Good morning. Before we begin, think for a moment about your identity in Christ. Consider who He says you are, believer. Perhaps, my favorite title/identifier is that we are the Bride of Christ. Over the next few weeks, we will unpack what that means—the benefits, the joys, the assurances, and the responsibilities of being the Church, the bride of Christ. Paul writes, “4 That is how it is with you, my friends. As far as the Law is concerned, you also have died because you are part of the body of Christ; and now you belong to him who was raised from death in order that we might be useful in the service of God” (Romans 7:4). This picture shows us, once in the graveyard, now—through His resurrection power—belonging to Him. The belonging is special: We, the Church, are His bride, and we are His bride preparing for a future wedding: “For a husband has authority over his wife just as Christ has authority over the church; and Christ is himself the Savior of the church, his body. 24 And so wives must submit themselves completely to their husbands just as the church submits itself to Christ (Ephesians 5:23-24).

 I have officiated at a great number of weddings during my ministry, and one thing that I know for sure is this: The bride is always prepared for her wedding day. Because of her preparation, everything is in place. From the dress to the music to the flowers to the reception fare, the bride attends to all. Can you imagine if, on the day of her wedding, the bride was busy doing other things? Hanging with friends? Distracted on her iPhone? Sitting in her wedding dress watching Friends reruns and eating Cheetohs? It simply doesn’t happen. And it doesn’t happen for the Church, the Bride of Christ:

Let us rejoice and be glad; let us praise his greatness! For the time has come for the wedding of the Lamb, and his bride has prepared herself for it. 8 She has been given clean shining linen to wear.” (The linen is the good deeds of God's people.)

9 Then the angel said to me, “Write this: Happy are those who have been invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb.” And the angel added, “These are the true words of God.” --Revelation 19:7-9

17 The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come!”

Everyone who hears this must also say, “Come!”

Come, whoever is thirsty; accept the water of life as a gift, whoever wants it. --Revelation 22:17

This scripture expresses God’s relationship and what is to come with His bride, the Church. It affirms the love He has for us, the bride, a love that prompted Him to send His only begotten son to die for us, forgive us of our sin, so that this would be our future.

Understanding this love strengthens our faithfulness. This is a divine love story. And it represents a marathon not a sprint. For this eternal marriage, the His bride no longer focuses on survival but on a life of freedom in found in her groom, Christ Jesus. The Groom’s love in this relationship is a love that leads and is Lord, but it also proceeds daily in affection and care, because we, the Church, are subject of His love.

 According to Paul in Ephesians 2, we, the church, have been built and are being built with Christ as the cornerstone; individually and corporately, we are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Empowered with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we are tasked with a mission to witness about the hope of the Gospel to a lost world. In faithfulness, we are to witness while striving for unity among believers. This work is the Church being built together (\*Ephesians 2:21-22). This work is sanctification, a setting of believers apart for God’s purpose; it is the Bride in preparation—God’s will for you. It is not simply behavior modification. This sanctification—this preparation of the Bride—results from the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. It means the refining of the believer’s being, following his surrender and by supernatural grace at work in the believer’s life (\*\*Hebrews 10:8-10).

And while sanctification is, indeed, a work of Christ toward and for His bride, we, the bride, have holy responsibility of surrender and cooperation (\*\*\*1 John 3:1-3). We live intentionally as a bride waiting for her groom. By the power of God’s spirit, we

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\*Ephesians 2:21-22

**21**He is the one who holds the whole building together and makes it grow into a sacred temple dedicated to the Lord. **22**In union with him you too are being built together with all the others into a place where God lives through his Spirit.

\*\*Hebrews 10:8-10

8 First he said, “You neither want nor are you pleased with sacrifices and offerings or with animals burned on the altar and the sacrifices to take away sins.” He said this even though all these sacrifices are offered according to the Law. 9 Then he said, “Here I am, O God, to do your will.” So, God does away with all the old sacrifices and puts the sacrifice of Christ in their place. 10 Because Jesus Christ did what God wanted him to do, we are all purified from sin by the offering that he made of his own body once and for all.

\*\*\*1 John 3:1-3

See how much the Father has loved us! His love is so great that we are called God's children—and so, in fact, we are. This is why the world does not know us: it has not known God. 2 My dear friends, we are now God's children, but it is not yet clear what we shall become. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he really is. 3 Everyone who has this hope in Christ keeps himself pure, just as Christ is pure.

pursue growing in godliness. With anticipation of Christ’s return and assurance that His Spirit dwells with us and in us now, an awareness of our “under construction” reality. But it also comes with the assurance—the reality--that He is the cornerstone of our ongoing building of self, and we are the object of His love: “Come as living stones, and let yourselves be used in building the spiritual temple, where you will serve as holy priests to offer spiritual and acceptable sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5). Sometimes, refining and sanctification are difficult, even painful, but if God’s word calls it sin, it’s sin. But when we trust our Bridegroom, we know the sanctification—the preparation for the wedding to come—is worth it. The fact that He considers us worthing of refining encourages! To be a part of the Bride of Christ and of the local church is a great privilege, an honor. Pray to the Bridegroom that He do with you whatever it takes to mold you, to make you ready for the wedding. So let Him in. Confess what needs His refining work–pride, control, anger, idleness, secret sins . . . Surrender. Don’t worry. God is not afraid of what He will find. He loves His Bride!

Passages in support of this sermon:

Ephesians 2:19-22

19 So then, you Gentiles are not foreigners or strangers any longer; you are now citizens together with God's people and members of the family of God. 20 You, too, are built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets,[a] the cornerstone being Christ Jesus himself. 21 He is the one who holds the whole building together and makes it grow into a sacred temple dedicated to the Lord. 22 In union with him you too are being built together with all the others into a place where God lives through his Spirit.

Acts 2:41-47

41 Many of them believed his message and were baptized, and about three thousand people were added to the group that day. 42 They spent their time in learning from the apostles, taking part in the fellowship, and sharing in the fellowship meals and the prayers.

Life among the Believers

43 Many miracles and wonders were being done through the apostles, and everyone was filled with awe. 44 All the believers continued together in close fellowship and shared their belongings with one another. 45 They would sell their property and possessions, and distribute the money among all, according to what each one needed. 46 Day after day they met as a group in the Temple, and they had their meals together in their homes, eating with glad and humble hearts, 47 praising God, and enjoying the good will of all the people. And every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.