

The Church as the Bride of Christ various Scriptures

Introduction –

- **Thank you to Tom Foreman for filling in last week!**
- We've been doing a series on the church and right now, we're working through the various metaphors or analogies that the New Testament uses for the church. Basically we are talking about 4 ways that the Bible talks about the church:
 - The BODY of Christ
 - The BRIDE of Christ
 - The BUILDING of Christ
 - BELONGING to Christ
- And today we are going to talk about the church as the BRIDE of Christ.
- There is basically just one thing that you need to know about the Biblical metaphor of the church as the bride of Christ. If the church is the bride of Christ, then JESUS is the Bridegroom!!!
- And that one thing means several things...

1. If the church is the Bride, and Jesus is the Bridegroom, then the church is the beloved of Christ!

- a. **Ephesians 5.25** says it most simply - "He loved her and gave himself for her."
- b. This means that Jesus sees the church as beautiful!
 - i. The passage that was read for us earlier, **Psalm 45** is about an ancient Israelite royal wedding. And it is interesting that nobody is really sure which royal wedding it is actually about! There have been some who think that it would have been about Solomon's wedding to the daughter of Pharaoh, but that doesn't seem quite right because Solomon shouldn't have married a foreign woman. Others have thought that maybe it was about King Ahab marrying Jezebel. But that certainly doesn't seem right because they were such a horrid couple.
 - ii. And since Hebrews 1 applies the first part of the passage to the beauty of Christ, I think that it is right for us to apply the second part of the Psalm to the church, the bride of the King! Listen again to **verses 13-15**:

¹³All glorious is the princess in her chamber,
with robes interwoven with gold.

¹⁴In many-colored robes she is led to the king,
with her virgin companions following behind her.

¹⁵With joy and gladness they are led along
as they enter the palace of the king.
 - iii. Would you use the words "all glorious" to describe the church? Jesus does!
 - iv. We should never cease to be amazed that Jesus sees the church as beautiful! Here's what I think is going on, just like with our spouses, we can choose to focus on the positive qualities or the negative qualities, Jesus chooses to focus on the positive! Sure, there are plenty of negative things about THE church and about THIS church, but if you could ask Jesus what he saw, the first thing out of His mouth would be the positive!
 - v. But not only does Jesus SEE the church as beautiful...
- c. This also means that Jesus makes the church beautiful!

Ephesians 5:25-27 – ²⁵Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷so 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.

- d. I want you to notice how Jesus is the one who sanctifies the church and cleanses the church. It is Jesus who presents her to himself. But then also see the results of Jesus' preparation of the Bride. The bride described "in splendor", "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing", "that she might be holy and without blemish".
- e. Jesus prepares the Bride, presents the Bride, and receives the Bride. Of course, the thing to remember is that the church is still in the "preparation" stage. The church is being made to be holy and without blemish. She is still being sanctified.
- f. But there are two other things that we need to point out. First of all, I want you to notice these words in **verse 26** "... that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her..." Jesus has already cleansed the church by His work on the cross! Even though we see all the spots and wrinkles, from Jesus perspective those are already forgiven and forgotten!
- g. And then in **verse 27**, I want us to notice the words "... in splendor..." This Greek work is related to the word for "glory". When that word is used for God it often means the inner, hidden character and glory of God. When it is used for the church in this context it means that although the church doesn't appear glorious at the moment, Jesus sees the inner character that He is forming in the church, He sees the inner holiness that He is fashioning, and when He returns, all of that inner glory will be revealed openly, and He will present to Himself a Bride radiant with splendor! The church has a glory that may be hidden now, but will blossom when Jesus returns!
- h. **Application** – What are some specific applications for how Jesus sees the church as holy and is making the church holy?
 - i. Even if we don't see the church as beautiful Jesus does and we should seek to adjust our vision to His.
 - ii. Now of course, I also realize that Jesus is incredibly honest about the real condition of the church. In Revelation, Jesus calls the churches to repent. Some of them are lukewarm, others have lost their first love, others have compromised with false teaching, and others have compromised with immoral living.
 - iii. But at the same time, Jesus loves the church. Remember how I mentioned that if we asked Jesus about the church, the first thing out of His mouth would be positive. There are several examples of that in the letters to the seven churches in Revelation. Jesus commends them for their positive qualities if He possible can.
 - iv. **Illustration** – One time a pastor was complaining about the church. And then he got a mental image of himself approaching the groom at a wedding and telling him "boy your bride sure is ugly!" Can you imagine actually doing that! But that is what we are doing to Jesus every time we complain about the church.
 - v. Now, when we consider this we need to think carefully. The church is not perfect, not yet anyway! Jesus knows that better than anybody. So Jesus' love for the church is what I would call an "honest love". And we need to reflect that honest love in our own perspective on the church. We don't have pretend that the church is something that it isn't. But our love for the church can be like Jesus'. Jesus' love for the church is a love that longs for the church to be sanctified (set apart just for Him), and holy (pure and righteous). So our love should reflect that Christlike love. We should love the church deeply, but we should long for whatever in the church that is not holy to be made holy!

- vi. And then, when we see the church with sin and immaturity and division “wrinkling” her skin, then we should remember that the only part of the church’s maturity and holiness that we can control is our own! We should pursue the beauty of the bride by pursuing our own holiness and spiritual growth!
- vii. And then finally, we should remember to look for the encouraging glimmers of splendor and glory in the church. Rejoice when you meet those people who love God with all their heart! When we see sacrificial love among believers we should celebrate!
- viii. May the Lord give us an honest love for the church that longs for the holiness of the Bride of Christ!
- i. **Transition** – But now we should be asking ourselves, what should our response to the love of Christ be...

2. If the church is the Bride and Jesus is the Bridegroom, what should the response of the church be?

- a. **Well first of all our response should simply be love.** Our hearts should be thrilled with the reality that Jesus Christ has set His affections on us!
We should recognize that we absolutely do not deserve his love and that His grace is truly amazing because it is so undeserving!
And then we should also respond to the love of Christ with...

b. faithfulness and fidelity – 2 Corinthians 11.2-3

2 Corinthians 11:2-6 - ²I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. ³But 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. ⁴For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. ⁵I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. ⁶Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.

One of the things that we have to understand about this passage is that Paul is rebuking the Corinthian church for tolerating things that would steal away their purity. He uses this same metaphor of the church being a bride to Christ and he doesn’t want them fooling around with other lovers before he is able to present them to Christ as a pure virgin. And the amazing thing is that this desire of Paul’s to present the church as a pure bride to Christ is in the context of preserving the Corinthian church from the influence of false teachers! Of course there are many other ways that the church can soil herself, and compromise her faithfulness to Christ, but the context of this warning is compromise with false teaching. Paul is just amazed that they would turn away from the simplicity of Christ and the Gospel for something else.

- c. **Our response to being the Bride of the Lamb in the end will be joy, exultation, and glory!!!**

Revelation 19:6-8 - ⁶Then 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.

⁷Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,

for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;

⁸it was granted her to clothe herself

with fine linen, bright and pure"—
for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

We will not be somber at the wedding feast!

- **Illustration** - I realize that sometimes there are tears at weddings. But if the bride and groom are all serious and somber, then something is WRONG!

- Our response to being the bride will be JOY! I think that we will be rejoicing that the process is finally done, we are actually as holy as we were meant to be.

- I think that we will be glad and exult in God because the whole process has been of His grace.

- And I think that we will give God great glory for all that He has done.

d. **Application** – So are we loving Christ with all of our hearts, are we faithful to Him, and is our joy in Him! Are we just delighted to be part of the bride of the Lamb?

e. **Transition** – And the final thing that we need to know about the church being the bride of Christ is that...

3. The Bridegroom is coming!

a. Now let me kind of set this up by saying that the idea of the church being the bride and Jesus being the bridegroom always rides beneath the surface. It is a metaphor after all. The real meaning that is behind it is the intimacy and love between Christ and His followers. That is the real issue and what receives most of the emphasis in the New Testament.

b. So some of the passages that refer to the bride or to the Bridegroom are a little oblique. One of them Matthew 25. As Jesus is teaching the disciples about the signs of the times that will precede his coming, he concludes with some parables regarding faithfulness and preparedness. Let's read...

Matthew 25:1-13 - ¹"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, ⁴but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. ⁶But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' ⁷Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' ⁹But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' ¹⁰And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. ¹¹Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' ¹²But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' ¹³Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

c. Now of course in this particular parable the Bridegroom is Jesus Himself, but we are compared either the bridesmaids that are prepared or we are the ones that are not!

d. Several points are important:

- The Bridegroom is coming.

- The delay may be longer than expected. (This is one of the few places where Jesus gives the apostles a hint that He may be gone longer than they think.)

- The point is to be ready! And when this speaks of being ready for the coming of the Son of Man, it is talking about be saved! The oil is not good works that somehow would prepare us for the coming of the Lord. The point is the contrast between those who are ready and those who are not. Those who are not ready are shut out of the marriage feast. And they are shut out not because the Bridegroom is harsh, but because they refused to trust in Him during all the time that they were given to prepare themselves.

- e. What is extremely important for us to realize is that being prepared for the coming of the Lord is a very personal thing! The foolish bridesmaids couldn't borrow oil from the wise ones. And we cannot borrow faith from someone else when we face the Lord. Only those who trust in Christ alone for the forgiveness of their sins are ready for the coming of the Bridegroom. Are you ready for His coming?
- f. And then, the flip side of the preparedness is anticipation! Jesus is coming will mean judgment for those who reject Him, but the greatest possible joy for those who receive Him!
- g. Jesus has made a promise to return, and our hearts should sing out with a holy "yes, Lord come!" Listen to **Revelation 22.20** – "he who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!"
- h. When the Apostle John was putting the final words into his amazing book, he couldn't let the ink dry without adding his own heart cry of anticipation for the coming of His Lord!
- i. **Application** - As we consider the Bride and the Bridegroom and the coming of the Lord, we certainly should be asking ourselves whether or not we are ready for His coming. But we should also be asking ourselves if we are excited and thrilled by the prospect of His coming!

Conclusion – So as we close today, we should consider...

- How do we see the church, the Bride of Christ? How do we see this church? Do we see the negative or the positive? What do we choose to focus on?
- And then, what is our response to being the Bride of Christ?
 - Do we love Him with all of our heart?
 - Are we faithful to Him or are we flirting with other pursuits?
 - Is our joy and delight in Him?
- And then finally are we ready for His return?