

A Bride for Christ

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Preacher: Jim Patterson

[0 : 00] The bride and groom make their vows to each other. I can't remember the exact words they use, but their vows usually include something like, all that I am I give to you, and all that I have I share with you.

You see, in a wedding, what belongs to one now belongs to the other. The two become a family unit.

There's this wonderful change in status, isn't there? And when I was thinking about this, I remembered something that happened at our own wedding, many years ago now. It was down in Wales, and the pastor in the church couldn't conduct the wedding himself. He wasn't legally able to do that.

He needed a registrar. In the church. So the registrar was there, sitting at the front of the church at a little table, and when the time came to sign the register, I distinctly remember, well, Megan might have forgotten.

[1 : 13] When it came time for Megan to sign, he pointed to the place on the sheet where she should sign her maiden name. And he said, you sign there, it'll be the last time you sign that name.

Of course it was. And that stuck with me. Because Megan and I had had a total change in status. And for Megan, that involved a change in name.

We were no longer unattached, you might say. We now belong to each other. We shared everything, and we shared a name.

And the Bible often uses marriage as a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church. Ephesians 5, that we read together there, tells us that Christ is preparing a bride who one day he's going to present to himself in splendor, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.

And in Revelation 19, we read about the bride and the vision of the marriage supper of the Lamb. Jesus and the church, his bride. And then we sang there in the psalm.

[2 : 35] And we sang, All glorious is the princess in the court, her bridal ground with finest gold is wrought. She comes before the king in brodered robes to you the maidens in her train are brought.

With joy and gladness they are ushered in, they come into the palace of the king. So, the image of the bride and a king.

I want to think about that tonight. This morning, we thought about how we're children of God. God's our father and we're his children. And this evening, I want to think about how the fact that the church is the bride of Christ.

To help us understand our situation in Christ, God has used all sorts of models and to show us what it means to belong to him.

So, this evening, I want to think about how Christ is seeking a bride and preparing a bride. I want to look at this on their five headings, actually. The extraordinary love and patience of God to an unworthy bride, number one.

[3 : 43] The extraordinary work of Christ to redeem his bride. The goal of the marriage. Our new situation in Christ. And the future for the bride. First of all then, the extraordinary love and patience of God to an unworthy bride.

Now, when King Solomon died, going back into the Old Testament, and Rehoboam, his son, ascended to the throne and became king of the whole nation of Israel, twelve tribes.

He didn't last very long. He might have only lasted a day or two. Because he spoke harshly to the people and he alienated the people. And ten of the tribes left him.

Ten of the tribes rebelled against him and only Judah and Benjamin stayed faithful to the house of David. And from that time on, there was a northern kingdom, which we call Israel, which was called Israel, and a southern kingdom, which was loyal to David and was called Judah.

Now, sometimes they were friendly and sometimes they were even at war with each other. But the ten tribes of the north from that time on are known as Israel.

[5 : 07] And they quickly sunk into idolatry and drifted away from true worship of God. And 200 years later, they were taken into exile in Assyria.

And near the end of that time, there was the prophet Hosea. It was his time to preach. And Hosea was sometimes called the deathbed prophet of Israel because he was the last prophet in the northern kingdom before the kingdom fell to the kingdom of Assyria, to the emperor of Assyria, in about 722 before Christ.

And in Hosea's prophecy, God used marriage and adultery to illustrate the unfaithfulness of Israel and his amazing love to an unfaithful people.

And it's a story which highlights the amazing love of God to an unfaithful people.

And I want to quickly summarize it with you in Hosea chapter 1. I'm going to read a few verses and just kind of skip through the story to get it.

[6 : 27] I don't know the page number of Hosea chapter 1. I don't know whether somebody wants to give it to us. Hosea chapter 1. Have we got page number?

Hmm? 7-5-1. 7-5-1. So here's Hosea the prophet.

And God acts out his love for Israel or gets Hosea to act out his love for Israel in his marriage.

Just looking at verses 1-3. The word of the Lord that came to Hosea the son of Beri in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah kings of Judah and the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel.

When the Lord first spoke through Hosea the Lord said to Hosea go and take yourself a wife of Hordom and have children of Hordom for the land commits great Hordom by forsaking the Lord.

[7 : 36] So he went and took Comah the daughter of Diblaim and she conceived and bare a son. So here we have God giving Hosea his instructions.

He was to go and the NIV says marry an adulterous wife or some Bibles say marry a prostitute and he does and she doesn't remain faithful to him.

They have three children together but she leaves him and goes back to her old lifestyle. God is using us to show what Israel was doing you see.

But amazingly amazingly in chapter 3 just looking at chapter 3 verses 1 and 2 Comah had left Hosea and the Lord goes to him and he says the Lord said to me to Hosea go again and love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulterous even as the Lord loves the children of Israel though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins which were part of the worship of other gods so I bought her for 15 shekels of silver and a homer and a lithic of barley that's a homer and a half of barley and I said to her you must dwell as mine for many days you shall not play the whore or belong to another man and so will I be with you amazingly not only was Hosea told to marry Gomer once but he was told to go and fetch her back again after she had been unfaithful to him she had shamed him he didn't have to normally speaking he could have washed his hands of her she had shamed him she had been unfaithful to him but God said bring her back fetch her back and he did because God was getting

Hosea to model in his personal life God's own patience and love for unfaithful Israel he does this all through the book if you read the book of Hosea you'll see how Israel had been totally unfaithful to God look at if you're there still at Hosea 3 look at chapter 4 verse 1 hear the word of the Lord O children of Israel for the Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land there is no faithfulness of steadfast love no knowledge of God in the land God likens spiritual unfaithfulness to adultery and the prophecy of Hosea is full of that comparison and Hosea the cheated husband brings back his unfaithful wife and loves her in spite of his unfaithfulness God is saying I'm like that I'm like that with you with Israel and with us and the book of

[10 : 54] Hosea contains speeches from God speeches that start with condemnation and judgment and end in tears and God says why are you living like this look at Hosea 11 just again a few verses in Hosea 11 some wonderful tender words here in Hosea 11 verse 1 we read when Israel was a child I loved him out of Egypt I called my son the more they were called the more they went away they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk I took them by their arms they did not know that I healed them I led them with cords of kindness with bands of love I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws

I bent down to them and fed them and yet they were unfaithful God says I bent down to them I led them I took them by the arms and taught them to walk yet they were unfaithful in verse 6 we read the sword shall rage against their cities consume the bars of their gates and devour them because of their own counsels my people are bent on turning away from me and though they call out to the most high he shall not raise them up at all so this picture of God's kindness and gentleness to people of Israel and then they turned away from him and then this wonderful verse in verse 8 God says how can I give you up how can I hand you over how can I make you like Adma how can I treat you like

Zebo my heart recoils within me my compassion grows warm and tender love love love for unfaithful Israel and God says that's what I'm like you've been unfaithful to me but yet my heart recoils within me from judging you my compassions grow warm and tender you see how God's love for sinners is remarkable the amazing love it's like the love of an honest man for an unfaithful wife modelled in the life of Hosea Gomer you see his wife she didn't get justice she didn't get fairness she got grace undeserved favour a model of

God's love for the church Luther he likened he took this story really and he likened the gospel to the story of a prostitute who marries a king just like Hosea's story here so her background was something to be ashamed of but by marrying the king she had a total change in status and that status change in status took place in a moment the moment the minister shall we say declared the man and wife she was suddenly a queen total change it didn't take days or weeks or years to happen it happened instantly now she had to learn how to be a queen and probably made mistakes but immediately the wedding was performed she became a queen with all her faults with all her background she became a queen what amazing love and patience

God shows to us we are rebels sinners unfaithful like an unfaithful wife yet God has shown that extraordinary love and patience divine love and patience to sinful rebellious people just like Hosea acted out in his marriage how shall I give you up oh Ephraim the yearning heart of God the amazing love of God for sinners the hymn writer wrote the love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell it goes beyond the highest star and reaches to the lowest hell could we with ink the ocean fill and were the skies of parchment made where every stock on earth a quill and every man a scribe by trade to write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry nor could the scroll contain the hole though stretched from sky to sky the extraordinary love and patience of

[16:11] God acted out by Hosea and Gomer in the Old Testament extraordinary love and patience of God the extraordinary work of Christ to redeem his bride returning to that passage you read in Ephesians chapter 3 we read there husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her that he might sanctify her Christ's love for us led him to Calvary's cross didn't it that was the price of bringing us back to God he gave himself for us Hosea bought his wayward wife back with 15 shekels of silver now that doesn't mean a whole lot to us does it that's about 165 grams of silver I believe and a homer and a half of barley that doesn't mean a lot we don't use homers and ideas but I believe it's about 330 litres of barley so you know there's a real figure here but

Christ bought our salvation at the price of his death on the cross 1 Peter 1 verse 18 Peter writes knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers not with perishable things as silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ like that of a lamb without blemish or spot our ransom cost Jesus his life he humbled himself he became obedient unto death even the death on the cross for you and me he who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God there was no other way all the Old Testament sacrifices could never pay for sin not all the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain could give a guilty conscience peace or wash away the stain but

Christ the heavenly lamb takes all our sins away as sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than name so we are redeemed we are redeemed by an infinite cost through the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for us the extraordinary work of Christ to redeem his bride then thirdly the goal of the marriage well we have it in Ephesians 5 again verse 26 he gave himself up for her verse 26 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 that she might be holy and without blemish that is the goal that is the goal of our salvation God is going to present Jesus will present us to the Father or himself without spot or wrinkle sanctify that means to set apart for holy use now here that must mean that we are set apart as

belonging to Jesus alone we're his we're set apart when we come to Christ we're set apart totally given over to him as a bride to her husband all that I am I give you all that I have I share with you it happens the moment we receive Christ as our saviour and Lord no longer my own but his but sanctification is also a process a process by which the Holy Spirit in the Christian makes us more and more like Jesus process of dying to sin and living to righteousness process of putting off the old man all the old habits putting on the new man the process by which in Luther's message the prostitute who married the king learns to live like a queen and the goal is one day we'll be presented before the throne in splendor without spot or wrinkle now when we look at the church with all its weakness with all its sin with all its divisions we may find it hard to believe that one day it'll be without spot or wrinkle presented to Jesus in glory yet it will be it will be not because we're capable of doing it not because we're by ourselves we can make ourselves like that we aren't we're weak and sinful but Jesus will complete his work in us ultimately the beauty of the church will be the beauty of Jesus in us so the goal of the marriage is to make us like

Jesus and to present us one day without wrinkle or spot will it happen yes Paul in Philippians 1 verse 6 says I'm sure of this that you who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ he's going to do it for all the weakness that we see in the church for all the sin and the weakness that we see in ourselves yet one day Jesus will complete his work and present us to himself without spot or wrinkle the goal of Christ for his church to present us to himself without spot or wrinkle in our new situation in Christ now they having been lifted from a faithless lifestyle and been made a queen the bride has a complete change in situation those wedding vows all that I am I give you all that I have I share with you and that's what happens when we come to

[22 : 26] Christ but we might say well what have we to bring what have we to bring well we haven't got anything to bring really all we can bring is our sin we've no diary to bring to this marriage when Megan and I got married I had an old rusty Morris Marina that was about it it rusted out in a short time but that was it but we have nothing to bring we come only with our like Gomer with our sin and shame and empty hands everything comes from Jesus in this marriage nothing in my hands I bring simply to thy cross I cling naked come to thee for dress helpless look to thee for grace foul eye to the fountain fly wash me saviour or I die that's how we come nothing in my hands

I bring empty hands like the publican in Jesus parable we come saying Lord be merciful to me a sinner but what does Jesus bring well here's the wonder of the gospel firstly he brings forgiveness and cleansing he might sanctify having cleansed her by washing of water with the word in Zechariah 13 verse 1 there's a wonderful prophecy on that day there should be a fountain open for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness a fountain for sin to cleanse us from sin Isaiah 1 verse 18 come now let us reason together says the Lord though your sins are as scarlet they shall be as white as snow though they are red like crimson they shall be like wool that's the first thing he does for us he washes us from all those sins that sit on our consciences he washes us white as snow you see

Jesus doesn't wait until we're worthy of him he calls us while we're sinners and he washes us clean Hosea acting out God's love didn't tell Gomer to go and get her life sorted out and to begin to live virtuously and then he would have her back no he bought her back so with Jesus he takes us as we are and he makes us what he intends us to be all that he has he has rather he gives us has he died for sin we died in him has he risen again we are risen with him has he lived the perfect life yes and he shares his righteousness with us like a bridal gown he gives us his righteousness Jesus thy blood and righteousness my beauty is my glorious dress midst flaming worlds in these are red with joy while I lift up my head he gives us that that wonderful robe like in the psalm there she comes before the king embroidered robes her bridal gown with finest gold is wrought it's not our righteousness it's the righteousness of Christ that he gives us the robe of Christ is ever new the bridal gown of the church is Christ's righteousness not ours has he entered into heaven and is seated at the right hand of

God we too have access right into heaven's throne room in our prayers so we are united to Christ as a bride to her husband all that Jesus has gained he shares with us we come with nothing we come with nothing and lastly the future for the bride Ephesians 5 27 speaks of Jesus presenting the church to himself without spot or wrinkle let's look again at those verses we read in Revelation 19 verses 6 to 9 here we get this wonderful picture of heaven of the marriage supper of the lamb then I heard what seemed to be the voice of many waters like the roar of many waters like a sound of many peals of thunder crying out hallelujah for the

Lord our God the almighty reigns let us rejoice and exult and give him glory for the marriage of the lamb has come 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 the marriage supper of the lamb the bride has made herself ready that day when the church of all time and every nation and every language will be gathered together at last with Jesus what a day that will be the shout of praise that day will be like the voice of a great multitude like the roar of many waters like peals of thunder great rejoicing John he could highly describe it he said it seemed like like it seemed to be like the roar of many waters like the sound was something that had never been heard in this world before a shout of praise to God when the redeemed of all nations stand before the throne like a bride on a wedding day without wrinkles and without spots and that's what God is working towards in all of us brothers and sisters and he will do it he will complete that work not one of us who has trusted in

[28 : 48] Jesus will be missing on that day but not everyone will be there how sad how terribly sad to miss that marriage feast because only those who know Jesus as Saviour and the Lord will be there all of us will be there everyone who knows Jesus will be there but if you don't know Jesus then you won't be there because you aren't part of the bride you'll not be there you need to come you need to come you need to you're invited you're invited let's read turn over just over the page to Revelation 22 and verse 17 two pages on and we get the final invitation of the Bible and it starts in verse 17 with the spirit and the bride say come that's the spirit and the bride that's the church say come and let the one who hears say come and let the one who is thirsty come and let he who desires take a water of life without price so the great invitation if there's any of us here and we're not sure that

Jesus is our saviour then the invitation is there come take the water of life without price for all of us who have come not one of us will be missing on that day because God is preparing the church as a bride for his son and we see in these passages the extraordinary love and patience of God like Hosea and Gomer the extraordinary work of Christ to redeem his bride through the precious blood of Christ like a lamb without blemish or spot the goal of the marriage to present us perfect our situation in Christ all that Jesus gained he shares with us and the future of the bride the lamb's great bridal feast of bliss and love in heaven God has made us the bride of

Christ may God bless his word to all our hearts tonight let's pray Father we thank you that though we are unworthy though we have been unfaithful to you so many times though we are sinful and unclean yet you have shown such extraordinary love and mercy towards us and done come down to this world and died to bring us to yourself Father we thank you and we praise you tonight for your word Lord write it on our hearts we pray and take us from this place to rejoice in what you have done for us and Lord if there's anyone here who doesn't know Jesus may tonight be the night when they come in response to that invitation and take of the water of life freely we pray

Lord in Jesus name Amen I'm going to sing Psalm 34 and sing Psalms it's on page 40 Psalm 34 on page 40 I'm going to sing verses 1 to 9 at all times I will bless the Lord I praise him with my voice because I glory in the Lord let troubles souls rejoice come taste and see the Lord is good who trusts in him is blessed oh fear the Lord you saints with need you will not be oppressed Psalm 34 1 to 9 next in time good time in Lord of order you won't see what about you