



THE GOSPEL OF JESUS WHAT THE SON OF GOD DID

The Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25-33 and Ezekiel 16:8-14)

We know from the Bible that Peter was married. Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:30), and Paul used Peter's example as a right for every apostle to be married if they wanted to be (1 Cor 9:5). It is most likely that several apostles were also married. Most scholars believe Paul was married at some time in his life. But it is almost impossible to imagine Jesus being married.

Several years ago, a book was published claiming Jesus was married and fathered two children (*The Da Vinci Code*; a 2003 fictional novel by Dan Brown). It was a very controversial book and had no historical evidence to prove its claim. Its popularity was steeped in the mystery and controversy of Jesus taking Mary Magdalene as His wife and then having two children.

Besides the lack of historical evidence, why is it so hard for us to believe that Jesus had a wife? Maybe in part, it's because we cannot imagine any woman being a worthy spouse for the Son of God. Obviously, no one could be perfect like Him, but as close as humanly possible. It just makes sense that she must be amazing. Maybe someone like His mother. She wasn't perfect, but God chose Mary for a reason, and she must have been special in her own way.

Can you tell where this is headed? Even though we know Jesus wasn't married in the literal sense, the Bible describes Him as having a Bride. This is found first in the Old Testament. The prophets Hosea and Ezekiel both talk about God taking His people as His bride. He chose them not because they were worthy or beautiful. God chose them from His prerogative and mercy. Like anyone going into marriage with their eyes open, He wanted them not *because* of who they were but *despite* who they were. And both Hosea 1 and Ezekiel 16 describe God's betrothed as both thoroughly unworthy and unconditionally loved.

This special relationship is continued in the New Testament. When questioned about his disciples leaving to follow Jesus, John the Baptist responded, "No one can receive anything unless it has been given to him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Messiah, but I've been sent ahead of him.' He who has the bride is the groom. But the groom's friend, who stands by and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the groom's voice. So this joy of mine is complete. He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn 3:27-30). Paul referred to himself as an ancient matchmaker. He considered his ministry to be helping those who do not know Jesus to be united with Him in a marriage relationship (2 Cor 11:2).

If the Church is the bride of Christ, what kind of bride is she?

Brides-to-be work hard to look their best. They carefully select their dress, hairstyle, and makeup. Maybe because there will be so many pictures or every eye on them during the ceremony. They won't look like this every day, but they will look as beautiful as possible on their wedding day. But the Bible teaches that God does not look at the outward appearance but upon the heart.

It is not the Church's outward appearance that captivated Jesus's affection. This is where the idea of Jesus being married gets even more bizarre. Jesus didn't select His Bride because she is "beautiful on the

inside." The Bible teaches throughout that God's Bride is double-minded, stubborn, to the point of being idolatrous/adulterous. They have wandering eyes and wandering hearts.

And yet, He loves them.

And yet, He loves us.

What kind of love does he have for us? Because of God's nature, He is perfectly self-sustaining and whole; He loves us freely. There is no need inside Him, and therefore He loves us purely. This is one reason why God's mercy and grace are so great. Since there is nothing inside Himself that's lacking or incomplete, He loves us as broken, sinful, and unworthy. We cannot disappoint Him because He knows the whole truth about us and chose to love us. We cannot earn His love because His love is freely given. Think about that. God knows you better than you do and He still loves you wholly and freely.

As we grasp and begin to comprehend the greatness of God's love for us and our covenantal relationship (marriage) with Him, we become free to love. That's why the Bible says we are to love one another as God has loved us (1 Pet 4:8). We are to forgive one another in the same way He has forgiven us (Eph 4:32). We are to be patient with one another in the same way God has been patient with us (Col 3:13). The only way to live like this is by appreciating our relationship (marriage) with Jesus and then working out our relationship with others.

Because we are united with Jesus, our identity is secure. We no longer look for additional or external identity markers. We are the beloved Bride of Christ and are free to live without fear, disappointment, anxiety, or hopelessness.

Marriage is both an ideal and a reality. It's the beauty and difficulty of becoming one. It's a lifelong commitment of sacrifice, patience, love, and forbearance. We struggle through all our relationships, primarily our marriages. But we can always rest securely knowing that Jesus's love, patience, peace, and forgiveness are perfect. In Ephesians 5, Paul commands husbands and wives to love and respect each other. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, he states, "This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church." Isn't it a joy to know we are free from the pressure of being perfect in order to be accepted and cared for by Jesus? In light of how He loves us, let us love one another and continue the matchmaking work of His apostles so that others may experience union with Jesus.

Discussion

1. What do you think about Jesus's bride?
2. Why is it so important to remember Jesus's love comes freely?
3. What kind of bride are you? How much attention do you give honoring, loving, and serving Him?
4. If Jesus loves and cares for His bride, do you share His love and patience? What do you think Jesus would say to you about your attitude toward His bride?
5. How has this particular lesson encouraged, strengthened, confronted or challenged you?

Our Corporate Prayer

Eternal and loving Father, we come to you unworthy and yet loved. We kneel before you broken, but under your care. We stand before you grateful and confident in your vows to love us until death and beyond. We confess that we know what love is because you demonstrated it to us. We are capable of forgiveness because we have experienced your forgiveness. Help us to live in and from your love. Teach us to know, by your Spirit, our identity in Christ. And empower us to live out our true identity as Christ's Bride in holiness, purity and grace. In the loving name of Jesus, Amen.