

How Beautiful the Bride of Christ!

✠ **We live together with God.** (vv.1-4)

✠ **We trust His worthy Word.** (vv.5-8)

✠ **We shine in His glorious grace.** (vv.9-14)

In the name of Jesus, our heavenly Bridegroom, dear Shane and Linda, loved ones all:

Sharing this day with you, your families and friends is a special joy for me. My wife, Cindy, and I just celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary. Looking back over the joys and sorrows, happiness and tears of this quarter century makes me all the more certain that the two of you are right where you belong today. God's Word to sanctify your marriage, the prayers of family and loved ones, God's blessing to be pronounced on you as you say your vows together – all are priceless blessings which many in our world never find. Love songs by some of my favorite artists who have provided some enjoyable slow dances with my bride at wedding receptions typically speak of “just the two of us.” But unfortunately both of us like both of you and every couple are two stubborn sinners whose best efforts could only earn for us the wrath of God. We could not know it if God didn't tell us, but **“all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”** (Isaiah 64:6) Which is why this particular wedding text is so precious because it lifts our eyes to the most wonderful wedding when Christ comes again on Judgment Day. Everyone who trusts in Jesus as his personal Savior is pictured here as the **Beautiful Bride of Christ**. Oh, **How Beautiful** as...

✠ **We live together with God.** (vv.1-4)

God loves us so much that He tells us to look at a beautiful bride and see how He thinks of us. Anyone who is honest knows we don't deserve this kind of treatment from God. Where is there a husband who every minute of every day cherishes and honors his wife the way we promise and sincerely want to on our wedding day? And where is the bride who faithfully cherishes and submits to her husband as promised if she has the courage to take such a vow in the first place. That word “submit” scares Americans in particular because it sounds so damaging to personal worth, so politically incorrect. Yet the very reason we can look forward to heaven in spite of all our selfish sins and open rebellion against our Creator is because God's own Son was willing to submit Himself to His heavenly Father's will and suffer our shame and guilt on the cross. As soon as we can see clearly this beautiful submissive love of Christ, we **“submit to one another out of reverence for Christ”** (Ephesians 5:21), and courageous Christian wives voluntarily **“submit to their husbands...as to the Lord...in everything.”** (Ephesians 5:22-24) Even more as my home pastor used to tell us, a Christian husband will make it easy for his wife to submit by loving her as Christ loved the church with His self-sacrificing *agape*-love, putting her first – her needs, her desires, her wants before his own – yet having the courage to stand up to her when he is convinced it is in her best interest to do so. A man can be a man, but only truly loving in Christ.

This does not sound logical to our human hearts. We're always asking, “What's in it for me?” The husband fears if he truly loves his wife before himself, she may take advantage of him. Any wife will naturally have the same fear that he may take advantage of her submission. Such fear caused the first couple, our first parents, Adam and Eve, to hide from God in the Garden Paradise of Eden. But the LORD God did not wait for them to find their way back to Him. He looked for them, listened to them blaming each other, and instead of crumpling them up like a piece of scrap paper, the LORD God promised to send a Savior, the Seed of the woman to crush the serpent's head. That Savior is Jesus Christ, scheduled to return at the exact moment determined by God to take home as the **Beautiful Bride of Christ**, everyone who believes and trusts in Him. There in perfection, **“as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband,”** **We will live together with God.** And **“He will wipe every tear from [our] eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”**

✠ We trust His worthy Word. (vv.5-8)

“Write this down,” He told John the Evangelist, *“for these words are trustworthy and true.”* The eternal God is speaking, the One who existed from all eternity and created us to live under Him in humble worship and praise. *He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!...”* This is so sure and certain that Jesus can say, *“It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.”* Christian women and men have this equal inheritance as sons of God. Eternal life is ours by faith in Jesus and every day our thirsty soul cries out for friendship and compassion, Jesus supplies them freely from an artesian well already flowing in His Holy Word, the Bible. Stoop down and drink and live. Linda, you need to keep on growing in the faith instilled by faithful parents and teachers all through your life. And, Shane, this window which God is graciously opening for us and you today is one through which He wants to pour the refreshing breezes of God the Holy Spirit in the Word. Let us all seek God while the window is open.

Most people hear these words as foolishness, just as the Lord says the sinful heart of man cannot understand and accept God’s Word. That is why I always pray not only for the words to say, but also for the people to have the ears to listen and the hearts to believe. In rebellion we, like our first parents, want to be equal to God or above Him. And many people seem to be getting away with it as theologians, pastors and churches the world over insist that a loving God would never damn anyone, that He will let people get to heaven by many different way. But the Son of God who says, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* (John 14:6 NIV), warns us here, *“But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”* The first death is when this body dies. But *“the second death”* is eternal hell for all who insisted on living without God or against God. There is no life that way. And those who refuse to say to God, *“Thy will be done,”* will eventually hear God say to them an eternal, *“Thy will be done. Have it your way cast out from my sight forever and ever. Your place is the fiery lake of burning sulfur.”*

✠ We shine in His glorious grace. (vv.9-14)

That’s why I’m so glad that Jesus died for me. God is truly gracious to show us first our sin and why we need a Savior, then give us so much hope and happiness that Christ died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. As a bride on her wedding day is radiant and beautiful, so God wants us to **shine in His glorious grace** in Christ. So John hears one of the seven angels say, *“Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.”*

See how this symbolic picture shifts? Now it illustrates the beauty of the bride of Christ like a gorgeous city set on a hill. If you look closely, Shane and Linda, this will take away all the fears you may have in marriage every time the Holy Spirit takes you away in God’s Word of **grace**. There are more details here than we have time to read. But the main one that impresses me for you today is the number and nature of the gates. Crusader castles built against Muslim *Jihad* a thousand years ago have a single very tiny gate easy to defend. And still they had to finally abandon these earthly cities. But the heavenly Jerusalem has twelve gates, three in each of four directions, each as a single pearl, and all of them will stay open in that eternal day when there is no night – because there is no enemy to threaten anymore.

It’s a picture of absolute security as **We shine in God’s glorious grace**. This is how our gracious God wants to bless you today, dear friends, not just the two of you, but three together with Christ. He wants yours to be a model marriage shining in brilliance that makes people want what you have. People need to see our **glorious** Savior who gives a man His undeserved love when He gives him a wife, and keeps on pouring out that love for every husband and wife who make Jesus the head of their life together. The closer you come to Him, the closer you get to each other as the **Beautiful Bride of Christ**. Amen.