

Lake Cities Community Church
Ecclesiology 101
Pastor Craig Schill
June 1, 2008

“The Bride of Christ”

I heard a speaker at a marriage conference a few years ago talk about how our culture’s yearning for love can be heard in our songs. For example....

All I need is love, love, love – love is all I need. I just want to hold your hand. But, you’ve lost that loving feeling, you’ve lost that loving feeling and its gone, gone, gone wo-wo-woe. I’m all out of love – I’m so lost without you! I love you, you love me – we’re a happy family – with a great big hug and a kiss from me to you. Won’t you say you love me too? Love me tender – love me true – love is a battlefield – Can you feel the love tonight? I just called to say – I love you and I mean it from the bottom of my heart! This feeling is like no others – I want you know! I never had someone who knows me like you do – the way you do! They say our love won't pay the rent - before it's earned our money's always spent. I guess that's so we don't have a lot - At least I'm sure of all the things we got. Babe -- I got you babe -- I got you babe!

Ah love! June is the month of love isn’t it - the month of marriages! Wedding anniversaries. For Tammy and I it will be 18 years on June 9th. Hard to believe how fast time goes. I have us thinking about love and marriage because those are the two dominant themes in our sermon this morning as we look at the metaphor of the church as the Bride of Christ.

Last week we saw the church as a body – the very temple and dwelling place of God. Next week we will examine the church as the Body of Christ, and the following week – the church as a family.

But our metaphor today *is the most surprising* of all the metaphors of the church. Because in 1st century Greek and Roman religion - the concept of gods and love did not compute! Serve the gods? Sure. Fear them? Of course. Sacrifice to them? Required. But love – no way! C.M Bowra in his book, *The Greek Experience* said, “Men in Greece may respect the gods and make friends of them, but there is nothing that can strictly be called a love of God.” I really enjoyed a particular seminary class on Bible cultural backgrounds. Dr. Joseph Fantin had a similar explanation of the traditional Roman religion of the day. Regarding any type of personal connection with God, he said, “Emotions didn’t really matter; there were no feelings required. The worshiper had no relationship with the deities.”

But, in sharp contrast – the Bible tells us that the church – the *ekklesia* –is the bride of Jesus Christ! And right next to that picture – the Bible trumpets the fact – *God is Love and God loves You!* Where is true love found? In the church! And if you let it – it will change your life.

Let’s begin, first looking at Christ’s love for his bride, second, the Bride’s love for Jesus, and third the future union of Christ and His Church.

Christ’s Love for His Bride

I’ve noticed in Scripture at least five characteristics of Christ’s love for His bride. Romans 5:8. says , “**God demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us**”. Because Christ’s love was expressed while we were sinners we see that **Christ’s love is a gracious love**. Grace means undeserved – unmerited. Christ’s bride

was smelly, and unattractive and rebellious. His love was a one-way street. The Bride had no redeeming qualities – beauty or intellect. It was a gracious love.

Jesus' love is gracious which leads to a second characteristic. Turn to Ephesians chapter 5 verse 25: **“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”** In other words, **Christ's love is a sacrificial love.** The Greek literally means to give oneself up voluntarily. With such an unlovely bride – you would think that Christ would enter marriage with reservation, with a trial period. Not so – he paid the highest price to have his Bride. I notice that today, June 1st, is the anniversary of the birth (June 1, 1926) of Norma Jeane Mortenson better known as Marilyn Monroe. Monroe in many ways represented the shallow love of the world. And in her own pain as she struggled to find true love, she said, “Hollywood is a place where they'll pay you a thousand dollars for a kiss and fifty cents for your soul.” Christ's paid an eternal price for your soul, because he loved you!

Look now at verses 26-27- he died... **“so that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.”** In other words (third), **Christ's love is a cleansing love.** All that unattractive stench and filth of sin so shameful upon his unlovely bride was cleansed away and she was wrapped in the perfect life of Christ, and Christ continues to purify his church even today.

Look now at verse 29, **“For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church.”** Sometimes we think of Jesus' love for us as only at the cross – but there is a continuing special love for His Bride. **Christ's love is a tender love.** We have a hanging in our home that reads, “Mother is another word for love.” These words, nourishing and cherishing – normally used as motherly words – caring for a

raising a child. This is how Jesus takes care of his precious Bride. Some of you need to hear this – Jesus cherishes you – you are precious and special to Him.

The story is told of George Beatty, of Cleveland Ohio who owned a Jewelry store. He was known for the dramatic displays he would put in the window of his store – Rubies, diamonds, topazes – he would arrange on a black velvet squares in the form of peacocks and flowers. His creativity with precious stones won him many customers. One day he received a letter from a wealthy customer who wanted a special gift made for his dearest granddaughter. George Beatty thought and prayed about what he could make, and he saw how precious this girl was to her grandfather – because he used the word “dearest” five times in the letter. Finally the idea came to him – and when the customer arrived to pick up the ring – he saw that it was set with first a diamond, then an emerald, an amethyst, a ruby a second emerald, a sapphire and then a topaz. “Why two emeralds?” the man asked. “Because there are two e’s in dearest.” If you take the initials of the stone – they spell the word DEAREST. If there was a wedding ring between the Bride and Jesus – it might spell dearest – because Jesus’ love is ongoing and he cherishes you and loves you deeply.

Now fifth and last, look at, verses 30-32, “**Because we are members of His body. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great, but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.**” Christ’s love is gracious, sacrificial, tender and **fourth, Christ’s love is an intimate love.** Christ’s love for his church is so deep and so mysterious that the joining of a man and woman in marriage is the very picture Christ wants us to think of with respect to Him and his church. Jesus’ love for is very deep and abiding and personal. It is any wonder that with such intimate love – Paul can teach in Romans that nothing can separate us from the

love of Christ – not death, or life, or angels, or powers or things today, or things to come, or height or depth, or any created things? Nothing can separate us from Christ’s love. We have security because Christ’s love in an intimate love.

The Bride’s Love for Christ

Christ’s love for His Bride is like a waterfall – his love pours on us in abundance – it is gracious, sacrificial, cleansing, tender and intimate. It is a deep and real love. But now what is our response to this love – what is our responsibility?

First, 1 John 4:19 reads: **We love, because He first loved us.** Our response to Christ, is to **Love in return.** Jesus’ love enables us to love one another. Let’s see what looks like in a little more detail – Turn back to Ephesians 5, verse 22

“Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be subject to their husbands in everything.”

Love for the church is not an abstract feeling. The Bible is very clear **The Bride’s love is obedient.** Subject to Christ in everything. **“He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me.”** If you have ever wondered how you can show your love to God – the answer is obey Him. Find out what He has for you to do and do it!

There is one more aspect of the Bride’s love I would like for us to see. Turn with me to another great passage about the church as the Bride of Christ, 2 Corinthians chapter 11 verses 2-5. Paul says, **“For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”** The Bride is to have a **faithful love** – we are talking about marital fidelity. Not going after other

potential husbands, not being tempted by false teaching, saying “no” to temptation that seeks to lead us astray. This means persevering, endure during hard times. Hanging onto your faith and staying devoted to Christ all the days of your life.

Marriage Supper of the Lamb

As we stand under the waterfall of Christ’s love we are compelled to love Jesus in return – by obeying our Lord and remaining faithful to Him all the days of our life. There is one more dimension to this metaphor we will now look at briefly. Turn to the book of Revelation 19: 7-9. “Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.” It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright *and* clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, “Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’” And he said to me, “These are true words of God.”

To understand this picture we need a brief understanding of marriage in the Ancient world. There were basically three phases. First was betrothal. This is kind of like our engagement, but more formal – to break a betrothal required actually divorce. This led to the second phase - a period of preparation that usually lasted for about one year. During this time the groom might even leave for a while to prepare a home for his bride. Remember Jesus said in John 14 – “I go to prepare a place for you – and I will return to receive you unto myself – so that where I am you may be also.” That was marriage language. During this time the bride would wait for her bridegroom to return. Remember here the parable of the 10 virgins (Matt 25) waiting ready for the groom to return? If they were faithful they would enjoy the third phase – when the groom and his friends would return and escort the Bride to His home and the marriage supper and wedding ceremony – a great feast that sometimes would last for

days. Then with all the preparations done – the Bride and the Groom would be together always.

Blessed are those invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Christ is not here – because he is preparing a place for us – But he will return to take His Church – His Bride with him to the greatest marriage supper of all time. You don't want to miss this – so be faithful in waiting for His return!

Application:

Let me encourage you with three points of application this morning. The first is: **Be Encouraged - You're Loved.** If you are discouraged this morning – let me give you a word of encouragement this morning – you are loved. You may feel your spouse doesn't love you, your kids don't love you – or your dog doesn't love you – Be encouraged, Jesus loves you! Pick up your wedding album (Bible). You are a Bride who is dearly loved by her husband. He loved you so much he died for you – and he loves you still – you are his dearest child.

Second, for those married listen closely, **The quality of your earthly marriage will track with the quality of your spiritual marriage.** There is a great mystery involved in the how closely the metaphor tracks with our own marriages. If you, wives, cannot be subject to your husbands at home – how can you be subject to Christ? Husband, if you are not faithful to her – how can you be faithful to Jesus? You can't. There is a mystery in this metaphor that puts the spotlight on the need for you and I to recommit to work on our marriages. It matters to your spiritual life more than you realize! A woman once said, "My husband and I have a very happy marriage - There's nothing I wouldn't do for him, and there's nothing he wouldn't do for me' – and that is the way we go through life – doing nothing for each other. If you have been doing nothing recently in regard to your marriage, let me encourage you to make your

marriage a priority again. Get out on a date, set aside time to talk – This metaphor of the Bride of Christ provides theological weight to the importance of earthly marriages.

Third – **Love Christ Well.** Be obedient to Him – stay faithful to Him. After all he has done for you – that is all he asks. Is there an area of your life where you have not been so obedient as you need to be? Are you off left field today– are you flirting with unfaithfulness. Come back to Christ. Obey Christ – Love Him and Him alone.

Conclusion:

Let me close with some more song lyrics. Contrast these words of love with those we started with. Love is found in the church. I invited you to Close your eyes and make these words your own:

My Jesus, I love Thee, I know Thou art mine; For Thee all the follies of sin I resign. My gracious Redeemer, my Savior art Thou; If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now. Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so, little ones to him belong – they are weak, but He is strong! Love Him in the morning when you see the sun arising – love him in the evening because he took you through the day – and in the in between time when you feel the pressure coming. Remember that He loves you and He promises to stay. When I survey the wondrous cross, on which the Prince of Glory died my richest gain I count but loss and pour contempt on all my pride. See from His head His hands His feet Sorrow and love flow mingled down did ere such love and sorrow meet Or thorns compose so rich a crown. Were the whole realm of nature mine that were a present far too small Love so amazing so divine Demands my soul my life my all. I love You, Lord, and I lift my voice to worship You, O my soul, rejoice. Take joy, my King, in what you hear: May it be a sweet, sweet sound in Your ear. Amen