

## BRIDE OF CHRIST

Hi we are in week two of three of our series on the church called Gathering.

Last week had a lot in it and if you want to catch up on it go to our website to read it again or download it.

But if you don't have time here's a brief recap – I talked about as to who we are and why we do church. So if you remember last week ago, we asked the question who is church for? is it for the Seeker? or is it for the Saints? and I answered that question by looking at scripture and realizing actually church is for God. We do church for God, we gather together for God and the best way that Seekers and Saints can be blessed is when we do church for God, because when we do church for God, he is glorified and we are satisfied.

So church is primarily of a vertical orientation.

We do church for God and then seeker and Saints are all blessed as a result.

Also that we can prioritize gathering together, even in the world full of currents. How do we gather? how do we become the people of God? The simple answer we prioritize it. We make it important and we prioritize gathering and all the currents of our world will not be able to sweep us away.

So today I'm asking another question. What is church? What are we.

Here's the answer to the question What is the church? The church is the bride of Christ. That image, or symbolism comes from what was revealed to John writing in Revelation 21:2 /

### [Revelation 21:2](#)

*Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

As I say the word bride, probably Minds begin to race back in the past. Images of weddings, films, your own wedding fill your mind? When God says that we are the bride of Christ I believe that symbolism, is helping us connect to a reality that is hardwired into the human soul. So when you hear the word bride, do you men think of the beauty you saw on the day and how you felt on your wedding day?.

The Bride of Christ, this is simply a symbol. This is imagery that God uses, its current, it's relevant imagery that helps us understand an eternal truth. So when you hear the word bride or the phrase bride of Christ, think this..... bride means belonging. It simply means that we belong. So when God calls you and I the bride of Christ when God calls the church the bride of Christ it means that we belong to Jesus. Jesus belongs to us and we belong to each other. The word bride also means bonded to, it means to be made one. Okay, when the bride and the groom come together, they are bonded to each other. It simply means that we belong to and we are bonded with Christ and with each other.

Now I do this sometimes at wedding's, and this depends on the couple standing before me. I take my stole and wrap it around their hands which they have just placed rings on. Saying tying the knot let no person break this union which you have formed. You see they are bonded to each other. In a Christian marriage they are bonded to oneanother and also bonded to Christ. Let no one, themselves included, allow that bond with Jesus to be broken.

Why do we make so many movies about weddings? Because it connects with something down inside the human heart. How many of you remember your wedding day? You can remember some things? How many of you can remember the song that you danced to on your wedding day your first dance as a couple.

I don't remember it. What I do remember is, don't stand on Diane's dress, don't stand on her feet.

How many of you can remember your wedding vows to this day?

I remember all the preparation that went into it.

Diane was a teacher then so as all teachers our wedding was in the school holidays. Six months from proposal to wedding, a lot of preparation to get done.

I remember I was still moving out of my rented place, then waiting for the last inspection at 12noon. Our wedding was in a couple of hours- time. I made it in time, though not with the correct suit on. I had my best man's suit and the ministers belt for my pants. Nobody knew, all eyes were on Diane, thank goodness.

That was some of my wedding day. That was 19 years ago last September.

When we think about a marriage, when we think about a wedding day, when we think about a bride and a groom, it creates emotion in us and I want you to understand that when Jesus calls us the bride of Christ This is imagery, this is symbolism. This is not just symbolic, but true meaning ..... for the deep love that Christ has for His church.

So as I talk about it I hope that you'll understand more, why it is so important for us to gather together as the people of God because we are the bride of Christ.

We are bonded together with him. We belong to him and he belongs to us. We are connected with Christ. In every marriage and every wedding there are three elements that we all experience and the first is preparation.

You can elope and you can go to a justice of the peace.

But if you're going to do the traditional wedding you got some work to do. You better prepare. It takes a lot to prepare a wedding.

You've got to prepare by finding a location. Are you going to get married inside or outside? Are you going to get married in a church or a wedding venue? Where you going to get married on a beach or overseas? Are you going to have a traditional wedding? Then who is going to be the minister? Or who is going to be the marriage celebrant?

There's a lot of preparation that goes into the wedding. What's the color scheme going to be? How about the bridesmaids dresses? How much are they going to cost? What will the men wear? What flowers will you have? Oh, and don't forget the cars.

I mean, you've got to prepare a lot of stuff that in the moment seems like it is so essential and important but as you go beyond the wedding you realize that the marriage is actually more important than the wedding. The wedding is the jumping off spot. The marriage is where it really, really, means something. But you can't have a wedding without preparation.

And I want to show you that when we are called the bride of Christ. Jesus himself is responsible for all the preparation. As a matter of fact, Jesus alludes to this in John chapter 14 verses 1 through 4.

If you look back in John 13, the verse previous to this Jesus has just predicted to his disciples that they are going to deny him and abandon him and leave his side at the crucifixion and this troubles their hearts. They become sad and anxious when Jesus tells them that, and so Jesus is trying to comfort his disciples when he says in John 14 beginning in verse 1 ***“do not let your hearts be troubled you, believe in God believe also in me. My father's house has many rooms. If that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to***

***prepare a place for you***” Jesus tells his disciples that he is going to **prepare**. What is he going to prepare for them? He is going to prepare a place.

Now there's imagery here when he talks about the rooms in his Father's house.

In the first century many cultures would practice marriage this way. A husband and a wife before they were married would be betrothed to each other for about a year. They would take 12 months after the arrangements were made and they would prepare for marriage and in some cultures including Jewish culture often the groom would go to his father's house and the groom would spend a year adding onto .... or building on to .... making an addition to his father's house because after he and his wife were married the bride and the groom would then go to the father's house and they would join that family .... they would live there. The father invites them to live with him.

So Jesus is using imagery at the Last Supper with his disciples the imagery of a bride and a groom and he's telling the disciples. I know that you're all worried that you're going to fail me and guess what ..... you are. But that's okay because I love you and my grace is sufficient for you, and I'm never going to turn my back on you and I'm never going to leave you and I'm never going to divorce this relationship.

**I am going to prepare a place for you.**

In other word's where you fail I succeed. Where you drop the ball, I take care of it. You are not perfect, I am.

I've got Grace for you. Even when you feel like we don't belong together and you're not good enough, and no you're not worthy of my love, but yes, you are worth my love.

We're not worthy of Glory. Only God is worthy of Glory, but we are worth His love. This is what bride and groom means. To be the bride of Christ means that we are fully completely unconditionally loved by Jesus. So he's going to prepare a place for us and then in **verse 3**, he goes on and says ***and if I go and prepare a place for you, .... here's the promise .... “ will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am”***. Why does Jesus call us his bride because he wants us to be with Him. It's about the relationship.

It's more than just a wedding. You all know marriage is more than just a wedding. Anybody can raise some money hire a church, get a minister or get a witness to sign some documents. Anybody can have a wedding.

But the marriage is where we spend eternity with each other in the new heavens and the new Earth in a place that Jesus has prepared for us. And then verse 4 Jesus says, ***“you know the way to the place. Where I am going”*** ... and then He will go on to say two verses later, ***“I am the way and the truth and the life”***

So the first element of any wedding of any marriage preparation, there's work to be done, and for us as the bride of Christ, Christ has made the preparations. Jesus came to Earth in the form of a man. He took on flesh. The Bible says he emptied himself. He became one of us so we could understand God.

The Bible says he was tempted with every sin we are tempted with, yet He never gave in. Every sin that I have succumbed to Jesus has said no to. Every sin you have succumbed to Jesus said no to. He lived the perfect life that I could not live. He died the terrible death I deserve to die and then he was raised from the dead by the power of God to offer all of us a brand new life, a brand new identity, a brand new community.

He gives us his Holy Spirit who helps us walk in Freedom. We are now joined with Jesus Christ in a relationship called salvation. We are now made one with our heavenly Father and we are now filled with the Spirit who guides us and loves us and convicts us and encourages us and challenges us and gives us gifts.

Is anything better than this? There is nothing better on earth than the one Jesus is offering, ***“I am preparing a place for you”***, but this occurred to me yesterday as I was going over my notes. What if. what if the place He's preparing for us isn't about the place as much as it is about the people. What if the place is preparing for us is not so much about the streets of gold and the Pearly Gates and the Mansion we're going to get to live in. What if it's about the people we get to spend eternity side by side with what if it's about that. I'm not just in heaven alone worshipping Jesus, but I get to worship him with you. You and I get to worship with all our brothers and sisters and they get to worship with us, but we don't get to do that. Not yet.

The place he is preparing for us will .... never end. So we will have eternity to get to know every single person that is ever belong to Jesus and to figure out how they came to Christ and hear their story about how he redeemed them.

What makes the place so amazing is that Jesus is there and all of his people are there that's what makes the place so amazing. He's been working on it for two thousand years. He told his disciples. I'm going to go prepare a place for you. He's not building buildings for 2,000 years.

No, he's not building .... buildings to prepare the place. He's calling people. Two thousand years He's been calling people. He's been calling Muslims from Saudi Arabia come and follow me, Hindus from Sri Lanka come and follow me, atheists from New Zealand come and follow me. Football players, stamp people, and netball fans, primary, intermediate and college students come follow me, carpenters and cleaners, lawyers and attorneys, and he's calling people come on follow me.

He's not building a place with like brick and mortar like the house next door. He's building a place with his people and every time we get together on a Sunday and we gather in one of our locations such as St Andrew's, or here, or when our home groups get together.

Do you know that every time we gather together, that gathering is practice for the wedding? We're practicing what it's going to be like to live in a place where all of God's people are gathered. And that's why, that's why I have to get here on Sundays, it's not an option. I have to get here. I love the church not because I get to preach in it. I love the church because you are my people. I belong to you, you, belong to me, we all belong to Jesus we are His bride and He is going to prepare a place for us.

Let me show you the second element of every wedding, of every marriage, **anticipation.**

Do you remember for those of you that are married? How much you anticipated about getting married, how much excitement there was about the wedding day, how excited you were to have all your friends and family there. Do you remember what it was like ladies when you got engaged and he put the ring on your finger? Remember that.

We got a text image a few months ago of my nephew and his girlfriend, it was more a close up of her hand. She had said yes and she's got this ring on her finger and they want everybody to know, I belong to him and he belongs to me. I'm spoken for. Remember all that anticipation? That anticipation is part of the process.

To be honest with you, to be the bride of Christ, .... to belong to Jesus, .... to be bonded to him in this family of God. If we're not anticipating His return then we're really not paying attention. Because I can't wait to see Jesus. I can't wait till he comes back and I don't want him to just come back and rescue us out of a bad situation.

No, I can't wait till he comes back and makes everything right? I don't think he wants to just take us away from Earth and whisk us off to Heaven. I think he is going to, by scripture make a new Heaven and a new Earth and restore and redeem everything back to the way He originally intended it, because God finishes

what he starts. I'm living in, your living in, we are the Bride waiting on the groom, in anticipation of that day.

I remember how much I looked forward to my wedding. I could not wait. It seemed like it would never ever get there and I'll share you what Paul says in regards to anticipation because that really is a part of what it means to be the bride of Christ. Paul says in Ephesians chapter 5. Verses 30 through 32 ***for we are members of His body***, this church here, belongs to Jesus. We are His. So the way we talk matters, the way we react matters, the way that we communicate on Facebook and Twitter the stuff we post on Instagram, the emails we send, the conversations we have, the way that we treat the person who serves us when we are out, the way we drive. It matters.

Because I'm part of the body of Christ, so what I do and say represents you, and what you do and say represents me because we're part of His body.

It says in verse 31 ***“for this reason. A man will leave his father and mother and be United to his wife and the two will become one flesh.”*** Paul is quoting Genesis chapter 2. Jesus also quoted this exact same verse in Matthew chapter 19. ***We become one with Christ in the same way that a husband and wife become one.***

And here's what he says in the next verse. ***This is a profound mystery, but I'm talking about Christ and the church.*** We are His bride. We belong together. We are bonded together. We are connected to each other. What is this great mystery? Here's the great mystery. Look I am not the bride. You are not the bride. We are the bride.

So Christianity, faith in Jesus is a personal decision, but it's not private. You've heard that already. So I'll make a personal decision to give my life to Jesus, but when I give my life to Jesus, I'm also giving my life to you. Because we are a body, and we belong to Christ.

What is this profound mystery? That two has become one flesh a husband of the wife of Bride and the groom that when the people of God gather we are connected to Jesus. We are bonded to Christ that is a profound mystery and the honestly will never understand fully what it means until that day. Until the day that Jesus comes.

Think on this imagery. When the bride begins to walk down the aisle and everybody stands up and looks at the bride everybody's been anticipating that. And we all know what that's like, the beautiful bride as she walks down the aisle, that beautiful dress everyone wants to see the glory of the Bride the joy of that moment. Now watch the watch the groom as he watches the bride walk. Watch his eyes watch her as she walks down the aisle.

Now with that imagery in mind know that there's not one moment of your life as a member of the Bride as a part of the body of Christ that the groom is not watching you. He sees you everywhere you go. He watches my every step I take. He knows everything you're struggling with he knows where you're deficient. He knows when you're having a bad day.

He knows when you feel disconnected when you've been hurt he knows when you're angry and when you're upset and you were confused and you were depressed and you are lonely there is never a moment when the groom takes his eyes off his bride.

To be the bride of Christ means that we are protected. It means he provides for us. It means he watches us and when he watches us, he watches us with anticipation as much as we're looking forward to the day that Jesus comes back. He's looking forward to that moment because he shed His blood to make sure we got access he gave His life to make us a part of his bride.

He is looking forward to it more than we all are.

Anticipation, but there is also one more element and that's invitation.

Invitation, do you remember how big of a deal it was that you have to get your invitations out for your wedding on time? Like you got to get your RSVP way in advance, and a wedding really is a lot about invitation. There's all kinds of invitations extended, you know, you send out the invitations and you have to figure out who are we going to invite?

You got to get the invitations out, right? There are people that you know can't come to the wedding, but you want them to know you were thinking about them. Then there are other people that you know who may or may not come to the wedding but you want them to know that you're thinking about them because they might have the ability to write you a really nice check as a wedding gift. All these things are really your inviting people to bless your marriage by giving you a gift. These are all what it means to be bride and groom.

You invite people to come, and then you invite them to eat. Who are we going to invite to be in the bridal party, who will be the groomsmen? Who are we going to invite to sit here and sit there?

Invitation is a big part of a wedding.

But we all know this there's one invitation that's extended, that trumps all other invitations when it comes to weddings, and that's the invitation that happens when the groom gets down on one knee puts the ring on the bride's finger and says, will you marry me? That's a real invitation. It's a proposal.

So I believe that God is trying to get our attention here. I believe that God wants us to see that invitation is a part of what it means to be the people of God. It's a part of what it means to be the church to be the bride of Christ. This invitation to the wedding happens and what takes place everybody's there. You're watching, the music is beautiful. The vows are meaningful. The Rings are exchanged and at the very end the Minister says you may turn. You make them turn to face the audience. I say you are now man and wife you may kiss your bride.

I invite that husband to kiss his bride and then everyone rejoices and celebrates and claps. I'm hers she's mine. We belong to each other we're bonded together she's my bride, and that's the promise that Jesus made and we get a view, a future preview of that moment in **Revelation 19. Verses 6 through 9.**

*“Then I heard ... John writes. “Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude like the Roar of Rushing Waters and like loud peals of Thunder shouting. Hallelujah for our Lord God Almighty Reigns, let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory for the wedding of the Lamb has come and His Bride has made herself ready”.*

See this imagery runs deep, this metaphor is powerful. We are the bride of Christ. I'm not, you're not, we are. You can't be the bride by yourself. When Jesus returns, you know who's leaving with him? When Jesus returns to Earth to make all things new, you know who's leaving with Him? At my wedding only one person left with me Diane Wescott. When Jesus comes back, you know who's leaving with Him? His bride the church.

That's why we gather. It's not about a place, it's about people. It's not about the building you're in right now. It's about the people because the building you're sitting in right now is an empty building until the people of God gathered and when the people of God gathered now, it's the church. That's who we are.

The bride has made herself ready, *fine linen bright and clean was given her to wear. Then the angel said to me write this, blessed are those who are ....* invited to what? *the wedding supper of the lamb, and then*

***he added these are the true words of God.*** You're invited. I'm invited. I've said yes. I'm going, have you said yes? Have you said yes to the invitation to the wedding supper of the Lamb? Because it's going to be awesome. And if you say yes to the invitation, then you get to be a part of the celebration. But if you say no to the invitation, you cannot be a part of the celebration. I'm going to join in with the multitudes of people who shout hallelujah at that wedding Feast because I've said yes to the invitation, and I invite you to do it.

How do you become a Christian? How do you nail it down? How do you know you belong to Christ? The same way that a woman and a man know they're engaged, a question is asked, will you marry me? somebody says yes. Yes, that's how you know.

Jesus is asking you right now. Will you be saved and all you have to do is say yes.

*Yes, I'll give my life to you. Pray this in your heart right now if you're ready to be saved. Just pray in Your Heart Right Now Jesus I Need you and I say yes to you. I want to belong to you. I want to be connected to your people. So I give you my life. I Repent of my sin. I put all my faith in you. I belong to you now Jesus.*

*Welcome to the family, the bride of Christ.*

*Amen*