

The Bride of Christ
Genesis 2; Ephesians 5; Revelation 19
August 2, 2026

I mentioned in a note to you all this week that three young people from South Woods—all part of families I love and respect—each asked me to preach their wedding ceremonies this summer. And while there are a *number* of ways to do that, I decided to make each ceremony part of a three-part series. That wasn't primarily because I thought a host of people would be at all three weddings. But because I thought there was a way each sermon could build upon the last—while saying, in essence, the same thing.

So, the first weekend of June I preached from Genesis 2 for the Wilbanks family. Then, a couple weeks later I preached from Ephesians 5, which *quotes* Genesis 2, for the Fisher family. Then, yesterday, for the Penningtons, I preached from those two passages, as well as Revelation 19, which fulfills *some* of what Ephesians 5 points to.

And today I attempt to bring all that together. Note, first:

1. A Bride Brought (Genesis 2)

I'll go ahead and say what many people have said before. That is, the Bible *begins* with a wedding; and it *ends* with one. Before we consider the first one, let's consider Genesis 1. Which is, of course, full of God creating. And it's full of God's delight in His creation (Gen. 1:10; 1:12; 1:18; 1:21, etc.). Day one is deemed "good." So is day two, three, four, and five. And then after the sixth day, we read **God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good** (1:31).

The world God made was not fallen, nor hostile. In fact, the word "Eden," means delight in Hebrew. That garden was beautiful, fruitful, and full of that which might please humanity—good, good, good, good, good, and very good.

But *then* we get to chapter 2, verse 18: **Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone.** Again, just to situate ourselves rightly—in terms of biblical timeline—be reminded that this is *before* sin enters the world. *Prior* to the fall of humanity, surrounded by that which God called good—even in *that* world—there was something the Lord knew we needed. He knew it before humanity did. None of this was Adam's idea. God had a design.

Verse 18 goes on: **Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."** Of course, verses 19 and 20 tell us that beasts and birds were *not* that helper. But then in verse 21: **So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.**

Don't miss how that verse ends: He *brought* her to the man. If Genesis 2 is the *first* wedding ceremony, we might say that our present-day ceremonies are something of a re-enactment of it. That's partly *why* the groom stands at the front and the bride is *brought* to him.

One of the perks of officiating a wedding is the perspective I get from where I'm standing. Because at the pivotal moment in the ceremony, most of those in attendance have to turn their heads from front to back, over and over. They *must* see the bride, of course. The dress, the hair, all those things. She's beautiful and she's *supposed* to be seen. However, in that moment, they don't *just* look at her. They turn back and forth, so that they might see the groom too. What will he look like when he *first* sees her?

Why am I telling you this? Honestly, it's a bit of a brag. Because from where I stand, I don't have to look back and forth. I can see her, easily. *And* because he's right in front of me, I can see him at the *same* time. And what do I see? When he sees her, he beams.

Well, Adam did it first. She was brought to him. And he said, in verse 23: **This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.** When he sees her, he rejoices.

To reiterate a vital point, there is a reason the Bible doesn't begin in Genesis 3. Genesis 1's creation is not merely prologue. Nor is Genesis 2's garden mere scene setting. These verses actually give us insight into God's purpose for creation. God's *pattern* for His world was to unite male and female; and then to use them—together—for His purposes. At another point in the creation narrative, we're told that **God blessed them and God said to them: be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion** (Gen. 1:28).

And I call this a "pattern," because this was to continue on *after* Adam and Eve. How do we know that? The conclusion of the narrative outlines something that's to be *ongoing*. Genesis 2:24: **Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.**

Now, because this is a pre-fall pattern, we might linger for a moment and note some implications. First, the words, "a man" and the words, "his wife" point us to the creation ideal—that which is to be replicated, over and over and over again. What *else* is in this pattern? A man shall leave his father and mother. This is yet *another* thing the wedding ceremony dramatizes. A father walks his daughter down the aisle and gives her away. Further, what is the one who leaves father and mother to do? According to verse 24, he is to **hold fast to his wife.**

This is God's design for creation, for humanity. The pre-fall pattern is one man, and one woman, for one lifetime. It's not *whoever*. It's not *however*. It's not however long you want to.

Because verse 24 goes on to say, **and they shall become one flesh.** This is the math of marriage—no longer two, but one. The wedding ceremony pictures this aspect as well. The groom walks in. *Then* the bride does. They enter separately—one then the other. But after the ceremony, they leave hand in hand, together.

And that pictures what is to come. And, yes, that includes physical intimacy, which is a good gift from God, given *before* the fall. But that aspect of becoming one flesh is an expression of a deeper reality. Which is, again, the math of marriage—no longer two, but one. God intends that marriage be an interdependent covenant, where one devotes himself or herself completely to the good of another, and does so by repeatedly denying self.

Jesus continues to hold this standard high in the Gospels. The author of Hebrews says that marriage is to be held in honor among all (Heb. 13:4). God's design is not something to be maligned, dismissed, nor merely endured.

Young people, the world will tell you a different story. But it's a lie, a destructive one. One man, one woman, one flesh, for one lifetime is what God intends. And further, He intends it for your good. Before sin entered the world, God gave this to us as a gift. At creation's genesis, a bride is brought.

However, we're not told *everything* in Genesis 2. We're not even told *everything* about marriage in this passage. Because the Bible unfolds, little by little. And as it does, the depth and beauty and glory of its first few pages is further revealed.

2. A Bride Sought and Bought (Ephesians 5)

In the New Testament we find out there was *more* in Genesis 2 than we thought. The Apostle Paul picks up on that in Ephesians 5, when he *quotes* Genesis 2. Ephesians 5:31: **Therefore a man shall**

leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

That's word-for-word precision. Everyone would've known what passage he was referring to.

And *then* Paul writes, **This mystery is profound.** In the Scriptures, "mystery" often speaks of a truth *once* hidden—but now revealed.¹ In using that term, Paul's saying there's something "underneath" or "behind" Genesis 2 that he plans to uncover for us. And that mystery, he says, is *profound*.

Then in the *next* clause, Paul reveals it, telling us what Genesis 2 is *ultimately* about: **and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.** Now, to grasp what that means, we might go back a bit and see what Paul's said already. Verse 32 is at the bottom of a section on husbands and wives. So, if we back up to verse 25, we'd read this: **Husbands, love your wives.**

In this section on marital responsibilities, "love" is what Paul emphasizes over everything. But by "love," he does *not* mean what the world often means by "love." I recently read a husband write about this, in a clever way, with something of a twist. The intentional lede, or hook, was this: "After 20 years of marriage, I finally have to say it out loud . . . There's nothing left connecting me to my wife . . . Today we live in two different worlds . . . zero shared passions. Zero shared interests . . . Any therapist from morning TV would issue a death certificate for our marriage. Friends are probably wondering when I'll announce the divorce . . . So here goes: I love this woman more than I did 20 years ago! And when she tells me in the evening about things that don't interest me at all, I listen to her with a pleasure that no self-help book can explain . . . Because over these 20 years, I've understood something that contradicts everything the media shove(s) down our throats. Shared passions aren't the building blocks of a relationship . . . The real building block is different. You want better for the other person than for yourself. You put their needs above your own. Your prefer giving to taking . . . Love is something you choose every day."

The point is this: love, rightly defined, isn't purely ethereal. In fact, it's the most practical thing in the world.² It's a settled determination to concern oneself with the well-being of the one loved.³ Simply, it is to lay down your life for them.

How do we know *this* is how love is defined? Because of how Paul continues: **Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.** That's not vague, nor abstract. It's concrete—and clear. *His* love means that He gave—Himself.

In one of the weddings I was a part of this summer, as the bride came down the aisle, some of the musicians in our orchestra played a beautiful instrumental arrangement of "How Deep the Father's Love for Us." Again, from where I stood, I saw the bride being brought. At the *same* time, I could see the look on the groom's face as his bride came toward him. And the song that played in those moments made absolutely clear what was behind it all—what the marriage itself pointed to.

To put it as plainly as possible. It's *not* that Christ and the Church are the metaphor. Christ and the Church are the *reality*. *Marriage* is the metaphor.⁴

Because there's a better Adam, who didn't *wait* on His bride, but sought her. And with His life, He bought her.

And this is applicable to every single person in this room. If you're married, it gives significance to every time you put your spouse's needs above your own, every time you die to self—every act of forgiveness, every moment of grace—decade after decade of faithfulness tells a story. It points to the covenant love Christ has for His own.

¹ Curtis Vaughan, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 120.

² Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, 143.

³ Vaughan, 117.

⁴ Ray Ortlund, *Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel*, 100.

But this speaks as well to those who are single. We can be reminded that marriage is *not* the ultimate reality. Ephesians 5 makes plain that you have been pursued by a love that has no end.

He loved, and gave Himself, with an aim. Note the purpose clause of verse 26: **that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.** Of course, “sanctify” means that He set His people apart. We have good reason to stick with the wedding imagery and say that His bride is *not* intended to *blend* in. That’s not what brides do. During a wedding, no one is wondering, “Where is she?” She stands out.

So ought Christ’s people. That was *some* of the purpose of Him coming for her.

But it wasn’t *all* of it. He set her apart for a purpose as well, detailed in verse 27: **so that he might present the church to himself in splendor.** Again, Paul seems to be alluding to a wedding ceremony.⁵ The word “splendor” was a word used elsewhere to describe clothing, maybe even hinting at the dress of a bride.⁶ He wants us to *see* that, in some sense.

But, of course, it means *more* than just that. Ephesians 5 is about as zoomed-out as it gets. And in Paul’s cosmic—big-picture—thinking, he wants us to consider, not just marriage, but the scope of this narrative, *all* of redemptive history. He references Genesis 2 in this passage. It doesn’t get much older than that. He then unveils more fully the most ancient of stories, pointing us to what happened 2000 years ago. But, then, moving from that past, *this* presentation of this bride to Himself in verse 27 points us the other direction—to a certain day in His people’s future.

3. A Bride Beautified and Brought (Revelation 19; 21).

In Revelation 19:6, we read: **Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory.”**

We must begin by saying the context is worship. As you likely know, this is one of the passages that inspired Handel’s *Messiah*. A great multitude cries out, “Hallelujah! Our God reigns!” And because of His rule, they rejoice, and they give Him the glory. That’s the scene—one of triumphant exultation in God.

And though this *certainly* includes the judgment of God’s enemies earlier in chapter 19, here this worshipful rejoicing is spurred by something else. Hear the second “for,” in this passage. Verse 6: **“Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure.”**⁷

To attempt to connect all this once again. We *might* say that if Genesis 2 prepared us for Ephesians 5, then Ephesians 5 prepared us for Revelation 19, where we see God’s bride made beautiful. I didn’t read this clause a moment ago, but Paul wrote that Christ came and gave Himself that He might present the church **without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish** (Eph. 5:27). That’s what Christ came to do.

His bride has made herself ready. It was *granted* her to clothe herself with fine linen. And Paul’s already told us *how*. She was loved and cleansed.

⁵ Vaughan, 119.

⁶ John Stott, *Ephesians*, BST, 228.

⁷ I don’t want to chase a rabbit here, but when John writes that the bride made herself ready, he uses a word that throughout this book refers to something that occurs *ultimately* as a result of God’s decree.⁷ It’s the exact *same* word we’ll read in Revelation 21:2 in a moment, which speaks of God preparing a bride.⁷ And that, of course, is what Ephesians 5 already told us.

And in this heavenly scene, the multitudes rejoice. Evil has been judged. His people are finally restored. Christ has done *exactly* what He said He would.

But not only is the bride made beautiful, John also writes that she is blessed. An angel tells him this in verse 9: **And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”** While there’s a good bit we might say about this, let me point out something in verse 9 that is *slightly* distinct from the emphasis of verses 7 and 8. Because in the verses we’ve already considered, the church is viewed as one corporate body. There is *one* bride of which all Christians are a part, one bride to which they belong. That’s true, and vital for understanding the Scriptures. God brings a people, a united people, to Himself.

But verse 9 moves *ever* so slightly from the corporate to the individual.⁸ Because it’s not *just* a bride in this scene, John makes a statement about those invited to this feast—this marriage supper. And he makes clear that those invited to it, that *each* of those sitting around this table are blessed. God’s favor rests upon each one of them, individually. And just in case we might wonder, the angel ends verse 9 with a word of certainty: **These are the true words of God.**

The bride is beautiful. The bride is blessed. And we know this bride knows the favor of God because of what then unfolds in Revelation 21: **Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.** This is what Paul meant when he wrote that Christ gave himself up, **that he might present the church to himself in splendor** (Eph. 5:27).

That bride made beautiful, that bride blessed by God, will finally behold. Verse 3: **And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”**

Here at the end, don’t forget what happened at the beginning. The bible began with a wedding. In Genesis 2, Adam and Eve were rightly related to one another, and to God. However, in the very next chapter, *all* that fell apart. They were driven out of Eden, and into exile. And what they knew of God’s presence from then on was brought about through tabernacles and temples, for centuries upon centuries.

That is, until God in the flesh came and dwelt among His people. And then gave Himself for them. So that one day, because of the covenant to which every marriage points, a people made right, a people made beautiful, might once again dwell with God.

This is the true story of God’s grace for His people. And it calls for our response. For those in Christ, for those sitting at His table, trusting Him for salvation, we worship.

And for those who’ve yet to trust, the response is to believe. In fact, on the last page of this book, Christ *Himself* speaks, saying, **I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.” The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price** (Rev. 22:16–17).

The bible begins with a wedding, *begins* its ending with a wedding, and then, remarkably, closes with an invitation.

⁸ See Beale, 945.

Conclusion

At one point, as I'm prone to do, I began to overthink my approach to these wedding homilies. I told each of the couples my plan. And then I began to wonder if making each wedding part of a summer series would be a strange idea to this or that bride or groom. Even if they *knew* one another, they might wonder, "What does *my* wedding—on this particular day—have to do with a wedding of another person?"

But then I concluded that, *if* the idea did give them pause, that *could* be a good thing. Because every wedding, every marriage, is actually part of a series.

In fact, those in Christ are part of a story—an ancient story, about a bride sought, bought, made beautiful, and brought to God.