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The Bridegroom and His Bride

John 3:29

Intro: We have found ourselves in the midst of a great theological treatise delivered by John the Baptist. In **vs26**, his disciples came to him with what they thought was a terrible problem that needed his immediate attention. It seems that this Jesus, whom John had previously testified as being Israel's long awaited Messiah was somehow now drawing away quite a few of John's congregation. In fact, they said, "**All are coming to Him!**" John then sets about explaining to them in great detail that what they are witnessing in the ministry of Jesus Christ was exactly what was supposed to happen; it was exactly what John was expecting and even *wanted* to see happen. John gives them 5 reasons why this is so and he concludes with a statement that should be at the foundation of every believer's life: "**He must increase and I must decrease**" (**30**). This summarizes why Jesus came and what His followers are to proclaim.

Now, our intent today is not to go back and rehash everything John the Baptist has said in the first half of his treatise because he has some very illuminating things to say concerning Jesus in the 2nd half of his discourse. But I would like to go back and spend some time looking at **vs29** again. The beauty of God's Word is that nearly every verse contains not only a primary application but there is almost always an underlying, secondary application as well. And, when that application applies to the person and work of Jesus, it's even greater than the primary application!

In vs29, the metaphor used was intended to highlight John's important role in the great drama of salvation. He's the **shoshben**; the one who, *according to Jewish custom*, arranged the marriage ceremonies and brought the bride to her husband. But, even more importantly than what this teaches us about John is what it teaches us about *Jesus Christ* in the *role* of the bridegroom & about what *believers* in Christ become *because* of their engagement to Him.

In the chronicles of the kings of Persia there's a story about the wife of one of Cyrus' generals. The wife was charged with treason and at trial was condemned to die. Her husband had no clue this was going on, but when he was told about it, he ran into the throne room and threw himself on the floor

before the king and cried, “Oh, Lord, take my life instead of hers. Let me die in her place.” It seems Cyrus was touched by this offer. He declared, “Love like that must not be spoiled by death.” He then gave the wife back to her husband and let her go free. As they happily walked away the husband asked his wife, “Did you notice how kindly the king looked upon us when he gave you the pardon?” The wife replied, “I had no eyes for the king. I saw only the man who was *willing to die in my place.*”

Today, if we can enter into the spirit of that story, we can begin to understand what the Bible means when it shows us that Jesus Christ is the great lover, bridegroom, husband, and provider of His church. He is the One who not only offered Himself in our place but who actually died for us in order that He might present us to Himself “**glorious . . . without spot or blemish**” (Eph 5:27). As His bride our eyes, hearts, minds, and souls should be fixed on Him.

29- Before we apply this theme to ourselves, we need to understand what it teaches about Jesus Christ. In short, what John was teaching his disciples was that **Jesus Christ is God!** We know this because when John applied the image of the bridegroom to Jesus, he wasn’t just pulling that comparison out of thin air. John was, in fact, applying an OT image to Jesus; the point being that in the OT, Jehovah – the Covenant God of Israel, is the bridegroom!

The earliest hint of this image is found in **Ex 34:14-17**. God tells Israel this in the context of giving them the law. Granted, the image of Jehovah as the bridegroom or husband of Israel isn’t clearly spelled out, but it is implied in the argument that for Israel to worship other gods is harlotry. In Deut, the warning against committing spiritual adultery (in Exodus) is changed to a prophecy that this is exactly what’s going to happen (**Deut 31:16**).

In the prophetic books, Israel has already departed from the Lord and the image becomes clearer. Isaiah writes, “**For your Maker is your husband—the LORD Almighty is his name**” (Isa 54:5a). Later he says, “**As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you**” (Isa 62:5). After this, the image appears more frequently, several times in Jer & Ez. Finally, the entire personal story of Hosea and the opening chapters of his prophecy are based on this theme. In all these books God is the faithful lover and husband. Israel is the unfaithful wife and bride.

When we see this same imagery in the context of John's preaching, we find that John was identifying Jesus with God. John preached on the basis of OT themes. He knew Israel was the bride and Jehovah was the bridegroom. Now Jesus shows up, and John immediately casts Him in God's role. The rule in math is that things equal to the same thing are equal to each other. If you have two equations like A equals B and B equals C, it's also correct to say that A equals C. If Jehovah is the bridegroom & Jesus is the bridegroom, then it follows that Jesus is Jehovah.

The 2nd major teaching found in the imagery of the bride and bridegroom is the **high calling** of the **church!** She's the one for whom Christ died. She's the one married to Him. Consequently, she's the one who is called to be faithful! It's in this particular sense that the imagery is further developed throughout the NT Epistles. Paul's great concern in II Cor 11: 2-3 was that the church he had established in Corinth would prove to be unfaithful to the Lord Jesus. How could this happen? It would happen if they allowed their minds to be "corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." But what does that mean? Paul goes on to show in the following verse that unfaithfulness occurs when the church, adopts "another Jesus" as it's head, "a different spirit" as it's driving force or "a different gospel" as its message.

We must understand what this means. It means that the church of Jesus Christ can be faithful, but she can also be unfaithful. She can commit spiritual adultery. She commits adultery whenever she departs from the Jesus of the Bible, the spirit of Jesus that witnesses of Him through Scripture, or the gospel of salvation by faith in Christ alone.

Has the church guilty of this? That question must be asked anew in every age. Is there another Jesus, another spirit or another gospel in the church today? Well, there are plenty of faithful churches still out there but by and large we must admit that the spiritual adultery of the church is widespread in our time. Many mainline denomination churches have long ago rejected the inerrancy of Scripture and thus cast aside the Jesus of the Bible. Others trend towards another spirit when they prefer to follow personal leadings or visions rather than the clear truth of Scripture. Finally, another gospel appears when works are mixed with faith in salvation. All of this has occurred & all of it is apostasy!

Of course, we must not assume that faceless organizations are the only ones capable of spiritual adultery. In **James 4:4**, the Apostle addresses the very real problem of personal spiritual adultery. James isn't talking about the physical earth but rather the economy of this world, the spirit of enmity against God by which this world operates. **John** clarifies this in his **1st** epistle (**2:15-17**). The comparison is clear: the things of this world are ungodly and they are temporary but the will of God and those who perform it will be eternal. Spiritual adultery occurs in the believer's life when we give to the world the love and devotion, the time and strength that the Lord alone is entitled to. We can bemoan the wretched state of the church around us but if we fail to devote the proper effort to our own relationship with Christ, we risk being unfaithful and further contribute to the problem instead of being a part of the solution. The degree to which we love the world is the degree to which we are unfaithful to Him who's loved and given us so much.

The imagery of the bride and bridegroom also teaches us about the issue of **sexual morality** and the **standards** for Christian marriage. This is particularly important today because the old sexual norms of Western society are being tossed out as quickly as possible and faithfulness in marriage seems to be losing its appeal for many people.

Why are promiscuous sex and adultery wrong? **1)** They're wrong because God says so. What is right is right and what is wrong is wrong, not because men say it is right or wrong, but because good is related to God's character. It is the morality of the universe. So, if God tells us something is wrong, it's wrong; regardless of how we feel about it.

2) They're wrong because they're not good for us as God made us. While it's true: right is right & wrong is wrong because God says so; it's also true that morality is related to the way we are made. Thus, we'll never fully realize true happiness unless we obey God's laws. We'll end up on an increasingly destructive path if we flout them.

3) The last and best reason they're wrong is because they break the picture of what God intends marriage to be. Human marriage serves as an illustration of the relationship of God and His people and of Christ and His church. This relationship between God and His people is based upon God's character. Sexual relations outside of marriage merely serve to break this parallel and call God's character into question. Women are to love their

husbands as the church loves Christ. Men are to love their wives as Christ loves the church. If we break God's illustration through adultery or sexual promiscuity, we as believers, misrepresent God and that's a serious thing.

How do we apply this personally? It depends. Some of us are not married but may be thinking about it. If that's you, you must 1st decide to hold to the highest possible standard of marriage (Bible) then evaluate the one you want to marry in terms of them. Young lady, look at your young man and ask, "Can he be like Jesus Christ to me?" If he can't, look somewhere else. Young man, ask yourself, "Do I love this girl enough to give myself for her? Am I willing to cover up her faults and be patient with her, as God instructs me to do? Am I willing to die for her?" If you're not willing to do these things, you shouldn't be marrying her. These are the demands of a godly, Christian marriage.

Others are beyond thinking about marriage. They're already married, and there may be difficulties. If you are in this category, you mustn't give up because of the difficulties. Doing so would suggest that God gives up on us, which is not true. Instead, you must love with a love that overcomes difficulties—first, by allowing the Holy Spirit to change you and then by winning over the other person. When you yield to Jesus Christ and His standards, He will begin by making you a new creation and then He will end by making all things new.

I realize we live in a broken world and that we're all products of that broken system. Maybe you haven't been faithful in upholding the sanctity of marriage as God intended you to do. This message is not meant to bring condemnation but instruction, correction if necessary. Thankfully, there is forgiveness in Jesus Christ – if you've already received it then glory in what He has done for you and determine to live in such a way that honors that forgiveness. If you're struggling in your marriage and wonder if it will ever get better, remember: each person must make their own choice to accept Christ and obey His will. But, as long as there is breathe, there is still hope.

There's one final great lesson in this theme. The image of the bride and the bridegroom also teaches us about the return of Jesus Christ. We see this when we apply the image in time. Presently, we're only engaged to Jesus. We are still awaiting that final consummation of the engagement at the future marriage supper of the Lamb. This is what Paul refers to in **Titus**

2:13-14. Have we been redeemed? Are we being purified? Are we looking expectantly for His glorious appearing? Our works, our lifestyle, our dedication to our Lord will show it. How will the Lord find us when He returns? Will He find us flirting with the world or will He find us occupied with His will and His work? Our attitudes always influence our actions. The attitude of expectant waiting will have a profound effect on our lifestyle, revealing itself in the choices we make every day, motivating us to constantly mortify the old nature and its fleshly desires. In fact, looking expectantly for Jesus is the antidote for the poison of worldly lust that surrounds us everywhere.

Christians, our marriages are important. God created marriage to illustrate the most blessed of all spiritual relationships—the union of a believing man or woman with Jesus Christ, the divine bridegroom of the church. Thus, marriage exists for God’s glory. That’s why Jesus is portrayed to us as the great bridegroom and husband of the church. It’s why we who believe on Him are portrayed as His bride.

Now, how are we going to communicate this greatest of all relationships if we who are Christians do not demonstrate it in our marriages? On the other hand, if we **do** demonstrate it there, then the world around us will have a visible, living and breathing illustration of how God works toward us in Christ to bring us to faith and save us from our sins. 😊