

We The Church: The Bride Of Christ

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Date: 23 February 2020

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[0 : 00] Well, is everyone enjoying the heat wave we're experiencing today? I'm afraid that I'm going to be disappointed to come later in the week, but at least today, there's some semblance that spring is coming.

And with spring comes a very exciting feature of the season, weddings. Spring is wedding season. And I love weddings.

I'm with Captain Jack Sparrow on this. I love weddings. They're wonderful. And my favorite time in a wedding, although the party afterwards is great, the reception is great, the food is great, my favorite thing in a wedding is watching the bride come down the aisle, locking eyes with her groom, and her groom just beaming, just ready to say the vows and to begin their marriage.

But imagine with me for a moment that what the groom's face would look like if he saw his bride walking down the aisle with a smartphone in her hand, head down, engrossed in a text conversation with a friend, or scrolling Facebook laughing at cat videos.

Or she sees an old college friend in the congregation and she stops and has a chat and catches up. I mean, that's ridiculous, isn't it? But why?

[1 : 28] Why is that ridiculous? Why is it so inappropriate? Why would that never happen? I mean, the bride has the freedom to have relationships with other people, right? She has the freedom to have commitments that are apart from her groom.

But in that unique time and place, it is her exclusive relationship with the bridegroom that should govern all of her actions.

And she's walking down the aisle to say her vows and to be with him for the rest of her life. And it should be that way throughout her marriage, that she will have other relationships, other commitments, but that relationship will be the relationship, the commitment that defines all other relationships and commitments, and that holds the highest place in her heart.

That is true in human marriages, and it is also true in the heavenly marriage. You see, even from early on in the story of the Bible, God's relationship with his people is often portrayed as a marriage. We're in the middle of a series on the church. It's behind me. And how the Bible speaks about the church. God uses many different pictures and images and metaphors to help us understand his relationship with his church and our relationship to him.

[2 : 55] For the past two Sundays, Pastor Mike has helped us see that the church is God's flock. We are following one unique shepherd, Jesus Christ. And this morning, we get to explore a different image that God uses to describe his relationship with his people, the church.

And this is what we're going to see this morning. If you're going to write something down right now. God intends to have an exclusively devoted relationship with his people, like a bridegroom with his bride.

God intends to have, and has always intended to have, an exclusively devoted relationship with his people, just like in a marriage, like a bridegroom with a bride.

The Bible is, in one sense, a love story. A love story that begins, is between God and his people. And really, the Bible begins with a marriage, Adam and Eve, and it ends with a marriage with Christ and his church.

It goes from Genesis to Revelation. And so, what I'm going to do this morning is just lead us through the love story of Scripture. It's got four chapters. And it'll be pretty brief. We're not going to camp too long in each of them because I want to make four connections after we walk through the love story of how this love story meets us right here where we are in 2020.

[4 : 15] So, four chapters of the love story and then four connections that help us answer the so what. Why does this love story do something, what does it have to do with me? So, let's look in

Deuteronomy chapter 7 to start our time together in chapter 1 of the love story.

Deuteronomy chapter 7. And here is chapter 1 of the love story. It's this. This marriage was initiated by God. That's chapter 1.

Now, this marriage was initiated by God. Now, we're not going to get to Deuteronomy 7 immediately. I just want to point one thing out there. Before I do, I've got to set the stage.

When our ancestors, Adam and Eve, did the unthinkable and rejected God, God dealt with their sin. He sent them away from His presence. But amazingly, He did not destroy the rebels as He definitely could have.

Instead, He began pursuing them. And lots of things happen from Genesis 3 when they sinned all the way to Genesis 12.

[5 : 23] But what happens in Genesis 12 is really foundational. It shifts everything in the Bible. God initiates a relationship with one guy.

Abram. He's just one ordinary sinner. Nothing special. And the way He initiates a relationship with him is He makes a covenant with him. A covenant, it's a really important word in the Bible.

It's not just a contract, like a business contract. It's not just kind of an agreement. It's a relationally binding commitment that God makes with His people.

He makes certain promises to Abraham. He agrees to do good to them, to be their God, and brings them into the land of Canaan where He's going to dwell with them.

He makes all these promises to Abraham. And it's all just initiated by God. I'm going to do this to you. And then the covenant also includes, it's mutual. It has certain commitments that Abraham and his descendants have to make that they get to follow through on.

[6 : 27] And that gets expanded and quite literally set in stone at Mount Sinai, about 400 years after Abraham, after God rescued His people from Egypt. And this word covenant is really important because it defines the kind of relationship that God initiates with His people.

And really, the best modern day equivalent that we can compare this unique relationship to is a marriage. marriage. It was mutual. It was meant to be exclusive, which is very important, as we'll see in a moment.

And it was serious. This is not something that Abraham was to take lightly. It's not something that God took lightly. But God initiated it. He pursued His people and He won them.

Before we move to the second chapter of the love story, let's look at something in Deuteronomy 7. That's why I took us there. We need to ask the question, why? Why did God initiate this relationship?

Why did God pursue this people? Why does He love them? Especially given what He knows about them. Let's look at Deuteronomy 7, starting in verse 6.

[7 : 36] For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His treasured possession. out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

Now listen here. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set His love on you and chose you. For you are the fewest of all peoples. But it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath He swore to your fathers.

Did you get that? Why does God love them? Because He loves them. It was nothing because Israel was big or powerful or sophisticated or technologically advanced.

He loved them because He loved them. There was nothing in them that attracted them to Him. He didn't need them for some particular reason.

He simply set His love on them because of His free, sovereign choice to do so. It's just by grace. So that's chapter 1.

[8 : 38] God initiates the marriage and it's by grace. Chapter 2. This marriage is troubled by unfaithfulness. This marriage is troubled by unfaithfulness.

Flip back a couple of books to your left to the book of Exodus. Chapter 20. Sorry, we're going to be flipping around a lot this morning.

Get to know our Bibles pretty well. Exodus chapter 20. And God spoke all these words saying, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

He's speaking to Israel here. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth.

You shall not bow down to them or serve them for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. That's marriage talk.

[9 : 43] Now, the word jealous should maybe raise some questions in our minds. Wait a minute, I thought jealousy is a sin. God's jealous? Isn't that bad? But let me assure you, it is right and good for husbands to be jealous for their wives.

That's why this is a marriage word. And it's also good and right for wives to be jealous for their husbands. Marriage can't function without the right kind of jealousy of a husband desiring the singular exclusive affection of his wife and the wife desiring the same from her husband.

Marriage can't function without it. I am jealous for my wife. I am a jealous husband. My wife is a jealous wife. And, you know, normally I'm a pretty easygoing guy.

I'm pretty calm, pretty measured. But if another man were to make advances on my wife, my normally calm demeanor would get fiery pretty quick. And that's right. It should be that way.

Because we are in an exclusively devoted relationship. That's why the thought of a bride walking down the aisle looking at her smartphone is so inappropriate. It doesn't fit with the kind of exclusive relationship that she is entering into.

[10 : 54] And God is saying, no other gods. I'm your only God. And sadly, it did not take Israel very long to violate that covenant promise.

Only a few days after God spoke these words, and the very same place at the foot of Mount Sinai, his people intentionally crafted and started worshipping a golden cow.

In essence, they started worshipping an idol. They started worshipping another god. They were committing spiritual adultery. And the astounding fact is they're doing it right at the place they had just made their covenant vows before God.

It's like a bride who's at the altar and she's starting to flirt with another man who's not her husband. It's unthinkable. And tragically, this just set the tone for the next several hundred years.

Israel continued doing this. God's marriage started falling apart from the very beginning. And none of it was his fault. He had initiated the marriage. He had paid the dowry price.

[11 : 55] He had given his wife everything she could have ever wanted or needed. He rescued her from slavery from crying out loud and her heart was far from him. On that note, start trying to find the book of Hosea.

It is a minor prophet kind of right in the middle of your Bible. It's the first minor prophet so it's right after Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, then Hosea.

Start trying to find the book of Hosea. This book, this prophet, is extremely helpful in helping us understand, get a glimpse into God's heart as the heavenly husband.

While we're finding it, let me set the scene for you. Hosea was one of God's spokesmen, one of his prophets, when the kingdoms of Israel and Judah are starting to really spiral, spiritually speaking, at least.

And although all of God's prophets were God's spokesmen, calling his people back to covenant faithfulness, Hosea was very unique. If you're there, look at Hosea chapter 1, we'll start in verse 2.

[13 : 05] You will see why Hosea is very unique. When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom because the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord.

Well, you don't hear that word very often these days, whoredom. It doesn't sound like a very good word and it's not. He is asking Hosea to go and find a wife who was, if not already a prostitute, who was at least prone to waywardness, unfaithfulness, and prostitution and marry her.

God wanted to use his prophet's life as a real life example of what his people were doing to him. They were playing the whore. They were acting as a prostitute although they were a married woman.

So Hosea actually went out and he found a wayward woman named Gomer and he married her. This means that Hosea got to know on a very personal level the kind of pain and grief that God felt as a betrayed husband.

And Hosea also knew very well what he was getting into. God told him to do it and he did it. And God did the same thing. He knew what he was walking into when he married Israel.

[14 : 28] He knew he had married an unfaithful wife. He had purposefully committed himself to a people who were not and would not be exclusively devoted to him as he was to them.

Now, I might be wrong but people don't normally do this, do they? Hmm, I think I'd like a spouse. I want to go look for the most unfaithful and uncommitted person I can possibly find and marry them. Who does that? It tells us something about the character and love of God that he would pursue a flaky, uncommitted, undevoted, and unfaithful people.

And God didn't just sweep this unfaithfulness under the rug. He didn't just say, oh, it's okay, just come back with me, please. No, he judged his people rather harshly according to their sin.

If you read the rest of Hosea or any of the prophets, you will see that God has very harsh words for his unfaithful people. God's judgment would fall on them, he would be carried away into exile, and it seems like the marriage is over.

[15:33] It seems like the marriage is in shambles. And they would be carried away and live in their unfaithfulness. But we are only on chapter 2. Let's look at chapter 3.

The love story continues. Chapter 3 is this. This marriage is transformed by God's costly grace. This marriage is transformed by God's costly grace.

Look just across the page at Hosea chapter 2. Hosea 2, we'll start in verse 14. Therefore, behold, I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her.

And there I will give her her vineyards and make the valley of Echor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

Skip down to verse 19. And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy.

[16:36] I will betroth you to me in faithfulness and you shall know the Lord. Wow. After all that steady, adulterous, unfaithful behavior, this is what God says?

I'm going to go after you again? Again, that's incredible. He's promising that after he judges their sin, he's going to start afresh with his unfaithful wife.

He's going to get her alone with himself in a place where they can start their relationship all over again. He's going to betroth her to him forever. And there will be transformation. Did you notice that in verse 19 and 20?

The relationship will now be characterized by righteousness and justice, steadfast love and mercy, faithfulness. and they will know him as they have never known him before.

It's almost like God's putting a date on his calendar in permanent marker for he and his wife to renew their wedding vows. And he's going to make it happen. They're going to start afresh.

[17:38] But notice what comes next in Hosea chapter 3. Look at verse 1, Hosea chapter 3. And the Lord said to me, Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins.

So I bought her for 15 shekels of silver and a homer and a lethic of barley. The camera lens shifts back to Hosea and God calls him to go after his unfaithful wife who has left him for another man and to love her by buying her back.

It cost Hosea money to make a transaction and buy his own wife back. Now whether it was because she was enslaved to someone or had become indebted to someone, we don't know, but it cost Hosea to get her back.

And the implication of chapter 3 is that the renewal and transformation that God's promising in chapter 2 is going to cost God something, just as it cost Hosea something. He would love her with costly grace in order to get her back into an exclusively devoted relationship with him, just as Hosea had done with his unfaithful wife.

Now flip to Matthew chapter 9. So when a person, a very unique person, shows up on the scene hundreds of years later and God's people are still waiting for this vow renewal to happen, for this transformation to happen, and this person claims that he is the bridegroom, our ears should perk up.

[19:19] Look at Matthew chapter 9, starting in verse 14. Then the disciples of John came to him, Jesus, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast but your disciples do not fast?

And Jesus said to them, Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?

The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them and then, then they will fast.

Jesus is using the issue of fasting here to make a really powerful point about who he is. He is linking himself to Yahweh of the Old Testament, the betrayed but determined bridegroom who's going to renew his relationship with his unfaithful bride.

And he's here. He came. The one that they were longing for is finally here. He's ready to renew. He's ready to transform and bring about an exclusively devoted relationship with his bride again. But what would be the cost? How would God the Son, the bridegroom, get his bride back in a renewed, transformed, exclusively devoted relationship with himself?

[20 : 28] This is where we want to turn to Ephesians 5, the text that Tim and Danielle read for us just a few moments ago. Ephesians chapter 5. Ephesians 5. Thanks for bearing with me with all the page flipping.

Ephesians chapter 5. Let's start at verse 25. 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, and that she might be holy and without blemish.

So Christ loved the church how? By giving himself up for her. He voluntarily took the costly road of Calvary, paying the ransom price of his own life to win her back.

It wasn't 15 shekels like Homer. It was his blood. Homer, sorry. Hosea. Let's put those two together. God is all in when it comes to his relationship with his bride.

He has withheld nothing. He paid the highest price imaginable to win an unfaithful bride back to him. And notice the transformation in verse 26 and 27. He paid the price.

[21 : 55] He gave himself to sanctify her, to make her holy, pure, righteous, just as he is holy, pure, and righteous. He paid the price to make her fit for himself to be a perfect match for him.

And he does this by cleansing her through the washing of water. just as a bride would ritually bathe before her wedding with her husband in ancient cultures.

Only Jesus' cleansing of his bride is done spiritually. And it's done by the speaking of the word of the gospel. That I gave myself for you. That cleanses her. It sets her apart when she believes that he gave himself for her.

And notice that Jesus is doing all of this for his bride. He made her fit for himself. He didn't say, all right, clean yourself up. He is doing it for her. Picture this.

A dashing, cultured, educated millionaire walks the streets of Chicago. And he finds an ugly, smelly, dirty, foul-mannered, ungrateful wretch of a woman.

[22 : 59] And he woos her with gentlemanly kindness, generosity. He proposes marriage to her.

And he pays for the most lavish makeovers, the finest clothes, the best education money could buy in order to make her a bride fit for him.

Now, it's not a perfect illustration, but at least it gets at the kind of costly grace that Christ has shown his bride. And notice that it doesn't say that Christ loved his church and gave himself up for her because she was holy, because she was lovely.

It says, Christ loved the church and gave himself for her so that he might make her lovely. His love makes her lovely, makes her holy. So the marriage is transformed by God's costly grace through Jesus Christ, the bridegroom, giving himself up for her.

And that leads us to chapter four. This marriage is destined for eternal bliss. This marriage is destined for eternal bliss.

start making your way to the end of the Bible, Revelation 19. Revelation 19. As you're turning there, let me remind you of something that Jesus said in John chapter 14.

[24 : 18] Don't turn there, just head to Revelation, but let me help us remember this. He has just told his disciples in John chapter 14 that he's going away and that they won't be able to follow him and they're very troubled, they're very upset.

But he turns right around and he says, don't let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms.

If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself that where I am you may be also.

In ancient cultures, when a bridegroom proposed to his bride and the betrothal price had been paid to the bride's family, the bridegroom would leave his bride's house and go back to his father's house to build a place in his father's house for the new couple to consummate their marriage once the wedding took place.

And once he finished preparing a place, he would leave his father's house, return to his bride's house, and take her back in a wonderful, exciting ceremony back to his father's house where the wedding feast would begin.

[25 : 28] Jesus is the bridegroom who came to us, his bride, paid the betrothal price and went away to prepare a place for us in his father's house and he's coming again so that we might forever be with him face to face and the eternal wedding feast would begin.

If you're in Revelation 19, look at verse 6, in the middle of verse 6. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. for the Lord God, our God, the Almighty reigns.

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.

It was granted to her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. So we, the church, are now awaiting our bridegroom's return because our exclusively devoted marriage relationship with God will be fully and finally consummated in eternal joy at the wedding feast and we will see him and we will be with him and we will know him and be fully known by him and the transformation will be fully complete.

We will be presented to our bridegroom without spot, without blemish, without sin, without shame and we will know and enjoy him forever. That is the love story.

[27 : 01] It is a love story of exclusive devotion that God has for his bride and that he expects from his bride and this love story includes us.

With the remainder of our time, I want to make four connections that this love story has with us right here and right now. The first connection is this. This marriage portrays God's unflinching commitment to an unworthy people.

God's unflinching commitment to an unworthy people. Just think about Hosea. Like God, he goes into a marriage with an unfaithful woman with his eyes wide open.

He knows what he's getting into and like God, he experiences the grief in the pain of being betrayed after giving himself in faithfulness to an unfaithful woman.

And like God, he willingly pursues his unfaithful and adulterous wife again at great personal cost. Church, the reason God loves us is not the reason we tend to love others.

[28 : 06] We tend to commit ourselves to others or have affection for others because we enjoy them. We see some goodness in them because they can provide some benefit to us.

Not with God. He saw our stone cold hearts, our pride, our rotten selfishness, our obsession with ourselves, our stubborn self-righteous, and he said, I will choose to do good to them because I choose to do so.

The only reason I'm going to do this is because of my sheer love for them and my free, sovereign choice to love them. not because there's anything good in them but because of my love for them and I will make them lovely through my love.

Christian, that is how God has loved you and that's how God continues to love you. It's not because you've progressed nicely. It's not because you finally stopped doing this or you finally started doing that.

He loved you when you were still his enemy, unreconciled to him, stuck in your sin and he sent Jesus to win you back to him by going to the cross for you.

[29 : 17] He loved you before you knew him, before you ever knew that you could love him. This is the great love of God and his commitment to unworthy people like us.

It was his initiation, his sovereign choice to love you, to love us like that. In a moment, we're going to sing a song that has a line, two wonders here that I confess, my worth and my unworthiness. We know we are unworthy because of our sin and yet his love for us gives us worth. Next, second connection.

This marriage highlights our radical new identity in our bridegroom. This marriage highlights our radical new identity in our bridegroom. flip back to Ephesians chapter 5, if you will.

I want to highlight something for us there. Ephesians chapter 5, where we were earlier. And let's look at verse 28.

[30 : 23] Ephesians 5, verse 28. In the same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. No one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it just as Christ does the church because we are members of his body.

And here he quotes Genesis 2. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

Paul tells husbands to care for and cherish their wives because they have been brought into a one flesh union with them. Marriage is a marvelous mystery.

Two bodies, two people become wonderfully one, united through exclusive devotion to one another. But then he makes our head spin by quoting Genesis 2.

And he says that the great mystery of the one flesh union of human marriage was meant all along to point to the wonderful union of Christ and his bride. When you stand by a body of water you look in and you see your reflection.

[31 : 40] Our marriages here on earth, our human marriages are just a reflection of the ultimate marriage that Christ has made with his church. When we put our faith in Christ's church we are joined to him.

We are spiritually made one with him. We become knit together in an intimate relationship with him. When Jess and I got married there were a lot of personal changes that had to happen.

I had to merge bank accounts with her. I had to change my residence. I had to put her name on my car registration, on my insurance. And the bride has even more to do. Right? She has to change her own name.

Jess had to go through the process of changing her name and then making sure that change was on everything from her driver's license to her Facebook account. When a marriage takes place two people's lives merge.

What is his becomes hers. What is hers becomes his. And so it is with the union of Christ and his people. Only it's not a very fair exchange. When he married her he took all her sin all her shame her debt her condemnation and all that was hers he absorbed.

[32 : 50] Paid it all. And all that was his became hers. His spotless record his perfect righteousness the father's endless approval and delight in him now is ours through our radical new identity with our bridegroom.

Do you realize church that you are your beloved's and your beloved's is yours. As the apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6 you are not your own anymore. You have a radical new identity.

You were bought at a high price and you are now one with your bridegroom. And he cares for you. He nourishes you as the husband cares and nourishes for his wife even as his own body.

We must think of ourselves as in the most intimate of relationships with our heavenly bridegroom because he cares for us in this kind of way. We have a radical new identity now.

Thirdly third connection is this. this marriage's purpose reorients our priorities. This marriage's purpose reorients our priorities.

[33 : 58] Look again at Ephesians 5 25. Notice again the purpose for which Christ loved the church and gave himself up for. Look for three that's. The word that shows up three times.

In verse 26 that he might sanctify her verse 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor and then later that she might be holy and without blemish.

So why did Christ lovingly give himself up for his church? To make her a lovely bride fit for himself. He died to make her holy. The purpose of this marriage is holy and exclusive intimacy between God and his people.

this is not just a relationship in our lives. It is the relationship in our lives. It is a relationship of exclusive devotion having high and holy affection for our bridegroom.

So let me ask you does the purpose for which Christ died for you show up as a priority in your life? the purpose of being in a holy exclusive affectionate relationship with Jesus does that show up as a priority in your life?

[35 : 19] Are you responding to his love by making your relationship with him your highest priority? This is a way we need to think about being Jesus' disciples. Having our hearts fully bound to him.

Not holding any area of our lives back from him. Giving ourselves body and soul to his person to his purposes to his priorities. The problem is this is really hard.

Just try fulfilling the command love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. It is really hard because sin is still present with us. We see everything that we see with our eyes tells us that Jesus isn't really that important.

He's unseen by us. He's invisible. It's by faith. fighting the fight of faith to be exclusively devoted to Jesus whom we can't see right now who is away from us it's really difficult.

In James chapter 4 I'm not going to turn there but in James chapter 4 he calls the church out. He calls the church adulterous.

[36 : 26] He exposes heart level identity level issues in the church that he's writing to and he says you're committing spiritual adultery church. You are not living in exclusive devotion to your bridegroom.

They believe the right things they attended church they're doing the Christian thing but what their hearts truly wanted and craved was far from God. They were committing spiritual adultery even as Christians.

Adultery begins in the heart. A person becomes dissatisfied with their marriage they think they could be satisfied with something else, someone else and they start looking start wanting start desiring start wondering start imagining being with someone else.

Their desires their passions draw them away from the one that they should be exclusively devoted to. So Christian how is your heart seeking satisfaction apart from your heavenly bridegroom?

You're walking down the aisle but are your eyes fixed on the one standing at the altar who's waiting for you? He is everything that you could possibly need or want or hope for.

[37 : 44] Are you allured by pleasure? Are you driven by comfort a longing for security in things that are not in Christ? Are you enticed by the prospect of having more earthly goods?

do you not believe that he can provide for you everything that you need? Are you enticed by the thought of your reputation or by the approval of others?

What does your heart desire besides your all satisfying bridegroom? Is he your priority? This is hard.

It's by faith. this life of exclusive devotion is through unseen things. We have to dedicate ourselves to the Lord and it takes work.

It takes effort. It takes engaging with him in prayer. It takes engaging with him in his word. Is he, your heavenly bridegroom, the object of your gaze as you walk down the aisle of this life?

[38 : 51] He died to make you a lovely bride and he's waving to you from the altar, trying to get your attention. He wants your gaze to be fixed and undistracted so that you can be exclusively devoted to him.

Lastly, and very briefly, this marriage reminds us of how we are to feel about Christ's bride. This marriage reminds us of how we are to feel about Christ's bride.

We're in the middle of a series on the church. And as Pastor Mike has mentioned the past few weeks, we want the way God thinks about and God feels about and prioritizes the local church to be the way that we think about and feel about and prioritize the local church.

And if he came from heaven to seek her out, to buy her out of spiritual adultery, to transform her by his costly grace, and to prepare her to be a lovely bride for all of eternity, then we know how much he thinks about her.

And we know how deeply he feels about her and how highly he prioritizes her. And if he prizes her in this way, then we also should. Every member of her, we should prioritize.

[40 : 04] Take a moment and just take a look around. Just look at the faces around you. This is fun. Don't feel awkward looking at people and you're not invading their personal space.

take a look around. This is Christ's bride. He died for her. You will be in eternal and intimate fellowship with Christ together, with all of these gathered together, and millions, millions, millions more.

We are his treasured bride. We must care for and nourish and promote the well-being of his people because that's what he does. We must commit ourselves to her because that's what he does.

It shows up in very simple, ordinary ways. Being here, Sunday after Sunday, as best you can. Being present, engaging with people. Get to know their stories, as Pastor Mike helped us with last week.

Talking to each other, seeing what their needs are, asking God if there's a way you can serve them. Serving in ministry roles is one way you can do it.

[41 : 12] You can help all the ministry teams we have, but it's just being here. It's being present. It's saying, I'm here, I'm engaged. Let's commit ourselves to Christ's bride the way he has.

And one day, perhaps not too far off, he will present us to himself in splendor, without spot or blemish, and we will see his face, and we will know him, and be astounded by his love.

We will not get enough of his incredible love. Ten million years in, we will still be desiring more of it. So let's live for that day, church.

Let's walk down the aisle with our gaze fixed on our unseen bridegroom, who we see by faith. Oh, beautiful and cherished bride of Christ, be exclusively devoted to him.

Let's pray. We thank you, Father, that you have engaged yourself fully, committed yourself fully to an unworthy people, to make them worthy, to make them lovely.

[42 : 33] Lord, if there are some in this sound of my voice that are feeling particularly unworthy, would you make your exclusively devoted love known to them?

Father, for those who are feeling distant from you, would you draw near to them, help them to draw near to you by faith? God, help us to be an exclusively devoted people to you.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.