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The Church Is the Bride of Christ: Part 1

The Glory of the Bridegroom

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 11:2-3

Sermon Series: *What is the Church?*

Topic: the Church, the Glory of Christ



2 Corinthians 11:2-3 (ESV)

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.

Ephesians 5:25-27 (ESV)

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

Revelation 19:6-9 (ESV)

Then 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. 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; ⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. ⁹ And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."

Doctrine: The Church is the bride of Christ. The church is those who love Jesus.

Introduction

There are many ways in which the Bible speaks about the Church. Thus far, this fall, we have seen that,

1. The Church is a **people**, not a place. The Church is the community of all true believers for all time.¹
2. The Church is **called** community - those particular people whom God has called to Himself, to enter into and enjoy "the fellowship of the Son" (1 Cor. 1:9).
3. The Church is a **spiritual** community. The Church is those people who have been awakened by and received into themselves, the Holy Spirit of Jesus.
4. The Church is an **apostolic** community. The Church is those people who faithfully hold to teachings of the apostles, who were the men to whom Jesus entrusted his own teaching and whom he commanded to teach to all nations.
5. The Church is a **defined** community - those who have publicly identified themselves as followers of Jesus and then formally attached themselves to a local gathering of fellow believers in Jesus for the purposes of spiritual growth and service.
6. The Church is a **disciplined** community - those who train themselves and one another to live obediently to the teachings of Christ.

¹ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), 853.

7. The Church is the **body** of Christ - those in whom the Spirit of Christ dwells and together who are a living manifestation to the reality of the resurrection of Jesus. The church is living proof that Jesus is living.
8. The Church is a **persevering** community - those whom God, by his grace, sustains in faith to the end. God has enriched the Church with knowledge of Himself, equipped the Church with every spiritual gift, and established the Church in faith, firm to the end.

The Church is the Bride of Christ

All of these truths are edifying and encouraging. However, none of them are sweeter than the teaching that **the Church is the bride of Christ**. This is the truth that we will consider today. We see this taught in several places in the NT. Let's look at three examples.

The Church in Corinth

Paul teaches this very clearly to the church (i.e. the community of true believers in Jesus) in Corinth.

2 Corinthians 11:2-3 (ESV)

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.

Paul is writing this to all true believers in Jesus at Corinth. He describes their coming to faith in Jesus like a pure virgin being betrothed to her husband. The husband is Christ and the pure virgin is the Church. Notes his primary concern. He fears their "*sincere and pure devotion to Christ*" might be "led astray." Just as a bride is sincerely and purely devoted to her bridegroom, so the church is to be sincerely and purely devoted to Jesus. Why? Because in a spiritual sense, the Church is the bride of Christ.

The Church in Ephesus

Paul teaches the same truth to the Church at Ephesus.

Ephesians 5:25-27 (ESV)

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so 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.

Paul uses the language of love and marriage as a means of describing the relationship between Christ and the Church. He reminds husbands to love their wives because the way in which a husband loves his wife is to be a visible representation of Christ's invisible love for the church, which is his bride. Christ's love for his church is deeper than his love for his own life! Christ so

loved the Church that he “***gave himself up for her.***” Paul means that ‘he gave up his life for her’ on the cross. When Jesus died on the cross, he died for the Church. Jesus died for the Church, because the Church is his bride, whom he loves more than his own life.

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

And one day Christ will marry his bride before his Father and the whole host of heaven in what is called *the marriage supper of the lamb*. The coming together of Christ and his bride, the Church, will be the highpoint of human history and the consummation of all ages. This is the great crescendo of all creation. Through the apostle John, God has given us a glimpse of what this day will be like.

Revelation 19:6-9 (ESV)

Then 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. 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; ⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. ⁹ And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.”

Will you be there at that celebration? Have you received and accepted God’s invitation to that great day? This is the celebration toward which all of time is moving. This will be the greatest wedding party in whole span of human history. This will be the sweetest supper since the foundation of the world. All of heaven and its innumerable hosts will shout with joy and exultation because the marriage of the Lamb and his Bride is now unfolding. Heaven will sing and angels will dance for Jesus and his bride, the Church, are now coming together to celebrate the “marriage supper of the Lamb.” Blessed are those who are invited to this grand supper. This day will be the happiest day any human will ever know; the day when Jesus and his Bride, the Church, celebrate their marriage. ***The Church is the bride of Christ.***

The Glory of the Bridegroom & the Beauty of the Bride

There are two implications of this great truth. The first concerns the glory of the bridegroom and the second concerns the beauty of the bride. We will consider the first today and the second next week. Today we will contemplate the glory of the bridegroom and next week we will consider the beauty of the bride. Today, I invite you to meditate on the reasons why Jesus is a glorious bridegroom. Next Sunday, we will consider the reasons why and how the bride ought to beautify herself in preparation of meeting a glorious bridegroom.

The Glory of the Bridegroom

The Church is the bride of Christ. A faithful bride loves her bridegroom, thus the Church is those who love Jesus. Christians are those who love Jesus and are singularly devoted to him. Church, do you love Jesus? Why? Why should you love Jesus? For what reasons should you be sincerely and purely devoted to Christ? There are many reasons to love him. There are many reasons why Jesus is glorious. The aim of this sermon will be to set before the eyes of your mind and heart, the glory of Christ.

The Glory of His Physical Appearance

Let's begin by considering his physical appearance. Is Jesus glorious because of his physical appearance? Do we know what Jesus looked like?

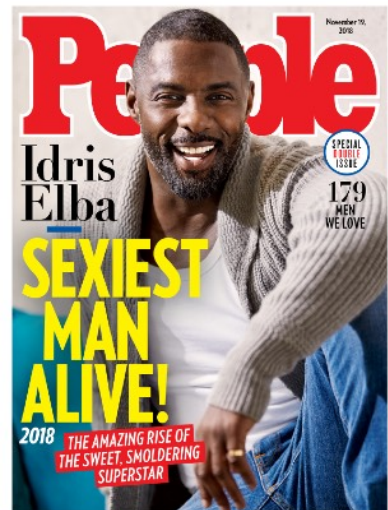
I think that, if you were to ask most people to describe a glorious bridegroom, at the top of the lists would be physical appearance. If you were to stop 10 women on the street and ask them what qualities they would look for in a glorious bridegroom, I suspect that 8 out of 10 would say first, "Well, he'd have to be gloriously good-looking!"

Like Idris Elba good-looking.

People magazine concluded last fall that Idris Elba was the most gloriously good-looking man alive.

What does Jesus look like? Does he look like Idris Elba?

Jesus does not look like Idris Elba, but he is gloriously good looking. He is not glorious because of his unblemished, perfectly formed physical features. He's been through too much hell to look like Idris Elba.



Being beaten in the face by a whole troop of Roman soldiers leaves marks on one's face.² Being blind-folded by the high priest's guards and then repeatedly punched in the face by each of them (while they mock him by say, "Tell us who hit you"), does not leave one's face without blemish. Having thorns pressed into your head with a staff does not leave beauty marks.³ It leaves terrible scars.

Isaiah 52:14 (ESV)

As many were astonished at you—
his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance,
and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—

² Jn. 19:3.

³ Jn. 19:4.

In other words, *Jesus was so badly beaten that he didn't even look human*. His face was so disfigured that he didn't look like a man. But hey, wait a minute, Jesus now has a glorified body, so won't all those unpleasant, facial blemishes be erased from his face? What did those who saw him after his resurrection report to us? Those who saw him after his resurrection testified that he still bore—even in his glorified, resurrected body—the marks of the wounds that caused his death. The scars of the nails and the spear in his side still remain in his glorified body. They eyewitnesses who saw him after he was resurrected reported to us that his body still retained the physical evidence of the brutality he suffered before he died. Therefore it is not unreasonable to assume that some scars might remain even on his face, his arms, his legs, his neck, and on his back (from the flogging and other abuse).

No, Church, Jesus does not look like Idris Elba, but Jesus gloriously good-looking.

He is gloriously good-looking because the wounds and scars remain as eternal reminders of all that he suffered and endured for the sake of his bride, the Church. Throughout all of eternity, when I look into the scared face of Jesus, I will be reminded that his wounds brought me healing and freedom. When I look into his eyes, I will be reminded that the blows that disfigured his face were the blows that I deserved to have land on my face. The prophet Isaiah says of him,

Isaiah 53:2 (ESV)

He had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.

No, Church, Jesus does not look like Idris Elba, but he is gloriously good-looking. For, when I look at him and behold the cuts and scars on his arms and legs, I will see there the cuts and scars that he bore *for me*. The lacerations on his back are stripes that ought to have landed on mine! When I look upon the nail prints in his hands and feet I will, for all of eternity, be reminded that *his* physical suffering paid the price of *my* sin. Even in heaven there will be ever present reminders to the Church, his bride, that he was *pierced for our transgressions and for the iniquities of the Church, he was crushed*.⁴ It is by his death alone that I—you and me, Church—are able to receive the gracious gift of eternal life with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

No, Church, Jesus does not look like Idris Elba, but he is gloriously good-looking. He is infinitely more glorious looking than Idris Elba. The looks of Jesus are more glorious than the looks of Idris Elba just as the brightness of the sun is more gloriously than the light of little, twinkling Christmas tree light.

If there is heavenly equivalent of People magazine, then Jesus deserves to be on the cover every year for all eternity for he alone is the most gloriously good-looking bridegroom who has

⁴ Isa. 53:5.

or will ever exist. Not because his face and body are without scars or blemishes, but precisely because his face and body still retain the scars that remind us of the price he paid to purchase eternal life for his bride, the Church—for us!

Jesus is gloriously good-looking not because he has a perfect face and body, but because the face and body he does have is a perfect reminder of the price he paid to secure the eternal freedom and life of his beloved bride, the Church. By earthly standards Jesus' face is nothing special to look at. However, by heavenly standards, there is nothing else worthy of looking at. Jesus is glorious because of his physical appearance.

Because He First Loved You

Second, Church, consider the glorious fact that he loved us before we ever loved him. Another reason to love Jesus is ***because he first loved you***. The apostle John says it this way,

1 John 4:19 (ESV)

We love because he first loved us.

Our ability to love God results from his love first being poured out within and upon us, through the gift of his Holy Spirit.⁵ Before any of us ever decided to love Jesus, he had already decided to love us. Jesus loved us even while we were his enemies.

Romans 5:8 (ESV)

God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

While we were living in active rebellion against Christ, he was laying down his life for us. Jesus died for us before any of us had ever even given him a second thought. While we were all hostile in our minds⁶ toward God, living our own lives, and doing our own thing, Jesus had already loved us and demonstrated that love by dying for us. Therefore, ***our love for him is predicated upon his prior love for us***. We love him because he first loved us.

My first real girlfriend helped me understand the power of this truth. At the beginning of my junior year in high school, as happened every fall, I came down sick with strep throat. This happened before she and I started dating. We went to the same church and I knew who she was, but we weren't close at all and I really wasn't interested in her.

However, while I was sick, she stopped by my house. She didn't ask to see me. She only dropped off a get well card and left a small bag of Hall's cherry cough drops. I don't know if she knew this or not, but I loved Hall's cherry cough drops. I used to suck on Hall's cherry cough drops even when I wasn't sick, but when I was, I always had one

⁵ Romans 5:8.

⁶ Romans 8:7.

in my mouth. I would go through a bag a day when I was sick. Who wouldn't? There's about 197 grams of sugar in each lozenge. It's like sucking on a small glucose pill.

But she surprised me. Who was this girl? Who on earth would take the time to come visit me when I was sick, and write such a kind note, and bring me such wonderful sweet elixir? After reading her note and enjoying a soothing, sinus-clearing, cherry cough drop, I resolved that, as soon as I was back on my feet, I would make it my aim to seek out this young lady and discover more about her.

The point is this, *it was her interest in me that drew me to her.* Before I ever sought her out, she first sought me. Before she showed kindness to me while I was sick, I never thought twice about her. But after she visited me, then I wanted to visit her. The same is true of Christ. Before we ever loved him, he first loved us. Before we ever do anything for him, he has already done everything for us.

Before we ever lay our lives down for him, he has already laid his life down for us. Before I ever knew his name, he already knew my name. Before you, Church, were ever affectionately disposed toward Jesus, Jesus was already affectionately disposed toward you! Long before we ever loved him, he loved us, even while we were lost in our sin, and enemies of God, he proved his love for us by dying for us.

Is there anyone on planet earth any more glorious than that? Is there anyone more worthy of our love, our sincere and pure devotion, than that great and glorious person who loved us before we ever loved him? Who is the great and glorious Bridegroom who loved us and gave himself for us, even while we were his enemies? Who is the glorious Bridegroom named Jesus? Do you love him? Is your devotion to him sincere and pure?

Because of His Glorious Power of Provision

A third reason to love Jesus is because of *his glorious power to provide for his bride.* Jesus has all the power of glory in order to provide for his bride, the Church, whatever she needs.

Philippians 4:19 (ESV)

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Many in the Church know this verse and can quote it. However, it is often misquoted and used like some magic spell that is thought to guarantee success in whatever you decide you want to do. And even more people know and can quote the sentence that comes just a few verses before this one.

Philippians 4:13 (ESV)

I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

This phrase is so popular that Under Armor has adopted it as a t-shirt campaign. If you look at the t-shirt, you'll notice that "...through him who strengthens me," part is missing. I suppose that's too much to fit on a t-shirt. Beware of getting your theology only from t-shirts. It is very incomplete.

These two verses are often used only to apply to the successes in life, as if God never plans to teach us anything through failure.

There is a contemporary brand of so-called "biblical" teaching that only applies these verses to the moments and seasons of victory. However, the larger context of these two verses needs to be in order to fully understand what Paul is teaching.



Philippians 4:11-13 (ESV)

I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Notice the context. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. I can be humbled and brought low, through him who strengthens me. I can be exalted and abound, through him who strengthens me. I know how to endure hunger and plenty, through him who strengthens me. I can endure poverty and wealth, through him who strengthens me. I can endure disease or perfect health, through him who strengthens me. I can do both, because he provides me the strength to do both. I can faithfully endure success or failure, through him who strengthens me. Through him who strengthens me, I can rejoice when I get the acceptance letter from my first-choice college and I can endure the rejection letter. I can faithfully endure unemployment through him who strengthens me and I can faithfully endure the blessings of employment.

Through him who strengthens me I can faithfully endure the difficulties of being single when I want to be married and through him I can faithfully endure the difficulties of being married when I want to be single. Through him who strengthens me, I can do all things. I can feast or I can starve. I can be alone or be with many people. I can succeed or I can fail. He is with me through it all and by the blessings of his abiding presence and sustaining grace, he provides me the help, support, endurance, and strength to endure whatever it is this is his great and good purpose for my life. By whatever means, I will glorify his great and glorious name.

Sometimes our Lord teaches us that the presence of his grace during seasons of difficulty is sweeter and more glorious than the absence of difficulty. This is the one of the deepest reasons I love Jesus. He has never abandoned me. He has always provided for me, whether it be through the joy of success or the sorrow of failure.

Jesus will never leave his bride. Jesus will never be unfaithful to his Church. He keeps his wedding vows and never breaks them. Jesus is the most glorious bridegroom of all bridegrooms. To look at his face and body is to see the costly proof of his glorious and costly love. He loved his bride before his bride ever loved him. He loved the Church and gave up his life for the Church before the Church was even the Church. His love for his bride is glorious. Jesus has all power to provide for his bride.

I invite you to set aside time to contemplate the reasons that you love Jesus. During this 24 Hour Prayer Watch this past Saturday, this is what I did. I simply sat down with my journal and asked myself, "Why do you love Jesus?" I wrote 23 reasons why I loved him and then I ran out of time. You just heard three of them. Make time this week to get alone with him and consider the reasons for which you love him. Write them down. It's a sweet spiritual exercise.

Trust in his provision.

Fall into his love.

Rejoice in his scars.

Glory in name. You, church, are his bride and he your glorious groom!