

## **The Bride of Christ**

I wonder what it would have been like to be a little bird flitting from branch to branch in the trees along the road to Emmaus.

I'm sure he would have noticed the two men walking side by side in deep conversation. And he couldn't help but notice the stranger who was quickly overtaking them.

When he caught up with them, he asked them what they were discussing, and why they looked so sad.

Well, that's when it all came out.

Proverbs tells us "**Hope deferred makes the heart sick,**" and that pretty much described their condition.

You see, Jesus of Nazareth, "**a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all**

**the people**" had been executed like a  
common criminal!

And it wasn't only the injustice of it all;  
they had been thoroughly convinced that He  
was their Messiah!

They thought they were on the verge of a  
golden age, but now they were devastated!

Well, almost devastated.

You see, that very morning some of their  
women had returned with the rather  
unbelievable story that two angels said He  
was alive.

And yes, the sepulchre had been empty, but  
that could mean several things.

Frankly, they just didn't know what to  
think.

If He was alive, why hadn't they seen Him?

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I'm sure the little bird was much taken up with their conversation, but he couldn't help noticing something else.

The stranger was becoming more and more dissatisfied with what he was hearing.

Finally he cried out --- **"O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!**

**26 "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"**

They must have been shocked!

But you know, he was right.

If they had only listened to their prophets, they wouldn't be in this dilemma now.

If they had read Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 with an open mind, they would have been forewarned that their Messiah would suffer

these things, and would rise again  
victorious.

And then Jesus, for that's who the stranger  
was, completely monopolized the  
conversation.

**"And beginning at Moses and all the  
Prophets, He expounded to them in all the  
Scriptures the things concerning Himself."**

I wonder what He told them?

Well, I'm not a little bird, so I can't  
really tell you.

But I wouldn't be surprised if He explained  
the meaning behind the types and symbols  
that abound in the Old Testament  
scriptures.

And I wouldn't be surprised if He started in  
Genesis, so why don't we do the same?

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If you think about it, I'm sure you would agree that God used a two-step method when He created every living thing.

First of all, when He made this wonderful universe that seems to go on forever, He also created the basic elements of our little planet.

And then, using the soil He had already made, God fashioned a vast multitude of living creatures.

That process is described in Genesis 2:19 --  
- **"Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air."**

Also in Genesis 2:7, we read, **"And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground."**

So, as far as man's physical body is concerned, he is made up of the same basic materials as birds and animals.

But that's where the similarity stops.

You see, after "--- **the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground,**" He **"breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."**

Certainly, the Lord gave life to the birds and animals, but nowhere in scripture do we read that He personally infused them with His own breath.

Nor does it say they were created in God's image and according to His likeness.

That is only true of Adam.

Yes, man is unique in all of God's creation.

And if Adam's creation was absolutely unique, we have to admit that Eve's was extremely unusual.

For instance, there wasn't any life in the dust that God used to create Adam, but He used living matter to create Eve.

And not only were her raw materials quite unusual, but the time of her creation was also quite unusual.

In the case of birds and animals, the male and female would have been created at the same time.

However, that wasn't true of Adam and Eve. So, why did Adam begin life as a bachelor? I'm sure God already knew it wouldn't be good for man to dwell alone.

And God doesn't have to try things out to see if they work.

So, why did the dishes have to pile up in the sink, and why did Adam have to burn supper three nights in a row before Eve showed up to rescue him?

Now, I'm being silly, aren't I?

But seriously, why did God delay Eve's arrival?

Well, there's a reason, and as you might expect, a very good reason.

You see, the first Adam is a type of the second Adam, who is, of course, eternal.

But Eve, who came along later and as a part of Adam's body, is a very precise picture of the bride of Christ.

And the more we examine her creation, the more the picture grows.

Genesis 2:21-22 **"And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place.**

**22 Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man."**

Here we see the world's first operation, complete with the need for anaesthetic.

Yes, **"the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam."**

Now I don't suppose God actually used an anaesthetic, but He did render Adam unconscious.

So then, whether He actually made an incision or not, it would appear pain must have been involved.

And if that is true, we have to ask the question, Why would God use a procedure that involved pain?

Surely He could have caused Adam's rib to simply float out of his body without any pain.

But He didn't.

No, God **"caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam,"** and then **"He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place."**

Once again, I believe God was making Adam an appropriate type of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who would endure unimaginable suffering in order to obtain His bride.

As Isaiah 53:5 tells us **"---He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed."**

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And then we noticed something else about this unusual procedure.

In spite of the fact that Adam had been rendered unconscious, he seemed to be totally aware of the unusual way in which Eve had been created.

Listen to his response in Genesis 2:23 ---

**"This is now bone of my bones  
And flesh of my flesh;**

**She shall be called Woman,**

**Because she was taken out of Man."**

Yes, his partner was part of himself.

And, as Ephesians 5:30 tells us, this is

also true of the Church ---"**For we are**

**members of His body, of His flesh and of**

**His bones."**

Yes, this special relationship that existed

between Adam and his wife was a

foreshadowing of the very special

relationship that would exist between

Christ and His church.

And this is also true of every Christian

marriage.

Marriage, which was instituted by God, has

physical and spiritual parameters unlike

any other earthly partnership.

Ephesians 5:28-32    **"So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.**

**29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.**

**30 For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.**

**31 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."**

**32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church."**

Yes, marriage must take precedence over all other relationships, including the parental bond.

And even though I recognize and sympathize with the obstacles some Christians have encountered, and even though I realize it

takes both partners to hold a marriage together, I must point out the fact that God intended marriage to be permanent. And when Jesus was asked about divorce, He went right back to this original intention:

Mark 10:6-9 **"But from the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female.'**

**7 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife,**

**8 'and the two shall become one flesh'; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh.**

**9 "Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."**

As I'm sure you realize, Jesus was quoting Adam's words, which are found in Genesis 2:24 --- **"Therefore a man shall leave his**

**father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."**

So, why were Adam's words so important?

Well, because they really *weren't* Adam's words.

He didn't have the background to make such a statement.

Adam was created as an adult, and so never had a father and mother.

And at that point in time, he wasn't a father himself.

So, as far as Adam was concerned, fathers and mothers hadn't been *invented* yet.

So then, Adam couldn't have been the author of this statement.

He was speaking by revelation.

And he was expressing God's intention that marriage be unbroken.

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And there are several reasons why marriage should be a lifetime commitment.

From a practical point of view, a stable marriage provides a firm foundation for developing children.

And stable marriages are the underpinning of a stable society.

But spiritually speaking, this unbroken relationship pictures another unbreakable relationship.

And by that I mean the absolutely unbreakable union between Christ and His church.

And you know, a proper understanding of this relationship is beneficial in both ways.

Not only do the basic principles of marriage help us to understand the relationship between Christ and His Church, but Christ's care for His church, and the

bride's regard for Christ, highlight our own responsibility.

Ephesians 5:22-25 **"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.**

**23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.**

**24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.**

**25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her**

**. . ."**

What a sacred institution this is!

No wonder Satan is so intent on destroying it.

And, as if marriage didn't have enough enemies already, our government has done its part to erode it still further.

They would do well to listen to Christ's words when He said: ". . . **He who made them at the beginning made them male and female.**"

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And so, having observed Eve's unique creation and her very special relationship to her husband, it is now time to consider another young lady and another type of the Bride of Christ.

Back in Genesis 24, we read about Abraham's desire to find a bride for his son Isaac. Time will not allow us to linger here, except to note that this portion of scripture contains many interesting types.

For instance, Abraham, who was willing to offer his son in sacrifice, is a picture of our Heavenly Father.

And Isaac, who was willing to be that sacrifice, is a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Also, **"the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had,"** and whom we will focus on in this lesson, is a type of the Holy Spirit.

As you will remember, Abraham had sent this faithful servant to Mesopotamia to seek a wife for Isaac.

Certainly, there's a great deal that could be learned here, but we will content ourselves with one very unusual detail.

In an amazingly short period of time, Rebekah, the young lady in question, made

up her mind to marry a man she had never met, and to leave her family and home. And this life-changing decision was entirely based on the testimony of Abraham's servant.

What a picture this is of the thousands of Christians who have accepted the Lord Jesus as their Saviour, based entirely on the Word of God and the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

1 Peter 1:8-9 "**. . . whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 receiving the end of your faith--the salvation of *your* souls."**

Well, we're going to jump ahead one more time.

Abraham's servant and his small company of men are escorting Rebekah to her new home in Canaan.

I'm sure there were dangers along the way, but she was in good hands.

That faithful servant was her protector and guide, and, of course, he knew the way.

And day after day, as they ate their meals or rested in the evening, the topic of conversation would always be Isaac.

The young lady never seemed to run out of questions.

And Abraham's servant never seem to get tired of answering them.

*How old do you think he is?*

*Would you say he's quite handsome?*

*What was he doing the last time you saw him?*

It was really quite amazing how little this young lady knew about the man she had said yes to.

But she wasn't having second thoughts.

And the more she learned about him, the more she wanted to meet him.

And not only did the servant answer all her questions, but he added some valuable observations of his own.

He told her about the father's love for the son.

And he told her about the son's willingness to lay down his life in obedience to the father's will.

And he told her about Isaac's riches, and the fact that he was the sole heir of the Abrahamic Covenant.

And the more she learned about him, the more her old life seemed to fade away.

Well, we're going to leave Rebekah right  
there . . . on a dusty road in Canaan.  
And you know, that's exactly where we are at  
this present moment.

Under the supervision of the Holy Spirit,  
who is our guide and protector, we are  
making the long journey that leads to  
*Canaan*.

Oh, there will be hardships, and even  
danger, but ---

♪♪ *It will be worth it all when we see  
Jesus,*

*Life's trials will seem so small when we  
see Christ;*

*One glimpse of His dear face, all sorrow  
will erase,*

*So bravely run the race till we see  
Christ.*

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And finally, in our study of the bride of Christ, I would like to investigate the ancient marriage traditions of God's Chosen People.

I don't think we could really call them types, as most of the details are not found in scripture, but they do have a story to tell.

When a young couple wished to be married, their first step was to enter a time of betrothal, or espousal.

This was something like an engagement, except it was much more binding.

Only a divorce could terminate a betrothal. And a betrothal was not to be entered into lightly.

Actually, several things had to happen.

The fathers on both sides would need to consult, and if in agreement, the amount

of the dowry that the young man would pay would be decided upon.

Next, the bridegroom would give the young lady a gift.

In most cases that would be a ring, as a ring symbolized endless union.

Also a document of marriage would be drawn up and given to the bride.

Oh, and there's another difference I have neglected to mention.

Unlike our engagements, a betrothal would begin a period of separation.

The young lady would continue to live with her parents, and further contact would not be allowed.

During that time of waiting and separation, she would busy herself in the preparation of such things as she would need for her marriage.

But she wasn't forgotten.

As the weeks dragged on, her bridegroom would send her gifts to assure her that she was always in his thoughts, and that he would come for her very soon.

So what was this young man doing all this time?

Well, he was building their new home.

Yes, he had gone to prepare a place for her.

And even though this time of betrothal was somewhat established by tradition, the young lady really didn't know when her bridegroom would arrive.

But she must be ready.

According to tradition, she must to go out to meet him before he could arrive at her parents' home.

But wouldn't that be an impossible burden?

She couldn't be looking down the road all day.

No, she couldn't, but she could be listening.

She knew that when her bridegroom and his friends would enter her neighbourhood, there would be rejoicing in the streets, and the neighbours would give the shout, "The bridegroom is coming!"

That would alert her and her friends to his arrival, and give them time to go out to meet him.

After that joyous reunion, the whole company would make their way to the bridegroom's new home to partake of the marriage supper.

After that, the young couple would begin their married life together.

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Certainly, an understanding of this tradition sheds new light on Jesus' parable concerning the 5 wise and the 5 foolish virgins who were to go **"out to meet the bridegroom."**

And it also helps us understand the circumstances under which Jesus was born. As Matthew 1:18 tells us " . . . **the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.**"

In other words, it was during that time of betrothal, when they were not allowed to communicate with each other, that Joseph got the awful news that Mary was expecting.

Poor Joseph, thinking his dear one had been unfaithful, **"was minded to put her away"** (or divorce her quietly.)

If he could have talked to Mary, she could have explained the whole thing, but, of course, that was impossible.

**"But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."**

And now you know the rest of the story.

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However, not only do these Jewish traditions give a better understanding of those New Testament accounts, but they pinpoint the church's status during this present evil age.

As the Apostle Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 11:2, ". . . **I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.**"

Yes, during this Age of Grace, the Church is Christ's betrothed bride.

We have received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and we possess the covenant that binds us together.

And like that Jewish bride, we should be expectantly waiting for the cry, "**Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!**"

No, He will not return to this earth, He will appear in the clouds, and we will meet Him in the air.

♪♪ *What a day that will be when my Jesus I shall see,*

*And I look upon His face, the One who saved  
me by His grace;*

*When He takes me by the hand and leads me  
thru the Promised Land,*

*What a day, glorious day that will be!*

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You might say, at least as far as the  
disciples were concerned, their time of  
waiting began when Jesus **"was taken up,  
and a cloud received Him out of their  
sight."**

What a sense of loss they must have felt as  
they strained their eyes for one last  
glimpse of their Messiah.

And how fitting were the words of  
encouragement, spoken by the two men in  
white apparel:

**"Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up  
into heaven? This same Jesus, who was**

**taken up from you into heaven, will so  
come in like manner as you saw Him go into  
heaven."**

And this has been the blessed hope of the  
Church of Jesus Christ ever since.

And, as you might have noticed, the angels  
assured them that it would be this "**same  
Jesus**" that would return for His church.

No, He will not send an angel.

He will appear in person.

And He will come "**in like manner as you saw  
Him go into heaven."**

He was taken up into a cloud, and He will  
*come again* in the clouds!

No, we shouldn't be duped by the many false  
Christs who have appeared since that  
marvellous event.

None of them have "**come in like manner**" as  
Jesus went "**into heaven.**"

And not only do we have the angel's testimony, but in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Paul gives us a detailed description of this blessed event --- **"But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.**

**14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.**

**15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.**

**16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.**

17 Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

18 Therefore comfort one another with these words."

Yes, the Lord's return is a *comforting* hope. And one of the glorious side effects of His coming is the guarantee that we will be reunited with our loved ones who have died in the faith.

No, it doesn't matter if we meet the undertaker or the upper taker, we will all participate in that blessed event.

Philippians 3:20-21 **"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,**

**21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious**

**body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."**

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When I was a boy growing up on the farm, the little red school house I attended was on the corner of our farm just across the field from our house.

So you see, I didn't have far to walk to school.

And I didn't have far to visit my only grandmother either, for her house was just across the road from the school.

However, she might as well have lived in Australia, for I rarely visited her.

You see, my grandmother was one of those born-again Christians, and my family thought her kind were rather strange.

By the time I found out what the Gospel was all about and had become a born-again believer myself, she had been in heaven for many years.

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When the Lord returns, I'm sure all eyes will be on our Saviour, including my own. But I might take a quick look around to see if I can spot my grandmother.

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Yes, the Lord's return is a comforting hope, and it is one we can share with others.

When our fellow believers are going through deep waters, we can't always say, "I know what you're going through."

But we can "**comfort one another**" with this blessed hope.

It should be a healing balm on the tip of our tongue.

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And Sunday mornings, when we remember our Lord, we should also remember His return.

**"For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes."**

Yes, it is only **"till He comes."**

Next week we might be enjoying **"the marriage supper of the Lamb."**

And certainly, this imminent return was the hope of the believers in Thessalonica.

And according to Paul's account, found in 1 Thessalonians 1:8-10, they were a healthy assembly. **"For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything."**

9 For they themselves declare  
concerning us what manner of entry we had  
to you, and how you turned to God from  
idols to serve the living and true God,

10 and to wait for His Son from  
heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even  
Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to  
come."

Yes, they had their hand on the plough, but  
they had their other hand on the door.

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And finally, the Lord's return is a  
*purifying* hope.

1 John 2:28 "And now, little children, abide  
in Him, that when He appears, we may have  
confidence and not be ashamed before Him  
at His coming."

♪ Faithful and true would He find us here  
If He should come today?

*Watching in gladness and not in fear,  
If He should come today?  
Signs of His coming multiply,  
Morning light breaks in eastern sky;  
Watch, for the time is drawing nigh-  
What if it were today?*

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No, we mustn't let the daily grind dampen our anticipation of the Lord's return. Can you imagine the joy in the heart of that young Jewish bridegroom when he saw his loved one coming out to meet him? I can almost see him giving his friends a wink and saying, *That's my girl!* Oh I know we will be **"caught up together"** to meet the Lord in the air. Physically speaking, we won't have to go out to meet Him.

But wouldn't it be a blessed thing if He could see the anticipation in the face of His blood-bought bride when He comes to take her home?

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And where will we be going after that meeting in the air?

Well, where was that young Jewish couple going?

They and their friends were going to his new home where the marriage supper would be waiting.

Revelation 19:7-9 **"Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."**

**8 And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright,**

for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

9 Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God."

Did you notice that V 7 says "**His wife has made herself ready?**"

Yes, the betrothal is over, and the time of waiting has come to an end.

Henceforth the church will be called "**His wife,**" the special object of His love and care.

But what about V 8 where it says, "**And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.**"

Why should she be arrayed in **"the righteous acts of the saints?"**

The only reason she is there is because she has been **"justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."**

And Ephesians 5:25-27 makes it quite clear that it was the heavenly Bridegroom who **"loved the church and gave Himself for her,**

**26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,**

**27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish."**

Surely it should be Christ's sacrifice and Christ's righteousness that are on display!

So why, on that special day, is she clothed  
in "**the righteous acts of the saints?**"

Well, there can only be one reason.

It must be the way the Bridegroom wants it.

Down through the ages, the Holy Spirit has  
been working through the saints.

Missionaries have given their lives to  
spread the gospel.

Schools have been built, orphanages have  
been maintained, and hospitals have been  
erected to minister to the sick.

Sacrifices have been made for the Lord Jesus  
that no one else knows anything about.

And now, on that special day, it is His  
desire that she be arrayed in her own  
*homemade* wedding dress.

It's what she has been busy at during her  
time of waiting.

♪♪ Oh! I am my Beloved's,  
And my Beloved's mine!  
He brings a poor vile sinner  
Into His "house of wine!"  
I stand upon His merit.  
I know no other stand,  
Not e'en where glory dwelleth,  
In Immanuel's land.

The bride eyes not her garment,  
But her dear Bridegroom's face;  
I will not gaze at glory,  
But on my King of grace.  
Not at the crown He giveth,  
But on His pierced hand:  
The Lamb is all the glory  
Of Immanuel's land.