Our Great Wedding (Eph. 5:22-33)

**Introduction:** She has been dreaming of her wedding day since the first time she saw Cinderella. Her knight in shining armor riding in on a white horse. The perfect lace gown with a ten-foot train. A five-layer double fudge cake she can stuff in his face. Three months of intense work with her mom and her closest friends followed by a one-week, stress-free, fairy tale existence. Best of all, the only man she’s loved her whole life putting her into the hands of the man she’ll love for the rest of her life. This is what she envisions for her wedding day.

He’s only been thinking about this day since the moment she captured his heart. Other more mundane thoughts have occupied his mind. Snagging the football and becoming the school hero in the Friday night game. Working the grill every night of the week so he could earn enough money to get his own car. Finishing school and heading off to college where he’d train for his career. Going to the movies to catch the latest horror flick with his favorite friends.

Then he met her.

Everything changed.

Soon, those who knew him since pre-school couldn’t vouch for his identity. The subject of his conversation was predictable – her. The recipient of the expensive gift was no shocker – her. Every smile crossing his face, every whistled tune coming through his tightened lips, every gleam in his cheery blue eyes – her, it was always her. He was a different person with a new dream. “I want to marry that girl.”

Love and marriage. They change people. Some only recently stumbled upon the joys the opposite gender can bring. Others have been anticipating it for what feels like their whole lives.

Anticipation also plays a significant role in Jesus’ relationship with His bride, the Church. However, the roles are reversed. *We* were the ones who wanted nothing to do with Jesus, the Groom, or the commitment that being in a relationship with Him would require. Other pursuits occupied our attention. He didn’t have anything we wanted, or so we thought.

There was no reason for Jesus to desire us either. We didn’t have anything *He* wanted, but He had everything *we* needed. So He pursued us. Jesus has always been the Pursuer. He sought us for our benefit and His joy. For eternity, Jesus has been dreaming of the day we would be His bride.

It was only after Jesus captured our hearts that we began to pursue Him. We should have been seeking Him all along. What Jesus does for the object of His love is far more than any bride could have ever imagined.

1. **Jesus Leads His bride.** *“head of the church”* (Eph. 5:23)

Before coming to Christ, the Bible describes Jesus’ followers in some not too complimentary ways – lost (Matt. 10:6) and blind (Matt. 15:14). It’s bad enough to be one or the other. But to be both lost *and* blind leaves you without hope (Eph. 2:12).

People like that are easy to manipulate. They follow any voice offering direction even if that voice comes from a person who is equally clueless about which way to go (Matt. 15:14; Rom. 2:19). The one giving direction may care little about the safety of the ones he is leading (John 10:12; Matt. 24:11).

All of us need good leadership. We were born blind and lost. It’s not our fault. Our condition was our parents’ doing (Gen. 3:6-7). Don’t get comfortable just because the blame is someone else’s or because your condition is universal. This is not a colossal game of “hide and seek” where it’s fun to be hidden. Lost-ness makes you easy prey for the enemy (Matt. 24:23-26; 1 Peter 5:8).

Satan wants to keep people wandering and stumbling, bruised and battered. Just as he and his forces can produce physical blindness (Matt. 12:22), so he darkens people to their spiritual wickedness. They don’t know they are lost, and they don’t someone is looking for them (Rev. 3:17; Luke 15:8). Satan hides the light that could give the lost hope (2 Cor. 4:4).

Some people don’t need Satan’s misdirection. They are willfully lost (Luke 15:13; Isaiah 53:6; Psalm 139:7-12). They are proud, blind men who take offense at the disabled label and rebuff help or correction even though they will soon step off the curb into the path of an oncoming bus (John 9:40-41). Their stubbornness will destroy them and any who follow them (Jer. 50:6).

A lost person is in mortal danger. They are blind to the threats around them and are in desperate need of rescuing. Thankfully, rescuing is what Jesus came to do (Matt. 18:11).

Jesus is highly qualified and very experienced when it comes to healing the blind and finding the lost (Matt. 11:5). The only ones He loses are those who run when they see Him coming (John 18:9). Neither the disease’s duration (John 9:1, 25) nor the patient’s grip on his condition (Acts 9:8, 17-18) diminishes Jesus’ success rate. And when people receive their sight, when they stop their wandering, Jesus produces joy for them and for the people who love them (Luke 15:32).

Do you remember what it was like when you felt that joy? You didn’t even know someone was looking for you, but you hoped (Psalm 119:176). The night you heard about Jesus was the greatest night of your life! You stood to your feet, took hold of Jesus’ hand as you grasped the pastor’s, and saw the countenance of God as you bowed your head to pray. The face of Jesus brought courage, hope, and relief to your frightened, lost soul. You had given up on any chance of ever going home.

Jesus led you out of darkness. Now He is ready to lead you for the rest of your days. That’s where a new problem begins.

We want His rescue; we don’t want His leadership. “Thank you for saving me. I’ll be on my way now.” Jesus made plans for a permanent relationship, not a one night stand.

The light Jesus is provides direction not just for salvation but for every day (John 9:5). He’s the Way to live not just the Way to Heaven (John 14:6; Acts 9:2). Not following Jesus was always stupid. It’s even more foolish to reject His leadership once we’ve seen that following anyone else’s orders, especially our own, is what got us into such a mess originally!

In the human relationship of marriage, two equally intelligent people put their mental resources together. Two heads really are better than one. They both give input, they cooperate, and they deal with the consequences of their choices together. The relationship between Jesus and His bride is not the same. We are not His equal. We don’t get a say.

Jesus is the Head. He says, “Let Me do the thinking.” No one needs to fear His leadership. Jesus is a loving, kind Husband, not a harsh taskmaster. Submission to His role will produce peace and productivity (Eph. 5:22).

I understand why a human bride has trouble deferring to her husband. He is often mistaken, selfish, and deaf to her concerns. Jesus is none of these. Submission was difficult for Eve; it is difficult still today (Gen. 3:16). Jesus has proven Himself worthy of our unwavering trust and utter dependence (Prov. 3:5-6). The more we trust Him, the easier it will be to obey Him in everything (Eph. 5:24).

Why do you hesitate to give up control? Where do you think you will wind up if you submit to Jesus and follow His directions? He is the loving Shepherd who is willing to lay down His life for the sheep. Do you think that His plans for you are bad (Jer. 29:11)? His sheep follow His voice, and they end up in good places (John 10:27).

The places He takes us may not always *seem* good. We love it when He brings us to spacious plateaus with gentle breezes, inspiring vistas, and an abundant supply (Psalm 23:1-3). But when the sky turns black, and the water isn’t so calm, we start to question Jesus’ leadership and His concern (Mark 4:37-39). The same fear we had when we were lost can rise within us again.

To the waves and to our fears, Jesus says, “Peace, be still. Following Me is the safest place you can be. Bullets may fly all around you, and they might even take you out. But *I* will take you home. Follow Me.”

1. **Jesus Protects His Bride**. *“savior of the body”* (Eph. 5:23)

There is a subtle but important distinction God makes in Ephesians 5:23. Jesus *is* the Savior, not He *was* the Savior. There was a time in the past when Jesus hung on a cross and vacated a tomb to provide rescue for all the spiritually blind, lost people in the world. There was also a time when you listened to His voice calling you out of death’s darkness, and He became not just *the* Savior, but *your* Savior. Jesus saved you.

Jesus is still saving you. Jesus rescued you from your sins and protected you from their eternal consequences. He continues to rescue and protect you every day. What good husband would say “I do” and then leave His wife to fend for herself the rest of her life?

Jesus *is* a good Husband. Your situation might cause you to doubt that. If He was good, why would He allow scary circumstances? Why doesn’t He protect us from all the evils in the world?

I am a husband. My love for my wife motivates me to protect her from any one and any thing that would do her harm. I can only protect her from so much. My failure to protect her from all pain does not cause her to question my love, only my ability. I am limited though my love is not. I believe I would die for her even though giving my life might not save hers.

Jesus *is* strong. There is nothing and no one that can get past Him. Whatever comes your way came through Him first. Knowing that may cause you then to doubt His love. Don’t. I believe I would die for my wife; Jesus already died for His. He may allow you to go through some temporary suffering and protect you *in* the storm instead of *from* it (Psalm 23:4-5; Dan. 3:17-18; 6:21-22), but His sacrifice proves His love. His resurrection proves His power.

There is one thing that limits Him—you. Your willingness to submit to His leadership determines the level of protection He can provide. A shelter can give us refuge from our surroundings, but it can be so confining. What teenager hasn’t complained about over-protective parents? What parent hasn’t cautioned about unseen dangers? Parents can only shield the ones who stay close. And the more we submit to Jesus’ leadership, the more safety He can provide.

On the day I got married, I put on a wedding band. One new groom complained to his bride that his ring was too tight. It was cutting off his circulation. She replied, “That’s what it was *designed* to do.”

Marriage is restrictive and confining. No doubt about it. But those restrictions permit you to enjoy the committed love of one person for the rest of your life. And when two people have lived and continue to live under the sexual limits Jesus places on His followers, those boundaries free you from guilt, shame, and certain diseases.

Whenever you are tempted to think that Jesus’ constraints are too tight, just remember what lostness and blindness felt like. Think about the weight of guilt He took from your shoulders and the relief its removal provided. Anticipate the wide open spaces you have yet to enjoy without restriction (Rev. 22:17).

In Heaven, the gates will always be open. There will be no more threats, internal or external. We will no longer desire anything more than we desire Jesus, and no danger will be able to reach us (Rev. 22:15).

For now, danger lurks all around us. It comes from Satan’s lies and attacks. It comes from man’s covetousness. It comes from false shepherds and wolves in sheep’s clothing. Don’t worry; just stay close to *your* Shepherd (Matt. 6:33). Awareness of the danger keeps you submissive to Jesus’ will.

We need Jesus’ protection. Two truths guarantee we have it. He has promised, and He protects what He loves.

1. **Jesus Loves His bride.** *“Christ also loved the church”* (Eph. 5:25)

Multiple marriage stories fill the pages of the Bible. Some of them are beautiful love stories. Others are horrific accounts of dysfunctional families. I want to briefly detail one example from each category. God’s grace is evident in both.

Ruth was a Moabite on her way to Bethlehem. Her story begins with a deceased husband and a widowed mother-in-law. When she begins to work in Boaz’ fields, she hasn’t got much with which she can catch his attention. She’s a second-hand girl from an enemy’s borders. The only things she has going for her are a servant’s heart, an ability to see deeper than the physical, and an unbreakable level of commitment. For Boaz, it’s enough.

He offers her food and protection. Ruth offers him marriage. They both accept. But there’s a problem. Someone else has a previous claim on Ruth’s property and on Ruth herself, and there’s nothing she can do about it. Boaz overcomes every obstacle and puts his future in jeopardy to gain Ruth as his wife. His primary concern is her protection and provision, not his loneliness. He loves her, and she loves Him. This time, love wins.

Gomer’s life tells a different story. Like Ruth, Gomer was an experienced lover. But the men she loved only used her. They didn’t return her love. She never knew genuine love from a man until she met Hosea. And Hosea never knew love’s cost until he met Gomer.

The relationship between Hosea and Gomer was stranger than any reality TV series today. For one, it began because of Hosea’s love for God not for Gomer. God told Hosea to marry a prostitute (Hosea 1:2).

Rather than argue with God about the oddity of His instructions, Hosea went down to where the prostitutes plied their trade. The first one that propositioned him got more than she planned when he invited her to share not just his bed but his home. She had always told herself a husband and a stable life was what she wanted, so she agreed.

Hosea had an advantage that most men do not. He fully knew the character of his wife going in. He thought the only direction their marriage could go was up. He was wrong.

Several men and several children not-his-own later, *Gomer* abandoned *Hosea*. Unbeknownst to her, Hosea continued to provide for Gomer and her children while she slept with other men. When her lovers had finished using her, they did what they could to insult her one last time. They put her on the auction block.

Guess who bought her. Hosea’s bid, though all he had, was very low. It was enough; there were no other bidders.

He brought her home, cleaned her, and bandaged her. And then he instructed her (Hosea 3:3). “You are mine to love, not theirs. You gave them sex; I won’t ask it of you. I do this not to punish you but to teach you that love and sex are not the same things. My love for you is not dependent on what you provide for me, and it is not hampered by what you have done to me.”

Their narrative was a picture of the stormy relationship between God and Israel. The only thing God could trust Israel to do was to be unfaithful. Despite Israel’s idiotic adultery, God continued His provision for them and His love to them. We do not know how Gomer’s story ends, but since hers and Israel’s are connected, we can only assume they share a similar conclusion. God and Hosea both say,

*“Then I will heal you of your faithlessness; my love will know no bounds, for my anger will be gone forever.”* – Hosea 14:4 [NLT]

That’s love.

God’s love toward us and our love toward each other are best expressed in marriage. Marriage is important to God, so much so that He explicitly directs at least two of the Ten Commandments toward its proper functioning. “You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14). “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife” (Exodus 20:17).

At first glance, these two commands look very similar, almost redundant. The first one has to do with the sexual relationship. The second covers what a wife does for her husband. While that would include romance, it would also reflect more mundane activities. Cooking his favorite meals, massaging his feet, adoring him with her eyes, giving attention to her personal attractiveness, pumping him up in front of his friends, keeping his house clean.

Can you hear the foolish husband saying to his spouse, “Why can’t you be more like David’s wife? She’s perfect. I wish I had her as my mate.” If you can hear that, then you can also hear the slap and the sobs that come immediately after. Some husbands love what their wives *do* for them instead of loving them as a person.

The absence of genuine love saddens God. He designed the highest expression of human affection to be between a husband and wife. Even that love can never reach the level of love Jesus has for His bride.

Boaz overcame every obstacle to get Ruth. Jesus overcame more to get us. Hosea went to a prostitute, offered his love, dealt with the rejection and whispers, and purchased Gomer when no one else would have her. As magnanimous as Hosea was, Jesus’ forgiveness and patience are far superior because His love is unconditional (Rom. 8:38-39).

How could Ruth *not* adore Boaz? How could Gomer cling to her unfaithfulness? How could Jesus’ bride respond to Jesus’ love in any other way except to love Him in return (1 John 4:19)?

Love is all we have to give, and it’s all He asks of us (Matt. 22:37). For when we love Him as He loves us, we will have no difficulty doing whatever pleases Him no matter the cost (John 14:15; Eph. 5:10). The test of love’s authenticity is what you’re willing to sacrifice for the object of your affection (John 3:16).

1. **Jesus Suffers For His Bride.** *“gave Himself up for her”* (Eph. 5:25)

Suffering is something we work to avoid, but love always involves pain. At the beginning of the romantic process, the grief is limited to the possibility of rejection, the struggle of planning, the cost of encounters, and the confusion over the opposite gender’s way of thinking. The pain feels intense, but it is small compared to what’s coming.

Once you find “the one” the costs increase. The ring, the wedding, the hospital bill after the birth of your first child. Of greater expense than the financial obligations of family is the sacrifices love requires – a willingness to set aside your agenda for the benefit of another (John 15:13).

You were planning on watching the game. She wants to go to the concert. You were hoping for romance tonight. She needs some extra sleep because the baby kept her up *last* night. You get mad because you don’t smell dinner when you get home. She gets hurt because although he enjoyed producing this infant, the stench of the diaper isn’t strong enough motivation to get him to change it. It’s a battle of wills. Who wins? The one who loves most, because that’s the one who submits and gains in the process (Eph. 5:28).

You were willing to experience pain to get her. She was valuable to you. Will you endure hardship to keep her? Her worth has not decreased.

Too many women weep alone. You suffer *for* her at your job and under her car making repairs. Do you suffer *with* her? That’s what she wants. She longs for someone who leads but also who listens. Most guys don’t take time to notice their wife’s hurt. They wouldn’t know what to do with it if they saw it. If you need an example to follow, look at Jesus.

In His attempts to secure us as His bride, Jesus went through pain. We rejected Him at first (John 1:11). Think about the stupidity of that for a moment! Now that we have the blood-colored glasses on, we can see how attractive Jesus is.

Jesus never got married while on earth, but even with many of His most admirable traits concealed, He was still quite a catch. He was kind, honest, faithful, attentive, compassionate, protective, courageous, loving, appreciative, and humble. And He could cook! Any woman would want Him. It’s sickening to think of what we almost let walk away! Thankfully, He was persistent in His pursuit.

His pain was persistent too. Accusers attacked His reputation and that of His mother. They called Him a blasphemer though He was divine. It hurt and angered Him when people used the place of sacrifice as a means for profit. When Lazarus died, and his sisters were in pain, Jesus’ heart broke too (John 11:35-36). Jesus’ own followers didn’t understand Him and didn’t stay with Him.

In the garden, His anguish was so intense that He sweat large drops of blood. His love for the Father and His bride led Him to say, “Not My will but Yours be done.” The only words from His mouth when they mocked, tortured, and crucified Him were words of forgiveness and love. Love hurt Jesus.

Jesus died for you when you had nothing to offer (Rom. 5:8). His most intense pain though was not the cross but that He watched those for whom He sacrificed reject His entreaty to cross over to His side. Unrequited love is love’s most potent torture.

Why enter into relationships if they create so much agony? Because of the joy they provide. You share the pain; you share the pleasure. Every time you gaze into your daughter’s eyes, every time you feel the embrace of your spouse, every time running after your grandchildren takes your breath away, you come to the same conclusion. Though painful, love relationships are worth the cost.

“Jesus, was what You gained worth what You paid?”

Hebrews 12:2 instructs us to see Jesus as we run our race. When you look at Jesus, do you know what you find? You find *Him* staring at *you*! Not everyone rejected Him (John 1:12). You didn’t. You are coming toward Him. And He says, “I love you. You are worth the pain I endured.”

Jesus did whatever it took to get you. He held nothing back (Rom. 8:32). No price was too high, no pain too severe. His bride was the prize, and she was worth it to Jesus. Now, we do what He requires until He takes us home with Him.

Yes, the race is painful, but our prize is Jesus. Jesus is worth the pain. Until we get to the finish line, Jesus calls us to endure (Luke 9:23; Phil. 3:10). The race’s end will end the race’s pain.

Jesus’ ache is not concluded either. His suffering did not cease when He came down from the cross, and His work was not complete when He saved us. That would be like the wedding being the final cost of the relationship. The marriage follows the wedding. It is in the marriage that both persons grow as they grate (Prov. 27:17).

1. **Jesus Refines His Bride.** *“that He might sanctify her”* (Eph. 5:26)

The Old Testament book of Ezekiel uses some disturbingly graphic terminology to illustrate the relationship between God and Israel (Ezek. 16:1-14). God describes Israel as a baby girl, dirty, discarded, dumped, and left to die. When God found her, she was naked, wallowing around in the afterbirth. She had nothing with which to attract God’s gaze or motivate His compassion.

For no logical reason, God gave her what she needed to survive. She grew, her breasts developed, and she matured into a beautiful young woman of marriageable age. But she was still without covering – physical or emotional. She was naked. The only thing hiding her skin was the grime.

Though beautiful, she nonetheless gave no justification for God to intervene. God had much that was far more attractive than she was. God intervened anyway. He married her. *Then* God cleaned her, perfumed her, clothed her, and fed her. He gave her the best, not the leftovers, and put her on a throne beside Him. His purpose was to parade her as a symbol of the change His love could produce.

The story Ezekiel records reminds me of another not nearly as graphic. This one is so tame and genteel that no one will blush. It’s the Broadway play “My Fair Lady.” In it, Professor Higgins who fancies himself a gentleman works to civilize Eliza Doolittle, an uneducated flower girl. His motivation for doing so is two-fold. Success will win a bet he made with a colleague and will prove his capabilities as an artist with Eliza as his masterpiece.

Higgins focuses his attention mainly on Eliza’s speech, thinking the correction of her phonetics will fool others into believing she is a lady. His plan produces a dramatic change in the way others see her. They eventually judge her not just a lady, but a princess descended from royal blood.[[[1]](#endnote-1)]

The similarities between Ezekiel’s story and Broadway’s version are uncanny. Two women from disreputable backgrounds gained the attention of wealthy benefactors and underwent dramatic makeovers. But a makeover is all they got.

After the application of makeup, the girls became attractive to others. They both left their men for the company of others proving the only thing that had changed was the outside (Ezek. 16:15-34; Prov. 11:22). If you remove the dirt and clothe the nakedness but don’t change the heart, the girl will get naked with other men and go back to wallowing in the mud. And a dressed up, well-mannered flower girl is still a flower girl at heart. Both women received an *adjustment*; they needed a transformation.

There is a major distinction between the two stories though. Professor Higgins considered Eliza a project. He didn’t manifest the inklings of love toward her until after she acted civilized. Israel was never a project to God. He loved and married her *before* He cleansed her. She was the love of His life. So are we.

We, Jesus’ bride, were in just as bad a condition as Israel’s description when Jesus came to us. We had nothing to offer except a stench so strong, it drove all others away. His compassion compelled Him to meet us at our need. Jesus washed the blood off our hands and our hearts by offering His as a sacrifice. Cleaning is important. Jesus’ home doesn’t become ours unless we are clean (1 Cor. 6:9-11; Eph. 5:5). Purity was not a prerequisite for His love though.

Jesus loved us right where we were. However, He didn’t leave us there. He did more than refine us; He cleansed and transformed us. Jesus changes the heart before He changes the manners. Correct speech, though important, doesn’t impress the Word of God unless it comes from a clean heart (Matt. 15:18-20; Eph. 5:3-4).

The way God dealt with His bride in the past teaches us something. You cannot make God love you less through your failures or more through your achievements. You *can* increase His pleasure and His pride. Just because God loved you when you were dirty doesn’t give you permission to stay in your original condition.

Your growth thrills Jesus. Some husbands are threatened by their wife’s growth. “What if she surpasses me?” Jesus has no inferiority complex, and you will *never* surpass Jesus. Any growth in you is because of Jesus (John 15:5), so He gets the glory anyway.

Let’s make it personal. What did God see when He found you? What does He see now? A civilized sinner, or a transformed saint? I pray there is a dramatic difference.

We weren’t wearing white when we came to Jesus (Isaiah 64:6), but we will be when we stand before Him on our wedding day (Rev. 19:8-9).

1. **Jesus Escorts His bride.** *“present it to Himself”* (Eph. 5:27)

A large amount of planning and expense goes into most weddings. Doing so almost seems a waste when you recognize that marriage ceremonies usually take less than an hour. It’s not the duration of an event that determines its preparation. It is the event’s importance.

Planning doesn’t guarantee every step will happen in sequence and every person will perform on cue. Invariably, something will go wrong. But as generations of mothers have counseled their daughters, no matter what happens, at the end of the day, the couple will be husband and wife.

As the ceremony begins, the bride’s concern is centered on her dress. The groom, however, has eyes only for the one wearing it. Jesus is far more focused on the purity of His bride than the quality of her clothing. The wrinkles Jesus wants to iron out and the spots He works to remove are on us, not our apparel (Eph. 5:27). He doesn’t care about the cake, or the decorations, or the guests. He loves His bride and anticipates more than just the next week or even the next fifty years. He’s making plans for eternity.

In an earthly wedding, the father escorts his daughter to the anxious hand and heart of her groom. The one who has groomed her from the day of her birth to the moment of her joining now steps back. It is time to place her under the protection of another man.

Jesus’ wedding is different. No one brings Jesus’ bride to Him. He comes to get her Himself (John 14:2-3).

Once Jesus has her in His company, He will perform a presentation He has been longing to make. Jesus will showcase His bride to His Father just as the prince displays His choice to the king. Jesus is proud of His bride, not because of Her beauty, but because she is a testament to the transformation His love accomplished (Matt. 10:32; Rev. 3:5).

Jesus’ attitude toward His bride raises a question. Amazingly, *He’s* not embarrassed to be seen with us even though we give Him cause to be (Heb. 11:16). Do you show the same pride in Jesus? When was the last time you considered declaring your love for Jesus and chose not to because you feared how others would react (Rom. 1:16)? Thankfully, Jesus will never abandon us (2 Tim. 2:11-13; Heb. 13:5).

Jesus’ presence is a good thing; going before the Father unaccompanied is a frightening experience. Jesus is comfortable being in the presence of His Father. He can calm your fears. You don’t have to worry about the Father not liking you. He already knows all your faults and chooses to love you regardless.

**Conclusion:** Jesus loves you. You are His bride. The day of your wedding is coming. You can plan for it, but you cannot put it on your calendar. The only announcement you will receive is when Jesus arrives. Get ready, and get excited! Your Knight in shining armor riding on a white horse is not a fantasy! (Rev. 19:11) He’s coming to carry you home to a city in the sky, and “happily ever after” will finally be more than a Disney fairy tale.

1. “My Fair Lady”; Wikipedia; retrieved Feb, 2018 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)