

Sermon - On Marriage and the Bride of Christ

■ Opening Prayer

Last time we spoke, I talked about Agape Love. This morning I would like to talk about marriage. How many people here this morning know that the marriage between a man and a woman is a typology of the relationship between Christ and his Church?

We are the Bride of Christ.

Now to be honest, when I first heard this as a guy, I was having some serious issues with the whole gender thing. What I came to realize that what God is talking about is simply the most intimate of relationships. I believe that it is the imagery that we can see in marriage that has inspired our Lord Jesus Christ to use this symbol. He wants us to know how deeply he loves and cares for each one of us. He wants to relate to us as a husband to a wife. Jesus doesn't want a one night stand but a committed relationship. We all know that the role of the Holy Spirit is to draw us to Christ and birth in us his image. We spend a lifetime of growing closer to him, but the question arises, how does marriage and the church relate?

Marriage:

Marriage has been instituted by God to illustrate himself. How then does marriage illustrate the trinity of God? A man and a woman, come together in love and unity. They are two separate people, but they have vowed to pursue the same goals and have the same ultimate objective. Man, Woman and God form a trinity of marriage.

This trinity of unity is successful when the goals and objectives of all the participants are going in the same direction. I like to think of marriage as a triangle with God at the top. As we get closer to God, we get closer to each other.

Let's look at a parallel example that God has given us:

Consider the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is an example of three distinct personalities in one essence that form one unit and who achieve one goal. Their wills are never at odds with one another.

Marriage is a partnership. In Genesis 2:18 the bible tells us "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." This helper is to be someone who matches him, corresponds to him, and completes him.

I want to note here that this term is NEVER used in the bible to describe an inferior person despite the culture of the day.

When we read man we must be careful to perform proper exegesis of the scripture. For example:

God put man (male) in the garden of Eden

It is not good for man (male) to dwell alone

God caused the man (male) to fall into a deep sleep

Let us make man (Humans) in our own image

God created man (Humans) in his own image, ... male and female He created them.

Many times I hear this scripture misquoted to provide support for arrogance or control:

Ephesians 5:22-33

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Marriage—Christ and the Church

²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. ²⁴ Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

What I find astonishing is how so many of us cling to the first part and forget entirely the second.

“Wives submit yourselves to your husbands.”

Here is a challenge: Try saying this to your wife and see how it works out for you. “Submit yourself to me woman, I am the man of the house!”

In fact, do me a favour and don't do this... I am way too busy for all the funerals next week...

What I want you to notice here is that the scripture says: “Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.”

Here is a little secret to the success of my marriage. I never have an issue with my wife submitting to my authority, because I love her more than I love myself. When it comes to what we decide to do, I don't want to lord over her, but protect and nurture, to comfort and edify her. My wife defers to me because, I would not only die for her, but I will live for her as well. We are a unit. We function as a team, in unity. We discuss our goals, we communicate and we invite God into every situation in our lives.

Is everything perfect, no... but, it is a LOT closer since we have worked to apply God's principles for marriage in our lives.

Just as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one essence so are man and woman in relationship to God
The bible tells us in:

Genesis 2:24

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²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Matthew 19:5

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⁵ and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?

Mark 10:8

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⁸ and the two shall become one flesh'; ^[a] so then they are no longer two, but one flesh.

Thus we have a model upon which to base our relationship.

So how do we keep our marriage healthy and by extension how do we keep our relationship with God healthy?

Love!

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

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⁴ Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; ⁵ does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; ⁶ does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Sound familiar?

Nitpicking and Criticism

Ever notice that people nitpick at what is happening in their lives? Ever point out flaws or failings in your mate because you're frustrated?

Proverbs 27:15-16

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¹⁵ A quarrelsome wife is as annoying as constant dripping on a rainy day.

¹⁶ Stopping her complaints is like trying to stop the wind or trying to hold something with greased hands.

And to be clear there are many other scriptures, this is only one which speaks to the ladies but equally applies.

James 1:19 says:

My dearly loved brothers, understand this: everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for mans anger does NOT accomplish Gods righteousness.

Stop nitpicking each other - its annoying!

So what does God say about what we should do?...

1 Peter 4:8

New Living Translation (NLT)

⁸ Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins.

After all as his bride, isn't this what, our groom Christ, is doing for us?

Ever lost faith in what your spouse was doing, ever give up and feel like you don't want to go on? God says:

1 Corinthians 13:7

New Living Translation (NLT)

⁷ Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

I would assert that the quickest way to destroy a marriage is to never let your spouse forget about the mistakes that he or she has made in the past. The unfortunate truth here is that people often tend to become what you believe them to be. Your perspective will define the relationship. People will live up to or down to the expectations that you set for them.

It sounds simplistic but Christ has forgiven us and truly believes in us, that's the model for us.

What a difference it makes when a husband believes in his wife, not only seeing her for who she is, but who she can become.

"Have you ever said to your wife: "I believe in you, I support your goals and no matter what happens we will make it through this together."?"

In Isaiah 62:5b God speaks through the prophet:

Isaiah 62:5b

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⁵... And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
So shall your God rejoice over you.

Our culture breeds low self-esteem, low self-image and low self-worth into our wives. This occurred even in the days of Solomon. When I think of the Prince and the lowly Shulamite maiden, I see a parallel between the love of God in showing us that we are beautiful to him and having faith in us, he sees potential that we do not see. Let's take a look at Song of Solomon 1:1-17 and reflect on how we talk to our wives. Do we use a Godly model or do we need to seek to learn from the handbook God has given us?

Song of Solomon 1:1-17

New Living Translation (NLT)

1 This is Solomon's song of songs, more wonderful than any other.

Young Woman^[a]

² Kiss me and kiss me again,
for your love is sweeter than wine.
³ How fragrant your cologne;
your name is like its spreading fragrance.
No wonder all the young women love you!
⁴ Take me with you; come, let's run!
The king has brought me into his bedroom.

Young Women of Jerusalem

How happy we are for you, O king.
We praise your love even more than wine.

Young Woman

How right they are to adore you.
⁵ I am dark but beautiful,
O women of Jerusalem—
dark as the tents of Kedar,
dark as the curtains of Solomon's tents.
⁶ Don't stare at me because I am dark—
the sun has darkened my skin.
My brothers were angry with me;
they forced me to care for their vineyards,
so I couldn't care for myself—my own vineyard.
⁷ Tell me, my love, where are you leading your flock today?
Where will you rest your sheep at noon?
For why should I wander like a prostitute^[b]
among your friends and their flocks?

Young Man

⁸ If you don't know, O most beautiful woman,
follow the trail of my flock,
and graze your young goats by the shepherds' tents.

⁹You are as exciting, my darling,
as a mare among Pharaoh's stallions.

¹⁰How lovely are your cheeks;
your earrings set them afire!

How lovely is your neck,
enhanced by a string of jewels.

¹¹We will make for you earrings of gold
and beads of silver.

Young Woman

¹²The king is lying on his couch,
enchanted by the fragrance of my perfume.

¹³My lover is like a sachet of myrrh
lying between my breasts.

¹⁴He is like a bouquet of sweet henna blossoms
from the vineyards of En-gedi.

Young Man

¹⁵How beautiful you are, my darling,
how beautiful!
Your eyes are like doves.

Young Woman

¹⁶You are so handsome, my love,
pleasing beyond words!

The soft grass is our bed;

¹⁷fragrant cedar branches are the beams of our house,
and pleasant smelling firs are the rafters.

Can you hear the passion, the dedication and the love? Nuff said...

Our state as the Church

This next bit puts us in a bit of a bad light but let's collectively take a look at the truth, in love, one for the other.

As we look at the book of Hosea, God commands the prophet to marry a woman who is an adulteress even though she is unfaithful and leaves her husband. God commands Hosea to purchase her back from the slave market.

Can you see the parallel between where we have been in our relationship to Christ and his redemption of us at the Cross? Stay with me here...

In Hosea 2:19-20 God makes a promise in type to his people, "I will make you my wife forever, showing you righteousness and justice, unending love and compassion, I will be faithful to you and make you mine, and you will finally know me as Lord"

To really understand this completely, I want to take a side trek into the culture surrounding a Jewish wedding...

The couple was initially betrothed. They took part in a communion of drinking from the same cup together. After which the groom would leave the woman alone and go away and prepare a place for them to live. They would remain apart for this time. Then at an unknown time the groom would return to claim his bride. The virgins would wait with their lamps full for the sound of the trumpet. Then they would run out to see who it was that the groom was coming for. It was the father of the groom who determined when the place was ready for the groom to return for his bride. If the woman was not ready or prepared when the groom returned he could refuse to marry her. During the time of the betrothal the bride and the groom were to remain faithful to each other and maintain readiness and excitement in preparation for the wedding.

Parable of the Ten Virgins

Matt 25:1-13 (..and there are several whole sermons just on this, but another day)

“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ “Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’”“No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’ “But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. “Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’ “But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’ “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Do you see the parallel here between the wedding and the return of our lord and saviour Jesus Christ for his bride? Paul himself dealt with the church in Corinth about being an unfaithful bride. In 2 Corinthians 11:2 we read: “I am Jealous for you with the jealousy of God himself. For I promised you as a pure bride to one husband, Christ”

We need to come to a place where we are in preparation for the return of Christ. We need to be ready.

Like I said earlier, the gender thing originally really wiggled me out, but now that I understand it, I see a loving and glorious picture of an awesome relationship with my Lord. It is intimate but not sexual in nature, but... the intimacy with Jesus parallels that closeness. If you have never thought that you as the church are the bride of Christ, now is the time. It is truly a relationship to die for.

I will die to myself for the Love of the father. More importantly I will live in newness of life for him.

What has Christ done has raised us up from being peasant brides to brides without spot nor wrinkle, not because of our righteousness, which is ongoing in our process of sanctification, but because of the robes of his righteousness that he has clothed us in. It was his blood that purchased a garment of righteousness for us. This is a gown worthy of a royal wedding. In Isaiah 64:6 it says:

Isaiah 64:6a

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⁶But we are all like an unclean *thing*,
And all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags;...

In Isaiah 61:10 we get clarity of the picture further...

Isaiah 61:10

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¹⁰I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
My soul shall be joyful in my God;
For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
He has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
As a bridegroom decks *himself* with ornaments,
And as a bride adorns *herself* with her jewels.

Jesus loves us and desires an intimate relationship with us. I think by now we have scratched the surface of the parallel between God's institution of marriage and the relationship between Christ and his Church.

When couples come together to be married have you ever noticed how they become obsessed with the details in the preparation. They want everything to be perfect. The dress has to be right, the tux just so. I would suggest to you this morning that this is not to entice their partner to marry them but rather they want to look their best BECAUSE their fiancé is marrying them.

I would suggest that this is how we should think of ourselves as the church. We want our Lord to see clean thoughts and pure hearts. We want our lives to exemplify Grace and Love. We want to be desired by Jesus because he loves us.

Jesus already loves us and has shown it. We should want to be a bride without spot or wrinkle so that we please our Lord.

The bible tells us first the natural and then the spiritual. If the intimacy has fallen in your marriage relationship, it has probably fallen in your relationship with God too. If there is no intimacy in your prayer life, look at your marriage.

I urge you, if you are married to examine your wedding vows and be honest with yourselves...

Ask yourself:

Am I really doing all that I promised? Am I loving, honoring and cherishing my spouse. Am I forsaking all others? Am I loving him or her in the good times and the bad? Am I loving him or her in sickness and in health? Are we being loyal and devoted?

Now are we applying those same concepts to our relationship with God?

If the answer is no to either question... open your handbook.

I conclude with a quote from John Milton the blind poet who so eloquently wrote:

Come forth out of thy royal chamber, o Prince of all the kings of the earth, put on the visible robes of Thy imperial majesty; take up that unlimited sceptre which Thy almighty Father hath bequeathed thee. For now the voice of thy bride calls thee, and all creations sight be renewed.

Prayer.