3:23, paraphrased). He says, “The reason all things are yours is because you belong to Him.” Of course, the verse I think of there is Song of Solomon 6:3. “I am my beloved’s, and He is mine” (Song 6:3, paraphrased). “I’m totally under His possession and He’s my possession. I am His; He is mine. Everything is mine and I’m totally His.”

This relationship was true even of the carnal Corinthians. He didn’t say, “All things are yours after you conquer the areas you’re struggling with.” He said, “No, you’re very carnal right now, but still all things are yours.” Because the plan of God isn’t decided upon your maturity level in the spirit. It’s built upon the plan of God from eternity, the blood of Jesus, and the yes in your spirit, and the maturity will come in its time.

Aren’t you glad he didn’t say, “All things belong to the mature?” He said, “All things are yours.” He just got through telling them they were carnal. I like the part in the Last Supper where Jesus says, “I love you the way

the Father loves Me, and all of you will betray Me this night” (c.f. Mt. 26:31; Jn. 15:9). It’s like I said: “Man, I could fit in that category.” That’s awesome. Literally just a few moments later He says, “All of you will fall away from Me tonight,” but that doesn’t change anything. He actually told them in John 13, “You’re clean.” He said, “You’re clean, with one exception, but you shall stumble and fall away from Me tonight” (Jn. 13:10, paraphrased).

Peter said, “Wash all of me, not just my feet.”

He said, “No, Peter. You’re already clean.” I love how God views the immature people, the great theme of Scripture that I really rejoice over.

GOD ORCHESTRATES ALL HISTORY TO WORK TOGETHER FOR OUR GOOD

I say basically the same thing a number of times in A, B, and C. God orchestrates all history to work together for her good, for our good as the bride. We’re very used to that verse, “God causes everything to work together for good” (Rom. 8:28, paraphrased), but I don’t know how often you’ve thought about the phrase, “He causes everything to work together to bring you forth.” To what? “To bring you forth in the likeness of Jesus Christ” (v. 29, paraphrased). You’re predestined to end up like Jesus Christ. Everything is bringing you forth in love. Everything is working for that reason. Again, the *everything* isn’t just the negative; there’s a certain amount of positive, a certain amount of negative, but it’s more than your personal experience. The very sky in heaven, the very presence of time and eternity, the angels, the demons, everything is working together with one thing in mind in the heart of God: your good; that you would be the bride that He’s promised His Son, the inheritance.

GOD ORDAINS HISTORY TO BRING FORTH A BRIDE IN VOLUNTARY LOVE

I’m trying to give you a different paradigm, a different lens through which to view and interpret history. I’ve written in paragraph A that historians, secular historians, basically discuss history around the great history-making events: scientific breakthroughs, economic developments, political developments, military crises, the formation of nations. They tell the story of life through those events. Let me tell you, the focal point of history isn’t scientific breakthroughs. The focal point of history isn’t military victories: “Napoleon conquers Europe!” That’s not what really makes history. Because history isn’t truly centered around the events and the discoveries and the ideas that men come up with. History is all going in one direction, to a wedding feast. That’s why history exists. Jesus stepped into history. He becomes the focal point of history, but He steps into it to bring it to a determined place for which everything exists, for that one event. Again, it changes everything.

Here in the middle of paragraph A I have Acts 17:26. God still controls history to prepare the bride in voluntary love; I should have put *love* there instead of *service*. In this Paul the apostle is describing what’s going on in history. He says, “God moves the boundary lines of nations for one reason.” He says, “He will cause the boundary lines to move over a few hundred miles. He’ll cause them to move one way in the 1300s and move the other way in the 1400s; to shift the other way in the 1500s and come back in the 1600s.” He says, “He’s always moving the boundary lines of nations for one reason—to cause people to grope for God, in order that they might find Him” (Acts 17:26, paraphrased). He says, “That’s why He’s moving boundary lines all the time.”

He wants people groping, saying, “Oh, nothing works,” and finding Him so that history comes to it’s conclusion. When you have God’s kind of power you can move the boundary lines around. Of course, the history tells it so differently; they don’t understand what’s going on. We can only understand and interpret history through the lens of the marriage of the Lamb. That’s the only way history can be understood, because

God has total power over all history. We can only interpret it through the growth of mature bridal love. That's what He's after. That's what God is after. The historians are mostly quasi-philosophers in a different form, because they're making all their statements, they're always trying to figure out the mysteries of life and all the colliding paradoxes of why people exist. They can see no clear purpose for pain or the celebration of life because they don't know Revelation 19. Revelation 19 is the anchor for interpreting life in your personal context and the life of a nation or a people or the redeemed. Revelation 19 is the purpose for which everything happens. Everything exists for her. Everything is for her good.

God the Father says these things. The history of redemption reveals God's romance. God has a heart. He's the ultimate romantic. I'm not talking about a sensual relationship with Jesus Christ. Some people kind of get funny in their thinking about this. I'm talking about a desire in the heart of God for the ultimate disclosure of His heart to His people and the ultimate receiving of their heart and valuing it back. That's what I'm talking about. He is absolutely a passionate lover. He will disclose His entire heart and hold no secrets from His people. He will so work to bring the deepest things of our hearts into the power of God, to be able to give it back to Him. That's what I mean. He loves love.

WHY IS THE HUMAN RACE IN LOVE WITH LOVE STORIES?

Almost everyone loves love stories—even those mean, tough old men who say they don't. Here's why I say that. I'm on these airplanes a lot. I'm going over the ocean and they have those movies on. The old, tough men say, "OK, I'll watch it. There's nothing else to do." I look around, and the attentiveness, the tears! I'm a quasi-psychiatrist philosopher, and I'm always trying to analyze: "Oh boy, what part is getting who?" I'll get up and go back to the restroom and I'm checking it out. I want to see how the people move and feel and act when these things are happening. I'm telling you, the human race loves love stories. They really do. They really do.

Why do we love love stories? Because we're made that way; we're made to love love stories because God loves love stories. The whole history of redemption begins with a love story and it ends with a love story. That's not an accident. When I go over the history of redemption, I could even say it differently: it's the whole self-revelation of God in the Word of God. It's not an accident that the Word of God, God revealing His heart to the human race, begins with a man who is given to a woman who is built just for him. That's how the whole thing begins and that's how the whole thing ends. It doesn't begin or end with political issues or economic issues or wars.

It begins and ends with a man, the first Adam, beholding his wife under God. It ends with the last Adam embracing His wife under God. It's about a man embracing his wife under God. The whole Word of God begins and ends that way. I love that; that's not an accident. Of course, we'll look at this much more in-depth in the other sessions. The first Adam was put to sleep, right? What happened when he was put to sleep in Genesis 2? A bride was taken out of his side.

We know that Jesus is called the last Adam. There are only two Adams. By the way, the Word of God never says "the first Adam" and "the second Adam." The Word of God always says "the first Adam" and "the last Adam," because if He was the second one, there might be a third one. There's the first Adam and there's the last One, who is Jesus Christ. The Scriptures tell us in Romans 5:12 that the first Adam is a picture of the last Adam. He's the picture of Jesus. The Word of God tells us this. There's no guesswork going on here.

The first Adam is put to sleep and his bride comes out of his side. The last Adam is put to death and the bride comes out of His side. What I mean is that on the cross when He's pierced in the side, I have no question in my

heart that that's a picture of what happened when Eve came out of Adam's side. His side is laid wide open and the blood and the water come out that provides His companion for all of eternity. I don't believe we need any guesswork on that; I believe it was absolutely intended by the Lord. That's why His side was pierced. He's the last Adam. It begins with a bride and it ends with a bride. This should say, "Revelation 19-22." It's the last four chapters: Revelation 19, 20, 21, and 22.

WE WERE CREATED IN THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD

The purpose of humanity. I just want to establish this point on paragraph C here on page two. God created us in His image and in His likeness. That's a very significant thing, because do you know why Jesus could be made like unto a human being? Because human beings were first created in His image. Jesus didn't become an angel to redeem angels. When the angels fell, Hebrews 2:16 says, "He didn't become like an angel" (Heb. 2:16, paraphrased). We're reading between the lines, but this isn't just a way-out thought. The angels aren't created in the image and in the likeness of God. They're pure in that sense, but there's something in the way we were built in our original design, which would even allow Jesus to take upon Himself the form of a man, because we were already initially in our design created in His image and likeness.

I've heard the theological argument that Jesus couldn't have made Himself an angel because they weren't in the image of God in their original design. Of course, God the Father knew that when He designed them. There's something very powerful about this issue that we were made in our original design. I have here Genesis 2:18: so that we would be a suitable partner to Jesus. Of course God knew the end from the beginning, but we were made in such a way that if we did fall, He could become like us.

You say, "Well, Jesus could be like anything." I don't want to get too deep into the mysteries of the Godhead because I don't understand them, but I don't think that Jesus could become something other than a man. I don't think He could become an animal. I don't think it works that way. He couldn't become an angel because only man and woman were made in the image and likeness of God. Therefore the incarnation works. Of course, God knew all this from the beginning. The earth was given as a place to gather, to nurture, to train those created in His likeness and image. The history of the redeemed before the "wedding feast", i.e. now, is preparation for life after the wedding feast. The whole thing is about life after the wedding feast. The whole time of the earth and the creation of the stars, the ocean, and all the forces that be, even the permission that the demonic powers have to assault us to some degree, to whatever degree they assault us where there's a warfare involved; all of this is geared to produce a bride that rules and reigns after the wedding feast with the Son of God, because the issue is voluntary love. This is what God is after. Everyone will obey God at the end, right? The demons will bow their knee; when He says, "Bow," they'll bow (Phil. 2:9-10). Those people who are in hell, when He says, "Go," they'll go. Everyone will obey; there's no question.

Obedience isn't the issue; the issue is voluntary love. Because in hell they won't love Him, as far as I can understand. There's an intensified bitterness and hatred towards God with the demons. That's just a theory, but love is voluntary. The reason God gave us free will is so that the glory of love could exist, because without a free will it's not voluntary love. The glory of it is voluntary love. Of course, with the voluntary love comes the chance to mess it up, but the people who messed it up are in the image of Him so that He could become incarnate and come and redeem us. The whole thing is about voluntary love.

THE INHERITANCE OF JESUS IS AN AFFECTIONATE PARTNER

I just gave you a list of verses in this first session so that you could do some studies later on the fact that Jesus has an inheritance. This inheritance is an eternal companion. It's an affectionate partner. Again, it's the full disclosure of His heart, number one. He's completely disclosed the glory and the splendor of His heart. There's no secret He keeps back. The angels are still looking into the Church; they're trying to figure out what's going on.

Jesus has held Himself back from the angels. He won't tell them what's going on. He makes them look at the bride to figure it out.

We say, "Man, they know a lot more than we know."

That's true, but the mystery of God has been entrusted to the Church. In Ephesians 3:10, Paul says, "The angels are studying the manifold wisdom of God through the Church" (Eph. 3:10, paraphrased). He will unveil Himself to the Church, and the angels have to get it from us, and from God does in us and through us. It's really quite an amazing thing, but it's more than just the disclosure of His heart. It's more than just the receiving of your heart. He's going to share His power with us, too, His position. He's going to share His supernatural body with us. We'll have a body like His. It's absolutely fantastic. The point I want to make here is the affectionate partnership; although the whole inheritance isn't just the fact that there's affection, because there's ruling together and other things we will look at in a few moments.

In Psalm 2:8, Jesus prayed. He said, "Father, You said that I would possess the nations" (Ps. 2:8, paraphrased). He's going to have full possession of a people. When it says, "possess the nations," some people think, "Well, that means He'll be over them." It's more than that. He wants to possess the people in those nations. He wants the possession of a people. He says many, many times, "A people for My own possession." He's after full, voluntary ownership of a people's heart.

Paul the apostle says in 1 Thessalonians 5:10, "Whether we're awake or asleep, whether we live or die, the whole point of it is, we share life together with Him" (1 Thess. 5:10, paraphrased). Paul summed up Christianity in one sentence: the whole point is about sharing life with the Bridegroom. Sharing life, affectionate partnership, that's what it's all about. Whether in this age or the one to come, it all comes down to sharing life with Him.

Paul says in Romans 8, "Nothing can separate us" (Rom. 8:38-39, paraphrased). Nothing can get in the way. Nothing can stop us from being the recipients of this. Of course, in the age to come nothing can stop us from giving our hearts fully back. We've heard a lot about being seated in heavenly places, but let's look at the phrase "seated with Him." It's not just seated up there. We're not just up there in a position of power. We're with Him. That's the power of it. With Him is the power of it, not just the high position.

THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP IS A PICTURE OF THE ULTIMATE REALITY

In Ephesians 5, Paul tells us that the purpose of marriage is that a man would leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife. Then he says right in the next breath, "This is a great mystery" (Eph. 5:32). I'm talking about Jesus' church. There's a leaving and a cleaving between Jesus and His church. He's cleaving to His bride.

Some people press the part of the relationship where Jesus had to leave His Father to purchase His bride. Because in the original text God speaks this over Adam. Well, Adam didn't have any father to leave. He said,

“For this reason you shall leave your father and your mother” (Gen. 2:24, paraphrased). In the same way the last Adam left God the Father to purchase for sin, but then He’s with Him. I don’t know exactly how all that works, but I know one thing: the cleaving is real and He’s talking about Jesus and His church. He says, “The marriage relationship is a picture of the ultimate reality.” The ultimate reality is His cleaving to us. This is awesome, isn’t it? It makes you look at life very differently when this touches you.

In the very same passage, Paul says, “Man, if you really want it to work right, nourish and cherish your wife like Jesus nourishes and cherishes His wife” (Eph. 5:29, paraphrased). He cherishes His people in this age. Again, the information is what allows us to receive this. We have such wrong information. The shame-based, “I’m a sinner who fails at loving,” is how most people in the Body of Christ see themselves. It’s not true. You’re a lover who struggles with sin; you’re not a sinner who fails at love. It’s totally opposite. He’s cleaving. He’s cherishing you. Nothing can stop Revelation 19 from happening. Nothing can separate you from Revelation 19. Just for a moment don’t you feel like saying, “Hey now, wait a second... This is pretty cool!” This is true. This is the truth. This is your story.

YOU’RE ALREADY INDESCRIBABLY VALUABLE AND BEAUTIFUL TO GOD

His passionate desire. Again, the verse we have been looking at so much lately is, “The Father loved Me” (Jn. 15:9, paraphrased). I like to use the word *embraced*: “The way the Father embraces Me, this is how I embrace you. By the way, all of you will fall away tonight.” That’s the context in which He said this. He said, “I will embrace you in the way the uncreated God embraced Me. That’s the power of My embrace.” It’s a wonderful thing.

I like Jesus’ prayer in John 17. This is called “the High Priestly Prayer.” He’s about to go to the cross tomorrow and He ends it in these last few verses. He says, “Father, that she would be with Me. That’s the whole point: I want her with Me” (Jn. 17:26, paraphrased). Here He’s about to endure the agony of the cross and this is the thing on His mind; He says, “Don’t let her forget Me! I want her with Me. Remember, this is the only reason I’m going through this dark tunnel of death and the wrath of God falling on Me. I want her with Me, Father!” That’s the cry of His heart before the cross. He’s thinking about you. The very fact that this is about you declares you as indescribably lovely. It declares you indescribably beautiful in the sight of God. I don’t care about human measuring systems. The very fact of this declares you as lovely. The very fact of Revelation 19 existing—it exists, and in the mind of God it’s already happened as far as God is concerned. Nothing can stop it. You’re declared already indescribably valuable and beautiful to Him. It’s a wonderful thing.

I like Malachi 3:17. I put it in there just for fun. The Lord is speaking, “They shall be Mine. On that day, I will make them My jewels” (Mal. 3:17, paraphrased). Of course, Revelation 21 is the city with all the jewels. We’re His jewels. The NIV says, “I will make them my treasures,” but the NKJV says, “My jewels.”

THE SON OF GOD WILL BE EQUALLY YOKED TO A MATURE BRIDE

I like number five here: the thief on the cross. Jesus looks over and that thing is still on Him: “Father, let her be with Me.”

The thief says, “Hey, what about me?”

He says, “You will be with Me” (Lk. 23:43). Here He is; it comes out again. Here He is, in His last breath, and that thing is still resting on His heart.

He came that they would be with Him. He didn't say, "You're free from prison." He didn't say, "You'll experience happiness." He described eternal life as, "You'll be with Me." That's where you'll be. I'm sure the thief didn't understand that, but a few hours later when he woke up he said, "Whoa!" This inheritance is equally yoked in love, equally yoked in love. We love Him the way He loves us. I've got 2 Corinthians 6:14. It's not about God, but it's about people being equally yoked in marriage and in other relationships of life. If God puts this command on His people, how much more will He fulfill it for His own Son? The context is God commanding people to be equally yoked. The highest relationship in which this is applicable is marriage. How much more will the Son of God be equally yoked in love? He won't break the Word of God in any regard. Amen? You'll be equally yoked to Him. You'll think and feel like He thinks and feels. You'll love Him like He loves you. You'll love the Father like He loves the Father. So I have verses there just to back up some of that.

Again, the point of the first session tonight is just to give us an introduction to the bride. That's what we're doing, just to get you in the mood for it, to get you thinking about these verses, and then we'll go into some verses even more in-depth, specifically about the bride, as we unfold these weeks.

The Jewish law concerning the inheritance is what? Someone had to die for the inheritance to change hands. Someone had to die. Jesus had to die even to receive His own inheritance. The inheritance isn't given while the person is living. Death was part of the law of that. He didn't die just to save us from the negative: He died to save us for the positive. You're not just saved *from* something; you're saved *for* something. There was something on His heart that He saved you for and it's Him.

WE'VE NEVER EVEN GRASPED THE THINGS THAT ARE IN HIS HEART FOR US

The Bride filled with the Bridegroom's glory. I love 1 Corinthians 2:9: Paul says, "Eye has not seen, no ear has ever heard, it has never entered into the heart of a human being the fullness of what God has already planned in eternity for the people of God" (1 Cor. 2:9, paraphrased). It's for them that He's planned it. He planned it from eternity. They've never even grasped the things that are in His heart.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF WHO WE ARE IS WHAT SETS THE HEART FREE

Paul the apostle says this is the truth. Obviously, it begins at Jesus' death. We don't understand all the death of Jesus in its fullness. It seems self-evident that we don't, but here's a little tip-off. The top ten songs in heaven, the songs that made the top ten charts, are all songs in the book of Revelation. They keep focusing on the marvel that the uncreated second person of the Trinity could somehow take upon Himself the form of the creature and keep this form forever. He is forever God, but God the Father is totally God and not human at all. We're totally human and redeemed, but Jesus is uniquely the only one of His kind, fully God, fully Man. There's no one like Him. When He said yes to this, when He left the side of God's glory and laid aside the form of God, He was always God the whole time. He never, ever ceased to be God. He laid aside the form of God and walking in the power of it. He took upon Himself the form of a man. This is absolutely fantastic! He could never lay it down again, never. That's what I mean. He couldn't have done this for an angel; He couldn't have done it for animal. It had to be those made in His image from the beginning.

You read the top ten songs. They keep coming back to this point. We'll be busy in the eternal city and things will be happening in heaven, and we'll stop as it seizes the city. We'll say, "My God, the glory to Him who gave His life for us." It just fills the city again. That's the ultimate glory, and the things God has prepared for us, but we don't understand who we are. This knowledge of who we are is what sets the heart free. It's not the only thing, but it's the big thing that sets the heart free. It's the big thing that makes us look at life all differently.

THESE MOMENTARY AFFLICTIONS ARE WORKING A GREAT ETERNAL GLORY

Paul gets excited in 2 Corinthians 4:17. He says, “These light afflictions” (2 Cor. 4:17). You read 2 Corinthians 11: you’re talking about a man who was beaten and whipped and stoned and thrown overboard in the sea a few times. He says, “These light afflictions are but for a moment” (ibid, paraphrased). He says, “I was only imprisoned two or three years in Caesarea.” He says, “Only a few years, just for a moment.” Of course, the point is this: he has seen the “far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17).

That’s powerful, man. He says, “I’ve just seen a glimpse. It’s never even entered my heart, either.” He says, “I’ve seen more than you’ve seen, but it hasn’t entered my heart.”

Paul couldn’t violate the Word of God. He had still only seen the tip of the iceberg. He says, “The far more exceeding and eternal weight of who we are to Him and who we are with Him.” He says the same thing again in Romans 8:18.

THE WAY THE FATHER LOVES JESUS IS THE WAY HE LOVES YOU

The bride in His image. The Lord spoke to Adam, “I will make you a partner suitable to you” (Gen. 2:18, paraphrased). Paul the apostle uses Genesis 2 and applies it to Jesus in Ephesians 5. We will look at that in-depth in maybe week five or six. It’s talking about Jesus, too. God the Father speaks of that. Then He says, “I will make a partner suitable to *You*.” I believe He looks at the last Adam and says, “He is just a picture of You. I will make You a partner suitable just like you. She will be just like you.”

We will never have deity. We will never be the uncreated, eternal God who is worshiped, never. That gulf between us and Jesus is eternally separate. We will never, never, ever bridge that gulf, but in all the other ways we will be. I have the four here that we have looked at recently. We will receive the Father’s embrace. Jesus said, “The way that Papa loves Me, that’s the way He loves you.” My goodness! Jesus said in John 17:23, “The way He’s embraced Me with delight is how He will embrace you, and all of you will fall away from Me this night” (Jn. 17:23, paraphrased).

The reason I keep saying that is that we slip into this old mode of, “Well, if I was one of those great apostles then it would be different.” No, it’s not like that. We have to understand it rightly

The second way in which we’re suitable to Him is that we’re in His image. We’re predestined to be conformed in the image of Jesus, so we’ll have a new heart. We’ll be wholly and totally satisfied for once, forever, totally satisfied like He is. Fantastic! Then we get the new body with all the supernatural abilities. Can I get an amen? The supernatural, unlimited abilities of the supernatural body—fantastic! This is your story. This isn’t just some religious story; this is your testimony. There will be a day and an hour when you’ll say, “When I was first told this I didn’t really believe it.” When you’re flying and soaring with the angels, you’ll say, “I didn’t really get this. I went to that class a few times. I went in ‘96 and went again in ‘98 and 2002 and didn’t really get it, but man, I’ve got it now.”

“TO HIM WHO OVERCOMES I WILL GIVE POWER OVER THE NATIONS”

Revelation 3:21. Look at this; I want you to read this. This is Jesus speaking personally. He’s speaking to John the apostle on the island of Patmos. He says, “Go tell him this.” He says, “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Rev. 3:21).

Again, Ephesians 1:22-23 says, “His throne is far above, far above everything that can be named” (Eph. 1:22-23, paraphrased). That’s where we’re sitting: the position of total rest. We’re not defending that position; we’re sitting there. We’re not going up there defensively; we’re not going up there anxiously. We’re going up there because we have been invited to sit in rest in this position. It’s the highest position, far above every name that is named, at the right hand of God.

In Revelation 2:26, Jesus adds, “I will give the overcomer power over of the nations” (Rev. 2:26, paraphrased). People come up with this doctrine that there are overcomers and non-overcomers. I don’t understand that. I have such confidence in the blood of Jesus and the heart of God that I don’t think the difference between the thief on the cross and Paul the apostle is all that vast. We imagine other things and I don’t really know, but I think the overcomer is the one who keeps the yes in his or her spirit and doesn’t lose it and say. The overcomer isn’t this super-saint, because I keep looking for who these overcomers might be. I had the fantasy until some years ago when I began traveling. Then I met a bunch of these famous men and I said, “My goodness, those men can’t be it.” I don’t say that despairingly; I just thought, “Well, who are the overcomers then?” I had the idea that those men who wrote those books must be the overcomers. Then I met a bunch of them and I thought, “This isn’t that.”

Then I said, “Maybe this is that. Maybe we are. Maybe that’s how it works. Maybe the overcomer is the one who keeps His testimony.” Meaning, under all the assault the yes is in his spirit to the end. It doesn’t mean he doesn’t ever stumble, but he gets up and runs to Him. Maybe that’s the overcomer: the one who doesn’t give up His testimony. I don’t know who these folks are who are the overcomers if it’s not that group. Maybe the Lord has something on His heart. I don’t really know, but that’s my theory of what the overcomer is: it’s the one who says yes in his or her spirit to the Lord.

THE VERY SEED OF GOD IS DWELLING IN THE HUMAN SPIRIT

Revelation 1:5-6. He makes us kings. I want you to hear this. Jesus Christ has made us kings. We’ve been hearing that for years. I want you to hear it though. Revelation 5:10, He made us kings to God, and we will reign. Jesus is reigning forever and ever (Rev. 11:15). The point is, we will be with Him. John saw thrones (Rev. 20:4). He saw people reigning on them (v. 6). They will reign (2 Thess. 2:12). Daniel saw dominions and thrones and those who were ruling (Dan. 7:22, 26, 27). The highest position conceivable has been given to the saints, that’s the point. The point is, there’s a plan that’s intentional and it’s not an accidental thing. God has put everything in His heart so that this plan would come to pass. It’s reigning with Him. We have His authority.

Again, those words have been used so much in the last ten or twenty years that they don’t seem to have power, but we’re talking about the Son of God inviting us to His throne. Do you know why you reign? Everything was made for you. That’s why you reign over it. It was all made with you in mind. “Eye has not seen, ear has not heard the things prepared for them.” That’s why we’re reigning, because it’s been prepared for us. He says, “Why would you *not* reign?” Who else would reign? It was made for you. It wasn’t made for the angels. The angels were made for you; you weren’t made for them. They were made for you. “You’re the ones in My likeness. You’re the ones who have the seed of God in you, not them.” The very seed of God is dwelling in the human spirit.

THE PEOPLE OF GOD WILL INHERIT THE EARTH

I don’t want to get to far off in this, but I’d like to introduce the idea that there’s a new earth. I don’t know all the details about it. There are all kinds of theories. That doesn’t matter, but the fact is that the new earth will

exist. Regardless of whether it's this version or that version, everyone agrees it will exist. We will live forever on this glorious creation called a "new earth" wherein righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:13). It was made for us. Therefore, we're the ruling class. We're the hierarchy, the queen who rules this ever-expanding empire called the kingdom of God. That's who we are.

We will inherit the earth. We will literally inherit the earth. It's not just our business gets a little better and that's kind of a symbolic way we're inheriting the earth. That stuff is true, too, but we will literally inherit the planet. It will be manifest as existing only for us.

Here we are in 1 Corinthians. Let's go right over to chapter 6. There's so much in 1 and 2 Corinthians about our image and who we are. Do you know why? They were the most carnal church. I really mean this. Paul put more energy in 1 and 2 Corinthians into telling them the dignity of who they were, because they were the most carnal church recorded besides the Laodiceans. Do you know what happened to the Laodiceans? Jesus says, "You will sit with Me on My throne." That's what He told the Laodiceans. He gave the Laodiceans the highest promises of the seven churches. They had the worst description and they get the highest promises. Why? Because God says, "They have to understand who they are. That's the only thing that's going to get them to rebound out of this tailspin: let them see who they are."

There's more in 1 and 2 Corinthians about the dignity of who we are. The Laodiceans and the Corinthians were dead-tied for the worst church in the first century and they get the highest promises of everyone. Fantastic! Look at what he says in 1 Corinthians 6: "Do you not know the saints will judge the world" (1 Cor. 6:2, paraphrased)? In the end the saints get the last word over all history with Jesus. We put our head on the breast of our heavenly Bridegroom and say, "What do You think about that man?"

He says, "What do *you* think about him?"

"Well, I think that..." Then we judge the world with Him. We're not robots. It's not like we're on automatic gear, where we say, "Tell me what to do!"

There's an interaction; there's a heart that's exchanged. We're being trained to grow in love. We're judging for real. It's not computer judging. We're leaning on His breast and hearing His heart and speaking out of the fullness of the relationship what we believe over the issues that need to be determined.

There are all kinds of different arenas of judgment of the past world. Jesus said, "You'll get greater condemnation than this man and this and that in the world to come, and all the creation that goes on." We will judge everything in existence.

WE WILL ARBITRATE AND EVALUATE THE WHOLE ANGELIC HOST

He goes on to say, "It's not just the world and the past. It's not just the earth and the future." Because it says we will reign on the new earth. He says, "You will judge the angels as well. You will arbitrate and evaluate the angels, good and bad, because you're the queen and they're your servants" (1 Cor. 6:3, paraphrased). You'll arbitrate and you'll evaluate the whole angelic host, good and bad, because they were made for you. Again, it's out of the dialogue; it's out of the heart relationship with the Son of God. It's not a robotic response. We will do it. He wants us to do it out of the fullness of our heart together with Him.

The whole point of me telling you this is this: I want you to see the grandeur of the position to which He has called us.

Go to number 2. Here in Matthew 19, He's telling the twelve, "You will sit upon thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel in the days to come" (Mt. 19:28). He says, "You'll be able to help me evaluate history past and the future concerning Israel."

These men say, "My goodness, that's a heavy position."

The Lord says, "And all of you will fall away from me." That's the group we're talking about.

Look at number four and number five down here. Number four: Matthew 12.

Remember the story of Jonah and Nineveh. He went to the city of Nineveh with all these unbelievers. Jonah preaches and they get saved. Jonah gets really mad. Well, they did get saved in the Old Testament sense. You know what's going to happen? They'll rise up and they'll judge and condemn generations. God's going to take that gang from the Nineveh revival, however long ago, and say, "Now I want you men to help me to figure out what to do with this generation across the earth" (Mt. 12:41, paraphrased).

The Nineveh men are going to say, "OK, I'll take that group over there." The Nineveh generation from one city will judge a generation with Him because they're the elect. They're redeemed; they're washed.

Then it goes on and says that the queen of the South, the queen of Sheba, is going to do some judgment of her own. "She's going to speak on My behalf concerning who did it and who didn't do it because she will be a queen to Me" (Mt. 12:42). Psalm 149 says the same thing.

THE DOMINANT AND DEFINING CONFESSION OF THE REDEEMED

OK, two more things and we'll end. It's very simple. The dominant and defining confession of the redeemed at the end of the age will be a bride's confession. Hosea 2:16 tells us this, as do a number of other places. We'll establish this very, very repetitively—not just these two verses, but a number of others. Hosea's looking at the people of the last generation when the revival spirit comes on him. We'll look at Hosea for one entire session, for a full hour. We'll go right through the bride in Hosea. It's one of the most dramatic books unveiling the bride.

This was written 700 years before Christ's birth. He says, "In that day, in the final generation, the people of God will no longer say to the Lord, 'My Master,' but will call the Lord, 'My Husband'" (Hos. 2:16, paraphrased). He says, "The defining relationship, the defining confession, the dominant understanding of the redeemed will be that of a bride to a husband." That will be the dominant understanding of the people of the generation in which all the promises happen that Hosea prophesied. It's the generation when He appears in the clouds, which is the final one. He appears to the final generation by definition.

John the apostle picks up on the same theme. It's not the Holy Spirit and the army; it's not the Holy Spirit and the kingdom; it's not the Holy Spirit and the family; it's not the Holy Spirit and the body. It's the Holy Spirit, and the people of God are called "the bride." They're in unity with the Holy Spirit crying to the Bridegroom, "Come" (Rev. 22:17). There's a bridal cry at the very end.

I would like to end, very briefly, with the last thing here. If you turn to Isaiah 14, I just want to read a verse to you. It's about Satan. Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 are the two big passages about Satan and how he fell and what happened in his heart. Nearly all the scholars hold the line, even those from different persuasions, that this is a story of Satan's fall.

Verse 12. Isaiah says, "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God'" (Isa. 14:12-13).

The stars of God speak of the angels. There are a lot of other verses that back that up. He said, "I want to exalt my throne above all the angels. I will sit on the mount of the congregation on the furthest side of the north. I will ascend above the heights of all the clouds, all of creation. I will be like the Most High. I will be like Him." One of the chief angels of the angelic host makes these declarations in his heart.

It says, "Yet you shall be brought down to hell, to the lowest depths of the pit" (Isa. 14:15, paraphrased). That's what God pronounces over him.

Let's look at our last section. *Lucifer* means "light-bearer." He was the one God called "the light bearer." Now the Bride is called the light of the world (Mt. 5:14).

Satan says, "I'll ascend into heaven. I'll go to those places." The Word of God says we're seated at His right hand in heavenly places with Him.

Satan says, "I will exalt my throne above all the angels."

Jesus says, "I will grant you to sit with Me on My throne."

Satan says, "I want to sit among the congregation on God's mountain on the sides of the north." The *north* seems to be the assembly place in the eternal city. It says in Hebrews and Psalm 48 that the saints are on Mount Zion on the sides of the North.

Finally, Satan says, "I will be like the Most High." The Word of God declares, "You have been predestined before the ages to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. You will be like Him when you see Him" (cf. 1 Jn. 3:2). Everything He wanted, everything He risked His entire destiny for, has been granted to us as a free gift.

Amen.