

Ephesians 5

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[0 : 00] as we turn to God's word let's just pray for a moment father we pray that you just open our ears our minds and our hearts to hear your voice speaking to us today amen for a few moments I'd like you to turn back to the chapter that we read in Ephesians chapter 5 we can read again at verse 31 Ephesians 5 verse 31 for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh this is a profound mystery but I am talking about Christ and the church today I want us to think about one of the great images that the Bible uses to describe the church and that is the image of a bride Ephesians chapter 5 is one of several places in the New Testament that speaks of the church of Jesus Christ as a bride and that image of God's people as a bride is one that runs right through the whole of the Bible it's foreshadowed in the Old Testament with the nation of Israel who was both a precious and yet a tragically adulterous bride to God the image is revealed more clearly in the New Testament like with everything in the Bible it's foreshadowed in the Old Testament revealed in the new when the bridegroom has come and the church is called to be the bride of Christ but the ultimate fulfillment of this image lies in the future the church as a bride is an eschatological reality it's something that belongs to the end times and the final chapters of the Bible in the book of Revelation describe the glorious spectacular marriage supper of the Lamb and for that reason there's a sense in which the whole of the Bible can be summed up as a moving heartbreaking and ultimately beautiful story of the love of God for his bride and so that's what I want us to think about together for a wee while today in particular we're going to focus on what the bridegroom does for his bride what Jesus does for his church and to do that we're going to focus just on five simple headings the first heading is this the bridegroom clings to his bride these words we have before us in Genesis in Ephesians 5 31 repeat the great marriage mandate from Genesis chapter 2 they express the beauty of the marriage union a man leaves his parents and he holds fast to his wife the two become one and here we have Paul doing what he often does with he's trying to give some practical instructions about marriage and often you'll find in Paul particularly usually in the second half of his letter he gives lots of practical stuff but as he often does when he's doing the practical stuff he just kind of throws in this massive theological truth whereby he says this union of bridegroom and bride that we see in marriage is exactly what happens in the relationship between Christ and the church and that image of Christ and the church being joined together in a marriage is pointing to us to the truth that really in many ways is the key truth for understanding Christianity when we're talking about theology we often talk about different doctrines these big kind of chunks of teaching that apply to Christian salvation and you can think of big terms like justification adoption sanctification these are all big aspects of our salvation in Jesus but over all of them lies one big doctrine which which I would say is the most important of all and that is the fact that if you are a Christian or if you become one you are united to Jesus Christ by faith and that union with Christ is the big doctrine that holds everything else together and and I think it's reflected in the fact that

Paul's favorite way to describe a Christian is to say that you are in Christ you're united to him the church is united to Jesus Christians are united to Jesus just like a husband is united to his wife and that basically means that all the benefits resources and achievements and status of Jesus are now shared with us that's one of the great things demonstrated in a marriage union that that the resources and and status of of the the bridegroom is shared with the bride so when my wife Una was united to me in marriage she gained a rightful share to my collection of mixed tapes that I had in the car anyone under the age of kind of 33 is not going to know what that is but we'll tell you afterwards if you don't know very important and she gained access to it when you were united to Jesus Christ by faith when you became a Christian you were given the right to share in his righteousness his presence his brotherhood his grace his love as bride the church is united to Jesus but that union has a very important implication it speaks of the fact that Christ is utterly faithful to his bride the biblical ideal for marriage is a relationship of absolute faithfulness and in Jesus we see utter unfailing faithfulness to his bride that's what marriage should be it's meant to be like that sometimes it's not like that often it's not like that and it's incredibly tough for everybody who has to experience that or be connected to it often we will fail as husbands and as wives but

Jesus never does and his faithfulness to his bride is absolute it's a great reminder that Jesus will never ever grow cold on you he'll never have his head turned he will never let you down Jesus will never ever break your heart instead he is the most faithful bridegroom he is committed he's loyal he's determined he is dependable in Jesus' eyes you are impossible to walk away from but what makes that even more astonishing is the fact that although the bride the bridegroom is the pinnacle of faithfulness the bride is the complete opposite the love story of the Bible is not this kind of Hollywood romance where the perfect girl finds the perfect boy and they just sort of fall into this perfect relationship and live happily ever after the love story of the Bible is not like that the love story of the Bible is of a perfect bridegroom who is repeatedly betrayed by his unfaithful bride and that truth is emphasized very powerfully in the Old Testament particularly in the prophets you'll remember that the prophets in the Old Testament their great function was really to be like warning men they came to speak usually when things were going wrong in the life of God's people and people were turning away and if you look at Isaiah

Jeremiah Ezekiel and Hosea they all describe Israel as an unfaithful wife sometimes in really quite shocking language and the reason they do that is because that imagery very accurately reflects the situation in the Old Testament Israel were meant to be faithful to God they were meant to be dedicated to him just as he was dedicated to them but they continually turned away and ran off with other gods and reading through the Old Testament and seeing the people of Israel repeatedly betraying God you would think that God would eventually say to them it's over we are finished and yet the astounding truth is that he does the very opposite and that truth is captured in I think one of the most remarkable verses in the whole of the Bible which is found in Hosea chapter 11

[9 : 46] Hosea is a prophecy all about Israel's unfaithfulness unfaithfulness and that's portrayed through the real life unfaithfulness of Hosea's own wife and yet when speaking about Israel God says how can I give up on you O Ephraim how can I hand you over O Israel how can I make you like Adma how can I treat you like Zeboim that's two towns that were destroyed my heart recoils within me my compassion grows warm and tender despite the fact that the bride was in a total mess God never gave up on her and the same is true of us as Christians even though we are broken even though we failed even though God could find a thousand reasons to dump us he never will instead he clings to us as Paul says he holds fast to his wife now

I think that's absolutely incredible because I can look at myself and I can find so many reasons that would make God want to push me away and you think God would just want to keep me at arm's length and maybe you feel exactly the same the truth is God wants to cling to you he wants to hold you fast and he will never ever let you go and the practical consequence of that for us as Christians is that in terms of a religious devotion we are spoken for so when you struggle with doubts in your faith which we all do remember that you're spoken for your bridegroom is holding you fast when you're under pressure from colleagues or friends or from culture pressure to compromise remember that you're spoken for when Satan dangles something that's attractive but wrong in front of you remember that you're spoken for and when feelings of low self-esteem leave your hopes and your assurance and your self-confidence hanging by a thread remember that it is a theological fact that you're spoken for you are his and he is never letting go because the bridegroom clings to his bride second thing

I want to say is that the bridegroom delights in his bride this is captured beautifully back in the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah chapter 62 where it says you shall no longer 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 but 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 Jesus delights in the church as his bride it's a great reminder that he's not a bridegroom that's being forced into this he's a bridegroom that is delighted and there are many reasons for that I just want to highlight two the first is because the bridegroom delights in his bride because she has a role in his life from the very beginning of the bible the bridegroom's bride has a role in his life

Eve was created to be Adam's helper she was made to be perfect for him ever since wives have been alongside husbands helping and supporting them that means the church as Christ's bride has a role in his life so the church serves Jesus the church accomplishes things for Jesus the church is given responsibilities by Jesus the church has duties to do for Jesus now that doesn't mean for a minute that the church is Jesus is slave no bride is a slave it means though that the bride is a key part of the life of the husband now that's astounding because at one level God doesn't need us he's completely self sufficient he's independent he can do anything he wants without us God does not need us but the love of God is so great that he's opened out his love so that we can have a place in it too and that means that as part of the church you are needed you have a crucial role in the life of

Jesus he needs you alongside him he needs you working with him so Jesus looks out into the world and he sees that there are people who need to be fed physically and spiritually there's infants that need to be raised there's a household that needs to be kept safe there's a harvest that needs to be gathered there's a message that needs to be spread and who is Jesus most important helper and all of that his bride you and me as his church and so the bridegroom delights in his bride because she has a role in his life but secondly the bridegroom delights in his bride because she is beautiful that points us towards Paul's words in chapter 5 of Ephesians which we read 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 the church as bride is beautiful you can see it there in splendor without spot or wrinkle or blemish now that might seem like a bit of a contradiction because a minute ago we were saying that the bride is in a mess and that's true but the amazing thing about

[16 : 14] Jesus as bridegroom is that he chooses his bride when she's ugly and yet when he marries her he makes her stunningly beautiful and that's because he cleanses us he renews us he wipes away every blemish and stain he heals every wound and scar as Paul describes here in Christ's cleansing work now I want us to notice something really important because when you look at that verse it's easy to kind of have the thinking the wrong way in our minds when we think of beauty we often think of putting stuff on don't we so people will put on their finest clothes people will put on makeup people will paint their nails and put on jewelry often we can think that a bride is made beautiful by putting stuff on on and that's true and normal and perfectly okay but that's not what

Paul is describing here in fact Paul describes the fact that with the church it's the very opposite the church is made beautiful not by putting on but by washing off that's what verse 26 says you can see it there the splendor comes through washing that means that the church as bride is made beautiful not by covering herself in stuff to make her look good but by washing off all the muck and stain and damage of sin and it's so important to remember that because it means that Jesus doesn't look at you and think I need to change her and make her beautiful no he says I need to cleanse her because underneath all of that mess she is beautiful and it's reminding us that all the stain and ugliness of sin in us and in the world around us is a horrible intrusion into the world that was never meant to be there we weren't made ugly we weren't made broken we were made beautiful in

God's image sin has ruined that but Jesus has come to fix us and restore us and that means that what Jesus ultimately wants is the real you Jesus does not want a makeover bride he wants a pure one he wants the person you really are the person made to bear the image of God the person who is the work of Jesus his own hands the person who in God's sight is just so beautiful the church as bride is beautiful and she's been transformed from the ugliness and brokenness of sin back to the pure beauty of what she was always meant to be and that is exactly what the world needs to see in us as we live out our lives as Christians the people who work with you the people in your family the people who see you and me in this week to come they need to see that we are being transformed from brokenness to beauty the bridegroom delights in his bride the marriage of

Christ the bridegroom and the church as bride is a wedding that is bursting with joy and perhaps the most precious truth that all of that emphasizes is that it demonstrates the fact that you are wanted now maybe you've spent your life being overlooked forgotten used or rejected and these are horrific things to have to experience but with Jesus you are so wanted because the bridegroom delights in his bride third thing I want to say is that the bridegroom protects his bride that's set before us in verse 24 28 and 29 now as the church submits to

Christ so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands down to verse 28 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 if you look back over the centuries of history since the New Testament times one of the great effects that Christianity has had on civilization is that it's transformed the status of women today in cultures where Christianity has had a strong historical influence men and women are treated equally or at least it's an expectation that they should be treated equally and that's a direct result of the gospel's influence the fact that women get the same education the same voting rights the same privileges as men are all a result of

[21 : 48] Christianity's influence here's an interesting fact for you lots of people think that the free church is kind of old fashioned and maybe not progressive in regard to women interesting fact for you so what year did women get the right to vote for their MPs in women in women in Britain in Britain 1921 there you go excellent answer do you know what year women got the right to vote for their ministers in the free church 1843 yes the Christian faith has transformed the status of women and if you doubt that just go to a country that's not had a strong Christian influence and see if women and men are treated the same in New Testament times it wasn't like that same in the

Old Testament women were very vulnerable and their status their safety their sustenance was very dependent on getting married you can see that's why the Bible has such a massive concern for widows because when widows lost their husbands they lost so much status and security and God constantly calls his people to care for women in that situation all of that meant that a key part of the bridegroom's role was to protect his wife and that's why the language of submission that you have in Ephesians chapter 5 is not remotely as oppressive towards women as people think people see that wife submit to your husband and it's like that sounds so awful but that's to misunderstand what it's meant it's actually the complete opposite of oppressing women it's saying that to submit to a husband was to come under his authority and that meant you were brought under his responsibility to be cared for to be provided for to be protected and to be defended in biblical times a husband was a key to a woman's safety security and prosperity that's why the new testament gives such strict commands to husbands their wives depended on them and they had to love their wives to the highest standard and all of that is pointing us towards the fact that the church as bride is protected by her husband and

Jesus does that in lots of ways he protects us by instructing us and his commandments are given to us to keep us from harm never forget that obeying what the Bible instructs will not spoil your life it will prevent you from spoiling your life their words of protection when the bride submits to her bride groom it means that she's safe she's secure and that's where she'll find true freedom so Jesus protects us by instructing us Jesus protects us by providing nourishment for us we have the Bible the sacraments the Christian community our own personal devotion these are all means through which Christ nourishes us and Christ protects us protects his bride by holding us close there's a beautiful word there on the screen the word cherish middle of the second last line speaks about how Christ nourishes and cherishes the church that word cherish basically means to make something warm and it's pointing us to the fact that

Jesus wants to draw you near and hold you close and keep you warm now often when we feel that we are cold spiritually we think that we should stay away from church that is never true if you're cold Jesus says come close and I will warm you up and all of this is pointing to the fact that Jesus as bride wants to protect you as bride because you are precious and in a world that crushes our self esteem whether it's at work or in social media or in relationships or whatever it may be we need to listen to the theological truth that in Jesus eyes you are so precious the bridegroom protects his bride fourth thing is that the bridegroom dies for his bride and this is where we see just how precious the bride really is often when we think about weddings we think of joyful wonderful occasions and that's true but all of that comes at a cost doesn't it today the cost of weddings

I think are pretty high maybe some of them are not necessarily that essential but they're there in biblical times however a cost was necessary a bridal price was paid to the girl's father you see an example of that with Jacob way back in Genesis you had to pay a cost in order to get a bride but these costs are nothing compared to the price that was paid by the church's bridegroom so verse 25 says that we're to love our wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her Jesus had to pay a massive cost for his bride but he didn't have to pay money he had to die for her the cost of this marriage was the cross and through that death the bride is rescued cleansed restored and healed and she's united to her bridegroom forever but we must remember what we said a moment ago this is not a forced marriage the bridegroom is not forced into this the bridegroom makes a choice and never forget that

[28 : 26] Jesus knowing the cost knowing the pain knowing the horror of the cross looks at you his bride and he says she's worth it and that's why our whole hearted devotion to Jesus our bridegroom is surely the only way we can respond to his astounding devotion to us so we have these four things the bridegroom clings to his bride the bridegroom delights in his bride the bridegroom protects his bride the bridegroom dies for his bride one more thing to say the bridegroom comes for his bride remember we said at the start that this image of the church as a bride speaks ultimately of the church's future destiny so yes we're all united by faith to

Jesus our husband by faith now and there's a sense in which it's already true but there's also a not yet aspect to it and the fullness of this marriage union lies in the future and it's described beautifully in the closing chapters of the Bible in the book of Revelation then I saw the first earth had passed away and I saw the bride as a bride adorned for her husband and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying behold the dwelling place of God is with men he'll dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God he will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more neither for the former things have passed away when Jesus returns the church will enjoy perfect union with her bridegroom then our maker really will be our husband then we will enjoy all the best that the bridegroom can give and above all then we will be with him forever and that means that right now we are waiting but the

Bible closes with this great message that the bridegroom is coming back Jesus is coming for his bride he's coming for you the church as a bride is waiting that's why the very last chapter of the Bible says the spirit and the bride say come and when he comes he will wipe away every tear that means all the pain of sin spoiled love will be healed all the hurt that we've experienced in our lives because of broken love all the hurt of singleness all the hurt of broken marriage all the hurt of widowhood all the heart break that we experience all the agony that these things can cause will be healed all of those tears will be wiped away and the bridegroom has gone to prepare a place for you and the bridegroom is coming back to get you but that maybe raises the question well why hasn't he come yet nearly 2000 years ago those words were written the spirit and the bride say come and we're still waiting you think why are we still waiting why hasn't he come yet well

I think that I think it's because the bride isn't ready now not in the sense that she isn't beautiful enough I don't mean that at all but in the sense that parts of the bride are missing in other words part of the church is missing which part is the people who aren't yet trusting in Jesus the people who are still to come in to his kingdom the people who are still to take their place as part of this great bride and if you're not a Christian yet that means you

Jesus the bridegroom is holding out his hand to you please take it let's pray father we thank you so much for this amazing image that we have set before us and we're just so thankful for Jesus the perfect bridegroom the perfect husband and the one who's come to rescue us to cleanse us and to keep us safe forever we thank you so much lord for your amazing goodness to us we pray that every single one of us here would be would be helped and taught by what these words what your word is saying to us for every one of us as

[34 : 47] Christians we pray that we would be comforted and helped and encouraged by this extraordinary image and for any of us who are maybe yet to come to faith in you we pray that we would just hear your voice clearly calling us to take our place in your family please have mercy on us we pray in Jesus name Amen ho and Bye we gentlemen done