

Called Out:
The Bride of Christ
Revelation 19:6-8; 21:2, 9; and 22:17

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Text Introduction: I wanted to take us on a short three week doctrinal survey of the church. Our primary focus has been some word pictures that the New Testament gives to the Church. We have observed that as a church, we are the building of God. We have observed that we are the body of Christ. Today, we note that we are the bride of Christ.

Text: 19:6-8 Then I heard something like the voice of a vast multitude, like the sound of cascading waters, and like the rumbling of loud thunder, saying:

Hallelujah, because our Lord God, the Almighty, has begun to reign!

⁷ Let us be glad, rejoice, and give Him glory, because the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has prepared herself.

⁸ She was given fine linen to wear, bright and pure. For the fine linen represents the righteous acts of the saints.

21:2 I also saw the Holy City, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband.

21:9 Then one of the seven angels, who had held the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues, came and spoke with me: "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

22:17 Both the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" Anyone who hears should say, "Come!" And the one who is thirsty should come. Whoever desires should take the living water as a gift.

Introduction: I still have a lot to learn about being a pastor, but I've learned a few things along life's way. For example, I've learned to ask more questions about weddings. The very first wedding I was ever asked to perform was announced to be held at a hotel. I met with the couple several times but had never really inquired much about the hotel. As it turned out, I had assumed way too much. See, I had the ignorance to believe that since they had told me that the wedding was going to be at this particular hotel, that they had told the hotel that the wedding was going to be at the hotel. But, they had not. They just liked the spiral staircase in the hotel's lobby and thought it would be a wonderful idea to walk down that spiral staircase and have a brief ceremony in the lobby of the hotel. What makes that story even more pathetic is that the hotel was hosting a Loggers Union Meeting at the same time. The sign outside said so, "Welcome Loggers Union #???"

Fortunately, most other weddings have been beautiful ceremonies with more proper decorum and rich symbolism.

As you probably have heard or assumed, weddings in the first century were quite different from today. In fact, weddings in the first century were not the kind of scheduled events that they are today. The

wedding occurred rather spontaneously when “everything” was ready. And by “everything” we mean the dowry price that had been agreed upon by the bride’s family and the groom’s family.

We never get the exact phrase “the bride of Christ” but the imagery of the Church as the bride of Christ is throughout the Bible.

- The analogy of a bride and groom is first used by Prophets (Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, for example) to illustrate the relationship between God and Israel. Interestingly, the analogy is almost exclusively used in the context of unfaithful Israel as an adulterer against God.
- The analogy is used by both John the Baptist and Jesus (in parables) to describe Jesus’ relationship with believers.
- The analogy is used by Paul in two moving and profound passages. One is Ephesians 5 where the primary subject is marriage between man and woman. The relationship between Christ and His Church is the point of the comparison. The other is 2 Corinthians 11:2. We ought to hear this verse: “For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy, because I have promised you in marriage to one husband—to present a pure virgin to Christ.”

Why this analogy? The analogy of the Bride of Christ points us to a . . .

Pure and Sanctified Relationship between Jesus and His Church

- Tells us something about Christ.

This analogy points us to covenant love—the grace-filled love with which Christ loves us. His love is perfect. His love is more patient than we could ever deserve. His love is proven. He sacrificed Himself for us.

- Tells us something about the Church.

Our love for Him is to be pure and sanctified. Our love for Him is to be with equal. Our love for Him should have no rivals.

Our love for Jesus, unfortunately, is like the love that some brides have. That is, some brides are in love with the idea of being married more than they are in love with the groom. It cannot be. It must not be.

After the resurrection of Jesus, Peter and the rest of the disciples, not sure of what all was happening, went fishing. Jesus met them, allowed them to catch fish, and started a fire to cook breakfast for them. In that scene is where we get that famous conversation between Jesus and Peter. “Peter, do you love Me?” Notice Jesus’ question. Jesus was not asking if Peter he loved being a disciple. Jesus did not ask, “Peter, did you love being with Me on the Mount of Transfiguration?” Jesus did not ask, “Peter, did you love walking on the water when I called out to you? No, Jesus asked, “Do you love Me?” And it is the question He asks us again today.

If you ask a lot of people today what best communicates love, many people would say, “time.” That is one way to ask about our love for Jesus. How much time have you spent with Jesus this week? Not just doing “Jesus things” but literally just being with Jesus.

A second unique point to the groom/bride analogy is this.

Perpetual State of Readiness for the Church

Marriages of ancient times had two distinct phases—engagement and marriage. The engagement phase was just as binding as the marriage. A divorce was required to get out of the engagement. That is why the Bible records of Joseph about Mary, “He made plans to divorce her quietly.”

What should characterize this interim period?

- Purity (21:2)
There is the tension about our getting ready and our being ready only by the grace of Jesus. We keep this tension in our lives. We are saved by God’s grace. We pursue purity by God’s grace. At the same time we pursue holiness by our own free will choice to be pure. We pursue holiness. We discipline ourselves to pursue the things of Christ.
- Praying (22:17)
We mark this interim period by longing for Jesus’ coming.
- Preaching (22:17)
We mark this interim period by inviting others.

So What?

Think about a wedding. Three questions are important.

- Are you madly in love?
- Are you prepared?
- Have all the guests been invited?

Those same questions are important when we think about being part of the church—the bride of Christ.

Joni Erickson Tada tells the story about her wedding day. For those of you not familiar with the name, Joni is paralyzed and therefore was coming down the aisle on her wedding day in a wheelchair. Two things happened to her that day. First, she got her dress caught in the wheel getting grease on her dress. Second she got her bouquet stuck in the wheel smashing her bouquet. Joni says she forgot about herself—the grease and the bouquet—when she saw her husband, Ken. Joni then says that this is the way it is with Jesus. We all come with grease on our clothes and smashed bouquets, so we must look to Him—Jesus!