The Heavenly Groom

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[0:00] Well, on April 20th, 1996, a group of over 100 believers internationally represented came together in the city of Cambridge in Massachusetts.

Among these believers were some that you'll recognize, R.C. Sproul, Alistair Begg, James Montgomery Boyce, David Wells, Michael Horton. They were heavy hearted as they gathered. And the reason is because they were very aware.
This is about 25 years ago, how much the doctrines of the Bible have been pushed outside of many churches in the West today. They describe the problem that they see this way.
The evangelical world seems to now be dominated by approaches to worshiping God that are man centered. Sermons about your self-esteem, false health and wealth promises, many treating the gospel as a product to be sold and treating sinners as consumers who want to buy it.
And there are others who treat the Christian faith as being true simply because it works. Such man centered ministries silence the doctrines of grace.
[1:18] And this is not new. In fact, this is the very truth, the doctrines of how God saves sinners that he has revealed in the Bible.

It's what the New Testament epistles, those letters write to defend and to make clear. That's exactly the human centered encroachment that they're pushing away from the early church in the first century.
This is what Martin Luther and John Knox and John Calvin, the reformers, had to dust off and open up from the Bible once again because the Catholic church had shrouded it over.
It was blind. They're blinding the people. They're making it all in Latin. They couldn't read God's word to hear the promise of grace. It's what the Puritans were arrested and thrown in prison for in England.
It's why their churches were shut down for preaching the doctrines of grace from the Bible. And so in Cambridge, they came up with five statements to simply reaffirm what the Bible teaches, what the Reformation was about, what the Puritans upheld and gave their lives for.
[2:19] One of those five doctrines is the doctrine of sola gratia, that God saves sinners by grace alone. One week from today, we'll have our Reformation Sunday, and I've invited one of the elders from our sending church, Chuck Porter, to preach a Reformation message.

And I believe he's going to tell us about the work that God did through men like Martin Luther and why the five solas are still so important for the church today. And now I'm reminded if we're here defending the doctrine of grace, which is simply the message of the Bible.
It's like what Charles Spurgeon had to do in the late 1800s. He said, anytime you see men gathered around the cage of a lion, they're trying to defend the lion and explain how powerful and mighty the lion is.
What should they do? Open the cage and let the lion show them. And that's my prayer that as we go through the Gospel of John, the lion, Jesus Christ, the lion of the tribe of Judah, you'll hear from his words, why he is so powerful and why he saves sinners by grace alone.
And I think this theme that we have, it's pointed to once again by John the Baptist, that Jesus is the groom. It carries all the way through what this interaction that Jesus has with the woman from Samaria.
[3:35] It's the same theme. I want you to see that from Christ himself. So first I want to show you the heavenly groom, Jesus Christ, and then I want to show you his unlikely bride.

Why can we call Jesus the heavenly groom? Look at verse 28. John the Baptist calls him that. He says, I'm the friend of the bridegroom. Chapter 328.

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And he says, the friend of the bridegroom rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. So I want to open up to you from what John the Baptist says, four observations about Jesus, the heavenly groom.
Number one, the heavenly groom cares about purity. Look at verse 22. Chapter 3, verse 22. Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside.
And what was he doing there? He was baptizing. And verse 23, John, the baptizer, was also there baptizing. And we're told that they were baptizing where water was plentiful.
[4:38] John Calvin observes that we should picture sinners hearing the gospel preached and proclaimed, being called to these waters that were plentiful, these rivers coming together and being plunged into the water.

Now, what did they have in mind? What was it that they were preaching that was calling these people to the waters? Well, look at verse 25. A discussion arose among some of John's disciples. So they're hearing the proclamation. And a Jew following them up from the south, from Jerusalem, all the way up to this area where they're baptizing. He's trying to cause division among the work of Jesus, the work of John the baptizer.
And it's about the doctrines that they're both preaching. What is it that the discussion was over in your Bible? Verse 25. It was about purification. Purification. So I want to pause and I want you to see that Jesus, the groom from heaven, he cares about purity.
There is not a single worthy groom who does not care about purity and the purity of his life and the purity of his bride. You know, picture a groom of the week leading up to his wedding.
[5:47] And imagine if he were just giving himself and his body, you know, and he heard that his wife was fooling around and that type of thing. That would be a wedding you would not want to bless and affirm.

You want a groom preparing himself and calling his bride to purity. And that's exactly what we have in Jesus Christ. The heavenly groom is so heavenly that not only the bride, but also all the guests at his wedding feast must be pure.
They must be clean to even join his wedding feast. The groom, he prepares his bride. He prepares everyone who's coming to his wedding feast. And he does this, we're told, look at chapter 4, verse 1.
Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples. So the pattern of ministry that Jesus set is that he will spiritually purify his people and he will do it through his appointed servants.
He will do it through his disciples who will become now the leaders in the early church. And that pattern continues. He uses the church to purify you, his bride, the church for himself.
[6:53] How does baptism remind you and assure you that Christ won once for all sacrifice on the cross was for you personally?

Well, an Orthodox catechism that we read explains it in this way. Christ instituted this outward washing with water because with it he gives a promise that as surely as the water washes away the dirt from your body, so certainly his blood and his spirit wash away my soul's impurity.
So when you picture a baptism, you get to watch someone being baptized every time it should minister to you and assure you that just like the water is washed away the outside of the person, the Holy Spirit by the blood of Jesus washes and purifies your soul, your inner being, preparing you for him.
Not only does the heavenly groom care about purity, he also, number two, has identifiable groomsmen. You'll be able to tell when you go to a wedding who's the groom who's the groomsman.
If they're all out in the lobby joking around, it's hard to tell. They're all dressed the same. They all look the same. You know, you really can't tell who's who. But when they take their place, the groomsmen are identifiable because of how they stand in relation to the groom.
[8:09] And so I want you to see John the Baptist as that identifiable groomsman, the pattern of a true believer who points to Christ the Savior. Four observations about John the Baptizer as a groomsman.

Number one, the groom's true friends stand for the groom. Look at verse 26. They said of John the Baptizer, Rabbi, he to whom you bore witness.
That's how John wanted to be associated to Christ. Who is Jesus? Who is this man also baptizing? He's the one that John bore witness to. The one that John stood for and vouched for.

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You picture at a wedding scene, the enemies of the groom wanting to come and take him down and mess him up. Picture like a Romeo and Juliet drama. Well, the groomsmen are right there and they have his back.
They will bear witness and they will stand by the groom. That's exactly what John the Baptist does. Now, listen, if the true groomsmen of Jesus are identifiable, that also means that we need to beware of imposters.
[9:12] Those who are ashamed of Christ are not welcome at his wedding feast. That's an imposter. Number two, the groom's true friends defend his credibility. Look at verse 27.

John answered, a person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. What was it that Jesus was receiving? Jesus was receiving all the people.
The disciples said, look, they're going from you over to him. John the Baptist assesses it. He says, they are. Yes, the father is giving all these people who have heard the gospel.
He is. The father is giving these people to his son. That's who is receiving them. The bride sees that Christ's life, work and glory were given to Jesus Christ by God, the creator of heaven and earth. And the groom witnessing that, the groomsmen are happy to vouch for him and to say, this is the true God. I point you to him. He is worthy of your trust.
[10:11] Number three, the groom's true friends make clear what they are not. Those in churches who have allowed biblical authority to be lost, Christ to be displaced, the gospel to be distorted or faith to be perverted.

They are not true friends of the bridegroom. Those whose own interests have taken the place of God's interests and those who are trying to do the work of God in the name of Jesus in their own way.
They are like a groomsman trying to kiss or steal the attention of the bride. John the baptizer did the opposite. The groom alone makes the joy of his true friends complete.
Look at verse 29. John the baptizer did not want the attention. He did not want the popularity. He was full. Simply hearing Jesus Christ preach the truth from heaven.
Verse 29. John the baptizer says, Who stands and hears him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete.
[11:23] He must increase, but I must decrease. What a pattern for ministry. We are full simply hearing the truth of God.

Our lives are so fleeting and short. We want Christ to be exalted and for his bride to come and enjoy him. And for their joy to be just as full as ours because he alone can satisfy.
The heavenly groom increases in the life of his true friends. Is Christ increasing in your soul? Is your joy in Christ growing and deepening?
Then you're a true friend of Christ. Where the heavenly groom is being decreased, being made less. Those are not true friends of Christ. This was another thing that the Cambridge Declaration pointed out.
They said the loss of God's centrality in the life of today's church is both common and lamentable. It is this loss that allows us to transform worship into entertainment, gospel preaching into marketing, believing into technique, being good into feeling good about ourselves, and faithfulness into being successful by worldly standards.
[12:40] As a result, God, Christ, and the Bible have come to mean too little to us and rest too inconsequentially upon us, the church.

But Christ's true friends like John the Baptizer, they live to make Christ's glory known to the whole world. It's the true friends of the groom, Jesus Christ, that will go out into the byways and the hedges and compel all who will come in.
When you have been made full with the voice of Christ, the truth of the gospel that Jesus reveals, you won't be ashamed. You'll be happy to do whatever he calls you to do.
And as a healthy church, we should be seeing that in our own lives. We should be out there, at least some of us in the busy streets, open air preaching. We should not be ashamed at some point to do an outdoor service and to simply worship the Lord, let the world may see.
And we should also be disciplined with our giving and our expenditures as a church so that we can propempo, we can send. That's the Greek word for sending out missionaries.
[13:45] I've talked in the last two weeks with two different missionary team leaders, one in South Africa, one in the northern tip of Africa in an undisclosed country. Both, I just need to share this with

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you all at some point, both have a glorious vision for reaching the unreached people groups within Africa.

One is doing it directly with a team of five other families, and the other is doing it by these men and women coming from tribes, and they know those languages of those tribes, being discipled and being equipped now to go back to their own villages and translate the scripture.
Powerful work, and we need to be part of that here from Parker, Colorado. Our giving needs to be to support that. We need to do it sacrificially. Whatever it looks like, whatever it takes, we need to be part of that, and we need to be praying for them.
And it'll be a joy to see the groom, Jesus Christ, calling his bride from the whole world to himself.
Well, the heavenly groom cares about purity, and he has identifiable groomsmen.
Number three, the groom attracts his bride. Picture the long aisle of a beautiful chapel, and there's the bride.
[14:52] Her heart is pounding. Her face is becoming flush. She is like a magnet, just drawn to the warm eyes and the smile of her groom who swallows hard when he sees her.

That's what the church is when you behold Jesus Christ. The bride, who is the bride? You are the bride if you are one who God has called to Jesus. Look at verse 29.
From the lips of John the baptizer, verse 29, the one who has the bride is the bridegroom. We are told in verse 26 that all were going to him.
Why? Well, look at verse 28. It's the same reason John the baptizer loves Jesus, the groom from heaven, because they have heard his voice. And they are full of joy at hearing the voice of Jesus Christ.
He draws them. He attracts them. He makes them to rejoice greatly. How could you describe the attractiveness of our Lord Jesus Christ? If you had to do it in one word, you could say heavenly.
[15:57] Jesus has an attractiveness that is otherworldly. Look at verse 31. That's how John the baptist reckons it. He says, He who comes from above is above all.

He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. But he who comes from heaven is above all. See, the bride, the church, is attracted to the heavenliness of the groom.
Jesus, he still lives and he still speaks to his church today. And when you hear the voice of Jesus, you recognize this is not something man could ever make up.
He moves and talks in the pages of scripture. And the way he treats people is above every other man, above everything else you could compare him to. You see the heavenliness of Christ.
It's because God has opened your eyes and caused you to behold Jesus Christ, the groom, coming for the church, his bride, coming from heaven to draw you to him.
[16:57] And then you can read the Song of Solomon's chapter 2, verses 3 and 4. And you can recognize, if you're the beloved church, you can recognize your lover, Jesus Christ, as an apple tree among the trees of the forest.

And you can say, like Solomon, So is my beloved among all the world. And like the bride, as she beheld the groom, she said, With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.
He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. That's the bride being attracted to Jesus Christ, the groom. And number four, the groom exchanges seals, exchanges signet rings with his bride.
So I want to show you this exchange. First look with me at verse 33. Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true.
To set your seal means that if you're someone who owns property, you would have a signet ring. This is your ring, your signature. And in a document that would be folded over, wet wax would be dripped there.
[18:13] You would take your signet ring and press it onto that wax. So you are setting your seal when you testify that this is true. And so when you receive the gospel, when you receive the words of Jesus Christ as life-giving for you, you are setting your seal that God is true, and God is faithful to his covenant promise.

Now, I want to show you how you do not set your seal to God until God first sets his seal to you. And now look at verse 32. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony.

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See, no one would go up and set their seal to God. You might be thinking, well, who is it that possibly could receive this testimony from Christ as true? How do you know whether you are a true believer?
I believe that right here in these next three verses, Jesus shows you exactly how God does this miracle of causing someone who is spiritually dead to open their eyes and believe Jesus Christ. Look at verse 34. For he whom God has sent utters the words of God. So the first way that God opens your heart and your eyes to believe his truth is when you hear the word of God preached to you.
[19:31] It's because Jesus Christ is still preaching and interceding so that everyone he purchased will believe in him. You must hear the call of Christ as the words of God himself on your life.

For he gives the spirit without measure. So when you hear the gospel proclaimed, it's the Holy Spirit ministering the word of God to your soul. Not just measured out just enough.
It's flooding over you. The spirit washes the truth of God over your entire being. Look at verse 35. The father loves the son and has given all things into his hand.
Why are all the people going to Jesus? Why is the spirit causing all those people to believe this word from Christ as true? It's because the father gave the bride to the groom.
God the father gave the church to his son, Jesus Christ, the heavenly groom. Without Christ, you already have the wrath of our good, holy, and just God against your sinful, rebellious soul.
[20:35] Look at verse 36. Whoever believes in the son has in the present right now, you have now inside of you the life of the age to come. Eternal life begins now.

But whoever does not obey the son shall not see life. But the wrath of God remains on him. This is the work of regeneration.
Like God explained, Jesus explained to Nicodemus. Now he's showing you now. If Nicodemus was the culmination of man's religion and being a law keeper, he's going to go down to the opposite end now to show you who God is powerful to regenerate and draw to the groom.
And that's the Samaritan woman. But I want to circle back to why there is an exchange of seals. Please turn in your Bible to Ephesians. Ephesians chapter 1 verse 13.
And as you turn there, I want to show you a couple of things. So the Lord Jesus Christ gave two ordinances.
[21:35] He commanded his church to do two things. One is to baptize. And the other is that we remember him with the Lord's Supper. So the Lord's Supper and baptism, they're both signs. A sign, like a stop sign, it points to the thing signified.

So baptism points to our union with Christ. The Lord's Supper is a sign that points to our communion with God. All right. Now, baptism, we are, we are, the union with Christ comes when he regenerates you and the Holy Spirit breathes life into you.
You have the fullness of the Holy Spirit washing over you. The Spirit without measure. When you are made alive in Christ, you are united to Christ. The moment he regenerates you. Look at Ephesians 1 verse 13.
Paul, writing to the church, he says, In him, you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, what happened?
You were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. So the same steps. Did you catch that? When you heard the word of truth, but you didn't just hear it as a message for anyone out there.
[22:48] You heard it as the gospel of your salvation. You then receive the promised Holy Spirit as God's seal, as the signet ring of the King, the creator of heaven, who will not break his word.

So that's the first ring that's given to the bride. It's the Holy Spirit. He seals the believer in Christ. And then, and so that's the picture of baptism. That's why we only baptize once.
You were sealed. You were united to Christ. But then, when you come up and you take the Lord's Supper, the Bible says you are proclaiming Christ and him crucified. You are now setting your seal to the work of Christ on your behalf.
He sealed you with the Spirit. Now you set your seal to the fact that God is true. How do you know that? You point to Christ. So the heavenly groom exchanges seals with his bride.
I don't want you to leave here wondering if he has given you a new heart, if God has set his seal to you. And you know why it's such a gift when we have the Holy Spirit?
[23:55] It's because the Holy Spirit does not stop working. The Holy Spirit fills you. It's the Spirit without measure to breathe life into your dead soul. But then the Spirit keeps bearing fruit in your

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life.

And the Bible teaches this. How can you know that you have the Spirit of God sealing you into Christ and that you can set your seal to God's truth of salvation through Christ alone?
Well, in the words of the Canons of Dorp, this is what the Bible teaches. When you can observe in your life the fruit of the Spirit described in God's Word, what are some things you want to be looking for to know if you have the seal of the Spirit?
You should see a true faith in Christ. That you don't put your faith in your own good works or your own merit to be in the presence of God.
Your faith is in the work of Jesus Christ for you alone. The Spirit also gives a true believer a childlike fear of God. It's a fear that sees God the Creator as your Holy Father.
[24:58] You fear Him with reverence and you love Him and you want to live your life in response of gratitude to Him. But it is a fear that does not take His law lightly. You want to please your Heavenly Father.

That's a sign of the Spirit changing your rebellious heart, giving you a love that is otherworldly. You will also have a godly sorrow for your own sin.
A godly sorrow from sin is a gift from the Holy Spirit to the true believer. So why do we read from the law and have a moment of confession if we're believers, if we're Christians in a church?
It's because that's how the Spirit continues to purify His bride. He is preparing you. He's showing you this godly sorrow for sin. It's killing off the sin of the flesh.
And it's replacing that sin with more and more love for God that only Jesus Christ could put into your heart. Jesus had said in Matthew 6 that the only people who are blessed are those who hunger and thirst for His righteousness.
[26:04] Only those who hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God that God alone can give you are the ones who will be satisfied. That's the promise. If you hunger and thirst for righteousness, God will satisfy you.

And if you have the Holy Spirit in you, the more of God that you get, the more you will hunger for God. If you thirst to be more and more right with Jesus Christ, your Savior, as your groom, then the closer you get to Jesus, the more you enjoy that communion with Him through the ministry of the church, through your reading of His Word, through your time in prayer and communion, the more thirsty you will be for even more of those living waters that come from Christ alone.
And if you're seeing some of these things in your life, never perfectly but always in increasing measure, then you can have confidence and assurance that God saw you as filthy and untouchable as you are, as you probably feel your sins to be.
And He said, come to the groom from heaven. He is for you. Put your faith, your hope, and your trust in Him. And now the Holy Spirit brings the fruit of Christ.
And He holds it up in your life. And He says, see how good Jesus is. He is bearing the fruit of the Spirit. These are gifts from Him. He purchased these gifts for you so you can know that you belong to God.
[27:30] Well, this is part one, the heavenly groom. Next time we come back to the Gospel of John, we're going to pick up on the same message.

I believe it's one continuous theme, and I want to show you His unlikely bride so that you can be encouraged. And what I want you to remember is this. The unlikeliness of the bride confirms the heavenliness of the groom.
So if you're feeling today, there's no way God can continue to love me, continue to forgive me. The more unlikely you are, the more you see how little of God's favor you deserve.
That just really points to the heavenliness, the otherworldliness, the divine love of God in Jesus Christ for you. Well, let's close in a word of prayer and then prepare our hearts for the Lord's Supper.
Let's pray.
[28:54] May your spirit purify us as your bride. Prepare us for your great wedding feast in heaven. And give us strength to wait anxiously until we can finally behold our heavenly groom, the Lord Jesus Christ.

God Himself who took on flesh to save His church. We praise you, Lord. May you be glorified in the life of this congregation today and with every day that you give us to live on earth.
Until we're with you in glory, we ask. Amen.

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