

**Theme: Coming Soon: How Shall I Meet Him?**

We live in a culture where the wedding is all about the bride, and for good reason, she's definitely the better half. There's a growing fascination, even an obsession with all things bride—her veil and her dress and her shoes and her hair. You can watch these reality shows about brides spending weeks and months planning the perfect wedding and “saying yes to the dress,” and if things don't go according to plan, you can watch from a comfortable distance as they turn into bridezillas on the day. There's usually some humorous element of spite to the fact that while the bride agonizes over every last detail, the groom just shows up for the day, and hopefully he's got his tie tied right.

Today we have before us a wedding scene, but this wedding is totally the opposite of what we're used to, because at this wedding, it's all about the groom. The bride is there, but the groom takes care of everything, the clothes, the dress, the meal. He makes sure everything is just perfect! The only question the bride needs to consider is, “How shall I meet him?” That's the very question each of you, dear bride of Christ, needs to consider today. Since that day as well as the groom is coming soon, **how shall I meet him?**

Our text from Isaiah 61 eventually breaks out into a glorious wedding scene, but it didn't start that way. It actually started as more of a wake or a funeral, and the bride wasn't dressed at all for a wedding. Her face was smeared with soot and she wore sackcloth because this day started in captivity.

Throughout the book of Isaiah, the people of God and the city of Jerusalem are often referred to as a young maiden, “Daughter Zion.” Daughter Zion had been betrothed to her groom, but even before the wedding came, she went after other men and became unfaithful. The groom was devastated! He had lavished her with nothing but love and affection and faithfulness, yet it wasn't enough for her to remain faithful to him. **“See how the faithful city has become a prostitute! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her—but now murderers!” (Isaiah 1:21).**

The prophet Isaiah uses this metaphor of committing *adultery* to convict God's people of their *idolatry*, their running after other gods and their unfaithfulness and their disobedience to him. He had beckoned time after time to his bride, he had sent the prophets to call his people to repentance. But Daughter Zion wouldn't listen! She was captivated by all that that she laid her eyes on, the gifts that other men could offer her. **“The Lord says, about his people, ‘The women of Zion are haughty, walking along with outstretched necks, flirting with their eyes, strutting along with swaying hips, with ornaments jingling on their ankles.’” (Isaiah 3:16)**

What groom could bear to look at his bride covered in the gifts and trinkets of her heathen lovers? So for a moment his anger flared at his people, **“Therefore the Lord, the LORD Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, declares: I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross (the impurities from metal) and remove all your impurities.” (Isaiah 1:25).** There was nothing left for God to do than to let his bride feel the weight of her unfaithfulness. The bride had run after others and the groom was forced to send her off—off to

captivity! God's unfaithful people would now have to bear the consequences for what they had done.

**"In that day the Lord will snatch away their finery: the bangles and the headbands and crescent necklaces, the earring and bracelets and veils, the headdresses and anklets and sashes and perfume and bottles and charms, the signet rings and nose rings, the fine robes and capes and cloaks, the purses and mirrors, and line garments and tiaras and shawls. Instead of fragrance there will be a stench; instead of fine clothing, sackcloth. The gates of Zion will lament and mourn; destitute she will sit on the ground." (Isaiah 3:18-26).**

The wedding was off and the day began in captivity. God had brought a foreign army against his own people to lead them off in chains to captivity in Babylon. There they sat in darkness, poor and afflicted, captured by all that had captivated them. There they sat brokenhearted, knowing full well that the wedding was off and that their sins had separated them from the most faithful groom they could ask for.

Do you know that darkness, so thick you can feel it setting in on you? Have you felt the shackles of shame that bind you in a prison of your own making? Guilt that won't let go! The horror of it all, is that as terrifying as that prison is, it doesn't even scratch the surface of eternity in chains and deepest darkness, totally removed from the gracious affections of our God. Our deeds exchanged changed our wedding day for an everlasting funeral, furnished with mourning and weeping and gnashing of teeth.

All of this would certainly happen to us if it wasn't for this one thing—the groom remembers the vow he made to his bride, **"I have loved you with an everlasting love." (Jeremiah 31:3)**. Not even she remembers, and yet he rises from his weeping and he sets out on one last valiant conquest to chase his bride down and bring her back. Not some fairytale knight in shining armor, but the Son of God clothing himself in flesh and blood, taking on the very nature of a servant. He crossed the gulf of sin that separated his beloved bride in captivity. Nothing and no one could stand in his way!

The day started with God's people in mourning, destitute in captivity, but it doesn't end that way, because the groom is preparing the wedding once again. The Servant of the Lord is singing his song, **"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners." (Isaiah 61:1)**. In the darkness, your heart could not be consoled, nor your shackles shaken off, nor your guilt atoned for. But he proclaims good news to the afflicted and binds the broken hearted. He brings freedom and release for the captives in chains and deepest darkness.

He comes **"to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor."** (Isaiah 61:2) In the Old Testament, God had set apart every 50th year as something very special called the year of Jubilee. If someone had a debt, in the 50<sup>th</sup> year it was forgiven. If someone had been forced to sell their property, in the year of Jubilee it was returned to its original tribe. If people had been forced to sell themselves into slavery, they were freed! Just like that! Friends, we are not living

the gloomy pandemic year 2020, we are living in the joy of forgiveness and the everlasting year of Jubilee. Debts forgiven, inheritance returned, freedom for the captives!

Remember that bride, Daughter Zion, disgraced and destitute, sitting on the ground, covered in ashes and sackcloth. Now the groom comes to prepare his bride once again for the glorious day. He comes **“to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.” (Isaiah 61:3)**. This groom once again pours out his unending affection and exchanges her disgrace for a crown of beauty and the perfect dress, and at great cost! At the cost of his own lifeblood, you see, **“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 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.” (Ephesians 5:25-27)**

At this wedding, it’s all about everything the groom has done for his bride, and finally this is what changes her heart, what changes your heart. No longer can she run after others, for she has seen the lengths to which he will go to bring her back. Her heart now belongs to her beloved because of his longsuffering patience, his sacrificial service, his everlasting love.

Dear friends, this wedding is truly coming soon, and though we come empty-handed, we must still ask ourselves the question, **“How shall I meet him?”** when he beckons his bride to come to the wedding feast.

How shall I meet him- that heavenly bridegroom Jesus? With the heart’s song of the joy, for he has made everything perfect! Listen to the song of the bride that Isaiah records, **“I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as bride adorns herself with her jewels.”** This is one wedding where we don’t have to worry about what to wear, because the Lord Jesus Christ has purchased for us not just the perfect dress, but perfection itself, with his holy precious blood and his innocent suffering and death.

In the last chapters of Revelation, the apostle John mentions Daughter Zion’s glorious wedding day so that we don’t forget it’s coming soon. At Christmas we once again celebrate the bridegroom embarking on his glorious quest to save his bride, and on the last day the groom will call his bride to the wedding feast of the Lamb. John gives us a peak of that vision of heaven, **“I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.” (Revelation 21:2)**. Clothed in his garment of salvation, that is how we will meet him. Until that day, we sing his glorious song of praise. Amen!