

In Africa, we taught the locals how to go down the path of a Bible story and see the treasure hidden there, and then how to apply it to our life. Each story is a path. But there are great wide paths that run alongside the stories as well. They are paths such as the character of God, the kingdom of God, eternal life, light and darkness, etc. But today I want to take you down one of my favorite paths. I thought a great way to start this new year would be to point you to the greatest treasure I have found in Scripture. It is the theme of entire books such as Song of Songs and Hosea. It is found in the Bible's first chapters and in the last. (Isaiah 54:5) It was the setting of Jesus' first sign of being the Messiah. (John 2:11) It is a very special wedding, the wedding of the ages.

We'll soon come to this passage in our Ephesians study, at which time we'll go into more depth of the relational aspects of the passage. (Read the passage.) We often read this passage to help us in our understanding of the relationship that God established in the home. Please notice that Paul tells us he is writing about a mystery, Christ and the church, Christ and you, His bride. Did you see in this passage the many times the example in marriage refers back to our relationship with God? The word "as" is used over and over. Six times in eight verses Paul compares our relationship in marriage to that of relationship with Jesus. In two of the verses, Paul directly addresses what Jesus is doing to prepare His bride.

You will rarely find anything in Paul's writings that are not firmly based on something in the Old Testament. Paul is going back to the very beginning and looking at the very purpose of creation. God made man in His image (1:27) and declared that it is not good that man should be alone. (2:18) Creation is a picture of the invisible realms. We understand God through the things He has made. (Romans 1:20) If man is in the image of God, it is not good that God should be alone. In creation, God is preparing a bride for His Son.

The purpose for this bride is, first and foremost, a companion, a solution to the aloneness. Man needs someone to whom he can express his affection. He needs a counterpart to share his life.

Secondly, she is a helper fit for man. *18 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."* Genesis 2:18 (ESV) Man is given a task, to tend and keep the Garden, but he needs a helper, someone to come alongside and help him with the task. This is not a burdensome assignment, but the joy of working together to accomplish something good. (Ephesians 2:10)

Commented [notes1]: Isaiah 54:5 (ESV)

⁵ For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called.

Commented [notes2]: John 2:11 (ESV)

¹¹ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

Commented [notes3]: Genesis 1:27 (ESV)

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Commented [notes4]: Genesis 2:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."

Commented [notes5]: Romans 1:20 (ESV)

²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

Commented [notes6]: Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Let us return to Ephesians 5 with this in mind and look at our role as the bride. We are to submit to our husband, Jesus. ²⁴ *Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.* Ephesians 5:24 (ESV) This is not the submission of an uncooperative slave, but of one that is loved and showing gratitude and respect through submission, "as to the Lord". The Lord holds the position of authority, but it is love that motivates our submission in everything. Everything God does is good. We join Him in His good works. It is a high and holy privilege to have the opportunity to be allowed to participate with our Creator. The prophets' title of "servant of God" was a title of honor. (Deuteronomy 34:5)

If your relationship with Jesus is less than that, you are missing the fullness of being His bride. If you do not rise early to spend the best hours of your day in His loving presence, communing with Him, you are not being the companion He created you to be. If you are not walking with Him in the cool of the evening, as Adam and Eve did in the Garden (Genesis 3:8), sharing your heart and hearing His, you are missing an indescribable joy.

If you are not working alongside Him in His work in the earth, communing with Him, being the object of His affection, then you are missing the joy of being His helpmeet. My time in Africa gave me the opportunity to hear many stories of the joy of serving alongside their husband, Jesus. He shares His joy with us. (John 15:11) And rather than lording it over us, our loving husband calls us friends (John 15:15) and speaks intimately with us as we work. Whatever task in this world we are given, we find He is right there empowering us to join Him in doing all to the glory of the Father. Our submission is one of delight.

Do you see yourself and your church family as a helper fit for Jesus, submitting to Him and working alongside Him out of love? That should describe our daily life, regardless of our occupation. We are to submit to Him in everything, in every area of life, in every decision, in every moment.

Next let us see in our passage Jesus' role as a husband and see if we have not experienced His faithfulness in this way. **The first and greatest expression toward us, His bride, is love.** It was demonstrated in the greatest way possible, by laying down His life for us. (John 15:13) In doing so He served us, for He is the greatest of all servants. (Matthew 23:11) He did it to make us holy and to cleanse us through His word. He is working too! He is preparing us to be His bride. It took 7 days to make the world. It has taken almost 7000 years to make His bride. But He promises to finish the work He started. (Philippians 1:6) He will have a radiant bride without spot or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. (2Corinthians 11:2)

Commented [notes7]: Deuteronomy 34:5 (ESV)

⁵ So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD.

Commented [notes8]: Genesis 3:8 (ESV)

⁸ And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Commented [notes9]: John 15:11 (ESV)

¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

Commented [notes10]: John 15:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

Commented [notes11]: John 15:13 (ESV)

¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

Commented [notes12]: Matthew 23:11 (NIV)

¹¹ The greatest among you will be your servant.

Commented [notes13]: Philippians 1:6 (ESV)

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Commented [notes14]: 2 Corinthians 11:2 (ESV)

² For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.

No wonder the Great Command is to love Him with our all! That is what He is doing for us. (Deuteronomy 8:5) **Anything less than our full devotion would be an unworthy response!**

Commented [notes15]: Deuteronomy 6:5 (ESV)
⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

We are warned in James 4:4 that, like Israel, we can take this love for granted. The things of this world can lure our hearts away from the Lover of our soul. We can become adulterers, taking God's precious love for granted. That is the subject of the book of Hosea. It rarely happens all at once, but rather through a little neglect of our relationship here and there that steadily increases until we find our thoughts are no longer on Him but on the things of the world. (Hebrews 11:26) He has not left us, but rather, we have drifted slowly away from Him.

Commented [notes16]: James 4:4 (ESV)
⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Our relationship requires constant attention, for it is a relationship of faith. We see the results of that faith, but we don't yet see Him face to face. (1Peter 1:8) That is the consummation of our marriage. Nurture your love relationship with Him daily. ³⁴ *Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors.* Proverbs 8:34 (ESV)

Commented [notes17]: Hebrews 11:26 (ESV)
²⁶ He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.

Commented [notes18]: 1 Peter 1:8 (ESV)
⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.

There is a day coming when our faith will become sight. (Revelation 1:7) Our eyes will see what our spirit knows is true. It is with great anticipation that we wait for that day. From the first century forward, the church has longed for His return. But the wonderful thing to contemplate is that Jesus is waiting too!

Commented [notes19]: Revelation 1:7 (ESV)
⁷ Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

At that last meal, He had them drink the communion cup, and told them He would never drink it again until the day He drank it new with us in His Father's kingdom. (Mark 14:25) He is waiting in anticipation for the day of the Marriage Feast of the Lamb. (Revelation 19:7)

Commented [notes20]: Mark 14:25 (ESV)
²⁵ Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

Commented [notes21]: Revelation 19:7 (ESV)
⁷ 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;

Our Bible begins with God preparing a wife for Adam as a picture of the bride of Christ. It ends with the fulfillment of that picture, as the bride descends from heaven. ² *And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.* Revelation 21:2 (ESV)

I don't think our anticipation matches that of Jesus, but we certainly have every reason for it to do so. We should be glancing at the eastern sky, with ears anxiously awaiting the sound of the last trumpet. Then we will see Him! One glimpse and we will be changed! (1John 3:2) Jesus' prayer will be fully answered. ²¹ *that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us,* John 17:21a (ESV) All our differences will be set aside as we are united in our love for our Savior.

Commented [notes22]: 1 John 3:2 (ESV)
² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

We are celebrating communion this morning. Not many realize how communion is intricately tied to this theme of the marriage of Jesus and his bride, the church. In first

century Galilee, marriages were arranged. Parents of both parties would discuss the possibilities. When a suitable bride was found, the father of the groom and the groom would journey to the prospective bride's home to speak with her father. The two fathers would haggle over the bride price. The groom would put up the agreed upon price as insurance for the girl in case of his death. It was an early form of life insurance. The more valued the bride, the higher the price.

Dear bride of Christ, do you realize how highly Jesus values you? He paid for you with His own blood. He could not have paid a higher price! (Romans 8:32) He could not have given anything more precious. In this bride price was not only a declaration of the value He places in you, but the means to make you worthy of the price paid.

Once the price was agreed upon, the groom would offer a cup of wine to the prospective bride. It was a way of offering his life to her. The wine represented his life's blood. He would ask her to drink it all. If she took it and drank it all, it was a way of declaring she accepted his life and would give her life to him. (1Corinthians 11:25) They were officially betrothed. A covenant agreement had been made. And so it is with the cup of communion. We are accepting Jesus' invitation to accept His life and give Him ours.

Interestingly enough, there was no date set for the wedding. The future groom would return to his father's home and add another room onto the dwelling. It was to be their new home. That is why the groom would announce to the bride, *"I go to prepare a place for you and if I go I will come and again and receive you to be with me, so that where I am, there you may be also."* (John 14:1-3)

Only the father of the groom could say if the new room was completed, and so he would inspect the work and direct any additions. Once the father was satisfied that all was ready, he would let his son know. That directly relates to Jesus' words about His return, *"No man knows the day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only."* (Matthew 24:36)

When the Father was satisfied that the work was complete, the son would gather all his friends and family and go in procession to the village and home of the bride. As they approached the town the company would blow a shofar announcing their arrival and the beginning of a week-long wedding feast. That is one reason that when Christ returns it is announced with a trumpet. The angel is announcing the coming of the groom to claim his bride. (1Corinthians 15:52)

Imagine the anticipation of the bride as the time drew near. Imagine her ears always waiting to hear the sound of the shofar. That is the anticipation of the believer throughout the last 2000 years. May we hear it in our lifetime!

Commented [notes23]: Romans 8:32 (NIV)

³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us—all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Commented [notes24]: 1 Corinthians 11:25 (ESV)

²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

Commented [notes25]: John 14:1-3 (ESV)

¹ "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.

² In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

Commented [notes26]: Matthew 24:36 (ESV)

³⁶ "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.

Commented [notes27]: 1 Corinthians 15:52 (ESV)

⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

The groom would take the bride privately into an inner chamber of her home. The friend of the groom would wait to hear the sound of groom's voice that declared that they had consummated the marriage. The friend of the groom was the description that John the Baptist gave as a picture of his role. When asked what he felt about Jesus baptizing more people than he was baptizing, John answered, ²⁹ *The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.* ³⁰ *He must increase, but I must decrease.* John 3:29-30 (ESV)

Jesus referred to himself as the bridegroom when answering a question about why His disciples didn't fast. He answered that they will fast when He, the bridegroom, is taken from them. (Luke 5:34-35)

This theme of Jesus being the groom and the church being His bride runs throughout the Scriptures. We need to emphasize it more today, for **the time of the wedding feast is drawing near.**

Perhaps the reason we don't emphasize more is the sense of obligation and commitment it stirs in us. It reminds us that we are to be His helpmeet that lives in submission to Him and that love is to be the summation of our relationship. It tells us that we are not free to let anything or anyone else take first place. It's time in His presence and in His word and prayer that keeps our first love in first place.

As we take communion this morning, will you hear it as the disciples in first century Galilee did? Will you picture Jesus handing you the cup and asking if you will receive His life and give Him your life? What a great way to start the new year, accepting the life of Jesus and giving Him yours, betrothed to Him.

Do you, bride of Christ, take Jesus to be your lawfully wedded husband, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, come what may, for all eternity? Do you? How then shall we live each day? Should it not be as His companion, friend, helpmeet, and lover? **Let us live in continual awareness that we are betrothed to the King of kings** and Lord of Lords who paid the greatest possible bride price to make us His.

The rest of our earthly life is preparing to be the bride of Jesus. Where are you going? I'm on my way to my wedding! I'm anxiously awaiting the sound of that shofar. This "happily ever after" is the only one that really delivers.

Questions

1. What books of the Bible directly address this theme?
2. What does Adam's need for another tell us about God?
3. What is our role as the bride of Christ?
4. What are our privileges as His bride?

Commented [notes28]: Luke 5:34-35 (ESV)

³⁴ And Jesus said to them, "Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?"

³⁵ The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.

5. What is Jesus' role as our husband?
6. How was that demonstrated?
7. How does this relate to the Great Command?
8. What is spiritual adultery?
9. What is Jesus anticipating?
10. What should we be anticipating? In what way?
11. What happens then?
12. How do we live this relationship now?