

Getting Ready For the Big Day
Ephesians 5:31-32
October 31, 2010 (kit)

We live in remarkable times. What will the next 10 years bring to this world? Will a billion or so Muslims come to believe that their savior has come in the person of a 12th Imam who will lead them to taking over the earth? Will there be nuclear weapons in the hands of Iran or Venezuela? Will there be war in Eastern Europe or maybe Asia? Will the dollar crash, leading to unheard of inflation and poverty around the world? Will the freedom of Americans be removed? Will voices of one-world governance gain traction on a world-wide scale? All of this seems, if not likely, at least possible.

Those who study the Bible remember that Jesus said that before His return things would be worse than at any time in history. We also know the Bible talks about the rise of an anti-Christ and a one-world regime. We also know the Bible talks about wars, and food shortages, and diseases, and environmental disasters, and starvation. These things precede the very end. We are also told to look to Israel, for the Jewish land will continued to be trampled until the very end comes.

It seems like all this is on the way. How near is it? We cannot know, but it might be in our lifetimes. This might cause us to look forward with doom and gloom. But it should not. Why not? Because the pain that has come and will come on this earth is compared by God to birth pangs. They increase in severity and come closer together until the crescendo to constant pain. But immediately after comes and end to pain and the great joy that a baby has been born.

So it is with the story of humanity. ***The pain will worsen, but in an instant it shall end and we will remember it no more, and we will have great joy at the dawn of God's new age.***

As Christians, it can be hard to look forward knowing the pain that is coming. However, we must focus not on the pain, but the joy that follows. ("Sorrow is but for a night, joy comes in the morning"). Near the very end of the Bible, in chapter 19 of the book of Revelation, when the devil and all the evil of man on earth have run their course, and the worst of all things is quickly ending, there is a declaration in heaven (either by a multitude of angels or by Jesus Himself):

Revelation 19:7-9 7 Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; 8 it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"- for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. 9 And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."

The time has come when we all learn the true answer to the question: What is the meaning of life? The time has come when we learn what human history was always about. The time has come when mankind understands its own pain for the first time. The time has come when we all understand why and what! The time has come when the plan of God brings to fruition the history of man and we see what He was doing all along. And when we get there, to this moment of enlightenment, we are standing at wedding reception, for the time of a marriage has come.

The brides dress is the righteous deeds of the saints throughout history. Every bit of pain

suffered in faith has its place on the wedding clothing and shines and shimmers in beauty. And we, the Church of Jesus Christ, are the bride. This time is coming for “these are the true words of God.”

We have said that our mission on this earth is to increase the health and size of God’s church everywhere. How can this be a mission worthy of all we do? The answer is it is the mission of God in the world and mission which, when complete, will end all history. Let’s look to our text from Ephesians:

Ephesians 5:31-32

Ephesians 5:31-32 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

Verse 31 is from the Law of Moses, Genesis 2:24. God created Adam; the first man to walk the earth. Whatever process God used to make the other stuff on earth, He waited until last to create man. The fish were already in their place. The whales were already swimming in the ocean. The birds were in the sky and the animals already prowled the ground. The sky was blue, the sun was bright; the stars were already hung in their place. The plants grew, the trees were there, the flowers were growing, the wind blew, and the rivers flowed. All was in place on the earth, but there was no man. Then God created Adam, the first man.

The man was different from all the other things that God has created. He alone bore the image of the Creator. He was called the ruler of the earth. All things were put in subjection under his authority. He was the manager of the plants, of the animals, of the fish, of the birds, of the bugs, of all that moved on the earth. He ruled it all and managed it all, for he was made in the image of the Creator. But the creation of man was not complete with Adam.

God did not want the one who bore His image to be alone. God Himself has never been alone. He has always existed in community, the One God, Triune, in three persons. And so, God introduced Adam to the earth, the animals, to the creation, to his home. Then He laid him down and made him sleep. He then took a rib from his body and formed from it a woman. This woman was not going to be like the other animals and fish and plants. She would be like Adam, made in the image of God. She would share his authority over the creatures and over creation. But she was not another man. She was a woman.

When we awoke, he knew at once that she was like him, for he said, “She is bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh.” But he knew right away that she was not like him; that she was female, and he was male. She was the compliment to him. He called her woman, acknowledging in that word that she was taken from man, but she was not a male. And he was happy to see her. She was his companion, made just for him. The two of them were compatible and complimentary, enjoying the company of one another, wanting one another. It was at this point, that Moses wrote of this event:

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

With this proclamation, the social pattern of mankind was established by God. The man and the woman were to marry. This meant that the two become one. And there would be children. This union would lead to more men and women. And, as they came to be, they were to duplicate the actions of

Adam and Eve, and were to pair up, leaving behind their parents, to form one flesh with one another.

This is the plan of God for mankind. ***Marriage is the first social arrangement of mankind. It is the basic form of government.*** It is the link of the chain of society. It is the main stitch of the social fabric. Only humans marry. It is God's plan for the continuation of His creation of man.

For centuries, since Moses wrote those words, declaring that a man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined to his wife, people all over the world have been certain that this referred to human marriage. And that ended the story. What Paul is saying is that wasn't where the story ended. In fact, the understanding that Genesis 2:24 referred to human marriage alone is not only incomplete, the greatest part of the meaning is left out.

Paul says, "I'm telling you a great mystery." by that he means, "I'm telling you a secret, one that has been hidden for ages. I'm telling you a secret from God that spells out the meaning of all things." What is that secret? When God made man and made marriage, and declared it so, He was really declaring what He was going to do in history. Marriage is really about Jesus and the Church. Jesus is the real groom. The Church is the real bride.

With this in mind, it makes perfect sense that at the end of all things, when all is done; we find that history ends in a marriage banquet. The big day is coming. ***No matter how dark the future might look, we must know that it all leads up to a wedding feast, a joyous day.*** The big day is coming and we are the bride. We must get ready. No bride lets the wedding day come without getting ready. So we must get ourselves ready.

Look back in Ephesians 5, to verse 25:

Ephesians 5:25-27 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.

When we look at this, we see that it's not really us getting ourselves ready on our own, is it? No. The Groom is the one who is getting us ready. Jesus did all the work. Look at the verbs (loved, gave himself up, sanctify, cleanse, washing with the word). Why does He do this? So that she is ready at the end of time, when He presents her to Himself. One day, the Church, His bride, will be holy and clean. That day, we already saw, is coming quickly (Rev 19).

With this in mind, when we say that we "exist to increase the health and size of God's church everywhere," we can see that this mission is not so much what we are doing, but it is what Jesus is doing. He is using the stage of earth and the time of human history as the setting by which He prepares His Church for that great day. We, for our part, are to work with Him on what He is doing. We are to cooperate with Him.

This reality leads me to a question: what does a ready bride look like? I know what a ready bride

looks like on earth. Normally, she has her clothing just right, and her hair, and her make up, and her nails. But she also has others ready. Her bridesmaids are also prepared; as is her family members. She has also attended to many details, such as where the ceremony and where the meal shall be. She has planned many things and has been working for many weeks to get ready for the day. There are many ways to measure when the earthly bride is ready for the big day.

But what does a ready bride look like when referring to the Church? Only God can fully answer that question. Clearly, the bride isn't ready now, or the Groom would be here. But in His Word, God teaches us quite a bit about what He wants His bride, the Church, to be focused on while we wait on Him. For the final messages on this series of our message, I would like to list off some of the major areas God wants us, the Bride, to focus on right now, as we prepare for the big day.

AREAS THE CHURCH MUST ATTEND TO AS WE PREPARE FOR THE DAY

1. Before all other things, the Church must be Crazy for God

No bride is worth anything if she doesn't love her groom. Who wants to marry a woman who says, "Well, you were the best choice I could find, but not necessarily the best choice." No, a man wants a woman who says, "You are the one I've been waiting for, and I'd risk anything to be yours. My joy is in you." Likewise, look at the foremost command of God towards you and I.

Mark 12:28-30 28 And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" 29 Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. That's full devotion, total abandonment of all you are and all you have for the sake of God. The church is often lukewarm not because they don't believe the right stuff but because the church loves so half-heartedly. God wants us to be crazy about Him. ***Crazy for God means you'll give up anything, risk everything, and venture all, for the sake of the Beloved!*** And when you do, you'll say there was no risk, no loss, for He is worthy of all.

Crazy for Him means you'll get fired for telling the truth when the boss wants you to lie, and never look back, knowing that you are serving the one you love most. Crazy for Him means you are willing to say to your girlfriend or your boyfriend, no, I won't live with you anymore. And when he or she thinks you're crazy, you say, "I am, and I don't apologize for it." Crazy for Him means you take a stand even when those around you say you are stupid.

Crazy for Him means denying yourself. It means instead of indulgence of every whim and every sin, you say, "I don't need to get drunk, I don't need to get high, I don't need to gratify my sexual desires, I don't need to get rich, I don't need anything. I just need Jesus."

Many, many Christians never make it to crazy for Jesus (which makes me wonder if they ever really met Him). They are comfortable living in the world, and they want religion. They want to just enough Jesus to cover their sins, but not enough to cramp their style.

So often the life of those who say they believe in Jesus is taken up with what level they can love

the world and still not be disqualified from loving God.

Loving Jesus, loving God, enjoying Him, is where your strength will come from. “The joy of the Lord is your strength.” That joy comes from letting go of everything except the Lord. This is what true love does. Paul said that he counted all things as “rubbish” for the sake of knowing Christ. Is this not the key to loving someone? Letting go over everyone and everything else? ***Are not the greatest love stories those which are filled with love that lets go of all things for the beloved? This is the call of Christ.***

Who wants to love God like this? You are my brothers and sisters and we are the church. All who don't want to, I feel sorrow for you, for you are lost.

What should we let go of? We should let go of our health and wealth and length of life and our standing in the eyes of men, our reputation, and pride. We are to give them all up. Why? Because we love God. We are to let go of all, and give our lives to Him. He calls this our worship. Look at the clean light of the word and see that this is so:

Romans 12:1 ... present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

The energy to live the Christian life comes from abandoning self because you are crazy for God in love. You are prepared to be a Jesus freak, to be associated with those weirdoes and strange people known as God's people. You don't care because of His great value. You are to love Him in such a way that your own life is worth nothing compared to loving Him. This is what we strive for.

We call worship singing. But it really isn't. At its best, singing is an expression of true worship, and true worship is the full giving of oneself to God, as an offering of love. Let's end with a song that expresses worship to God. But let us realize that singing the song means nothing unless our lives are sacrificed to Him.

David was a man after God's own heart. Why? Because He loved God. He was also a man of music. Look how he ordered these thoughts in His head:

Psalm 63:3-5 Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips,

The love of God was better than his own life. That's why he praised God. Do you desire to follow his example? Not so much in music, but in loving Him above all? As we sing this final song, now is the time to let go of all. To receive the love of Jesus who died for you. To let go of everything: your relationships, your money, your health, your future, your accomplishments, your all; to lay them down as a love offering to Jesus, and to sing your love to Him in praise.