

Being the Bride of Christ

Scripture: Eph 5:21-33, Rev 21:2

Sunday, June 28, 2020

Last Sunday we looked at the metaphor for church as the Body of Christ. As you know when the word “church” is used, you can mean church with a small c which is the universal church or the total of all churches that ever existed or Church with a capital C that refers to a particular local church like the Argentine Mennonite Church. So when you look at the five metaphors we are examining from the New Testament we have to also be clear about which “church” metaphor is being referred to. In last week’s metaphor, the body of Christ, I believe the metaphor works both at the local level and the universal level. Picture it like a large triangle that is made up of smaller triangles.

Today, the metaphor we are going to meditate on is “the bride of Christ”. This is a metaphor that functions at the level of the universal church. The Bride of Christ is the whole church put together, not any one individual local church. Fair enough? Now we typically don’t spend much time thinking of this metaphor except when we are at weddings and the Ephesians 2:22 to 33 passage is chosen. Now this is a beautiful passage that talks about how the wives should honor their husbands and submit to them in everything. In the culture we live in, many men might take it as license to lord it over their wives and many women might jump up in horror and get all defensive and say that they are equal to any man so why should they submit to any man. But this passage cannot be properly understood without its context and without the Holy Spirit’s help. So if you are listening to this and have difficulty with this passage please do two things. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you and secondly, let me finish laying out all the blocks so you can judge the finished product and not the construction site 😊 So getting back to our

marriage analogy, if you think that what Ephesians 5 asks of wives is not fair, look at what it asks of husbands. The command to husbands is ***“just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing^[a] her by the washing with water through the word,²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives”***. Oh blimey! Take that you husbands. That is a bar so high that you will have to wear your sun glasses to look up to even see it, let alone trying to vault over it.... And then Apostle Paul says, ***“This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church”***. Now this metaphor is not like other metaphors because actually it is more than a metaphor. There is something real to it. And it is real enough that you can use the Christ-church language to understand Biblical marriage or you can look at Bible marriage to understand the relationship between Christ and the church. It is so profound that Apostle Paul calls this metaphor a mystery. And we are going to dwell on this mystery to wrestle with our understanding of church. So in the passage we are looking at, there is a lot about what Christ has done in the relationship right? Let me list it for you. 1. Christ has loved the church. 2. He gave himself up for her 3. He has washed her through the Word 4. He has made her without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish. 4. He made her Holy and blameless 5. He has then presented her as a radiant church to himself

All that is on Christ. Most of us believe all of it. But the question is, if Christ did those 5 things, what is the other side's response, right? Because that's where we come in. What should the church do in response to all that Christ has done for her?

That is where the Christian marriage analogy is helpful to ponder. What we have in this passage is that the church should submit to Christ in all things. If you look at the submission passage in this context, it seems so powerful because it is drawing us into something that is so much bigger than ourselves right? Now before I go on,

I need to clarify, the Christ-church status at this moment in history. Right now, the church is not yet the “bride of Christ” but the “betrothed of Christ”. That means the church is engaged to Christ and not yet married. But even as one engaged to Christ, the expectations in the relationship are very clear.

Let me point out three things. The first thing is that, being engaged, the church should be **faithful** to the One she is engaged to. This is not the time to be going crazy with other people with wild parties because your freedom is coming to an end. No no no! When you are engaged you are already spoken for and you have eyes for no one else. The church is spoken for people. The church belongs to Jesus Christ and Christ alone! So the first thing that should come to mind in the church’s relationship to Christ is her **faithfulness**.

Now you are engaged because something incredible just happened to your life before the engagement right? You are engaged because this man came into your life and told you that of all the woman in the whole wide world, that he has eyes only for you and so will you marry Him, right? Now you as a woman, I presume 😊 thought about all the things you know about this man who is asking you the question and all the things he has already done for you up to that point, and as you pondered all those things, you said yes, am I right? You said yes because you admire this man. Now remember, when I say you, I am talking to you as part of the universal church. So when you think of the fact that He asked you of aalll the people in the world he could have asked because after all He is the King of kings, and then He has gone out of His way to transform you from a nobody to royalty, isn’t that deeply **humbling**. So humility, after faithfulness I believe is the next quality that is birthed in one who is engaged to Christ.

Finally, when you are engaged, you have a calendar somewhere in your house, don’t you, on which you mark off the dates? Because you know that the best is yet to come. Soon there will be a glorious celebration where you will look more beautiful than you

have ever looked in your whole life. And after the big celebration, your life is going to get a massive upgrade. After all you are about to marry not just anybody but the king of kings. You just cannot get the big day out of your mind. It has become what you think about in the day and dream about at night. Everything in your life is now filled with **anticipation**. So when you are engaged, you are not just faithful to the one you are engaged to but you are humbled by the very thought of marrying the king of kings and finally your life is filled with anticipation of the big day and everything after that.

If these three aspects (FHA) are the effect of this engagement on the church, then how does this play out for each one of us who are part of the universal church. Let's take it one at a time.

A **faithful** church I believe does not deviate from the wishes of her Lord. That means we as a church are not to be enamored by other voices. There are many voices out there calling us. There is the voice of the culture that says, "gender is a spectrum", Jesus says, "have you not heard that he made them male and female"? There are voices that says, "fight for your rights", Jesus says, "love your enemies" and "my kingdom is not of this world so I will not fight like the people of this world". Culture says "it is all about what you want", Jesus says, "if you hold on to your life you will lose it, but if you are willing to give up your life for the sake of the kingdom it is result in so much new life". If we are going to be faithful to Christ, we have to be faithful to his wishes. To be faithful to his wishes, you have to know well all the wishes of Jesus, not be distracted or enamored by the culture and you will even be willing to stake your life on what Jesus wants. That is what it means to be faithful to Jesus.

Secondly, when we are aware that Jesus Christ has chosen us as his beloved, we as a church can have two reactions to this. One is pride and the other **humility**. This is a danger that we have to be extremely aware off because this situation has happened

before. You remember when God chose Israel as his beloved, instead of living out the purpose of this blessing, which was to be a blessing to all the other nations, Israel chose instead to be prideful about its special place in God's eyes and felt and acted superior. As a result, it did not focus on its mandate of "being a nation that blesses all the nations of the world". This very same danger has always been facing the church of Jesus Christ through history and even today. In the United States, it looks like the church is more worried about its superior position in this nation with its special, rights and access to power than about its faithful witness to Jesus Christ. When we realize that Jesus Christ has chosen us not because we are better, but because we won the lottery with Christ then we will not be prideful of our specialness, but humbled by our chosenness. Then in our humility, our question would not be what we deserve now, but how we can in all humility serve as ambassadors to this world of our great King. Our humility should be the consequence of understanding that we are not Christ's church because we deserve to be but because we won the lottery. In Biblical language that translates to the grace of God. Understanding our undeserving status really I believe will help us to be humble in it.

So as the betrothed of Christ, the church has to be uncompromising in its faithfulness and humbled by being chosen. But there is one more think that is important. The church has to have that glow of **anticipation** of Christ's return. Now you might say, how does that translate to what we can do now. Let me explain. When you see a glow on someone's face because they are dreaming about a different world, you are seeing a glimpse of the world in which they have one foot already planted in.

You see when you know that a new future is coming you do things differently in the present don't you. For example when my wife moved to Alabama she hardly bought any furniture for her apartment. She had borrowed a few things from people here and there and bought just one or two things. So when it was time to move we were able to pack

all of her stuff in one mid-sized sedan and still have place for the two of us to sit in it for our 3 day trip up here. So let me put it this way. If the church, the betrothed of Christ has one foot already in the future that is to come what is the one thing she would do differently in the present? Think about this for yourself but since I am preaching right now I will offer you my opinion and you can take it how you want.

I believe that the one thing she would do differently is not worry about avoiding possible persecution at all costs. You see when you take a stance for Christ, the state is not going to be happy at all points. Because sometimes the values of the state and that of the church are going to clash. When that happens, the state will either try to buy the church's favor or if that does not work it will persecute the church. This sounds all very unpleasant. But let me tell you that if our heads are sufficiently filled with anticipation of the glorious riches of Christ's kingdom that is coming in all its fullness, then any pain of persecution we bear now will be overshadowed by the glorious visions of the new world to come. A world which will be illuminated by the glory of Christ and ruled by the fullness of Christ. A world where beauty will abound and there will be no room for evil.

That new era will of course be inaugurated by the "wedding feast" of the lamb of God with the church his bride. This will be a time where the church, you and me will get to see Jesus face to face and be in His glorious presence for all eternity. If we are to fill our minds with all that is good and true and pure and praiseworthy, what is better, truer and more praise worthy than filling our minds with the New World Jesus is preparing for us. So if our minds are fully set on the future that God has prepared for us, the one thing that we will do differently in the present is not worry about the persecution we might face in the present when we take a stance for Christ. If we are the betrothed of Christ, we have to live in giddy anticipation of the future God has prepared for us. Like when Stephen the martyr was stoned, did not focus on protecting himself but prayed for the

forgiveness of those who stoned him while he looked into the heavens and glimpsed at the glory that was awaiting him.

If we are the betrothed of Christ my friends, we will be marked by unwavering faithfulness to our Lord Jesus, humility in speech and action in being chosen by Christ and finally a giddy anticipation of the glorious future that awaits us even overlooking earthly pain or even persecution that might come upon us at any time. May we live, and move and have our being in our identity as the betrothed of Christ, the one who has saved us from sin and is coming again in glory to take us into a brand new world. Let us pray.