

Spiritual Health Check: Delight in the Bride

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[0 : 00] Good morning and welcome here for this Sunday, June 12th. Just in case you forget, guess what next Sunday is? Father's Day, exactly.

It's also Michelle's birthday. What's that? Iris' birthday too. They share the birthday. That's good. Many people share the same birthday, which seems weird, doesn't it?

But I guess when we have 365 to choose from, there are limited options. So we're continuing in our sermon series, Spiritual Health Check, this morning. And in this series, we've looked at the importance of setting a baseline, setting a healthy standard upon which we can measure things, right?

If we don't know what healthy is, we don't know when we're starting to go off track, perhaps. And so as Christians, as followers of Jesus, it's important to recognize that our spiritual health is actually far more important than our physical health.

although we focus on our physical health more often at times. So as we continue in this series, we're going to take a closer look at some of the ways we can assess our spiritual health.

[1 : 08] Some of the things that we can look at and pay attention to, to, as I said, ensure that we're on track. So raise your hand this morning if you consider yourself to be a history buff.

Wow, there's very few of us. So either there's closet history buffs or Vern and Connor and Larry and Carol and I are just nerds, I guess, which is fine.

We're good with that. So do you like to learn about society or culture or technology and how it has advanced over time? Is that something that interests you?

Or how culture has developed, how nations have risen and fallen, or things like that? Well, in my undergraduate degree, I really enjoyed discovering that I'm a history buff.

In fact, I took so many history courses that I had a packed schedule because I just turned out I loved it. I took courses on Canadian history pre- and post-confederation.

[2 : 10] I took some on American history. You can boo and hiss if you like, but fascinating stuff as well. I even took some classes in medieval European history during the summer.

That's how nerdy I was. So there were many exams and many papers and tons of reading, and so I'm certainly glad that at least that part is history.

Thank you. Pity you laugh. So seminary students also, not surprisingly, hopefully, to you, take courses, classes on the history of the church.

And I took two full-year courses that covered the developments and changes in the church from when it first began up until more contemporary times.

And at least for me, the more I learned about how God had worked through his church throughout history, and I am still seeing him work throughout his church to this day, it brings me joy.

[3 : 10] It brings me delight and comfort and confidence. And so our sermon this morning is titled, Delighting in the Bride. Delight in the Bride, pardon me.

And we're going to consider what it means to delight in the bride, what that even means, and how that can be a measure of spiritual health. And I'm going to begin with a bit of a lesson in church history.

But we're not going to be talking about Reformation and church councils and creeds and all those things. Although we took lots of that stuff in university and to try and match dates with creeds and, oh, my goodness.

But I want to start at the beginning, which, as Julie Andrews says in Sound of Music, is a very good place to start. So we could spend a great deal of time considering key names and dates of significance in the history of the church.

But these are ultimately just branches of the tree. So this morning I want to consider the root of the church. I want to consider its origin and its source.

[4 : 20] And that is? Thank you. That was a fast answer. So let's look at a couple of verses together to begin this morning. And you can read these with me. So, not quite yet, though.

Tucked away in the account of Jesus' ministry and his miracles, we find a key statement that Jesus makes after Simon Peter declares Jesus to be the Son of God.

And we find that in Matthew 16, verse 17. We can read this together. Jesus replied, Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church. And the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Matthew 16, verse 17. And then in 1 Peter, chapter 2, verses 4 and 5, Peter himself reminds us of how the followers of Jesus fit into the church.

[5 : 28] So let's read this together. As you come to him, the living stone, rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious to him.

You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a royal priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

It's nice to hear us read Scripture together. So we recognize not only is Jesus the foundation of our faith, he is the origin of our church.

In fact, he is the cornerstone. But Peter also recognizes that individual followers of Jesus are stones as well.

And that we form the building blocks of the church. Isn't that a powerful image? If you go outside the front door here, you will see a cornerstone.

[6 : 28] One of the cornerstones of our church when it was first built. And there's a plaque there that you can read. So that's a corner... There's a very concrete... Pardon the pun.

A concrete example of what a cornerstone is. So did you catch that one piece that Peter says, as you come to him?

So we recognize that as an individual accepts Jesus Christ and surrenders to them, him as their Savior and Lord, they themselves become an integral part of the church.

Can you see that? So yes, we have the opportunity to become part of a local church in a specific time and a specific place. But we also have this amazing opportunity to become part of the universal church of Jesus Christ.

And you've heard me talk about it in these ways before. The family of God across time, across nations and cultures, which is so much more than just a physical building.

[7 : 41] So there's our very quick essential church reminder. That Jesus created the church and it is composed of, made up of, his people.

Those who have recognized him as their Savior and Lord and who have surrendered their lives to him. And so we recognize too that scripture also uses, scripture loves metaphors and I love metaphors.

So scripture uses different metaphors besides construction and buildings when it talks about the church. In our discipleship sermon series, that series, if you remember, was anchored in John 15, 1 to 17, where Jesus related the connection between the church and himself as being like what?

Do you remember? You are the vine. Vine and branches, right? So that was the key, the core of that series that we talked about.

In 1 Corinthians 12, verses 12 to 27, it's related that the body of Christ and its individual parts are being as though they are parts of a literal body.

[8 : 56] That whole passage talks about, well, if I am this, then surely I'm not needed because I'm not that. But it indicates to us, that passage powerfully illustrates that all parts are needed to make a whole.

And while each one may serve a different purpose, may have different skills and abilities, all are needed to make a working whole. The motif of a shepherd, that metaphor is also used, a shepherd caring for his or her flock.

That's a common image that's used throughout Scripture. First of all, to relate to God and God in his relationship with his people. And then to Jesus, we see it in the New Testament over and over, particularly in John 10, verses 1 to 21.

Jesus is talked about as being the good shepherd. The church and its people are also referred to as a priesthood of believers. You've probably heard of that as well.

So in fact, if we go back to 1 Peter 2, verses 4 and 5 again, and it's still there, that's good, we see the building metaphor in here, right? But we also see that combined with, and maybe you noticed this, combined with the idea of a priesthood.

[10:16] Those two pieces are both in there. So I'll just read this again. As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house to be a royal priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

So then, of course, scripture uses the metaphor of a bride to relate to our relationship with Jesus. And this theme continues throughout the New Testament right through to the book of Revelation. You can see it as a theme woven through the entire New Testament. And there's a great deal more that could be said about all these metaphors, how they're used in scripture, but it's the metaphor of the bride that I want to really zero in on.

So why a bride? Why is that the metaphor that's used to represent the relationship between Christ and the church? Well, the bond created in marriage is intended to be, despite what the world views it as, it's intended to be forever.

It usually involves vows, right? We make vows in a wedding. And it's a commitment between two people. I'm even going to say covenant.

[11:49] So a wedding also often involves an engagement period, right? When the bride and groom are connected and committed to one another, but the marriage relationship, the union isn't fully recognized yet, isn't fully realized to the extent that it will be.

So when we come to Christ, we make a commitment to Him. In a sense, we become betrothed to Him, engaged to Him, committed to, bonded to Him.

And in turn, He has made the commitment to us that He will return one day. And that that relationship will be restored to a degree we can't even begin to imagine.

And so then we recognize that the Holy Spirit living within us is the concrete down payment, if you will, the promise that that ultimate relationship with Jesus will come, will be realized.

Jesus didn't say, I'm going, see you later. He said, I'm going, I'm giving you a comforter who will guide you, who will encourage you, who will teach you and help you, and I will come back.

[13:11] But it's not just you and me as individuals who are the bride of Christ. Although it's very much that relationship that's at the core. But we recognize as a body, we are all together the bride of Christ.

As a body, who are the church? Who are the bride? In Ephesians 5, we also find familiar verses that are often used in wedding ceremonies.

Bless you. As the Apostle Paul equates the sacrificial love that should be exhibited within a marriage, he equates that with the sacrificial love that Jesus exhibited for his bride, the church.

And believe me, there are a lot, and you've probably heard, there are lots of people who get quite worked up about women submitting to their husbands and isn't that archaic? And well, if you read deeply into that passage, I think people tend to gloss over the fact that yes, Paul is calling wives to submit to their husbands, however, what does he conversely call husbands to do in regards to their wives?

Love them and sacrifice for them in the same way that Jesus did for the church. What did Jesus do for us?

[14:36] He gave everything because he loved us so much. That's the part that tends to get missed, I think.

It is a reciprocal relationship that's meant to be there. For God so loved the world, so loved his flock, so loved his beloved children, his bride, so much that he was willing to give his own life for it, for us. So who is the bride? Who is the body of Christ that scripture speaks about? Well, hopefully this is obvious.

You are. I am. Everyone who claims Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior is part of the body of Christ, part of the bride.

And if you were here last week, you may remember that we consider the importance of recognizing the spiritual and physical needs of other people. But how do you feel about other members of the bride itself?

[15:50] I read this quote recently. Something is amiss when a person participates in the life of a church only because of the forces of ought. Parental training, family expectations, long-term habits, the heavy weight of conscience, and a sense of duty are not the overriding compulsions of the Christ-like as they arise on the Lord's day to gather with God's own.

The primary motivation for the growing Christian in their church participation is want, not ought. The primary motivation for the growing Christian in their church participation is want, not ought.

A sense of duty or tradition or conviction can play into our desire to engage in our church and to engage with fellow believers and that's a good thing.

There's nothing wrong with that. But those things should not be your primary motivation. Checking a box, feeling guilty if you don't go, those kinds of things.

So my friends, as we get ready to close here, I want to ask you some questions that we should all consider as people who are part of a church family, the bride of Christ.

[17:17] Do you love God's people? Do you love his church? Do you love his mission in the world? As you interact with other people who follow Jesus, do you see them, are you able to see them the way he sees them?

Or are you limited to your own perspective? Do you see other people, other followers of Jesus, simply as someone you have to interact with when you'd really rather not?

Or are you able to recognize that every person you meet has the same value, was created with the same love and care by the same creator as you?

As you consider the people who you are in community and relationship with at church, look around if you want, can you recognize that these are some of the people with whom you will spend eternity?

It's a pretty interesting perspective. Honestly, I truly believe we will get to heaven and we will say, oh, so-and-so is there.

[18:30] That's a surprise to me. Or we'll say, oh, I didn't expect this relationship to have been as important as it seems it is now.

Eternal perspective will be enlightening to say the least. Can you see why and how coming together in person is such a critical part of being part of the bride of Christ?

I have friends who are very focused in ministry on being online and an online presence. Online presence doesn't replace this. Online presence does not replace what we're about to walk down the hall and break bread together today.

My friends, my dear brothers and sisters, we are a body. We're a fellowship. We're a community of people who share an identity, a purpose, a mission, and an eternal father.

We're brothers and sisters. Psalm 149, verse 4, tells us that the Lord takes pleasure in his people. Do you?

[19:39] Ask God to give you his patience, his compassion, and his deep abiding love for others that he calls his own so that you can truly delight in the bride.

Amen.