

THE Best IS YET TO COME

Don't Forget Your Wedding

Peter Hartwig

“And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb.” And he added, “These are true words that come from God.”

Revelation 19:9 (NLT)

My dear NCC friends, this is Peter Hartwig. I'm back for day four of our conversation on eschatology. And I need to start off by giving credit where credit is due. I got the idea for today from Michael Ramsden, who is a British theologian and speaker.

Imagine that you run into a friend of yours, not an especially close friend, at Ebenezers when you go to get your Saturday morning cup of joe. You're in line together and you're just sort of chatting and you ask him, “Hey - so what have you got on your plate today?”

And your friend goes, “You know, I feel like I have something but I don't remember... otherwise, I think it's just a slow Saturday.”

“That's nice!” You say, “What's your fiance up to today? Is she here?”

And your friend turns white with panic when he yells, “Oh my gosh, I'm supposed to be getting married right now. My wedding was supposed to start an hour ago!” And runs out of Ebz.

That would be weird, right? It would be weird for someone to forget their wedding - for it just to slip their mind. But you know what I've noticed (and Michael Ramsden has noticed too)? When you ask people about what the Bible says about the future hope of the world - they almost never seem to remember that the Bible ends with a wedding. And that's a bit weird, isn't it? I, at least, am prone to think about final judgement, heaven and hell, the great reckoning. But there is also a wedding in there, designed to signify the great hope that God has planned for the world: the wedding of heaven and earth.

For the Bible to say that there is a wedding at the end is no small statement. No one eloped in the ancient world. Weddings were several day affairs. They were a whole community event. For the Bible to say there is a wedding at the end is to say that we should be looking forward to the end.

A lot of preaching over the years has tried to make people afraid of the end. It's tried to make the end something awful and horrifying - even for people who believe in Jesus. But there is this whole tone of voice about the end in scripture: a voice of excited, giddy, anticipation!

I wish I were less this way, but - to be honest - it can be hard for me to get excited about things that are entirely new. I think it's because when you're experiencing something totally new, you never really know what's going to happen. It can be fun or it can be hurtful and basically, it's just your imagination that fills in your expectations.

This is why I have never gone skydiving. I can't imagine myself hurling towards the earth in unhindered free fall with my stomach slinking into my throat and me feeling like "this is great!"

Now, maybe you're not like me. Maybe you love skydiving and so maybe you are all excited about the idea of the totally new experience of the end of history - the eschaton. But if you're more like me, you need some help. You need something to fill in your imagined expectations and give you some assurance.

For me, at least, that's what this whole wedding imagery does in Revelation. It gives me something to hold on to, something to be excited about. I've never seen the end of history before. I've never seen the defeat of death or the new heaven and earth.

But I have been to weddings. I've even performed a few. I know the anticipation of winding up to the wedding day. I know the joy of the service and the fun of the reception. I know the warmth of having everyone you love in one room. And I'm also a... I'll say, confident dancer.

I know all that. And it's helpful for me - maybe also for you - to know that at the end of time, whatever the Lord actually does... It will be like a wedding. It will be the marriage of heaven and earth. Tomorrow, we will look at Scripture's richest, most compelling vision of the eschaton. The end of Revelation.

Until then, I hope you find yourself looking forward to the wedding. Talk soon.

Has fear gripped your thoughts of the end? What would it be like to have a mentality of joy and celebration for the end of your life?