The Bride of Christ

More than a billion eyes were on her as she stepped out of the queen’s 1977 Rolls-Royce in front of London’s Westminster Abbey on Friday.

- A ripple of excitement swept through the crowd that had been gathered from the far reaches of the world both physically and by the various media outlets.
  - At that moment billions of eyes focused their attention on one thing...
    - The dress.
- For five months the dress was, perhaps, the best kept secret in all of London.
  - The secrecy is a part of the tradition.
  - Everyone wants to see the dress and every bride wants to keep it a secret.
    - It’s something that adds to the excitement of that big day.
- The bride’s wedding dress, one designer said, is the most important dress that she will choose in her life.
  - The dress speaks volumes about the bride!

I am a firm believer that there has never been an unattractive bride.

- There is something about that wedding dress, about that wedding day, that brings out the best in a bride.
  - From the time when she was just a little girl, dreaming of princes and princesses, she has been planning for that special moment.
  - And, when the time comes, she prepares herself.
- She goes to every length to insure that she looks the best that she will ever look in her life on her wedding day.
  - Carefully and meticulously she styles her hair and worries over the minutest details of her appearance.
  - Right down to her shoes, everything is selected to compliment the natural beauty of the bride.

And, when the big moment finally comes, the crown jewel of it all is her wedding dress!

- This past Friday, the entire design world waited with baited breath to see the dress that would be worn in the Royal Wedding.
  - And, according to the various media outlets, when the time came the dress did not disappoint.
- The lacy, long-sleeved, gown with lace overlay was everything that it was expected to be.
  - With an ivory silk veil
    - trimmed with hand-embroidered flowers,
    - a sparkling tiara
    - and an almost-9-foot train,
  - the lace covered full-skirted dress was on magnificent display when she entered the abbey.
• It was immediately obvious that great care had been taken in preparing the dress.
  o The news media would later be told that the Royal School of Needlework had constructed the lace.
    ▪ Their attention to detail was impressive.
• According to the official website of the royal wedding "the workers washed their hands every 30 minutes to keep the lace and threads pristine, and the needles were renewed every three hours to keep them sharp and clean."

The amount of time and attention that went into the construction of that Royal Wedding Dress is impressive
• but as I considered all of the media hype and the central role in the ceremony that was given to the dress
  o I was reminded that all of creation, today, stands in anticipation of a much greater marriage celebration.
• The day is soon coming when the King of Glory will return for his bride
  o and when he does, the scripture tells us that once again the dress will be the center of attention!

Revelation 19:7-8 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.  • And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

The Lord is coming back for his church and, when He does, He’s coming back for a Bride that has made herself ready!
• He’s coming back for a church that has prepared herself for his coming!
  o He’s coming back for a bride that has paid great attention to herself, that has presented herself to him!
• I’ll never forget the day that I looked down that aisle and saw my bride come through the back doors of the church.
  o I never anticipated the tears that filled my eyes that day.
    ▪ She was absolutely beautiful.
    ▪ She had adorned herself,
      • going to great lengths to prepare herself
      • and I was immediately smitten with her.
• Let me tell you, friends, if I wasn’t already hopelessly in love with her,
  o when saw her that day I would have been hopelessly lost,
    ▪ falling head over heels for her all over again.
• She was beautiful.
  o She had taken every care,
  o gone to great detail to adorn herself
  o and make herself beautiful
  o and she did it all for me!
• Everyone else in the church that day may have been smitten by her,
  o but it wasn’t for them, she did it all for me!
• She was my bride, the love of my life,
  o and she cared enough about me to make herself ready for that special
day!

I come to this pulpit tonight to tell you that God is coming back for a people that
have made themselves ready for him.
• He’s not coming back for a church that is casual and complacent about his
coming,
  o he’s not coming back for a church that is careless about her
appearance.
• He’s coming back for a bride that has prepared herself,
  o he’s coming back for a church that has made itself ready!
• Let me tell you what God expects from his bride.
  o He expects that she has made herself ready.
  o He expects that she as taken every precaution,
    ▪ exerted every effort,
    ▪ been concerned with every meticulous detail,
    ▪ that she has diligently and with much effort prepared herself to
meet her groom!
• Salvation may focus on grace,
  o our walk with God may focus on faith,
  o our place in the bride may be centered on mercy,
    ▪ but, make no mistake about it, the beauty of the bride is
focused on her works!
    ▪ It is focused on an effort she makes.
    ▪ It is focused on her appearance
      o on the way that she presents herself.

When the King of Glory splits the eastern sky and calls his bride out of this world, a
beautiful bride that has prepared herself for him will meet him in the air.
• And, although he is already smitten with his bride,
  o he will fall in love with her all over again on that day
    ▪ because she has prepared herself to meet him!
• Her beauty will arise from her righteousness,
  o from the fact that she has been careful to preserve and present
herself.
  o Her beauty will arise from the fact that she has meticulously kept
herself!
• I’m afraid that sometimes we let ourselves grow too complacent with what it
means to be the church, the bride of Christ!
  o I’m afraid sometimes we get too casual about our appearance, about
how we have kept ourselves.
• Let me tell you something tonight,
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- when He splits the eastern sky He’s coming back for a bride that has been concerned with her own appearance,
  - a bride that, with Him in mind, has arrayed herself in fine linen, clean and white!
- The church will be arrayed, that day, in the righteousness of the saints.
- If they were so careful and so meticulous about the dress of an earthly bride
  - washing their hands every thirty minutes to keep the threads pristine, changing needles every 3 hours –
  - how much more careful should the church be about its role as a heavenly bride.

You might ask how we, as the church, can be that diligent.
- What do we do to prepare ourselves?
  - What is the spiritual equivalent to washing your hands every thirty minutes and changing the needles every three hours?
    - I’ll tell you how.
- Paul said in Titus 3:5 that the righteousness of the church comes through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost!
  - Perhaps that’s what John mean when he said that
    - “to her it was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white!”
- That, through our meticulous care
  - and the working of the Holy Ghost in our lives
    - we are made ready for his coming!
- You wonder why it bothers your Pastor when you miss church,
  - you wonder why we harp so much on a personal prayer life,
    - because it is by these things that you watch yourself, and prepare yourself
      - and by these things it is granted to you to be arrayed in fine linens!
- Some of us, in this house tonight, need the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost!
  - Ephesians 5:26 tells us that Christ, by his love, will present to himself
    - “a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.”
    - A church that is “holy and without blemish!”
- God is in this place tonight and his great grace is working among the church for a singular purpose,
  - He is trying to prepare us, to help us make ourselves ready,
    - that He might present us to himself a glorious church!
      - He’s in love with his church!
      - He sees his church as a glorious bride!
  - He wants to prepare us that we might be without spot, without wrinkle, free from every blemish.
• If you will allow him tonight He will work in your life,
  o if you will submit yourself to the Holy Ghost tonight, God will do a
    work of regeneration and renewal in your life.
• You can leave this place and say, as Isaiah said in Isaiah 61:10:
  o “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for
    he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness...”

In order to fully understand the imagery of the church as the bride of Christ it is necessary, this evening, that you understand the Hebrew wedding tradition:
• In Biblical times when a Hebrew man wished to have the hand of a Hebrew woman in Marriage,
  o he would visit the father of his future bride to discuss the price that would be necessary for her hand.
    ▪ A bride price would be negotiated.
• The Groom then made a visit to his intended Bride to present himself to her with his plans for their future.
  o Upon presenting to her his plans, and seeing her response, he would pass a cup of wine to her.
• This was the moment of truth for their course of action.
  o To drink of the cup would be her acceptance to his proposal and a life long commitment to him.
    ▪ To pass on the cup would end the relationship.
• This moment in her life was very important.
  o To drink from the cup meant Betrothal,
    ▪ the establishment of a marriage covenant,
      ▪ and a pledge to be set apart exclusively for her husband.
• Sharing the cup, with eyes on each other, hearts soaring,
  o the Groom would make a promise with words like this:
    ▪ Let not your heart be troubled.
      ▪ In my Father’s house there are many rooms, and I go to prepare a place for you.
    ▪ And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again to take you unto myself that where I am you will be also.
      ▪ If it were not true I would not have told you.

The moment she drank from the cup her intentions were sealed,
• and when the price was paid The Covenant was sealed.
  o She was betrothed to him,
    ▪ separated from the world as she then waited for his return.
• She was not then His Wife, but was then a Bride in waiting.
  o From this moment forward the bride would be known as one that has been bought with a price.
    ▪ She is not yet the wife of her betrothed,
      ▪ but she belongs to him because he has purchased her!
• She was given the legal right to conduct any business that was in his interest during his absence in his name.
  o Though the marriage was not yet consummated, the authority of his name belonged to her and, with it, she could buy and sell and bind and loose!

Meanwhile the groom would return to his homeland to prepare their Bridal Chamber and he would continue in preparation until it was finished – no matter how long it took!
• During his absence which could be a day, week, month, a year or even longer,
  o the Bride would wait and put together her dowry,
    ▪ in preparation for Her Groom’s return.
• Until the day that he returned for her she wore a bridal veil, which was a symbol of her separation.
  o No other man would look upon her face in this time.
    ▪ She would not share herself with anyone else.
    • (Share ourselves with the world?)
• She was betrothed.
  o Her commitment was played out during this waiting period.
• She would prepare by day, and wait by night for her Groom.
  o She stayed busy by day making preparations,
    ▪ making herself ready,
    ▪ as her heart longed for that moment when He would return for Her and take Her onto Himself.
• She lived every day in anticipation of the shout of the bridegroom!

Folks, I am convinced that we have grown far too comfortable with this old world!
• Somebody needs to be reminded, today, that this world is not our home!
  o The posture of the church is the posture of that bride,
    ▪ ready, waiting, anticipating the return of her beloved!
• When we stop anticipating his return,
  o when we stop gazing to the heavens and searching for the cloud,
    ▪ something is wrong!
• Heaven stir us tonight!
  o We are his bride!
    ▪ He has gone to prepare a place.
      • Just surely as he went away,
        o he will return again!
          ▪ He’s coming back for us!
• It’s high time that we made ourselves ready!

When the Groom finished preparation of the Bridal Chamber he would return for his bride.
• In the dead of night he would depart, and, like a thief in the night, he would come to his bride!
The Groom would lead a great torchlight procession, with His Best Man and members from the wedding party accompanying him.

- They would make their way to the house of the bride to claim his waiting wife.
  - There would be no forewarning.
    - The event could happen at anytime.
      - It was incumbent upon the bride to make herself ready and to keep herself that way!

- The Bride needed to be ready at a moment’s notice,
  - for her only announcement came by a shout in the night – the Bridegroom cometh!

- Her dowry prepared by day, and waiting by night with her lamp lit in anticipation of His Coming,
  - the bride must be constantly ready!

- Every night she listened for the sound, for the shout,
  - night by night, not knowing when or at what moment he would come.

- Her days and nights were spent in perpetual readiness,
  - prepared to trim Her Lamp and go to be received by Her Groom!

I come to this pulpit tonight to remind the church of who we are!

- We are his bride!
  - We have been bought with a price.
    - He has gone to prepare a place for us.

- And he will come again, with a shout of the archangel,
  - like a thief in the night,
    - suddenly he will come for a bride that has made herself ready
      - and has kept herself prepared for the day of his return!

- The bride didn’t pass the days of his absence in frivolity;
  - each day was spent in preparation.
    - She had to be ready for his return.

- When she heard the shout – the Bridegroom cometh – she had to be ready at a moment’s notice to rush out into the night and meet her love.
  - There would be no time then, to prepare the lamp,
    - there would be no time then to array herself in her wedding dress,
      - it was too late then to worry about her appearance
        - she had to be ready!

- She lived in a continual state of readiness.
  - Every day she worked to increase her dowry
  - and every night she meticulously dressed herself in her wedding gown and waited...
    - When he didn’t come,
    - she did all over again,
      - each night she made herself ready!
      - Every day she prepared herself.
• She met every day with the constant thought – this could be the day!
• One would think that it would get old after a while,
  o but every night the joy and wonder of it all swept over her soul
    ▪ as she prepared herself a fresh
  • and said to who ever would listen,
    o this could be the night!

It is time for the church to stir itself – this could be the night!
• Have we grown too comfortable with waiting?
  o Have we grown too complacent with this world?
    ▪ Have we become too settled here?
  o Or do we greet each day with the happy anticipation that this could be the day that He is returning for His church!
• The parable of the 10 virgins is in scripture for a reason because there exists a very real danger of growing complacent in the waiting.
  o There exists a very real danger of being lulled to sleep by the seemingly endless procession of uneventful days and nights.
• I came to remind you tonight of who you are!
  o You are the bride of Christ and he will return again!
• When he comes, will he find you ready and waiting or will he find you sleeping with no oil in your lamp?
  o He’s coming suddenly, he’s coming without warning.
    ▪ We must be ready.
• He’s coming for a bride that has made herself ready!
  o He’s coming for a bride that is arrayed in fine linens, clean and white!

I read an article back in November that was published on CNN and cause quite a stir in the wedding industry.
• The point of the article was that it was suddenly becoming fashionable to be married in colored wedding dresses.
  o For years the tradition has been white wedding dresses.
• However, the article posits the idea that a shift started taking place 10 to 15 years ago as folks began to embrace ivory instead of white.
  o From that shift, the author argued, the natural progression of change has brought us to the place where it is now socially acceptable to wear a Red, Blue or even Lime Green dress on your wedding day.
• One wedding planner was quoted in the article as saying,
  o “White is universally hard to wear for so many body and skin types…
    o The whole I’m a virgin and I’m wearing white thing is kind of silly now.”
• The argument was made that the bride wants to look her best and she should feel comfortable wearing whatever color she feels best compliments her skin tone and hair.
The statement was further made that many brides today are having their second or third wedding and, having already done the traditional thing, they are now willing to try something new.

I read the article back in November and immediately began to think about how reflective this is of the attitude and spirit of our day.

- But I also began to think about how this kind of thinking has begun to creep into the religious world.
  - It may seem to be a bit of a stretch but bear with me for a moment.
  - There are a lot of folks, today, who have decided that they can wear whatever color of dress that they want to wear and still be a part of the bride of Christ.
  - There’s a general attitude sweeping the church world that wants to rid itself of any kind of a standard,
    - an attitude that says, “Hey! I’m the bride and I should be able to dress however I want too.
      - After all, the whole I’m dressed in white because I’ve kept myself pure and holy seems kind of silly and old fashioned to me!

- But I’ve got a message for you tonight.
  - The scripture says that he is coming back for a bride that has made herself ready, a bride that has arrayed herself in fine linens, clean and WHITE.
    - And if there’s any question regarding what is meant, John went a step further explaining that the linen is the **righteousness** of the saints!
  - We need to be careful this evening not to let the voices of this world to speak into our lives
    - and cause us to loose our hold on what it means to be
      - set apart, holy and pure, covered by a veil, dressed in fine linens and prepared for the day of his coming!
  - We need to be reminded what it means to be without spot, blemish or even wrinkle!
    - I want to remind you tonight, He’s coming back for a bride that has **MADE HERSELF READY**!

I’m going to touch one more verse of scripture as we bring this sermon to a close.

- Paul told the church in 2 Corinthians 7:1
  - “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”
- What a great promise we have and are reminded of as we consider what it means to be the Bride of Christ!
  - We belong to him.
  - We have been separated unto him.
    - Our life is not our own.
We’ve been bought with a price!
• But when we recognize the incredible promise of what all of that means,
  o when we recognize that he is coming back for us and is going to
    rapture us away to the wedding feast of the lamb, to spend eternity
    with Him,
  ▪ we must also recognize that it is incumbent upon us to make
    ourselves ready!
• We must cleanse ourselves once and for all of anything that defiles us.
  o It is not enough to ask God to cleanse us;
  ▪ we must clean up our own lives and get rid of those things that
    make it easy for us to sin.
  o Each of us is being challenged tonight to make ourselves ready!

Too often we deal with symptoms and not causes.
• We keep struggling with the same sins because we have not gotten to the
  root of the trouble and “cleansed ourselves.”
• Perhaps there is “filthiness of the flesh,”
  o some thing in our life that, while it may not necessarily be wrong,
    “feeds” the old nature and causes us to struggle needlessly.
  o Or it may be some “filthiness of the spirit,” an attitude that is wrong.
  o Whatever it is, we need to cleanse ourselves!
  o We need to search it out and put it under the blood of Jesus!

But Paul doesn’t stop there, we must also be “perfecting holiness in the fear of God”.
• This is a constant process by which we make ourselves ready!
  o In an attitude of reverence for God, which produces obedience in our
    lives, we are able to make ourselves ready.
• Holiness can be perfected or matured as we strive to make ourselves ready
  for his coming!
  o Paul is talking about a maturing, growing holiness, an increased
    Christ-likeness.
• For too long we have viewed holiness as a destination.
  o That’s not the message of scripture.
• Holiness is a process, it’s a lifestyle.
• We want to focus on the lines that define what the bible describes as a
  highway of holiness but the lines aren’t holiness,
  o it’s the process of growth within those boundaries that becomes
    holiness in our lives.
• Paul isn’t talking about suddenly becoming holy,
  o he’s talking about a process of growth by which we make ourselves
    ready!

CLOSE
As we consider the awesome truth of what it means to be the Bride of Christ, two
things are incumbent upon us tonight.
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• First we must be stirred to cleanse ourselves.
  o Secondly we must be challenged to continually make ourselves ready!
• You cannot perfect holiness in the fear of God with unrepented sin in your life.
• Some of us need to first visit an altar of repentance and cleanse ourselves of some weights and sins that have been dragging us down – both in our flesh and in our spirit!
  o There are some attitudes that need to be left at an altar tonight!
  ▪ There are some worldly habits that need to be discarded at the altar.
  o And then we, as the church, need to embrace the challenge that has been given to us tonight!
• I hear a cry in my spirit! The Bridegroom cometh!
  o We must make ourselves ready!
  ▪ We must perfect holiness in the fear of God.
  ▪ We must grow in our walk with him,
    • continually, day by day growing in holiness –
    • this is the only way that we will be ready when he comes.
• This is the perpetual posture of the bride
  o ~ working by day and arrayed in fine linens by night –
  o waiting for the cry of her soon coming Lord and King!
• Let us make ourselves ready!

He’s coming back for a bride who has made herself ready
• On that day the focus will be on the dress!
  o Because the dress speaks volumes about the bride!
• Let it declare that the church has made herself ready.
  o That the church is without spot or wrinkle, free from every blemish!
• Let it declare that the church has cleansed itself of the filthiness of flesh and spirit and has spent her days of waiting busy at the task of perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord!