

The Church: The Bride of Christ

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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; ⁹ Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ¹⁷ The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. (Revelation 19:7, 21:9, 21:2, 22:17)

Are you a “wedding person?” In other words, are you one of those people who really loves to go to weddings, who gets excited when you get an invitation in the mail? Marriage is an institution that was established by God at the very beginning of time... at the time of creation. Weddings are meant to be joyous and also very serious occasions. But whether you consider yourself to be a “wedding person” or not, there is one wedding that you want to make sure you attend... it is the wedding of the Lamb of God and His bride. God is preparing a huge wedding celebration. He is preparing the bride for her bridegroom. Revelation 19:7 says that when the end of time comes, the bride will make herself ready, she will adorn herself for her husband. This is the picture, the portrait of Christ’s

relationship with the church that God wants us to see and clearly understand. This is God's final act of redemption – the eternal marriage of His son with his bride, the church. Today we are going to look at how God uses this picture of the bridegroom and the bride to teach us how much he loves us and why we should all be looking forward to our wedding day.

First, I want to lay a quick foundation. God teaches us in many ways. He uses stories, word pictures, parables, the intricacies of the creation... and many others. He does this to help us comprehend, at least in part, what is incomprehensible. God is so complex, so much greater than we are, so unlike us that it is really difficult, in fact nearly impossible, to understand His character and nature. God knows this and to help us at least partially understand His character and nature, God uses elaborate word pictures... life size dramas, designed to show us his works, his nature and his love for us. The Bible is filled with these pictures and when we come to understand them, as they are intended to be understood, God's incomprehensible nature, character and purposes become much more comprehensible. God wants us to know him deeply and intimately, so he uses these examples to teach us to trust Him and to be able to know Him in a way we could never understand otherwise. A good example is found in the history of the Hebrew people. In that history, which is real history... not a fable or parable, God tells the actual story of His people's establishment in Egypt through the imprisonment and rise to power of Joseph. God uses Joseph to teach us about his sovereign purposes, even in events that are purely

evil in their human intent. The short version of the story goes like this: Josephs' brothers hated him and sold him into slavery to get rid of him, he was taken to Egypt where he was falsely accused and imprisoned. Through a God driven set of circumstances, Joseph becomes the Vice President of Egypt... the second most powerful man in the nation and when drought hits, he not only saves Egypt from starvation, but his own family who came to Egypt in search of food. Then, at the end of Genesis in Chapter 50, Joseph tells his brothers, "You intended it for evil (when you sold me into slavery), but God intended it for good." Then, 400 years later as the Hebrew's were released from slavery in Egypt, God uses the miracle of the Passover and the death of all the firstborn children in Egypt to gain freedom for his people, but he also uses this event to predict the coming of the messiah, His son Jesus Christ who would be the ultimate Passover sacrifice. While the Passover would be the key to the release of the people of God from slavery in Egypt, Jesus would be the key to the release of all mankind from the slavery to sin and death. This is how God uses the sweeping movement of historical events, all under His control, to teach us lesson after lesson about his nature, his character and his purposes for his people.

Today we want to look at another very graphic, very clear word picture that God uses to teach us about His love for the Church. That picture is of the church as God's chosen bride. It is a word picture that runs throughout scripture, start to finish, and it is glorious.

The Bride In the Old Testament

God prepares the canvas on which he will paint this picture in Genesis 2:24, *²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.* Here, in just the second chapter of scripture, as a part of his initial act of creation, prior to the fall, God lays the foundation for the establishment of marriage. And it is in the institution of marriage that God begins to paint the portrait of the bride... a portrait that reveals the relationship between Christ and his redeemed people, the church.

The prophet Isaiah picks up the theme of God's people as His chosen bride. God speaks in Isaiah 62:1-5, *For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. ² The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. ³ You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. ⁴ You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. ⁵ For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and*

as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

This is a prophetic passage that speaks to the people of Israel, to God's chosen people. But make no mistake, it also speaks to the redeemed people of the Church of Jesus Christ... the redeemed people of God who have been reconciled by the blood of the Lamb. You will be righteous, kings will see your glory, you shall be a crown of beauty and a royal diadem in the hand of the Lord. No longer will be forsaken, no longer will you be desolate... now you will be called "My Delight Is in Her" and your land "Married". God rejoices over you!!! The almighty God of the universe, the creator of all things, the one who holds the world and all of creation in the palm of his hand... He rejoices over his people, the church. We bring great joy to our God. Out of his pleasure, out of his joy... he showers us with love, compassion and mercy. This is what it means to be the Bride. We are the people of God – the source of His rejoicing. You see, God loves His son so much and He is ecstatic at the thought of presenting him with the greatest gift He can imagine... a spotless bride. If you are having a hard time imagining this, think about the emotion of father who gives away his daughter at a wedding. This is a faint image of the emotion of our father as he prepares to give us, the church, to His son the bridegroom.

Now turn to the book of Hosea. God uses the book of Hosea to give us another look at the picture of a bride and her groom. This time he uses the

analogy to help us understand our unfaithfulness and his unbelievable mercy. Hosea is a prophet of God in the Northern kingdom. The Assyrians are about to come and wipe out the northern tribes of Israel. It had been a time of tremendous economic prosperity, but also a time of unparalleled idolatry. Does that sound at all familiar? God is about to bring judgment on the unfaithfulness of the people. To demonstrate the gravity of their sin, God commands Hosea to do something that you may find difficult to believe. I am sure Hosea found it hard to believe. It was something NO respectable Hebrew would do, especially a prophet of God. Look at Hosea 1:2. ² *When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord."* ³ *So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.*

God commanded Hosea to marry a prostitute. God did not ask Hosea to go rescue Gomer from prostitution and then marry her as a picture of His mercy. No. He told Hosea to go marry this woman while she was prostituting herself. His marriage to Gomer is a graphic picture of the immorality and idolatry of the people. They are just like Gomer. They are married to God yet they have committed adultery with other religions, the god's of the land, they have forsaken their husband, the Lord. Gomer and Hosea have three children. They name them Jezreel, No Mercy, and Not My People. Each name is pregnantly significant with meaning. Jezreel will

be the place of their demise as God brings an invading army of Assyrians. No Mercy describes the fury of God's judgment upon them and Not My People places them outside of the household of God... it is a picture of a people with no relationship to the God of their forefathers. They will be divided from God, shown no mercy and declared foreigners in the kingdom. God uses Hosea and Gomer, a real marriage, with real children, to paint a graphic picture for the Israelites and most importantly, for us. It is a picture of what happens when we disobey God, when we forsake and ignore God and his commands. But God's judgment is not forever, He is a God of restoration and compassion. Even as he judges his people in Hosea, God is about revealing his redemptive purposes for his people. In Hosea 2:19-23, after he pronounces judgment, God then announces his plan for ultimate forgiveness and reconciliation. And once again, he uses a wedding theme: ¹⁹ *And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy.* ²⁰ *I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord.* ²¹ *“And in that day I will answer, declares the Lord, I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth, ²² and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel, ²³ and I will sow her for myself in the land. And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people’; and he shall say, ‘You are my God.’ ”*

The Apostle Peter explains Hosea's prophecy when he says this in 1 Peter 2:9-10, ⁹ *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a*

people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

All through the Old Testament, God uses the picture of his people as His bride to teach us unfathomable truth... Marriage is God's way of teaching us about his love and care for us. He created man and woman and he created marriage as a permanent picture of how he is joined together with his people. The people of God are the bride of God and he is our bridegroom. God gave us the institution of marriage as a display of His loving kindness and mercy toward his people. God calls us righteous, glorious, a crown of beauty, a royal diadem in His hand. He takes great joy and rejoices over his people. God also disciplines his people. He is a very jealous God who does not tolerate other lovers, He demands faithfulness from his people. But he is also very merciful and forgiving. We know all of this through God's use of the imagery of marriage, with his people as the bride, in the Old Testament. But, there is more.

The Bride in the New Testament

The analogy of the Bride continues throughout the New Testament. John the Baptist refers to himself as a "friend of the bridegroom" in Matthew's gospel, and the Apostle Paul uses the analogy of marriage fidelity throughout his epistles to explain God's righteousness and to help us

understand what it means to “obey all that he has commanded”. Look at 2 Corinthians 11:1-3, *I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me!* ² *For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.* ³ *But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.* In this passage, Paul picks up on the theme of holiness and purity. He paints a picture of the church as a people who are engaged, or betrothed, to be married. They are the bride and God is the bridegroom. Paul is writing to the church at Corinth because he is worried that they have a wandering eye and may become unfaithful to their fiancée. Here we see a theme that is woven through all of scripture... the need for purity in the church. Paul uses the image of virginity to help us understand. I am going to try and pull this all together for you using this theme, this word picture as a tool.

Here is a question. Why did God institute marriage? Primarily, marriage is a picture that is intended to help us understand God and understand our relationship with Him. Marriage was not primarily instituted for companionship or for partnership or for meeting one another’s needs, even though these are important in a marriage. The ultimate reason that God created marriage was to use it as a canvas to paint a picture of how we, as his people are to understand his intentions toward us and how we are to respond, in light of his choosing us as his bride. That is why I think this issue of virginity helps us put this all in perspective. Have you ever

really thought about why it is wrong to engage in sex outside of marriage? Is it because there are some very real consequences? Is that why God has warned us to stay pure, so we won't experience the consequences of broken relationships or disease or unintended pregnancy? The answer is no, that is not ultimately why God has warned us to remain pure... not to engage in sexual relationships outside of marriage. God has a far more important, a far more compelling reason.

Here it is: God is a jealous God. Marriage is a picture of His desire to be in an eternal, monogamous relationship with us. Virginity is a clear statement of intent to remain pure until marriage. Remaining a virgin is how we declare our love for God and our desire to be in a relationship with him that has no other lovers. That is why we see statements in scripture like this one in Hebrews 13:4: *4 Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.* Adultery and sexual immorality are not pointed out because they are "worse sins"; rather it is because marriage is God's canvas and on that canvas he paints a glorious picture that reflects his desire to have us as his people and our desire to honor Him and be his pure and faithful bride. As Christians, we are betrothed, we are engaged, to God. We are his bride and he has no intentions of sharing us with the world. God asks us to declare our desire to be in eternal relationship with him through our purity. In this example, it is in the form of our virginity, as a declaration that there is no other God before Him. The church is the

bride of Christ. We are engaged to him. We are called to purity as a demonstration of our commitment to him. By remaining unstained and pure we glorify God by telling Him and the world that we value His love and His relationship more than we value the love of the world.

Marriage is not primarily for our good. Even though it is for our good. Marriage is an institution created by God to help us understand the beauty of His character, the purity of His nature and the faithfulness of his commitment to us. We are his bride and he is our bridegroom. This truth has huge implications as we consider how we should then live. When we realize that the glory of God and our marriage relationship with him is on the line, it will cause us to re-evaluate our way of life and our casual disregard for the institution of marriage and all that goes along with being the bride of Christ. Marriage is for God's glory. It is a picture of how he brings glory to himself through the human institution of marriage.

The Bride In Revelation - A Description of Our Future Hope

Finally, I want us to see the picture of the church as the bride of Christ in the great book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. In the final few chapters of Revelation, John paints a picture of the church and its marriage with the Lamb that is exciting and brings us so much hope. I want to read five verses. They are a combination of Revelation 19:7, 21:9, 21:2, and 22:16-17. Hear this, church... hear this bride of Christ, hear this and be filled with joy:

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; ⁹ Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ¹⁶ "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." ¹⁷ The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

The church is the dwelling place of God, the new Jerusalem. God is joining us together as one, in unity. We are being prepared, the scripture says "adorned", as a bride on her wedding day, readied for her husband. Then, in the final chapter of the Bible, at the conclusion of all human history, Jesus makes this statement, *"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."* Here is our confidence. Jesus sends his angel to assure us of his faithfulness. He is coming to the wedding, he has no intention of breaking off the engagement. He sent his angel to warn us, the church, about staying true to our bridegroom. In his mercy and compassion, he sends his angel to teach us, to strengthen us and not to destroy us. So, in light of that truth, the Spirit and the bride say, "Come."

And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And Let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires to take the water of life without price. Come to our wedding. Come into eternity with us, the bride of Christ. This is our confidence, this the reason that we can speak to all and invite them to be a part of the wedding, as the Bride of Christ. Jesus is coming for us, he will not back out, he will not fail to show up. We can confidently invite all who are thirsty, all who will listen... come to the wedding feast of the Lamb. And so, the book of Revelation ends with the same message that we heard at the end of Matthew. Do you see it? As the bride, we are the ones who speak the words of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, and say, “Come”. Come to hope, come to life. The wedding celebration is close at hand... come. Go make disciples of all people... it starts by inviting them to come.

Concluding Thoughts

The church is Jesus’ bride. He loves us so much, he rejoices in us. The church is the dwelling place of God. He is building us together, making us into a wondrous temple, His own dwelling place. God established the church, God will grow the church, God will protect the church and God will ultimately come back to earth for us and finalize His wedding plan. Nothing will stop him, nothing will slow him down, nothing will foil his purposes. Not sin, not demons, not Satan himself. We are the bride of

Christ and our engagement with him began when he established the church on the day of Pentecost.

While we are waiting for him to come and take us home, we have been given a mission. God's will is that the church grow... that it grow in numbers and that it grow in maturity. We have been given a task, a mission. We are to go into all the world, to all peoples, and make disciples of them. Each of us individually, and every church that bears the name of Jesus Christ has been called to make disciples. That is our mission. That is our work until the day of Jesus' return.

May he come soon, but until then, I pray that we spend our lives making disciples together. All to the glory of God...

AMEN.

Benediction

²⁰ Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, ²¹ equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. ¹

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), p. Heb 13:20–21

Endnotes: