

## Keep Your Head Up You Are Christ's Bride

A Sermon on Revelation 21:9-23  
Year C - Easter 6  
1 - May - 2016

JJ<sup>1</sup>

You all have been to a wedding before. You've seen the bride all beautifully dressed. You men who are or have been married have had the awesome privilege to stand at the end of the aisle waiting for your own bride to be walked down the aisle, to you. Although she, her mother and her friends helped pick out the wedding dress, that dress is primarily for you. Although she and others spend all that time with makeup and hair, it was done for you. Yes, all those preparations, decorations, beautifications were done for others to enjoy and for fine photographs, but really, it was done for you. And if you were like me, your smile nearly broke your head in half when she turned the corner and you first saw her with everything just so.

At that moment, no one's head was hanging down in boredom, waiting for the service to begin. No one's face was buried in a bulletin. Everyone's heads were lifted high and standing to see her led down the aisle.

Friends, today we get a glimpse of our heavenly wedding day. In fact, it already started last week. And just as no one's head is hanging at our weddings here on earth, even more so will there not be one head hanging on our heavenly wedding

day. Friends, today you are again shown in John's Revelation that you can **KEEP YOUR HEAD UP** even as you live in this world that daily tries to pull you down because **YOU ARE CHRIST'S BRIDE**.

John's vision of the Church of God in eternity began last week when we heard him say, "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). Up until this point, John had been seeing the Church Militant. That is, the church of believers still living, struggling and suffering here on earth. Most of those visions we passed over in this series of lessons. But if you take the time to read them you see that those visions portray a very dirty, even ugly scene. While hopefully the only blood shed in preparing for your wedding was a nick shaving, as we see Christ's Bride on earth preparing for her heavenly wedding we see a battle which often leaves her members bruised, bloodied and even killed by Satan and his allies. But it's always important to note that Christ's Bride, his Church on earth is never defeated, even though it doesn't always seem that way.

Now, near the end of his visions from the Lord, John sees the Church Triumphant.

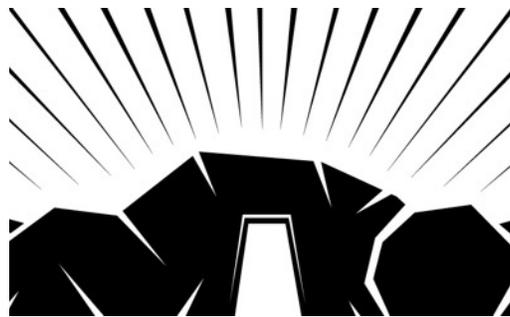
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<sup>1</sup> JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

Now he sees Christ's Church as she truly is and was always meant to be—"the Bride, the Wife of the Lamb." John says that the angel "carried me away in spirit to a mountain great and high..." He's brought to this great and high mountain so he can see the grand scene much like a photographer going for higher ground at a wedding to get the whole picture.

Again John saw "the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." Before, it seems that John only got a glimpse of Christ's Bride and saw that she was beautiful. Now he gets to see her in detail. "It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal."

Perhaps the best way to picture this is to picture diamonds dazzling under the lights of a jewelry store. But notice that the beauty isn't something she has but is given to her. It is God's glory that makes her bright and beautiful. God is the one who has made her holy through the sacrifice of his Son and her Bridegroom. And that is the beautiful difference between our weddings here and our wedding and relationship with our eternal husband, Christ. Where the man probably plays no role whatsoever in beautifying his bride here on earth, Christ is the one who beautifies us! And how badly we needed to be beautified!



By nature, we were spiritual harlots. We were impure and filled with the disease of sin. There was nothing lovable about us. Our sin made us more undesirable than the most disease ridden, drunken, drug-addict bar tramp. Yet Christ chose us! Yes, chose us to be his Bride! And he did everything to clean us up and ready us for our heavenly wedding day. Paul describes this amazing act of love in his letter to the Ephesians: "...Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Eph. 5:25-27).

As John looks closer, he sees the Bride pictured in her beautiful perfection, symbolized by a enormous perfect cube. He also sees what brings us into and keeps us in the Church. He sees twelve pearl gates. Three on each side. Each of them had a name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. The foundation was made of twelve precious stones, each one had a name of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. As Paul writes in Ephesians, the Church of Christ is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets..." (Eph. 2:20) Meaning that we are brought into God's family and brought safely into our heavenly home through the Word of God.

Finally, as John gazes upon the Bride of the Lamb pictured as a city, the heavenly Jerusalem, he notices something odd. "I did not see a temple in the city..." John expected to see a temple because the temple was at the very heart of Jerusalem. It was the center of their worship life. It was the place where God's grace was poured out on them as a nation in the most vivid ways. It was the place where believers could approach God with their sacrifices, albeit in a very limited way.

But then John sees that something better, something new has been prepared for God's people in heaven. "I did not see a temple in the city because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." There is no need for a building or even a means of distributing God's grace to his people any longer. Why? Because they are now and forever in the very presence and glory of God! In heaven, Christ's Bride enjoys a perfect, direct, personal and intimate relationship with Christ, her husband!

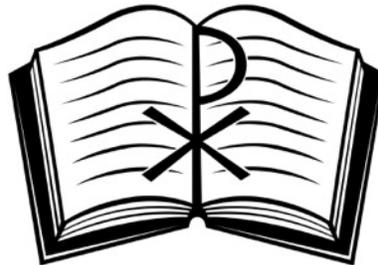
Ladies, whether recently or long ago, when you walked down that aisle to your husband, what did you see? What did you hope for in your future with him?

Did your vision change and hopes change over the years? In many ways they did, didn't they? He isn't or wasn't the perfect husband. There are disappointments along the way when he didn't live for you. Yet, hopefully there has been growth together in your relationship with one another and with God through the bond of God's Word and forgiveness.

The wonderful thing, friends, as we look forward to being gathered at the aisle of the heavenly wedding hall, is that we will see a perfect and loving husband who is

not only perfect in himself, but also has made us perfect. We see a husband who suffered for us. Died and rose again for us. Literally went to hell and back for us! Friends, this is who waits for you at the wedding feast of the Lamb. This is who pro-

protects you and purifies you until you get there. That, friends, is why you can **KEEP YOUR HEAD UP. YOU ARE CHRIST'S BRIDE.** Amen.



SDG<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

