

**THE BRIDE OF CHRIST**  
**November 22, 2015**  
**Bramalea Baptist Church**

As we've discovered over the past few weeks, there is no relationship on earth that is more fundamental than the marriage relationship. It is foundational to our well being as a society. Instituted by God, marriage is the most intimate of all human relationships. It is a relationship of utmost importance and must be treasured and nurtured at all times.

As we conclude our series this morning, I want to continue on the theme of marriage. I don't want to talk however about my marriage or yours, nor do I want to talk about the institution of marriage. Scripture often refers to the Church as the bride of Christ, and it is this that I want us to focus on today.

I want to speak this morning about Christ's love, devotion and sacrifice for what is, for him, the passion of his heart, his Church – the bride of Christ. I want us to think about what that should mean to us as the universal Church and, more specifically, what it should mean to us as Bramalea Baptist Church. Finally, I want us to ask one simple question of ourselves, are we ready for that marriage.

***PRAYER***

**THE COUPLE**

Inarguably, the two most important people at a wedding are the bride and the groom. After all, it is their day and it is their wedding that we gather to celebrate. One day all of heaven will celebrate as Christ is united with his bride, the Church. Towards the end of Revelation, John sees the wedding of Jesus, the Lamb, and of his bride, the Church. What a beautiful picture is painted for us.

**Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:**

**“Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns.**

**Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!**

**For the wedding of the Lamb has come,**

**And his bride has made herself ready.**

**Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.”**

**(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)**

**Then the angel said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’”**

Revelation 19:6 – 9

**The Bride**

Let's focus our attention briefly on the bride. The Church universal is the Bride of Christ. Who makes up the Church? The Church is comprised of those who have

been called out by God's Spirit to salvation. The Church is God's chosen people. I Peter 2:9 says, **"You are a chosen people. You are a kingdom of priests, God's holy nation, his very own possession. This is so you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."**

Attending church does not mean you are a part of the Church. Being part of the Church means that you have acknowledged and embraced Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. Then, and only then, are you part of the Church.

### **The Groom**

Often in a wedding ceremony, the groom takes a bit of a backseat. As the bride enters the church, everyone stands and turns to watch as she comes down the aisle to meet her groom. When I'm at a wedding, I love to watch the look on the groom's face as the bride enters. There is such a great sense of anticipation, he is often lost deep in the love he holds for the one who is coming down the aisle to pledge herself to him forever. If you can picture that, than you have but a glimpse of the intensity of Christ's love for his bride, the Church. Jesus himself, is the groom.

I want you to take note of the term used for Christ in this passage, **the wedding of the Lamb has come**. Throughout Revelation, we read of the Lamb, the Lamb seated on the throne, the Lamb who leads his people to living streams of water. It harkens back to what John the Baptist said of Jesus in John 1:29, **"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."**

This term reminds us of Christ's character, his sacrificial love for the Church and how he wishes to be regarded. In a message on the Marriage Feast of the Lamb, noted preacher Charles Sprurgeon says this, ***"Christ anywhere, even in his highest glory, still wishes us to regard him as the sacrifice for sin. He desires to be viewed by us in has character as the lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. This is a character which he never lays aside and it is as the lamb that he will manifest himself in the consummation of all things when his Church is perfected."***

Christ sacrificed himself, gave himself up for his bride. Christ possesses and exemplifies a deep, sacrificial love for the Church. There is nothing more important to him than his bride.

I want to read a short passage from Colossians 1 to help give a fuller picture of the groom. **"Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before God made anything at all and is supreme over all creation. Christ is the one through whom God created everything in heaven and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see – kings,**

**kingdoms, rulers, and authorities. Everything has been created through him and for him. He existed before everything else began, and he holds all creation together. Christ is the head of the church, which is his body. He is the first of all who will rise from the dead, he is first in everything!”**

Col. 1:15-18

This is a vivid picture of the groom. He is God. He spoke all things into being. He is preeminent; he is supreme. He is first in everything! This is the one whom you and I as the church are preparing to wed. Are you committed to this marriage? Will you do what is necessary to prepare to be the bride that Christ desires and deserves?

### **THE PREPARATION**

Leading up to, and in anticipation of a wedding, decisions are made as where the marriage will take place, what type of reception will be held, what guest will be invited and then the detailed preparations begin. Will there be music? Who will be in the wedding party? What type of flowers or other décor will there be?

The bride herself thinks about how she will look on her wedding day. Often there are numerous trips to bridal shops to try on dresses; various hair-styles are discussed. One of the brides greatest desires is to present herself at her very best for her future husband. I remember my own daughter’s wedding, thinking about how absolutely radiant she looked as I walked her down the aisle. While she has always been beautiful to me, I remember thinking how especially beautiful she was in that moment. I think it is a beautiful expression of how important this day is to her, it demonstrates her love and devotion to her future husband.

We as the bride of Christ must take the same care as we prepare for the day that Christ will return and claim his bride. Ephesians 5 offers us wise counsel as we prepare for this day.

### **The Holy Life**

**“Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God’s people. Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes – these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness. You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is really an idolater who worships the things of this world. Don’t be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the terrible anger of God comes upon all those who disobey him. Don’t participate in the things these people do. For though your hearts were once full of darkness, now you are full of light from the Lord, and your behaviour should show it! For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true. Try to find out what is**

**pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, rebuke and expose them. It is shameful even to talk about the things that ungodly people do in secret. But when the light shines on them, it becomes clear how evil these things are. And when your light shines, it will expose their evil deeds.”** Ephesians 5:3-14

In order for us to prepare as the bride of Christ, we must understand the life God desires for his bride. Christ wants his bride to be pure, to be holy. This means that we avoid such things as sexual immorality, greed, obscene jokes and conversation. Paul tells us plainly, **“these things are not for you.”** We must as individuals and as the Church, take this call to holiness seriously.

When God called us to salvation, he sanctified us, set us apart; he called us to be holy. His word teaches us that we are to be in the world, not of the world. I wonder perhaps if the Church, in our desire to reach the world, has become too much like the world. I’m not speaking here of using contemporary music in worship, or the fact that some people dress casually for church or that churches serve coffee in the lobby. These things can help us to break down barriers and reach people that we might not otherwise reach. As I think about this, one line from this passage kept jumping out at me, **“Don’t be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins...”**

One of the biggest changes I have observed in the Church over the past 20 years or so, is the willingness of the Church to simply excuse sin as a means of gaining favour and acceptance with the world around it. I am not for a moment suggesting here that we should not be grace filled people, nor am I suggesting that we should not offer people forgiveness. But, there is a big difference between extending grace and offering forgiveness and excusing sin, turning a blind eye to it.

Does this mean that we become crazed sin managers, running around pointing out every little perceived sin in the lives of others? No! **“Remove the log in your own eye before removing the speck in your brother’s.”** It means that we examine our own lives and stop excusing sinful behavior. We must call sin what it is, sin, and we must seek to root it out of our lives.

There will be occasion as well where we might see a brother or a sister caught up in sin and we will need to bring it to their attention. I know that might make some of you uncomfortable, but we are all part of the same body. If, for example, I know of a brother or sister caught up in a sin – adultery, habitual gossip or lying – do I not do them a disservice if I ignore it? And, if I do turn a blind eye to it, am I not doing a disservice to the church becoming the bride that Christ seeks?

**“For though your hearts were once full of darkness, now you are full of light from the Lord, and your behaviour should show it!”**

We have been called out of the darkness. We are now full of light, light that comes from Christ. Our behavior should show it! So as the bride of Christ we must recognize the life that God desires for us and that is a holy life.

### **Holy Living**

Understanding the life God desires for us, we must realize that this holy life does not come about by accident. There are things we must do in preparation. Living a holy life takes planning. As we consider the verses we’ve just looked at and read on, the message is simple and clear, we must **choose to live a holy life**.

**“So be careful how you live, not as fools but as those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days. Don’t act thoughtlessly, but try to understand what the Lord wants you to do. Don’t be drunk with wine (or beer, or Mike’s Hard Lemonade), because that will ruin your life. Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill and control you.”**

Paul makes it very clear in the previous verses as well as these that we must not be casual about sin in our lives. He reminds us once again to **be careful about how we live**. Living a holy life certainly involves choosing what not to do, but that in itself is not enough. A holy life is not only marked by what we don’t do, but – more importantly – it is marked by what we do. Look at the contrasts that are underlined in the slide on the screen. In order to live a holy life, we must choose it. How do we do that?

At the opening of this chapter, Paul says, **“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”** Eph. 5:1 – 2 We imitate God. We live lives of love, we seek to understand how God would want us to behave and we take opportunity to do good. We make a deliberate choice to replace the behaviours of this world with the behaviours of the Kingdom.

It’s not always easy to change our behaviour, to break free from what might have become habitual behavior, but if we are serious about being the bride of Christ, then we will be serious about making positive choices. If you deal with anger, seek to exercise self-control. If you gossip, stop it. If you lie, tell the truth. If you cheat, seek to be honest.

You don’t have to do it alone. Our greatest desire as a church must be to see one another become more like Christ. There are people here who will come alongside you to help you make positive changes and choices. How do you find

those people - reach out. Get involved in a small group, volunteer in a ministry. Take concrete steps to invite people into your life who will support you in choosing to live the way God desires.

But more importantly understand this, God has given us his Holy Spirit to guide us and transform us. **“Let the Holy Spirit fill and control you.”** When you become a Christian you are filled with God’s Holy Spirit. Ask the Spirit to help change you, to transform you. But hear this, if you want to experience true change and transformation you must surrender to the Holy Spirit and allow him to control your life. And, you must work in partnership with the Holy Spirit to choose to live a holy life.

### **THE MARRIAGE**

Continuing on in the chapter we read this, beginning at verse 21, **“And further you will submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. You wives will submit to your husbands as you do to the Lord. For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of his body, the church; he gave his life to be her Savior. As the church submits to Christ, so you wives must submit to your husbands in everything. And you husbands must love your wives with the same love Christ showed the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by baptism and God’s word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead she will be holy and without fault.”** Eph. 21 – 27

#### **Marriage is a partnership**

Paul now addresses human marriage as a symbol of the relationship between Christ and his church, the bride. There is much that we could say about this passage alone, but I want to keep our focus on the relationship between the church and Christ. There are two things I want you to take away from this portion of Scripture. The first is that **marriage is a partnership.**

Paul speaks of mutual submission here, **“submit to one another out of reverence for Christ”**. As we think of this in terms of the church’s relationship with Christ, as well as in our marriage relationships, we must understand what is meant by submit. The idea of “submit” here is often misunderstood, and – if we’re being candid – it has been used by some in the church to try and control and manipulate. The term that is used means a voluntary desire, it is not a call for wives to be under the thumb of their husband. It is an act of love, that involves the whole person indicating a sense of safety and peace based on the character, the loving character demonstrated by the husband. **“Love your wives with the same love Christ showed the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean.”**

Christ gave up his life for his bride, the church. Dwell on that for a moment. His love, his passion, his devotion to the church was so great that he gave up his life. The love Christ demonstrates is a love that is freeing. His sacrificial love sets us free from sin's grasp. It is a love that sets us free to love him back with a heart that desires to submit to him.

Our relationship with Christ is a partnership. Not in the sense of business, but in the sense of the most intimate relationship that exists, marriage. Christ has done his part through his incredible sacrifice. He has loved his bride perfectly. Our part is to submit to him willingly and lovingly.

Submitting is not always an easy thing for us to do, even when it comes to Christ. Let me ask you something, how deeply have you experienced the love of Christ? I use the term experienced very deliberately. In order for my heart to be transformed so that I can freely and lovingly submit to Christ, I must experience Christ's love. Christ did not sacrifice himself simply so that you could go to heaven. He died because of his immense, unending love for you. I cannot emphasize this enough. The power of this kind of love is irresistible. However, if Christ's love is only an intellectual concept to you, if you do not grasp the enormity and the power of his sacrifice for you which is rooted in love, then I can guarantee you that submitting to him will always be a struggle.

### **Marriage is permanent**

The final thing I want you to see about this is that **marriage is permanent**. Listen to what Paul says, **“As the Scriptures say, ‘A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.’ This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one.”** Ephesians 5:31 & 32

The groom and his wife are joined together and become one. This idea of joining is something that signifies completeness. This is what God intended of marriage. As we have learned over the past few weeks, God's intent behind marriage is that a husband and wife would be joined together permanently. The only thing that could part them was death.

This is not the case however when we think of the marriage of the Lamb. There will come a time in the future when all preparations for this marriage will cease. The time will arrive when Christ and his bride are joined together as one. **“This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and his Church are one.”**

The joining together of man and woman is a picture of the marriage of Christ and his bride. The difference is that nothing can separate Christ from his bride. The sacrifice of Christ and the mutual love between Christ and his Church will create

a bond so powerful that nothing can prevail against it. In speaking of the future glory of the Church and Christ's immense love Paul states this in Romans, **"I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can't and the demons can't...nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord."** Rom. 9:38-39  
When Christ returns for his bride a union will be formed for all of eternity that will never be broken. The marriage of the Lamb and of his bride is permanent.

### **CONCLUSION**

The church is the bride of Christ. He died for her, he has nurtured and cared for her. He has selflessly put the needs of the church above his own. He has demonstrated a passionate love for his bride. He desires that the church would be holy so that the world would know the place of honour the church holds. In response to this sacrifice of love, we must choose to live holy lives and to submit to him willingly. The relationship that Christ has with his bride is powerful and it is permanent. Nothing can prevent the forthcoming marriage of the Lamb to his beautiful bride. So I ask you as I did when we began, are you committed to this marriage? Will you do whatever it takes to prepare to be the bride that Christ deserves?