

I know how your story ends.

After you suffer scars on your heart from the pain you will endure, after your own failures have robbed you of your confidence, after you know the cold loneliness of life and what it is to lose your most loved ones, when you have known what it is to travel life with tears as your most frequent companion, after all this ceaseless struggle, and unless Jesus returns first, you will die.

And then, you will open your eyes.

Imagine. Imagine a bride in her magnificent white dress walking down the church aisle to the man who waits, yearns to be her husband. And imagine how beautiful that bride is on that day – that no other woman in all of creation can compare to her.

Now take that beauty, and take the beauty of every bride who has ever lived or ever will live, and combine it into one shining, glorious moment.

And know that that moment doesn't compare with what waits for you.

In that moment when you open your eyes, you will know that truth that God designed brides and grooms as a picture, just an appetizer, of what waits in heaven.

You will stand under a bright sky on a green, green lawn.

And children will rush into your arms, squealing in delight to be reunited with you. And all eager, all laughter, all joy, they will lead you and say, "Come on! Come see the mansion built for you!"

And they will guide you into a city made of every kind of gemstone. And to our ears, that sounds so tacky, but not this! Here shines beauty.

And they will bring you to your home. And it will be beyond what you have ever dreamed for yourself. And you will ask, as we do when we are newly-arrived, "Well, what does this cost?"

And they will laugh and tell you that it is paid for already.

And then you will be reunited with those who have gone before you. And those who came after you! And tears will spring to your eyes, and just like that, they'll be wiped away in joy. And never again – *never again* – will there be tears. There will never be weeping. There will never be pain. The old order of things, the way that left scars on your heart and tears in your eyes, where you had to work so hard, the old order of things has passed away, and everything is new.

There is a river in that city. And the river is so clear. You've never seen water like this. It's the water of life.

And you see a tree that's growing on both sides of the river. There's fruit on it. And the fruit is pleasing to the eye in a way that you've never known food to be before. And you pluck it from its branches, and you bite into it, and the juice dribbles down your chin. And you laugh.

And then, you are taken to the throne to meet the King.

And you see around the throne such a number of people that you will never be able to count them – like stars in the sky or sand on the seashore. They come from every people – some look like you, but many do not, and it does not matter anymore, because everyone is praising the King.

And on the throne – there is the Lion of Judah, there is the Lamb of God, there is Jesus.

Hear the song that everyone is singing: “You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

And with your blood you purchased men for God.

And with your blood, O Jesus, you purchased *me*.

And you will join in that chorus with a voice that will never grow tired. And you will never be ashamed of that voice.

And you will sing, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise! To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!”

And they will lay out the feast: the wedding feast for the Lamb.

And this food is amazing. And the wine never runs out.

And every day it gets better. You can’t imagine it getting better than that first day, and yet somehow, it does. And it will.

Know this: you are here because you were bought at a price. Not because you made your own way. Not because you earned anything. But because Jesus purchased you with his blood. Because he chose to wash you and make you his own.

And now he is pleased that you are here with him forever.

And this will be said of you: “They are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb is at the center of the throne. He will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

And this story – *your* story – is true.

Revelation 5, 7, 20, 21