

## “FOREVER IN HIS PRESENCE”

Song of Songs 2:13-17, I Thessalonians 4:13-18, Revelation 19:5-9, 21:1-4  
August 28 & 29, 2021

Over the last few months, we've been imagining what it would be like to actually meet Christ Jesus. We've looked at the lives of those who encountered Jesus in their life, and the changes that took place when He responded to their need and touched their life. We've looked at the transition from being just acquainted with Jesus, moving to becoming a friend of Jesus, going on to accepting His call into our own lives, and then becoming a devoted disciple of Jesus, serving Him in our everyday lives. We've seen the depth of His love for all of us, and His willingness to pay the price for our sins so that we might become free of the penalty of death because of our sin. And we have come to know how Jesus provides the Holy Spirit to us in order to help us in our own lives, today. But what's the end of all of this? What is the end result of getting to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of our lives?

To answer those questions, we first have to look at the great love that Jesus has for us. The lesson from the Song of Songs today puts human emotions into what God has for humanity. God calls out to all of us, “*Come then, my love; my darling, come with me*” (2:13). God desires that we be with Him and He wants us to recognize the abundant blessings of having Him in our life. He is inviting us, even enticing us, to turn to Him with such great love that we easily answer Him, “*My lover is mine, and I am his*” (2:16). God wants us to so desire being with Him that we dream about Him (3:1), that we long for Him to be with us (3:2) so much that we seek Him with our whole heart. And when we find Him, we hold onto Him and never let Him go (3:4). That's the kind of relationship that God longs us to have with Him.

But sadly, we become so distracted with all of the things around us that we lose sight of the One we love and begin longing for the things of this world rather than for Him. And we begin to question whether or not God loves us because He has been gone for so long. Yet God desires that we hold onto our love for Him so that nothing in all of this world separates us from His great love (Romans 8:31-39).

That's why Jesus came to the earth, God in human flesh, to help us once again grow our desire to

have the Lord in our lives. Jesus reaches out to us because He loves us and wants us to be with Him as we go through this life, and then, to be with Him in Heaven when this life is finished for us here on the earth. So He woos us, and encourages us, and reaches out to us, and calls to us and invites us to be with Him. It is His great desire to have us with Him.

And so the battle of our souls rages on, between the forces of evil, that desires us to forget God and go on our own way doing our own thing; and the forces of good, that desires us to embrace and trust in God and follow His ways. Satan wants to destroy us. He wants us to be with him in the abyss of Hell because he hates us. *“We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do”* (Ephesians 2:10). So Satan desires to disrupt and distort and pervert the goodness of God in us, so that we reject God and follow Satan instead. By following Satan, we reject God’s Salvation and carry our own punishment for the sins we commit, and we are condemned to eternal death because of the separation between us and God caused by sin. And there in Hell, we will be in great anguish, tormented for all eternity by a never ending death (Revelation 20:10).

But that’s not God’s plan for humanity! God wants us to live with Him, where *“He will swallow up death for all time, and the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces, and He will remove the disgrace of His people from all the earth...”* (Isaiah 25:8). And when we remain faithful to Him, after waiting for so long for His return, after longing for Him with our very being, when He returns for us like a bridegroom for His bride, then *“...it will be said on that day, ‘Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation’”* (Isaiah 25:9).

You see, God longs for us to be with Him, but He leaves the choice up to us. He lets us choose the path we walk, and allows us to go the direction that we want, and He permits us to follow and worship whomever we want. God’s desire is that we follow after Him, and go His way and worship Him. But He gives us the choice. God does not force us to follow Him, but He invites us to see the great difference between following Him and following Satan. In God there is love and life, but in Satan

there is only hatred and death. And God lets us make the choice between the things of this world and the things of His glorious kingdom. The things of this world are temporary pleasures, empty and fleeting; but the things of God are eternal joys, fulfilling and forever. So Jesus calls out to us, *“Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”* (Matthew 11:28-29).

So there is a huge difference between those who die without Jesus and those who die with Jesus. Without Jesus we have no hope. But with Jesus we have eternal life. Today we heard in the Epistle lesson that the Apostle Paul puts it like this, *“We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will take back with Jesus those who have died believing in Him”* (I Thessalonians 4:14). So when Jesus does return for those who believe in Him, *“...we who are alive on the day the Lord comes will not go ahead of those who have died. There will be the shout of command, the archangel’s voice, the sound of God’s trumpet, and the Lord Himself will come down from heaven. Those who have died believing in Christ will rise to life first; then we who are living at that time will be gathered up along with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord”* (I Thess. 4:15-17).

There will be a huge reunion for the believers in Jesus Christ. Those who have died will join those who are still alive and be joined with Jesus, ready to go into the House of the Lord. Jesus will fulfill His words to the disciples, *“When I go, you will not be left all alone; I will come back to you. In a little while the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me; and because I live, you also will live”* (John 14:18-19). When we meet Jesus, when we put our trust and faith in Him as our Savior and Lord, the One Who has made reconciliation with God the Father for us, we are promised that He will take us to be with Him forever. What a glorious day that will be!

But listen to how the apostle John received the revelation from the Lord of what that day will be like. This is Revelation 19:5-9 and 21:1-4. (READ Revelation 19:5-9, 21:1-4)

Those who revere the Lord will hear the call to *“Praise our God...”* (19:5). It will be a call for

all of those who love God and have trusted in Jesus to recognize the Lord God Almighty as Our God. Everyone, great and small, will be invited to worship Him who sits on the throne of Heaven. And there will be millions of people praising God, so much so that it will make *“the sound of a roaring waterfall, like loud peals of thunder”* (19:6). Have you ever thought of the rolling thunder as the angels of Heaven praising God? Interesting concept for anyone afraid of storms. It’s a time to praise God and join in with all the angels of heaven in worshipping God Almighty. When that many people and that many angels cry out, *“Praise God! For the Lord our Mighty God, is King!”* (19:6), it would certainly sound like the roar of a mighty waterfalls, or a great clap of thunder.

A few years ago, some of our high school students were able to go to Buffalo, New York, on a mission trip with Group Missions. When we were there, we took the time to go to Niagara Falls, and it was amazing. The amount of water going over the falls caused a roar so loud that we had to shout into each other’s ear just to be heard. It was easier to use sign language than to communicate with words. That’s what the sound of the praise of the Lord our God will be like when the millions of people and angels call out to Him together.

And on that day when Jesus returns for us who believe in Him, it will sound like thunder because of all of the praise and adoration given to the Lord at that time. But there will be other words called out, *“Let us rejoice and be glad; let us praise His greatness! For the time has come for the wedding of the Lamb, and His bride has prepared herself for it. She has been given clean shining linen to wear”* (19:7-8). There will be rejoicing because we will have come to Christ Jesus as His bride, and the long awaited wedding will take place where Jesus will claim us as His very own, washed clean by His blood, and fitted with the new clothes of righteousness. We will be pure and holy, just as Jesus is pure and holy. All our sins will be washed away and we will stand in the presence of God with renewed, redeemed, recreated bodies having put away the old, earthly bodies.

Just imagine, as believers in Jesus Christ, these old, broken, sin scarred bodies will be regenerated into the likeness of the Lord God. We were made in His image at the beginning of creation,

and so we will be renewed into His image at the wedding feast of the Lamb. There will no longer be cancer. There will no longer be arthritis. There will no longer be COPD. There will no longer be glaucoma. There will no longer be any sickness. There will no longer be drug addiction. There will no longer be Covid19. No more leukemia, no more AIDS, no more SIDS, no more osteoporosis, no more dementia. Those who have lost organs or limbs or abilities due to disease or accident or ailment will find renewed, regenerated bodies that can run and skip and jump and kneel before the Lord in praise to Him. That in itself will be enough for some to praise God when we meet Jesus again.

And better yet, there will be no evil, no wickedness, no hatred, no jealousy, no anger, no greed, no lust, no rape, no murder, no sex trafficking, no abortion - nothing that will ever to cause us to become separated by God again through sin. *"...nothing that is impure will enter the city, nor anyone who does shameful things or tells lies. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of the living will enter the city"* (21:27).

Can you imagine that? It will be not be anything like what is here on the earth, because *"the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars...will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur"* (21:8). You see, we will be in the presence of God Almighty, and He does not tolerate any evil or wickedness in His presence. For, at that time, *"God's home is with mankind! He will live with them, and they shall be His people, God Himself will be with them, and He will be their God. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, nor more grief or crying or pain. The old things [will] have disappeared"* (Rev. 21:3-4). Everything will be pure and holy even as God is pure and holy. But only the believers will be with Him.

And there will be no night there (21:25), *"because the glory of God shines [everywhere], and the Lamb is its lamp. The people of the world will walk by its light..."* (Rev. 21:23-24). We will walk in the Son-shine of Jesus with no more need for sunscreen. No sun burns on those new bodies of ours. Oh, we'll have the mark of Jesus written upon our foreheads and the name of Jesus stamped on our hearts. But all our scars, all our brokenness, all our age spots will all be gone, and we will be brand new!

Imagine it, when that day comes when we join Jesus in the Kingdom of God, God will remake the heavens and the earth. “*The first heaven and the first earth [will disappear], and the sea will be no more*” (21:1). It will be remade into the likeness of Eden BEFORE the fall of humanity. Wow! WOW! WOW!!! I can’t wait! Come, Lord Jesus, quickly!

But there is much more that needs to happen before Jesus returns for His people. First, the whole world must hear about Jesus and be given the chance to follow Him. That means that the Good News of the Gospels needs to be translated into the languages of all the people groups throughout the world. Everyone needs to be able to read about the Salvation of the Lord Jesus in their own heart language so that they can understand the great love of God for us. And they will need to hear the Good News of the Gospel so that they might be able to put their faith in Jesus Christ.

Then, it means that people need to be willing to take the news of God’s gift of Salvation to all of the other people of the world. It is one thing to have the Bible translated into the language of the people, but it another thing for the Bibles to be taken to the peoples who speak that language.

In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus gave the disciples what we know as the Great Commission, “*Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them My disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age.*” That call to the disciples has become the great call for all believers to do the same thing – to share the Word of God with others so that they might come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior. Every one of us is called to be witnesses to the love and grace of God to the world through Jesus. We are the workers for Jesus, to help others come to know Jesus, so that they, also, might come to be disciples of Jesus, fully faithful followers of The Way, The Truth, and The Life. How will the world hear about Jesus unless WE take Him to them, in Word and deed?

Only when every person in the world has had the chance to hear about Jesus can the work of Jesus be completed. Only when everyone has heard about Jesus and been given the chance to make the decision to either receive or reject Jesus Christ as the Savior of the World, will the time come for His

return. You see, *“The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not willing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance”* (2 Peter 3:9). God desires that everyone have the chance to hear about His grace through Jesus Christ and decide for themselves if they will let Him become their Savior. Then their names will be added to the Book of Life, and they will be *“invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb”* (Revelation 19:9). Only those who profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, only those who actively live for Him and follow His commands, will be invited to be a part of the wedding feast at the return of Jesus.

But having accepted Jesus as our Savior, having received the invitation to be the bride of Christ, when we stand before Jesus on that day, what will we have to offer Him? We may rejoice in our hearts that we are standing before our Rescuer and our King. We may have incredible and irresistible waves of love and adoration filling up our souls. We may be delighted to be standing before the One we cherish. We may want to give ourselves to Him as an expression of our gratitude and wonder. And we may want to join in with the millions who are praising God for all that He has done.

But we may find ourselves unable to speak, unable to sing, or even unable to write. We may find ourselves incapable of expressing the great joy we have at being in His presence. What might be the cause of this?

Unfortunately many people make a profession of faith in Jesus as their Savior, and that will enable them to stand in the presence of God, but that’s it for them. However, those who believe in Jesus are called to live out their faith in ways that touch the hearts and lives of others so that they may also claim Jesus in their lives. Yet many people think that attending worship meetings are all that is important, yet they go with their hearts remote and uninvolved. Many will do work for the Lord, but they do it out of obligation rather than praise to the Lord. Many attend studies and conferences and seminars, but never share what they have learned with others. They are nominal followers of Jesus who are more interested in the benefits of Christianity than the true worship of God. They have received their reward, but in God’s presence all their work will be burned up before His righteous gaze.

When that day comes to stand before Jesus, they will have no voice. They may have the most intense desire to worship, but they will not be able to do so. They had not lived so as to possess the currency for praise in the presence of God Almighty. They thought they were rich but will find instead that they are bankrupt, smothered under the counterfeit coins of self-centeredness.<sup>1</sup> They thought they were doing the work of God, but it was all for their own glory and their own credit.

That's why it is so important that we not only profess Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, but that we fall in love with Him, and live for Him, and work for Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, today. Then we will have the ability to worship and praise the Lord our God on that day when we come before Him. We will be able to lay our "crowns" down before Him, because we have first lived our lives conforming to His Word, even suffering for Him, all so that others might see Him in and through us, and they also rejoice in Him as they claim Him, too.

Folks, I want you to be able to not only stand before God, in His presence forever, but I want you to be able to join with me in worshipping Him, and praising Him, and glorifying Him for all that He has done. But the choice is yours. Only you can take that next step closer to Him as you uses this life to do the work He has for you. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life for us, not only here on this earth, but also in the eternity to come. And it is only through Jesus that we gain it. Let's pray...

Father, Thank You So Much for giving Jesus to us! He has shown us Your great love for all people. He has demonstrated the life that You desire all Your people to live. He has opened up the door for us to find eternal life. But we are the ones who must choose this day whom we will serve, be it the gods of this world, or to serve You, Lord God Almighty (Joshua 24:15). Thank You that Jesus modeled for us what faithfulness looks like, trusting in Your will and Your way. Thank You for getting our attention, allowing us to come to know You through Jesus. Help us to faithfully obey Your commands and follow Jesus in all we do and say, so that we might rejoice in You when He returns. Give us the courage to be bold in our faith so that others might come to know Jesus because of our witness for Him. This we pray today, in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.

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<sup>11</sup> (Robert Ras mussen, *Imagine Meeting Him*, [Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 1998], pg. 256-258)