

Jesus and the Wedding

1. Introduction & Context

- John the Baptist came preaching and preparing the way for Jesus
 - But in Matt 4 John was arrested and imprisoned by Herod the Tetrach
 - And without his leadership and prophetic voice to guide them ... they're confused about what it means to be a faithful follower of Jesus
 - One of the issues they're trying to get their head around is the practice of fasting
- Fasting
 - In the OT, God's people were only required to fast once a year on the Day of Atonement
 - However, during the exile in Babylon, more regular fasts of remembrance were instituted
 - In Jesus day, the Pharisees had codified that tradition and insisted that you had to fast twice a week
- Jesus says there's nothing wrong with fasting > okay to fast
 - He says in Matt 6 "When you fast ... this is how you should do it"
- But notice when John's disciples come and ask Jesus
 - "Why don't they fast?"
- And Jesus says
 - "Why should they mourn?"
- Because fasting was most often associated with grieving and mourning
 - Grieving and mourning over
 - Sin
 - Death of a loved one
 - Anguish, danger, desperation,
- But the point of this passage is not really about fasting
- Because Jesus takes this issue fasting that's presented to him and takes it to teach them something about them and something about himself
 - And he does it using this image of the bridegroom
 - He says - "I'm the bridegroom, and while I am with you ... then mourning, joylessness, and fasting ... is inappropriate
 - Yes there'll be a time when I will be taken away
 - But while I am with you ... it's a time for joy
- Notice here how Jesus calls himself the Bridegroom
- He's saying

- If you want to get an idea about who I am, I am like a bridegroom
- If you want to get an idea of what it's like to be a Christian, it's like you're the bride who's going to a wedding feast
- And so in this passage we see
 - Jesus tells us something about himself > he's the bridegroom
 - Jesus tells us something about us > we're a bride
 - He tells us something about our future > we're going to a wedding
- Today look at
 - The Beau
 - The Bride
 - The Banquet

2. The Beau

- When John's disciples ask the question - Jesus answered
 - *"How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast."*
- By referring to himself as the bridegroom, Jesus is drawing on an image that was pregnant with meaning in the Old Testament
- For throughout the OT, God was constantly likening his relationship with his people, the Israelites, to a marriage
 - God was the groom / husband
 - Israel was the bride / wife
- So, for example ... Isaiah 54:5-6
 - *⁵ For your Maker is your husband-- the LORD Almighty is his name-- the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. ⁶ The LORD will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit-- a wife who married young*
- Isaiah 62:5
 - *Isaiah 62:5 ⁵ As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.*
- So, right throughout the in the OT, God is regularly spoken of as the bridegroom, the husband of his people and Israel is his bride
- And then Jesus comes along and says ... "That's me"
 - "I'm the bridegroom"
 - "All those OT passages are pointing to me!"

- "The bridegroom you've been waiting for ... has come!"
- "And therefore this should be a time of joy ... not fasting"

- What does Jesus being the bridegroom teach us about him?
- Teaches us he is faithful to his bride
- In the OT God remained utterly committed to Israel despite her waywardness, idolatry and sin
 - He never turned his back on Israel
 - He never gave her up for another nation
 - He never went back on his promises

- And in Jesus Christ, we have a bridegroom who is absolutely and permanently committed to you
- You want to know how committed he is to you?
- Paul draws the analogy between husbands and wives and Christ and the church
 - And in Ephesians 5 Paul writes
 - *Ephesians 5:25-27* 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.*

- In other words ... Jesus Christ was so committed to you ... that he was willing to lay down his life for you
- And through the cross he says loud and clear ...
 - I am faithful to you
 - I commit myself to you
 - I give myself up for you
 - I will never, ever, ever, ever, forsake you

- As the ultimate bridegroom Jesus is saying ...
 - My love for you has no limits
 - My love for you has no conditions
 - My love for you will never go out
 - My love for you will never go cold
 - My love for you is permanent

- Knowing therefore who Jesus is and what it means for Jesus to be the bridegroom ...

- It makes total sense to be rejoicing in his presence
- It's not time for mourning or fasting
- It's time to celebrate with the one who has come to gather his bride

3. The Bride

- As we said before, if Jesus is the bridegroom, then his people are his bride
 - So what does the Bible teach us about the bride?
 - What we learn about those who are wedded to Christ
- We know from what we've already mentioned that Jesus is the bridegroom and the church / believers are the bride
- However, the marriage between God and his people was not a marriage of equals
- For while God was utterly faithful to his people ... Israel was an adulteress wife
- In the OT God said
 - I will be your God and you will be my people
 - I brought you up out of Egypt
 - I saved you from slavery
 - I have chosen you from among all the nations and set my affection on you
 - not because you were more numerous, or powerful ...
 - but because I made a promise / vow / a covenant to be your God and to love you and bless you
- And Israel covenanted with God to be his people
 - To make him the one true God
 - To love him with all their heart, soul and strength
- But Israel was unfaithful to the Lord
 - Like an adulterous bride who they forsook the Lord and chased after idols and foreign gods
- Listen to how the Lord described Israel in Jeremiah's time
 - *Jeremiah 2:20-24* ²⁰ "Long ago you broke off your yoke and tore off your bonds; you said, 'I will not serve you!' Indeed, on every high hill and under every spreading tree you lay down as a prostitute. ²¹ I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me into a corrupt, wild vine? ²² Although you wash yourself with soda and use an abundance of soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me," declares the Sovereign LORD. █ ²³ "How can you say, 'I am not defiled; I have not run after the Baals'? See how you behaved in the valley; consider what you have done. You are a swift she-camel

running here and there, ²⁴ a wild donkey accustomed to the desert, sniffing the wind in her craving-- in her heat who can restrain her? Any males that pursue her need not tire themselves; at mating time they will find her.¹

- And despite her unfaithfulness, God remained faithful to his people

- We need to understand how this shows us something about ourselves
- When we understand Jesus is the bridegroom and his people are his bride
 - We're not think of this as some fairytale wedding of two people who were perfectly matched for one another
 - We're not to think that Jesus is like some Prince Charming and we're this sweet, innocent Cinderella that he marries

- No we need to understand that we're like the unfaithful bride
 - You see, before you become a Christian, you and I are like a prostitute
 - Sharing our love with anything and everything this world has to offer
 - Chasing after other heart desires
- Now some of you are probably shocked by that image
 - But that's how we need to understand the seriousness of our idolatry and how we have failed to love God with our heart, mind and soul
- But understanding that also helps us to better understand what it means for Jesus to be the bridegroom
- Because despite that ... despite our unfaithfulness ... despite our waywardness ... despite our idolatry
 - Jesus Christ comes as the faithful, loving, gracious bridegroom
 - And he comes and says ... come and be my bride
 - Come and let me love you
 - Come and allow me to present you holy and blameless and without blemish

- Doesn't that just blow you away!
 - Who would do that?
- Don't you see how that shows us just how gracious and committed and forgiving Jesus Christ is towards you, when he does that for you?

- Now Jesus alludes to that in v15 when he says

¹ C.f. Hosea 1:2; 2:1ff

- *The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast*
- He's talking about his impending arrest and crucifixion²
- That will be the time when it's right for them to mourn and fast
- But of course ...
 - this is how he will take his stained, broken, and adulterous bride that we are
 - and turn us into the holy, blameless and spotless brides that we are in Christ
- Jesus had to leave them and go away ... because he had to go to the cross
- Because at the cross he
 - gave himself up
 - emptied himself for his bride
 - took on our sin and idolatry and waywardness
 - And in doing so ... he cleansed us, washed away the stain of our sin
- And so now God no longer sees you and I as the adulterous bride
 - He sees us holy and righteous > without wrinkle or blemish and perfect in his sight

4. The Banquet

- Now you can't have a bride and a bridegroom without a wedding banquet
- And when God promised in the Old Testament, the arrival of his great and glorious king (a.k.a. the bridegroom) ... the day of his coming was explained using the language of a great and glorious feast
- Jesus tells us as much in Matthew 22:2
 - *"The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son*
- Perhaps one of the clearest passages in scripture that spells this out is Isaiah 25:6
 - *On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine-- the best of meats and the finest of wines.*
- You and I know the best banquets are always weddings banquets
- This is the image that is being portrayed here in Isaiah

² Matt 16:21, 17:22-23, 20:17-18

- We're told in v6 that there will be the best of meats and the finest of wines
- **Illustration – Rockpool**
 - 40th birthday > gift voucher for Neil Perry's restaurant Rockpool
 - Renowned for their steaks – without a doubt best steak I've ever had!
 - Not something you or I could pull off on our Beefmaster BBQ on the back deck
 - This was melt in your mouth meat that oozed flavour
- **Illustration – Le Pont de la Tour**
 - Liana and I living in London
 - Out for dinner for a special occasion with good friends at Le Pont de la Tour > restaurant by Tower Bridge
 - Menu > one page > very nice
 - But the wine list was like a telephone directory
 - Wines from every wine making country in the world
 - Split into reds, whites, champagne ...
 - Looking for Australian wine > how much for a Penfolds Grange > GBP 1,500 (AUD\$2,500)
 - Wonder what is the most expensive wine?
 - Most expensive wine > French Bordeaux > GBP7,500! (\$12,500)
- This is the image of the KOH that Isaiah is giving us
 - A Neil Perry steak that melts in your mouth
 - With a GBP7,500 bottle of French red
- It's the ultimate feast
- But more significant than the food is what God says next in v7-8
 - ⁷ *On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations;* ⁸ *he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth.*
- God is saying, to enable this banquet to go ahead and for everyone to be able to rejoice and find joy, as any wedding banquet should be
- The Lord will
 - *will swallow up death forever*
 - *wipe away the tears from all faces*
 - *remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth*

- Can you imagine a bride and groom getting married when it's known to both of them and to all the guests at the wedding that one of them had an affair before they were married
 - Can you imagine the tension if
 - they hadn't resolved it
 - they hadn't reconciled to each other
 - there'd been no forgiveness!
 - It wouldn't be a joyous occasion at all ... it would be awful
- But through the cross, Jesus Christ has reconciled us to God
 - He's dealt with the stain of our adultery
 - He's paid the price so we can be washed clean of our sin
 - Through his death ... he has removed our disgrace
- Which means all who are brides of Christ share in the heavenly banquet with great joy ... knowing Jesus, the bridegroom has forgiven us and is delighted in us as his bride
- This is why Jesus says it's not a time for fasting
 - It's a time for joy
- This was Jesus point in the two parables about the wine and cloth
 - You don't mix old and the new
 - You don't mix fasting and mourning with the arrival of Jesus
 - Because in him ... the KOH has come
 - A new age has dawned ... a new time of forgiveness and reconciliation has come
 - Jesus is the long awaited king and the disciples joy at his arrival is entirely appropriate
 - Because the bridegroom has arrived to usher in this new era that will culminate in the heavenly wedding feast – the new heavens and earth
- The Book of Revelation gives us an insight into what that will be like for all who will be at the heavenly wedding banquet
 - *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 the saints.) ⁹ *Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'"*

- **Application**

- What does all this teach us?
- It teaches a number of things about what it means to be a Christian
- Because if you're a bride of Christ who laid down his life to make you spotless and blameless ... then you're in a wonderful relationship characterised by duty and love
- Let me explain what I mean

- ***Relationship of Duty & Love***

- Think about a normal marriage > a good and healthy marriage
- Any marriage that is only duty will never last
 - If you simply say "well I've got this duty, I made these promises, I have these obligations, it's a legal commitment I've made that I need to stick to"
 - There's no love !
 - There's no joy!
 - Any marriage that is only duty is not going to last
- But any marriage that is only based on love isn't going to last either
 - In other words, any marriage that is not **filled** with duty will not last
 - If you say ...
 - "I'm only going to be loving > be faithful > be tender > be loyal ... if I feel it"
 - "I'm never going to treat my spouse in this way simply out of duty"
 - That marriage won't last either
 - You and I up and down all over the place
 - Our emotions are not reliable at all
- Any marriage that is nothing but duty won't last ... and any marriage that is not filled with duty will never last either
- Your feelings of love re-enforce the duty ... and your duty re-enforces the feelings of love

- It's the same thing with Christianity
 - For many people, Christianity is a matter of duty
 - They're afraid of not doing it
 - It's an insurance policy for them
 - They have this sense that its good for them and good for their kids
 - You do it out of duty ... but your hearts not in it
- But that's not Christianity!

- Jesus is the bridegroom ... you are his bride who's made you pure and spotless
- He's taking you to the wedding feast ... it's a place of joy ... not duty

- People who go to church and say they're Christians out of duty ... well they misunderstand what being married to Jesus and being a Christian is all about
- On the other hand, we need to realise that being married to Jesus and being a Christian is also a duty ...
 - we pray because we owe it
 - we give because we owe it
 - we church together because we owe it
 - we obey because we owe it
- And if you misunderstand that too ... then you also misunderstand what Christianity is all about
- Because who do we owe it to?
 - The bridegroom who welcomed us brides to himself despite all our sins and disgrace ... and then went to the cross to make us pure and holy

- So being married to Jesus and being a Christian is a relationship of duty and love

- ***Relationship of exclusive love***
- It's also a relationship of exclusive love
- Marriage is an exclusive relationship
 - In marriage, you're committing to give your love to one person for the rest of your life
 - It is utterly exclusive
 - You are not meant to give your love to someone else
- Imagine if a man or a woman said to their spouse
 - I want you to be exclusively committed to me – emotionally, sexually, relationally
 - I want you to support me and make my interests your interests and make my needs number one in your life and everything else comes second
 - I want you to be all that to me ... but I don't want to be exclusively committed to you
 - I want to see other people
 - I want to be with you emotionally, sexually and relationally sometimes

- But I want to do that with other people too
- What would you say about that type of relationship?
 - It's sick!
 - It's wrong!
 - It would never work!
- Same with Jesus
 - A relationship with Jesus doesn't work that way either!
 - Because Jesus says ... I am totally committed to you
- When Jesus died on the cross for you to cleanse you from your guilt and shame and sin ... that is exclusive and total commitment
 - He held nothing back for you
 - There was nothing for anybody else
 - There was nothing left for himself
 - He laid down everything for you
- And so therefore it's totally right that our love be exclusive to him
 - Not just loving him sometimes
 - Not just loving him when it suits
 - Not just loving him until something else grabs our attention
- Being a bride of Christ means being utterly exclusive to him

5. Conclusion

- When Jesus Christ says he's the bridegroom ... he's saying
 - He will love you with everything he has
 - He will sacrifice himself and lay down his life for your redemption
 - He will come back and take you to his heavenly banquet
- In binding himself to you he's saying
 - We're in a relationship of love and duty
 - I showed you my love on the cross
 - I fulfilled my duty to secure your redemption
 - We're in a relationship of exclusive love
 - I gave up everything for you
- Now you do the same

PRAY