

## Sermon for May 28, 2017 – Easter 7

Revelation 22:12-21 (NIV84)

### Theme: You are invited

- 1) *To become a citizen of heaven.*
- 2) *To find life in the Word.*

<sup>12</sup> "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. <sup>13</sup> I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. <sup>14</sup> "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. <sup>15</sup> Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. <sup>16</sup> "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star." <sup>17</sup> The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. <sup>18</sup> I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. <sup>19</sup> And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. <sup>20</sup> He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. <sup>21</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

June is traditionally seen as the wedding month – hence the saying: “June bride.” With the cost of getting married being so expensive these days, a bride and groom usually don’t just invite any old person off the street to their wedding. No, the people they invite are usually, in some way or another, special to them. They are loved. Consider it an honor, therefore, when someone invites you to their wedding.

Well, guess what? You all have been invited to a very special wedding that is coming in the not so distant future. It is the marriage that will take place when Christ comes again on the last day to take his chosen bride – his Church - to live forever with him in paradise. What a joyous day this will be: believers will begin their life together with Christ in the eternal joys of heavenly paradise.

The fact that both the groom and bride invite you to this wedding shows how loved you are by them. And where do you find their invitation? It is beautifully written on the pages of Scripture in the crimson ink of Christ’s blood, shed for the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus and his bride - the Church – want you to partake of the eternal, festival joys of heaven. Listen to their invitation under the theme: **You are invited:** 1) *To become citizens of heaven.* 2) *To find life in the Word.*

### Part One: To become citizens of heaven

Shortly before our sermon text, God describes the last day as a wedding - when Christ will come to be united with his bride (aka – the Church) who is all decked out to meet him. What is she

wearing? The richly wrought robe of righteousness that Jesus won for her through his life, death and resurrection. The LORD has set the date and wants you to be a part of this festive occasion.

He says: <sup>12</sup> *"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.*

Jesus is coming soon: what a beautiful and yet scary thought! Are you prepared to meet him? Every day that passes is a day closer to his arrival. He is bringing his reward with him: the right to live with him in peace and joy forever as his dearly loved child.

But what does Jesus mean when he says: *"I will give to everyone according to what he has done?"* Aren't we saved by grace and not by works? God demands perfection and we are sinful. If Jesus rewarded us according to what we have done, how would we ever be able to enter heaven?

It is true, if God would truly reward us solely on the basis of our own deeds, hell would be our fate! Thanks be to God: we have other deeds to offer God than those we have done: those of Christ! He lived a perfect life of obedience to all of God's commands. He gives this righteousness as a free gift to all who turn to him in repentance and faith – as the next verse of our text indicates:

*Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.*

Blessed are those who wash their robes? What robes? Ah, the robes are not real robes, rather they are symbolic of our righteousness before God in thought, word and deed – and, boy are we dirty! The prophet Isaiah once wrote: *All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.*<sup>1</sup>

Thankfully, there is something that cleans our filthy robes: the blood of Jesus; *the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*<sup>ii</sup> Earlier in Revelation, the apostle John recorded a vision of the saints in heaven. The angel guiding him said that they were those who: *have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*<sup>iii</sup> St. Paul also says in his letter to the Galatians: *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*<sup>iv</sup>

At our baptisms God washed away the filthy rags of our own deeds, and clothed us with his Son's perfect righteousness. It is only on the basis of this righteousness and what he has done, that we are rewarded with heaven and invited to partake of the tree of life to which Adam and Eve were forbidden access after their fall into sin. Those who are cleansed by Christ are welcome to partake of the wonderful fruit of eternal life. They are welcome to be citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem and royal members of God's family: the holy Christian Church.

*Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.*

Those whose lives reflect the unbelief of their hearts are not allowed to attend the LORD's wedding. They will not gain entrance into the Holy City. Why not? Because they love their sin more than Christ. They refuse to repent and wash their wickedness away in the blood of the lamb. Such people will have to remain outside the protective gates of heaven, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.<sup>v</sup>

*"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."*

Jesus, the LORD and promised Messiah of Scripture, has declared these things. They are as good as done. So how do you receive Jesus' words: in complacency or faith? I pray you receive them in faith and heed his invitation to be washed clean of all sin. Repent and trust in Jesus alone for salvation. Your LORD is inviting you to become a citizen of heaven. His bride (the Church) invites you to find life in his Word.

### Part Two: To find life in the Word

*The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.*

The Holy Spirit calls out through the Gospel preaching of Christ's Church. "Come," they say – indiscriminately calling out to all who will hear and heed their invitation. Whoever's guilt-ridden soul thirsts for salvation is invited to come and drink the free water of life. And this water satisfies, as Jesus himself once said: *"Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*<sup>vi</sup>

What is the water Jesus offers through his Church? It is the Gospel - the good news of what Jesus has done: how he forgave every single one of our sins and reconciled us to God. The Gospel declares us free from all guilt and condemnation – offering us peace and eternal life with the LORD. This is why the Spirit and Church invite us to come and drink. And where do we find this blessed water of life? Only in God's Word. Only in Jesus' promises.

Did you know that the human body is 76% water? A person might be able to live without food for a few months, but a person will die within 3-4 days without water.

God describes his Gospel as water for the soul. In other words, our souls need to be constantly drinking God's promised grace. Without continual remembrance of Christ and his sacrifice for us, our faith will die in short order. Thankfully, when God called us to faith, he put a little spring inside of us: a new man that reminds us of Christ's work and urges us to meditate on the Gospel whenever possible. But if we carelessly refuse to regularly meditate on God's Word and partake of his Sacraments, that little spring will dry up. This is why it is of the utmost importance to heed the Spirit's invitation and study God's Word with fellow believers at Church.

But that invites the question: what kind of Church does Jesus want you to attend?

Let me answer that question with an illustration: Imagine you are very thirsty and there are three glasses of water in front of you: 1) pure Rocky Mountain spring water. 2) 100 % Distilled Water. 3) Water that has a hint of blue toilet bowl cleaner chemical added to it in an attempt to make it better. Which will you choose?

If it were me, I'd pick the pure Rocky Mountain spring water. Why not distilled water? Because all the good electrolytes are removed through the distilling process, so distilled water will raise your bodies acidity level. Too much of it can make you sick. Why not the water with a hint of toilet bowl cleaner added to it? Because those chemicals will make you sick.

Now, what does all this talk about water have to do with the Church? This: the Spirit and Church invite us to come and drink the pure, living water of salvation. However, there are also false churches offering a different kind of water: a water that has been changed in some way. Jesus warns us to avoid such water.

*I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book.* There are church bodies which add man-made rules to the Bible. They speak of unwritten traditions of the Church that need to be followed or misinterpret Scripture to make it say something it does not. These people are adding junk to the living water of God's Word. And just as you would not want to drink water with dangerous chemicals added to it, so you do not want to spiritually drink these teachings these false churches add.

*And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.* Just as there are Churches that add to Scripture, there also are Churches that take away. In an attempt to make the Bible less offensive, they remove any talk of sin and hell. Some go so far as to question the Bible's teaching on salvation through Christ alone – claiming that there are many paths to enlightenment. God warns people who do such things that they are in danger of losing their place in heaven. No man has any right to stand in judgment over God's Word – adding or subtracting to its teachings. This is why Scripture encourages us to join a Church that teaches the truth – where the Spirit's invitation is clearly heard and Christ's souls saving salvation is proclaimed.

<sup>20</sup> *He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon.*

The wedding date has been set. The invitations have gone out. Jesus is coming soon. At the Spirit's prompting, let us heed the call and RSVP to the invitation by praying: *Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.*

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<sup>i</sup> Isaiah 64:6 NIV84

<sup>ii</sup> John 1:29 NIV84

<sup>iii</sup> Revelation 7:14 NIV84

<sup>iv</sup> Galatians 3:26-27 NIV84

<sup>v</sup> Cf. Matthew 22:13

<sup>vi</sup> John 4:14 NIV84