

WHY JESUS NEEDS A WIFE

Tenth in a series by Dr. Rick Perrin on *Let's Look at God* from Revelation 19:5-9 and 21:1-8
“*The marriage supper of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.*” Revelation 19:7

For most American Christians the first awareness that Jesus had a wife came with the publication of the best-selling novel, *The DaVinci Code*. That book proposes that in Leonardo DaVinci's famous painting of the Last Supper, the person sitting at the table on Jesus' right is not John the disciple, but is Mary Magdalene, whom Jesus married and brought into his inner circle, and who was the mother of his children. Their latest descendants live in France, and I'll provide you with their address after our service if you want to write to them. The idea that Jesus was married comes from the Gospel of Thomas and other Gnostic texts, the earliest of which date from the second century AD. These books have been brought out and dusted off and their ideas blown up like a hot air balloon and breathlessly floated before the world as if they were the most exciting discovery ever to come down the pike.

For those who would believe these propositions, all I can say today is, “April Fool!” for there is not one shred of evidence—not one shred—to give these claims credibility. Not one serious historian, not one responsible theologian, believes them, for the simple reason that every bit of evidence supports the traditional position, that Jesus was unmarried throughout his life, and he died on the cross leaving no wife, not even a girl friend. And yet, I must tell you, one day not too far in the future, Jesus will indeed marry a wife. Over the past several weeks we've been taking a fresh look at God, trying to shake free of whatever misconceptions we may hold, attempting to understand God as he really is. So this morning I want to talk with you about Jesus' wife, for if we don't understand about his wife we will fall short of grasping the significance of our own relationship with God.

The place to begin is with Palm Sunday. We find an account of what happened that day in each of the gospels, but it is perhaps Matthew in chapter 21 who tells us the most. Jesus has been staying a couple of miles outside Jerusalem in the village of Bethany at the home of Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha. Jerusalem is packed to overflowing with pilgrims from all over the world who have come to celebrate the Jewish Passover. On Sunday morning, five days before the Passover, Jesus sent two of his disciples to pick up a donkey he'd arranged to borrow, so that he could ride into the city. There is a sense of anticipation in the air, for speculation has been proliferating among the people that Jesus is in fact the long promised Messiah. If he is, the people expect he will enter Jerusalem and overthrow the Roman occupation and seize control of a renewed Jewish state, ushering in a golden age not seen since the days of David and Solomon.

As Jesus comes out to mount his beast, people begin to gather around him. The disciples place some of their garments on the back of the donkey, and Jesus jumps up, swings his leg over, and takes his seat, and the little procession begins to move. Quickly, others come running from their camping spots along the way and join the throng. They begin to yell and cheer, and this attracts still more people until a large contingent assembles both in front and behind him. People take off their coats and spread them in

the dusty roadway to make a kind of carpet for the donkey to walk upon. Others slither up the palm trees and cut down the fronds. The celebrating crowd picks them up and begins to wave them. With one voice they start singing the thousand year-old song from Psalm 118, "*Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!*" (Matthew 21:9) Now word flows from camp to camp and into the city itself. People rap on the doors of their neighbors' houses to announce that Jesus of Nazareth is riding into the city. Come and join the parade! Each home is packed with relatives and friends, many, if not most of whom, have traveled from Galilee. Now the city is emptying and people rush out to meet the throng that is slowly proceeding with Jesus in the middle.

Tens of thousands of people, maybe hundreds of thousands, all crowding onto the narrow road and filling the spaces along the sides. All of them singing and shouting and cheering. Never has there been in all the long history of Jerusalem a demonstration like this! The road Jesus inched along winds down from the high hilltop east of the city. Today the hillside is covered with graves, a huge cemetery spread with a covering of grave stones both ancient and modern, bleached by the sun into a shimmering white limestone and marble carpet. These are the tombs of hopeful Jews and some Christians who expect that when the Messiah comes he will set foot first on the Mount of Olives, and they want to be close at hand on the glorious day of resurrection. But on this morning in about 30 AD there are few graves. Instead, the hillside is overlain with a canopy of olive trees. Some of their direct successors still grow there, now thick and gnarled and twisted with age. But then it was like a vast garden where the farmers gathered the ripe olives and pressed them into oil for cooking and to light the lamps at night. Down, down, the road snakes, into the deep pit of the Kidron Valley. And then across the narrow floor, until it begins to rise once more, up, up, winding and turning until the walls of Jerusalem tower above them and the open gate receives the tumultuous crowd, like surging football fans impatiently shoving their way through narrow turnstiles into a stadium. Sweating, pushing, shouting, singing, they squeeze through the opening and flood into the narrow, stone-paved streets.

They thin out now, many giving up the effort so they can breathe again, so little children will not be trampled. Still Jesus rides, one step, halt, another foot forward, receding, then lurching ahead until at last he arrives at the temple steps where he dismounts and slowly climbs into the spreading temple courtyard. The older children are singing now, freed from their parents' restraints, accompanying Jesus as he shuffles through the crowd to the temple entrance. He stands there gazing at the merchants, their tables piled high with goods for sale, the animals marked for sale as sacrifices, jammed into crates and cages, bleating and squawking. He just stands there silently, looking, watching, until the temple officials shove their way to where he waits, their faces ablaze with anger and indignation, and they demand in the ugly tones of men self-righteously offended, "What is the meaning of this commotion? Who gives you the right to come here and disturb the temple with this, this mob of rabble you've incited?"

Indeed, what is the meaning of this? Matthew tells us it was the fulfillment of prophecies made by Isaiah and Zechariah, 750 and 500 years before. "*Now this took*

place that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, ‘Say to the daughter of Zion, “Behold your king is coming to you, gentle, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.”’” (Matthew 21:4-5) Christians have usually understood Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday as a preview of his coming reign as king over the earth. It was Israel’s King who came, and the Jews rejected him and crucified him in an ultimate act of rebellion against God. That is of course an accurate interpretation of what Jesus was doing. But this morning I want to suggest another meaning behind Jesus’ ride into the city and his arrival at the temple as his planned destination. The event of Palm Sunday was a symbolic act that has a personal application for you and me.

In order to see the symbolism and understand what Jesus was doing, we must go back to John chapter 2. Here we find the story of the wedding at Cana. It was the occasion of Jesus’ first miracle and the starting point of Jesus’ public ministry, and that alone should draw our attention to it. The wedding at Cana is the only recorded time that Jesus attended a wedding. Cana lay about nine or ten miles north of Nazareth where Jesus grew up and spent his early adulthood. John says Jesus and his disciples were invited to the wedding, so this was probably the marriage of a relative or at least a friend of Jesus’ family. When the wine ran out, Jesus saved the wedding celebration by turning water into wine. It symbolized what Jesus came to earth to do—to bring the wine of celebration into the lives of all who follow him, and to make all things new.

A Jewish wedding of the first century was different in significant ways from how we do weddings today. The arrangements are already made. The families of the bride and groom planned and prepared everything. As evening falls the wedding begins with a joyous torchlight procession led by the groom, accompanied by his friends. They walk together, singing and dancing, to the bride’s home. She of course has been anticipating the groom’s arrival, and she and her bridesmaids have spent all day getting ready. She puts on her best dress. She fixes her hair, applies her makeup, dons her jewelry. When the groom arrives her dad escorts her out, and then, with the bride and groom in the lead, the procession is reversed. They return to the groom’s home and the party begins. The feast lasts for a week, sometimes for two weeks, so that family and friends who live at a distance have time to get there and to spend significant time enjoying each other’s company. These are days of eating and drinking, of telling stories, of renewing old relationships. Those of you who have been worn out after just one day of wedding and reception, be glad you didn’t live in first century Cana!

We now have all the pieces in place. Let’s move on to the interpretation. In the Old Testament we find scores of passages where God calls Israel his bride or his wife. For example, In Isaiah 54 God says to Israel, “*Your husband is your Maker, whose name is the Lord of hosts; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, who is called the God of all the earth. For the Lord has called you, like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, even like a wife of one’s youth when she is rejected, says your God.*” (v 5-6) In the book of Hosea, God tells Israel that because she has worshiped false gods he has divorced her. “*She is not my wife, and I am not her husband.*” (Hosea 2:2) But later God says, out of

his mercy, *“In lovingkindness and in compassion...I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness. Then you will know the Lord.”* (2:19-20)

In the story of salvation, Jesus takes the role of the husband and of the groom. In the events of Holy Week we have the symbolic acting out of the first stage of a wedding. The parade to the temple is the procession of the bridegroom and his friends to the home of the bride. The temple was the Father’s house where God met with and cared for his people. In a sense the temple was home of Israel, the bride. Jesus’ friends accompany him, cheering and singing. He is going to receive his bride and lead her back to his own house. Do you remember what Jesus said to his disciples as they ate together in the upper room? In John 14:2-3 he told them, *“I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”* And of course the place he went to prepare a home for his bride was the cross.

The march to the temple, the suffering of the cross, is the first stage of the wedding. Next must come stage two, leading the bride to her new home. In Ephesians 4:8 the apostle quotes from Psalm 68 and he says that after Jesus rose from the dead, *“He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives.”* After Jesus paid for the sins of his people on the cross he ascended to the Father and presented his redeemed people to God. It’s the picture of a wedding procession returning.

Now turn with me to the last book in the Bible, to Revelation 19. The same John who wrote of Jesus attending the wedding at Cana, who recorded Jesus’ words about going to prepare a place for his people, and who walked with Jesus in the grand procession into Jerusalem, now records a vision about the marriage of Jesus. Starting in verse 6 he says, *“And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude and as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.”* (V6-7)

What bride does not take great care to dress for her wedding? Psalm 45 is a song celebrating the king’s marriage. You recall that on Palm Sunday Jesus was hailed as the king of Israel. Even the placard nailed on the cross above his head confirmed it. So Psalm 45 begins by describing the king in all his glory, but then it turns to focus on the bride. The groom at the head of his royal procession knocks at the door of the bride’s house. The Father opens the door. His daughter is gorgeous! She takes the groom’s breath away. The psalmist writes in verses 10-15, *“Listen, O daughter, give attention and incline your ear; Forget your people and your father’s house; Then the king will desire your beauty; Because He is your Lord, bow down to Him....The King’s daughter is all glorious within; Her clothing is interwoven with gold. She will be led to the King in embroidered work; The virgins, her companions who follow her, will be brought to You (That is, to the bridegroom at the head of the procession.) They will be led forth with gladness and rejoicing; They will enter into the King’s palace.”* In Revelation 21:2 we have a similar passage. John says, *“And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.”* Back in

Revelation 19, verse 8 John tells us what she is wearing. “*And it was given her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.*” Note this, for we’ll come back to it.

We must first however make certain we understand just who the bride is, and what her name is. In Revelation 21:2 she is called *the holy city, the new Jerusalem*. In Ephesians 5, in Paul’s well known passage on marriage, he talks about how husbands and wives ought to love each other and serve each other. And he says that marriage between a man and a woman is holy and sacred because it symbolizes something greater. He says, “*I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.*” (Ephesians 5:32) Now you know who the bride of Jesus is, and now you know her name. The wife of the Lord Jesus is the church. Her name is your name. You, you and I, are the wife of Christ!

In verse 9 of Revelation 19 John exclaims, “*Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.*” How happy is the bride, how happy are those who are invited as guests to the marriage banquet! Here is the third stage of the wedding. You remember I said that in weddings of the first century the feast lasted for a week, perhaps two. Jesus resupplied the wine when it ran out at Cana because it was a symbol of the eternal celebration of his own marriage supper. The tables are sagging under the weight of the specially prepared food. What a variety! It has been imported from all over the world, the very finest and tastiest dishes. And the sparkling wine, the fruit of the vine, the perfect vintage, the most exquisite bouquet! And it will never run out. And the feast will not wind down after just a few days, nor will the guests drift off to their scattered homes. No, this festival will continue forever and forever.

There will be only laughing celebration. In verse 4 of Revelation 21 John says, “*He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain.*” There shall be no one there who will upset the joy. No one will mar the delight or diminish the marital bliss. The bride and her groom will dwell together, deeply in love, happily ever after. (v3)

You have received the invitation. I hope you’ve eagerly torn open the envelope and read there how Jesus died on the cross to pay for the sins of his people. To accept the invitation, simply repudiate your sins and cast them at the foot of the cross. Then joyfully place your faith in the bridegroom God has sent to save you. Have you done that? If so, now is the time to get ready. Now is the time for you and me to put on our wedding clothes. What shall we wear? We saw earlier in Revelation 19:8 that the bride’s dress is “*the righteous acts of the saints.*” It’s your service to Christ, your acts of grateful obedience that clothe you. It’s your deeds of love for fellow believers that adorn you. It’s true, you may *feel* ugly because of your sin, but Jesus will make you beautiful, so beautiful that you will shine with glory when he leads you home. So come now with hope-filled anticipation. Jesus has a wife, and it’s you, the church for whom he died!