

Isaiah 41:17-20 (Opening)

- 17 *When the poor and needy seek water,
 and there is none,
 and their tongue is parched with thirst,
I the LORD will answer them;
 I the God of Israel will not forsake them.*
- 18 *I will open rivers on the bare heights,
 and fountains in the midst of the valleys.
I will make the wilderness a pool of water,
 and the dry land springs of water.*
- 19 *I will put in the wilderness the cedar,
 the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive.
I will set in the desert the cypress,
 the plane and the pine together,*
- 20 *that they may see and know,
 may consider and understand together,
that the hand of the LORD has done this,
 the Holy One of Israel has created it.*

Some of you know I enjoy watching the DIY channel on TV; probably too much.

One show in particular that I love to watch, and have my DVR record every time it's on, is Rehab Addict. The show follows the exploits of Nicole Curtis, a single mom who, as it says on her website "takes ramshackle homes from the wrecking ball to their original stunning glory." It's all about making the buildings look as much like they did back in the early 1900's as possible.

How do you make old things look new again, without making them look like they were made yesterday? Lots of hard work and knowhow; what my mom and dad used to call elbow-grease.

But what about this world? Can we get things back to the way they were supposed to be, the way God intended things to be?

Well, lots of folks will tell you the way to get things back to the way they were supposed to be is to stop all the pollution, stop damaging the environment, and start taking care of what we have been made responsible for. That would be great, if it would work. But I have a sinking suspicion that it wouldn't work.

Why don't I think it would work? Because mankind is broken; even if you could get a large number of people to care about the environment and taking care things, it wouldn't make things the way they should be. The way things should be is perfect, and we can't get it there on our own.

If you look at Genesis chapter 1, every time God creates something, he says that it's good. If it's good in God's eyes, it's perfect. On top of that, let's look at verse 31 in Genesis chapter 1.

Genesis 1:31

³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

God said that everything He made was very good; perfect. So why can't we get it back to that point? Because we're the ones who have messed it up; we ruined perfection. Since the fall of Adam and Eve, perfection has been broken, and we've been trying to get back to that point ever since.

Unlike those old Victorian houses, we can't restore the earth to its former glory; we don't have the power to do that. The power to do that belongs to Jesus.

After His death, burial and resurrection, Jesus stayed around for 40 days, explaining things to his disciples. They still didn't get it, though. In the book of Acts, chapter 1, we read this:

Acts 1:6-11

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." ⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Basically, the disciples say "Are you going to kick the Romans out now, Jesus?"

His answer to them seems to me to be something like “No, and it’s not for you to know when My Kingdom will be restored.” Then Jesus pointed out what they really needed to be worrying about; spreading the Gospel “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” He seems to be saying “Don’t worry about when I’m coming back. Just know that I am.”

We’ve been talking about Passover all this month, and this is the fourth and last sermon on that topic, for this year at least. First, we talked about the ten plagues in Egypt and Passover specifically, and how the Jews were brought out of Egypt. That’s the first of the four cups of wine in the Passover celebration, the Cup of Sanctification, or calling out.

The next week we talked about the actual Passover celebration as it is still celebrated today; the specific rules and regulations of the celebration, and what is focused on during the celebration. God delivered them from the hands of Egypt. That’s the second cup of wine in the Passover celebration, the Cup of Deliverance.

Last week, we tied the Jewish Passover Seder to the Lord’s Supper that we celebrate every week. I pointed out that the cup that Jesus said was “my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins”, and how even the Jews today say that the third cup of wine represents the blood of the Lamb that was painted on the doorposts, causing the plague to pass over those who trusted in and did what God said to do. This was the third cup of wine, the Cup of Redemption.

I also pointed out that Jesus didn’t drink the fourth cup of wine at the Last Supper. Jesus said in Matthew 26:29

Matthew 26:29

²⁹ I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

The fourth cup of wine, the Cup of Restoration, is based off Exodus 6:7

Exodus 6:7

⁷ I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

Isaiah writes about the restoration of God's Kingdom a lot; about putting things right. A good example is in Isaiah 11.

Isaiah 11:1-9

*¹ There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.
² And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
³ And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,
⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,
and faithfulness the belt of his loins.
⁶ The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;
and a little child shall lead them.
⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.*

- ⁸ *The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.*
- ⁹ *They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.*

Safety and security; peace and harmony; the way things were supposed to be, the way things were “in the beginning”. That’s obviously not going to happen just because there’s a change in government; it’s hard for the government to convince animals to live together without attacking each other.

On the day He ascended into Heaven, I’m sure the disciples thought they were finally going to get to share that last cup of wine with Jesus; that He was going to bring His Kingdom on that day. They were still expecting an earthly kingdom. But after being filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the disciples began to understand what Jesus had been teaching them; the pieces began to fall into place. They knew that Jesus was waiting for the time set by God for His return, to restore the new Kingdom, not the earthly kingdom they had all expected, but to renew everything. Peter explained it in Acts 3:19-21.

Acts 3:19-21

¹⁹ *Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out,*
²⁰ *that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,*
and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹ whom
heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about
which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

So what does this restoration look like? What kind of imagery does the Bible use to describe this relationship?

Well, the Bible refers to the relationship between the church and Christ as a marriage. Paul uses that analogy in Ephesians 5:25-27.

Ephesians 5:25-27

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

To tie this back to the Passover celebration, the Greek word that's translated as church in the most of the New Testament is Ek-klay-see'-ah. The literal definition of that word is "those who are called out", like the cup of Sanctification, the first cup of the Passover.

Let me add some to that. If you look at Exodus 6:7 again, God says "I will take you to be my people". The Hebrew word there translated as "I will take" can also be translated as "I will marry", as in to take a wife. God is promising that His people will be His bride. This is why sometimes the fourth cup of the Passover Celebration is called the marriage cup.

Israel was often referred to as God's bride; sometimes in a not so positive manner. Ezekiel and Hosea refer to Israel as an unfaithful wife, to put it mildly. John the Baptizer understood the relationship between Christ and the called out people, His chosen. In John 3:29, he explains to his disciples:

John 3:29

²⁹ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.

John compared himself to the best man at the wedding, with Christ being the bridegroom, and the church, His called out people, being the bride.

We really don't understand this whole wedding analogy, because our wedding traditions are very different than they were back in the first century in Israel.

The bridegroom would sometimes choose his bride, but sometimes she was selected by his father. If the bridegroom did select his bride, his parents had to approve of her before the process could move forward.

After the bride was selected, the father of the bride would be asked by the father of the bridegroom if the marriage would be acceptable. A contract would be drawn up, and the bride-price would be negotiated. Sometimes the bride-price was in currency, sometimes in livestock, and sometimes in an equivalent amount of labor. Jacob agreed to work for seven years for Rachel, and ended up working another seven years because his father-in-law tricked him by giving him the older daughter, Leah, on his wedding night.

So, once the contract was agreed to by both fathers, the bride and the bridegroom were considered betrothed, that is they were "spoken for". Betrothal held the same weight as marriage, without the aspect of living together. If the betrothal was to be broken, it would be considered a divorce.

Now, the bridegroom had to do whatever was required by the marriage contract to "acquire" his bride. If there was a specified bride-price, he would have to go and earn that amount of money to provide to the bride's father. The bridegroom would also go back to his parents' home and get living quarters made for when the marriage was finalized.

Once everything was completed, the bridegroom has completed the bride-price and the living quarters were ready, the bridegroom would get his friends together and go get the bride and her bridesmaids, and there would be a big ceremony bringing the bride to the bridegroom's house. Once there, they would have a huge party, celebrating the marriage.

Jesus alludes to this in John 14:1-4.

John 14:1-4

¹ “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ² In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. ⁴ And you know the way to where I am going.”

Jesus, talking to his disciples, talks about how as the Bridegroom He would prepare a place for His bride, the called out people of God, those chosen by God to be His bride. The price would be paid; the required work would be done to pay the bride-price. Once the place was prepared, He would return for His bride.

In the parable of the 10 virgins in Matthew 25, Jesus explains that the bride and the bridesmaids need to be vigilant, always ready for when the bridegroom would show up and escort them to the place prepared for them.

A big part of the marriage celebration was the ornate clothing that both the bride and the bridegroom would wear. The imagery of the Church, the called out people of God, being the bride of Christ is so powerful, John used it to describe the final restoration in the book of Revelation, chapter 21.

Revelation 21:1-4

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and

God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

That’s when the wedding feast begins. Once the bride and the entire wedding party arrive at the bridegroom’s house, the party starts.

Of course we have the example of the wedding feast in John chapter 2, the wedding that Jesus attended in Cana. Jesus’ first recorded miracle is turning water into wine at a wedding feast.

Jesus doesn’t share the last cup of the Passover meal with his disciples, the Cup of Restoration, or the Marriage Cup, because He won’t drink it again “until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” Not until the wedding celebration.

That celebration is described in Revelation 19:6-9.

Revelation 19:6-9

⁶ Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

*“Hallelujah!
For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.*

*⁷ Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;*

*⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure”—*

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

⁹And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."

Now, remember, in order to get to the wedding feast, as the bride, the bridegroom and His attendants come and escort the bride and the bridesmaids to the feast. But we need to be ready, as Jesus explains in Acts 1:7 "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority." In the meantime, we have work to do. That work is what Jesus finished Acts 1:8 with: "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

We need to be good witnesses, and let God do the work of the ultimate renovation, the total rehab of life and the world as we know it. Sometimes, the only way to fix something is to tear it down and start over again. The new Heaven and the New Earth will be the total Restoration of how life should have been; how it was before the fall; before sin came into the world. Once sin and death are taken care of, we will live forever in the perfect home that our Bridegroom has prepared for us, and share the cup of Restoration.

Revelation 22:1-5 (Closing)

¹ Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.