

The Bride, the Lady, the Church

12/25/2023

Scripture 1: (Isa. 62:1-12 ESV)

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have set watchmen; all the day and all the night they shall never be silent. You who put the LORD in remembrance, take no rest, and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth. The LORD has sworn by his right hand and by his mighty arm: "I will not again give your grain to be food for your enemies, and foreigners shall not drink your wine for which you have labored; but those who garner it shall eat it and praise the LORD, and those who gather it shall drink it in the courts of my sanctuary."

Go through, go through the gates; prepare the way for the people; build up, build up the highway; clear it of stones; lift up a signal over the peoples. Behold, the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to the daughter of Zion, "Behold, your salvation comes; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him." And they shall be called The Holy People, The Redeemed of the LORD; and you shall be called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken.

Scripture 2: (Rev. 19:6-9; 21:9-27 ESV)

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, 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"-- for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."

Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb."

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed-- on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. He also measured its

wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement. The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day--and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Scripture 3: (Eph. 5:22-30 ESV)

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.

Sermon:

This Advent season we have considered four women from the ancestry of Jesus: Eve, Rahab, Ruth, and Mary; each of whom exemplified a different element of our faith as Christians: Hope, Peace, Love, and Joy. Today, for this fifth Sunday in Advent, the Lady whom we shall consider is not a lady in fact, yet she is one in metaphor.

Since we have now lit the “Christ Candle”, our lady of the day is the “Bride of Christ”: the Church.

Over recent months we have spent a fair amount of time looking at the doctrine of the Church:

- We have looked at **Who** the Church is, as the *ekklesia*; the Elect; God's Called and Chosen people, Israel (10/29/2023).
- We have looked at **What** the Church does in the world; our good works of charity and evangelism (11/05/2023 and 11/12/2023).
- We have looked at **How** we are united in fellowship, *koinonia*, together in Christ with Christ and God the Father by the Holy Spirit (08/06/2023).

But today, we will examine the substance of **How** the Church relates to Jesus Christ as our Husband, as our relational Head, and as our Glorious King.

Together our three Scripture readings describe the progressive nature of our relationship with Christ that the Church, which Christians, experience: our former time of reprobation, what we were; our present time of sanctification and glorification, what we have now become; and finally our response to God's grace and mercy, how we submit and obey Jesus Christ.

Now there is a very good reason why traditional “Disney Princess” movies like Snow White and Cinderella resonate with people so well. It is because these myths echo and emulate the Christian story of the Church's redemption and glorification. Walt Disney loved the telling of these stories where “nobody” women, women without high social status or station, were rescued from servitude, enslavement, or some other negative and oppressive circumstance through the willful action, determinate choice, and power of a “somebody” Prince. Not only do they get rescued and redeemed, they are also graciously cleansed, elevated, and promoted to a social status that is equal with and appropriate for the Prince, who ultimately glorifies them by uniting them with himself in marriage; sharing his own pre-existing glory and honor with them, as his wife.

This is the same story which the prophet Isaiah and the Apostle John tell about God's people, the Church. But their story is not some fantastical “fairy tale”; it is the “true reality”, the “prototype” {the same as “antetype”} upon which every “fairy tale” is based and inspired by.

The whole latter half of Isaiah's prophecy can be summarized as being concerned principally with two things: Israel's Messianic hope and Israel's eschatological expectations which together culminate in the great “Day of the LORD”. Previously, we have studied the work of Israel's Messianic “suffering servant” (Isaiah 52:13-53:12; 03/06/2022, 03/13/2022, 03/20/2022, 04/03/2022, 04/17/2022) which was fulfilled by Jesus during His earthly ministry through His sacrificial death and was efficaciously sealed for us by His resurrection on the third day. Moving beyond that fulfillment, Isaiah now looks to the beautiful consequence of Christ's atoning work.

Before the cross, God's Elect people were called “Forsaken” and their land was considered “Desolate” on account of our unrighteousness, our wickedness, and our sin but most especially, because of our constant, recalcitrant idolatry and spiritual adultery. But now, after the cross, God's Elect are being transformed as we are clothed in Christ's righteousness, for the LORD's glory.

- We are being fashioned into a “*crown of beauty*” and a “*royal diadem*” in the hands of our God.
- We are being given “*a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give*” (Rev 2:17), thus our identities are also being transformed. **We are, as the Apostle Paul says, no longer who or what we once were (1 Cor 6:11).**

Now we shall no longer called Forsaken and Desolate, but instead we will now be named *Hephzibah* and *Beulah*, “My Delight is in Her” and “Married”, because the LORD delights in us “...*as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall [our] God rejoice over [us]...*”.

We have gone from being a people that was despondent, abused, and taken advantage of by all the nations of the world, to a people who are now being glorified and celebrated as a bridal princess, as the Sovereign's treasured possession. We are truly the “Cinderella-story”!

Justified by Christ's death on the cross, and credited with His perfect obedience, our imputed righteousness will go shine “...*forth as brightness..*”, and the wonder and glory of our salvation by Christ's hand, will shine “...*as a burning torch*.”. Therefore, all of the nations will see this righteousness, and all the kings of the earth will witness the glory that is found within God's grace and is freely given to His people.

Then, after His Bride has been prepared; once we have been washed by God (justified by the shed blood of Christ) and clothed (both declared righteous and made righteous through the imputation of Jesus' obedient works); the prophet is told, “*Say to the daughter of Zion, [to God's people who dwell within the eternal city of God] 'Behold, your salvation comes; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.'*”.

- Christ, our salvation, our Bridegroom is coming to claim us from the hand of our heavenly Father (John 10:29).
- Life, the resurrection life, is the reward for His obedience and we are His recompense; His payment; His prize.

He is coming to claim us because we are those whom God the Son has rescued from the power of sin and death. Then finally, claimed by Christ and united with Christ, we “...*shall be called The Holy People, The Redeemed of the LORD; and [we] shall be called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken*.”.

- United in Christ, we are His Holy People because He is Holy.
- United in Christ, we are the Redeemed of the LORD because He has redeemed us from our deserved judgment under the Law.
- United in Christ, we are Sought Out and we are Not Forsaken because God the Son took on flesh, became incarnate and entered into time and space to seek and save His people who were lost and wandering in darkness (Luke 19:10; Is 9:2; 1 John 2:11).

Then, we move from the vantage point of Isaiah and turn to John's view of the same eschatological event, “*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, 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'-- for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.*”.

The glory of the Bride is the LORD's glory, because He is the one who has prepared and arranged all things, for that great and glorious day. The Bride has been cleansed, she has been purified, washed, and made clean and now is "...*granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure*"-- *for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.*". Now that the Church (capital "C" Church) has been sanctified, our imperfect good works that we do for righteousness' sake are also redeemed. All of our good works, which are unworthy on their own, are made worthy in Christ's righteousness. They are perfected by God's grace, in Christ, because of our salvation not as the means of our salvation.

"And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" What a most wonderful day that will be! It is no wonder that the Christian heart constantly cries, *"Maranatha"*, *"Come Lord!"* (1 Cor 16:22).

Then, the final picture which John gives us of Christ's Bride, is of her dressed in all of her marital finery, ready to receive her Savior, her Lord, and her Husband, *"Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, 'Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.'"*, and the angel showed John, *"...the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God..."*.

Obviously John is using metaphors and symbols to describe what he saw, yet by describing the Bride of Christ as a city, as the King's city, his symbolism is really very appropriate. The Church, as a whole body, is at once, both the most inclusive and the most exclusive body ever known to humanity. The Church includes people from every tribe, tongue, land, people, place and time by God's grace alone, and it excludes everyone who does not believe in and trust Jesus Christ as their Savior. A city has gates which may be opened wide, inviting and welcoming everyone who comes in friendship to the king, but a city also has thick and strong walls which keep out everyone who does not offer their allegiance to the king and are, by nature, his enemies.

John describes for us the perfected and completed Holy and Eternal City of Jerusalem, the Bride, the Church in the fullness of her revealed glory.

- She has twelve gates, with each one named for one of Israel's tribes, symbolizing the completeness of God's Elect. Everyone whom the LORD has called from everywhere, is welcome and shall dwell within her gates. Each of her gates are crafted from a single pearl, symbolizing perfected peace: smooth and without blemish.
- She has four walls {representing the four cardinal directions, thereby symbolizing the whole of the earth} resting upon twelve foundation stones, with each one named for one of the Apostles, symbolizing the foundation which their Gospel ministry has established for the Church. All of their evangelism, their martyrdom's (their witness of faith) are given for us to learn from and to follow, because Jesus Christ is their "cornerstone" (Ps 118:22; Matt 21:42; Acts 4:11; Eph 2:20), the prototype whom they imitated (1 Cor 11:1). Her foundations are adorned with jewels, symbolizing their great value and the future common nature of what we presently call precious.
- She is described as a perfect cube, emphasizing an equality between the gates and the foundations; where no one but the King has priority or primacy.
- Her streets are paved with pure gold, *"like transparent glass"*, symbolizing her purity to the utmost; possessing no imperfections or stains which might catch or bend the light shining out from within her.

No human bride has ever been dressed so fine. No white dress can even compare. Yet upon the occasion of every wedding, we will stand in awe of the bride's beauty, her radiance. We do this because she carries within herself a glow, the light of love for her husband and a reflection of his love for her. It is even moreso the case here, with the Bride of Christ, the heavenly Jerusalem. *"And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb."* Yet still, the glory and beauty of the Bride is as nothing, compared to the Glory of God and the Light of the Lamb. The Bride pales in comparison as she is overshadowed by Him and submits to His loving authority.

Meanwhile, the Bride still glows as she reflects God's glory and magnifies it out into the world, where *"By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day-- and there will be no night there."* The Bride whom John sees, shines with the light of righteousness and with God's glory in salvation, which is the very same light that Isaiah saw, just from a slightly different point of view. They both were witnessing the day when Christ's reign over all things will be here, and He will be enthroned in glory, acknowledged by all, and all of our petty rebellions will be ended because then Jesus will forever reign with our heavenly Father. AMEN.

What a glorious picture of the Bride, Christ's Church! We believe that such is what we will one day be, but it is also how we are now, from the viewpoint of Christ and in eternity. We are the Bride of Christ Jesus, who is our Betrothed. We are already united to Him by covenantal bonds: of marriage, of grace, and of redemption. Just as Mary was already the wife Joseph when the angel Gabriel appeared to her (Luke 1:27), so too the Church is already the Wife of Christ. Our "bride-price" was paid by Jesus upon that Roman cross, therefore we belong to Him and He belongs to us. However, just as Mary and Joseph waited until after Jesus' birth (Matthew 1:25), we also eagerly await the glorious consummation that will follow the *"marriage supper of the Lamb"*.

Thus, while Christ first came to prepare His Bride, the Church to whom He has betrothed Himself, and He will come again soon to collect His Bride; nevertheless, until then, we are still forever united to and obligated to Him as our Lord, our Husband, and as our spiritual and familial Head (1 Cor 11:3; Eph 5:23).

Thus we move beyond the realm of "Fairy Tales" into the time of "Happily Ever After!". Although Disney stories never show us the particulars of what life is like after the Prince marries his "formerly Nobody, but now Somebody" Princess, Scripture does provide us with the rule and guide for us to "Live Joyfully Ever After" in our union with Christ.

The key to our "Ever After" is found in Ephesians 5 {and in other correlated passages (Col 3:18-25; 1 Peter 3:1-7)} and it is certainly not limited only to verse 22, as some men might selfishly (and wrongly) wish. This passage is the key because, while Eve was created to be a helper, an *ezer*, for Adam (Gen 2:18, 20), God has also given us the union of marriage to be an image of the intended relationship between Christ and His Church.

The Apostle Paul writes, *"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands."*

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body."

Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, here commands “*Wives...submit to your own husbands...as to the Lord.*”. Sadly, that is a verse which has been sorely used and abused by too many men, because even one is too many. There are those who will corruptly interpret it to suggest that 'a husband is as Christ, to his wife'; intending that they should be as lord, master, king, sovereign, or even as God to them. Enforcing that kind of interpretation is a clear case of abuse and must not be tolerated by anyone. That is just as relationship ending, as covenant breaking of an example as are broken bones, a bruised face, or claims of falling down stairs when a person lives in a one story home. So No! That is NOT what this passage means. Husbands are not “as Christ” to their wives, although we are to relate to her (and she to we) as she and we relate to Jesus Christ.

Wives are to “submit” to their husbands, but “submit” is another contentious word in our present era. What does it mean to “submit”? What does Scripture mean by it? The Greek word translated here as “submit” {*upotassetai*; indicative, present, passive, 3rd person singular} may be explained as:

- to subordinate oneself;
- to be subject to, or the subject of; or,
- to be under the authority of.

Submission is not meant to be forceful or forced; it is passive action {not only as in grammatical passive}. Biblical submission is a willing choice to surrender one's own personal autonomy and authority to another person. It is a conscious decision made to trust that another person has your own best interest at heart and that they will act and make decisions for your benefit, your good, and your well-being. Therefore, wives are to trust and expect that their husbands, as the final “tie-breaking” authority within the household economy, will always act and instruct them to act in a manner which is meant for their ultimate good and benefit.

But why? Because that is how and why the Church submits to Jesus Christ. We submit and obey Christ and His commandments because we trust, we believe, and we expect (because we have been taught this throughout Scripture) that He has provided these instructions, these commands, and these decrees for our ultimate good; a good which cannot help but also increase His own glory as well as benefit us.

So, why must wives submit to their husbands? For the same reason that Christians submit to Christ's authority over our lives: because of love.

The flip side of Paul's command for “wives” to submit is, “*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...*”. Husbands are to *agape* their wives because Christ has *agape'd* the Church; because Christ *agape'd* the Church by sacrificing Himself for her.

Therefore, a wife is commanded to submit to her husband, trusting that he will always act for her best welfare, because a husband is commanded to love their wives, by willingly sacrificing of himself (his wants, desires, preferences, and yes, sometimes even his own needs) for her good benefit: for their mutual benefit and their improvement together. Both wife and husband are better together, because overall, God made us to be complements for one another. We are equally partners together, yet without both being equal in every way because we each have our own unique roles and parts to play in life, in our relationship, and in our faith. {We are not identical copies of one another. We do not become interchangeable once we become husband and wife.}

Thus it is with the relationship between the Church and Jesus Christ.

- The Church submits to the commandments of Christ, the commandments of God, because we believe that they are given to us for our good: for our moral, spiritual, and physical benefit.

- The Church gladly submits to Christ because we know that Jesus loves us; because we know that God our heavenly Father loves us. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”* (Jn. 3:16-17 ESV).
- The Church humbly submits to the commandments and the will of God because we know what great price Christ willingly chose to pay for us. *“And God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* (Rom. 5:8 ESV).

But why did Christ demonstrate such active and extreme love for His Church?

“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”. Jesus Christ agape'd us in this way:

- to sanctify the Church;
- to wash us and cleanse us of our sin, our unrighteousness, and our remaining guilt;
- so that He could present the Church to Himself as His Bride: pure, and holy, and perfect;
- so that we would be made holy, because He is the Holy God (Lev 11:44; Matt 5:48)
- because Christ must sanctify His Church since He cannot and will not unite Himself with something that is corrupted, tainted, and unholy (because then He would become corrupted, tainted, and unholy), because He must also protect and preserve Himself.

Thus Jesus Christ sanctifies His Church out of His great love for us. Since He is uniting us to Himself, He also protects us: by preserving us in purity and holiness; as He protects Himself and His own purity and holiness.

“In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.” So, as a husband and wife are united, as they are joined together to become one flesh, a wife will submit to her husband because she knows that he loves her, and that he will take care of her because by taking care of her, he is also loving himself and taking care of himself. A wife will submit because she trusts that her husband will act beneficently towards her, because it is in his own best interest to do so. Thus she should gladly submit to his benevolent authority because she knows that he loves her as, or better than, he loves himself if he is following the example of Jesus.

Jesus Christ loves His Church so much more than His own life, that He willingly surrendered His perfect, sinless life and traded it for our due justice; so that we would receive the glorified eternal life that He deserves, while taking the divine condemnation, judgment, and wrath of God that we deserve upon Himself.

Jesus did all of this for the Church because He loves us; because He desires us and cherishes us; because He wanted to protect us and rescue us from our own sinful condition; because *“...we are members of his body.”*

So this is the Good News of Christmas.

- God the Son was born, Jesus Christ came into the world, to rescue His Chosen People, the Church, from our sorry and pathetic estate of sin and misery.
- Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose again so that the Church would be justified, sanctified, and then united in glory with Him (Rom 8:28-30).

- Therefore, because Christ has done all of this out of His love for His Bride, the Church gladly and humbly submits itself to His authority, becoming obedient to all of His commandments that are found within or derived from sacred Scripture.
- Therefore, because Christ has done this out of love for His Bride, the Church performs her good works of charity and *agape* in the world as part of our loving witness of response before them, of our Betrothed.
- Therefore, because Christ has done this out of love for His Bride, the Church everywhere proclaims the good news about Jesus Christ, that He came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim 1:15) by God's grace, through faith in Him (Eph 3:8-10).

Finally, as we live and love and work together as the Church of Jesus Christ, we bring Him more and even greater glory and honor, every day with every word of praise (1 Cor 10:31), because so too our own glory in Him will be increased {our share in His glory will not increase, but our portion will because, when you increase the whole and the percentages remain the same, each portion must also increase; 25% of 40 is less than 25% of 100, because the whole is increased, the portion is also increased}.

Thus the Bride of Christ will be glorified and is glorified, shining forth and proclaiming the righteousness of Jesus Christ for all the world to see; for all the world to know the great love that our King has for His Elect people. Thus by His light reflected in us “...will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day-- and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.”.

Those whose names are written in the Lamb's book are the Redeemed of the LORD; the Elect; the Church; the whole of Israel.

Christ has called us. Christ has justified us. Christ has sanctified us. Christ has united us to Himself as His Holy Bride, and He glorifies us. Jesus Christ has done this all for the glory of God, alone.

Jesus Christ is born. “*Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.*”

Jesus Christ is born and you are invited to the marriage supper, you are invited because you are the Bride.

You are all invited. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

AMEN