

Series: Church Matters

Preached @ ECCC by Grant Peers on 19th February, 2012

Scripture: Eph 5:22-32

INTRODUCTION

If we want to be the church that Jesus has called us to be we have to first understand who we are. Foundational to the church is the picture of her as the Bride of Christ. Now weddings are beautiful! The wedding day is a cherished memory in the minds of the couple. An overwhelming amount of preparation and time and money goes into this very important day – two become one and a new life begins!

If you really want to understand what it means to be the church that God wants us to be we need to understand a foundational picture that Paul gives us. What does it mean that we are the bride of Christ and what does it mean that he is our bridegroom.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

Paul starts this passage by explaining the roles and responsibilities that husbands and wives should have in marriage (23-24). This morning we are not so much concerned with this, but with the picture of the church that we get here. And the interesting thing is we will see how dissimilar it is to the pattern of marriage in the world.

1. CHRIST LOVED US BEFORE WE WERE ATTRACTIVE

Now that is not the way you choose a wife nowadays.

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her

Notice the word order here. It says that he 'loved' first and then 'gave' himself; and because he gave himself he would make her holy, he would cleanse her, she would be a radiant church without stain or wrinkle – holy and blameless. In other words because he 'loved' her she became radiant and beautiful.

So Christ didn't choose his wife the way we do. *If you're a guy you pick up a bridal catalogue and order one – mail order bride! No, we look for someone who is attractive to us, who is intelligent, and faithful. That is how I chose Joanne – she is the most beautiful girl in the world.* But Christ chose an unlikely woman who was not attractive, or intelligent, or faithful and made her those things at the cost of his life.

One of the most tragic books of the OT is the stories of Hosea. It is a horrible story, it is a story that should not be, it is wicked and mournful. The story is told in the first three chapters of

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the book and the last 11 chapters is an explanation of the story that is painted in the first three chapters. Hosea lived and wrote at the time of the demise of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Here is how the book starts out:

Hosea 1:2 (NIV) When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD."

Hosea 1:2 (MSG) The first time GOD spoke to Hosea he said: "Find a whore and marry her. Make this whore the mother of your children. And here's why: This whole country has become a whorehouse, unfaithful to me, GOD."

Hosea marries a woman called Gomer. She is unfaithful to him with other lovers. She has children and they are called names that mean "not loved" and "not my people". You see Hosea is actually writing to the Northern Kingdom of Israel who has a 300 year reputation of unfaithfulness and infidelity towards God. The tension is do we find protection, loved, freedom and provision under the hand of God Almighty or do we seek the blessing of Baal and the protection of a foreign powerful nation?

Just as marriage is deeply personal and absolutely exclusive so is their covenant with God. God has endured frequent devastating and sickening episodes of unfaithfulness. They openly mock the faithfulness of God by choosing idols over the Almighty God of the universe. Now I mean this in the nicest way possible: we are Israel – the wife of unfaithfulness and adultery. We love and serve idols hoping that they would provide the satisfactions, hope and meaning that only God can.

Free love

The love of Christ is a free love. It is **not** the word 'love' for sexual passion between husband and wife, **nor** the word 'love' for a friendship love, but the word for selfless, self-giving love. It is the love of Ephesians 2:4-9

In other words God chose a dead woman as a bride for his Son. And a dead woman does not start by fulfilling conditions. First he has to be raised from the dead – and that required the death of the Son to bring the resurrection of the bride.

Distinctive love

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The great theological tragedy for the church is that Christians have learnt to enjoy a love from God that is no more precious and peculiar and enduring and distinguished from the general love that God has for the world¹. *Think about it like this: I am married to my lovely wife, Joanne and God intend her to experience a strengthening, caring, reliable, self-giving love is different from the friendly and general love that I show towards other women.* In other words the love of a husband to a wife is distinguished from that shared with other woman and the wife must know and experience it!

I have heard Christians say, “God love all his children”, by which they mean that God loves every created person the same, but they are wrong. God does have a general love for all his creation, but his children are the ones he has adopted as his own through the substitutionary death of his Son.

And so experiential tragedy, and great source of weakness for the church is that she treats the love of God in a general sense and not in a specific, unique, peculiar way. Christ loved us before we were attractive to him, in fact while we were unattractive to him he loved us with a distinguishing, regenerating, covenant love – and so we have this love shed abroad in our hearts and the Spirit testifies that we are the children of God and we have the precious and immeasurable and immense promises of God to support our hearts. When the marriage love is weak - the church is weak.

2. CHRIST GAVE HIMSELF FOR THE CHURCH

Again today the general way in which most men win their wives today is by romance and fast cars. More like the traditional African way, Christ won his bride by paying a dowry. To be the bride of Christ means that you not only were loved with a free peculiar love, but with a self-sacrificing love by which he dies for us. No very romantic – but very real!

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her

Even more than that, listen to:

Roman 5:7-8 & 10 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us... 10 For if, when we were God's

¹ J. Piper, in the sermon “Beautifying the Body of Christ”

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enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

So while we were still helplessly lost in our sin the Bible says we were ungodly and enemies. In other words he died not only for an unworthy woman but for a reluctant woman, who found his repulsive!

So think about it as Jesus dies on the cross, as he gives himself in love – the powerful saving, cleansing, sanctifying, beautifying effects of the cross were for a fiancée who was not only unattractive, **but** who found Christ repulsive **and** who had no intention of marrying him.

3. CHRIST GAVE HIMSELF TO CLEANSE THE CHURCH

In a third way the marriage between Christ and the church are not like the picture perfect wedding from Top Billing is that the bride is filthy. Today brides dress in an ornate and beautiful white gown, looking glorious, and parade down the aisle for your moment of in the sun. *I have done a few weddings: today they popular thing to do is to let your bridesmaids enter first to one piece of music. And they must get all the way to the front. There is then a pregnant pause as a new piece of music starts – and all on her own (except for her father) she enters – dada...*

Read [Ephesians 5:26-27](#)

But not so for Christ: we were dirty with the guilt and the moral filth of sin over us and inside us. We were not only: (1) unattractive and not beautiful, (2) enemies and not friends, but also (3) filthy and not clean. He bathed us to make us clean before an all holy God. His blood was spilt so that we could be cleansed. The pinnacle of Christ's work on this earth is his death – because God is pleased "to look on him and pardon us". He has given us eternal reconciliation. *Protex, Lux, Sunlight, Lifebouy have got nothing on Jesus.* We are eternally made acceptable before a holy God.

CONCLUSION

You know what I want to do now – I want a button that I can push that will just supernaturally flood your hearts and minds with a far deeper and more real and more pervasive sense of the love of God – the cleansing, giving free love that is ours in Christ. I want you to that love and grace to flood over your life in a healing and wooing way – that whether you are feeling distant or dirty or sinful or hopeless or desperate – you would find him and sense his power and presence.

Come to the front – not for prayer but as an expression of faith