Good morning, Family. This morning, we conclude our sermon series about our God-given, Christian identity as believers. Over the past few weeks, we have covered only few of the many “in Christ, I am” affirmations: Forgiven in Christ, free in Christ, Valued, Redeemed, Purchased as a matchless price, Precious in His sight, and today the beautiful, incredibly important identity, the name we are called by Christ Himself: the Bride of Christ. This Bride—all of us!—is deeply loved by her groom, and she is preparing herself for the marriage feast that will occur when He comes for her. Family! We should consider ourselves blessed to be a part of God’s eternal plan: The Church, His Bride.

The word “church,” literally translated from the Greek *ecclesia* means “a called-out assembly.” The Church that is the Bride of Christ is not a social club, it is not a simple gathering place, or even an organization. It’s an *organism—*a family joined together by adoption in Christ through grace. This family grows together in His Grace out of darkness into light; in that light, together we are equipped for every good work, and we prepare as His bride for His coming. The church is not built on a foundation of our own thoughts or principles or preferences. This church is built on Christ—His salvation, His teaching, His sacrifice, and His promise. This church—we—are commissioned saints with Christ as our fixed point of reference. That’s who we are!

Christ, the head of the church, nourishes the church. He protects her and builds her up. He prays for her! In John 17:13-26, Jesus prays,

13 “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. 14 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. 15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. 19 For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

20 “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me, and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— 23 I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

24 “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

25 “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. 26 I have made you known to them and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

Think about it! Christ prays for us, prays that we would be one. In our unity with Christ, we are commissioned to be united with each other. Being part of this commission, being *in Christ*, we confirm what Christ has done for us. Living in the light of this truth should impact our day-to-day living. As the Bride of Christ, we are an eternal institution ordained by God Himself.

 I think we can better understand what it means to be the bride of Christ by looking at the Hebrew wedding customs of Jesus’ day. The wedding had three stages: 1) Betrothal, 2) The Presentation, and 3) The Celebration.

In the betrothal stage, the groom’s father gives the dowry payment to the family of the bride. This payment establishes a covenant, and the engagement begins. The groom now leaves the bride to prepare a place for her (\*John 14:2-3). Meanwhile, the bride is not idle; she uses this time to prepare herself for the groom’s return. For the presentation stage, which takes place after the groom and bride’s separate efforts in preparation for their union, the groom comes for the bride. She does not know when he will return, so she has waited with great expectancy (\*\*Matthew 24:35-37).

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\*John 14:2-3

2 My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

\*\*Matthew 24:35-37

35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

36 “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son,[a] but only the Father. 37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

When the groom arrives, the bride’s father places her hand into the groom’s hand, signifying that the two are one. Finally, the new couple, their parents, and all their community enjoy a banquet. What a celebration they have! And here’s the news: The length and richesse of the celebration depends entirely on the wealth of the bride’s father. We are the Bride. We are to prepare. We will see Christ come. We will have His Father set our hands in Christ’s. And we then will have a quite a celebration that matches the supremacy of our God!

How can we, the Bride of Christ, be anything other than joy-filled?!

 How beautiful is our salvation! How beautiful is our portrait as part of the Bride of Christ! How dwarfing is the truth that we are part of God’s eternal plan! In this identity, we live equipped to live for Him and to encourage one another. Jesus has promised to return. I don’t know when, but I know we are closer today than we were yesterday to that great coming. Are we ready? Are we waiting with joyful expectation? In Ephesians 5:25-27, Paul writes, “25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”

Again, I ask, are we waiting with joyful expectancy? I do believe that living in joyful expectancy, confirming what Christ has done and is doing, would change much about us. We need to feel a longing for our King, but we cannot be so Heavenly-minded that we are no earthly good. As the Bride in waiting, we must be about preparation. In your seats, you have no doubt found a stick-on name tag. I want to encourage you to pick up a list of the “I Am” affirmations that I have amassed and had made into a handout, available on the greeter’s desk. Pick a name, a title, from that list and write it on the name tag. Wear it or place it in your Bible; put it somewhere that ensures you will see it and remind yourself of who you are in Christ. One of the most important revelations we can get from the Word of God is an understanding of who we are in Christ. Rejoice with Paul when he writes, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (\*2 Corinthians 5:17). Walk as we are, *in Christ*!

Passages in support of this sermon:

Revelation 19:7-9

7 Let us rejoice and be glad

 and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,

 and his bride has made herself ready.

8 Fine linen, bright and clean,

 was given her to wear.”

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.)

9 Then the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”

Ephesians 5:28-32

28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— 30 for we are members of his body. 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.”[a] 32 This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.