

## Session 3 - The First Commandment in First Place

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### 1. Introduction

- a. True prayer we have said is our response to an ongoing revelation of God through Christ who is the Word of God declared to us. Jesus is what God has to say to humanity and everything the Father speaks to us by His Spirit is that which belongs to Christ Jesus.
- b. Enjoyable and sustainable prayer, the type of prayer that we can pass on to our children and grandchildren, must be rooted in this ongoing revelation of Jesus Christ. The only thing that can keep a heart from growing weary in the battle, bitter in the trial, and prideful from being successful is a heart that has been awe struck with the majesty and beauty of Jesus.
- c. A heart filled with wonder from this beauty strengthens the weary, comforts those tempted to grow bitter, and humbles us so that we never become prideful.
- d. Our response to the Word of God is not something that we simply make up ourselves but must be rooted in the Scriptures which are the words of God given to us. The Bible is God's language.
- e. Like babies learning to speak we are must have the word spoken into us. Peter admonishes the church we must *"desire the pure milk of the word"* (1 Peter 2:1-3) so that we can grow up in Christ.
- f. As the Spirit speaks the Word (Christ) to us we respond back using the word (Bible). This is the nature of our conversation with God.
- g. Many have come up with strategies and systems to submerge your heart and mind in the Scriptures and we would be smart to learn from them so that we do not waste years of our life aimlessly wandering in our prayer times simply asking for things we want God to do for us.
  - i. I said it last week but I believe session 2 probably has the most potential to revolutionize your prayer life. When God (Spirit) begins to reveal God (Father) to your heart through the God the Word (Jesus) it dynamically changes the human heart. There is no greater thing that someone could experience.

### 2. The Bridegroom God

- a. There are many different revelations of God given to us both in the Old Testament and in the New. God is seen as our Maker, King, Shepherd, Healer, and our Deliverer among others.
- b. These identities of God speak of His very character and His very nature. When God declares that He is our great Shepherd He is not simply telling us what He does but what He is like at His very core. When God declares His name He is unveiling His heart to us.
- c. One of the greatest revelations given to us throughout the whole of Scripture is that God is not only our Maker and Savior but He is also a Bridegroom. God is our Husband.
  - i. This is a scandalous claim. The marriage covenant is the single most powerful covenant humans can enter into with each other.
  - ii. To say that we can be, and will be, “married” to God is something that is hard for us to comprehend.
- d. Again, because prayer and worship must begin with God Himself, we must have a discussion about Him before we can go into the depths of prayer.
- e. Over and over God through the mouths of His prophets declares that He is a Husband to Israel and that the covenant He made with them in Exodus 19 was that of a marriage vow.
- f. Isaiah is one of the greatest of all Old Testament prophets and his book is routinely called “The 5th Gospel” because of his clear references to Christ.
- g. The 53rd chapter of Isaiah is widely considered to be the clearest picture of the suffering Christ in the whole Old Testament. Isaiah speaks about the Messiah to come who would die for the sins of His people and suffer under the wrath of God for our sakes.
- h. Many quit reading at the end of the chapter but Isaiah continues to prophesy right into chapter 54. In light of the Messiah just revealed Isaiah exclaims:

*“Sing, O barren, you who have not borne! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you who have not labored with child! For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman,’ says the LORD. ‘Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; neither be disgraced, for you will not be put to shame; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and will not remember the reproach of your widowhood anymore.’” - Isaiah 54:1 & 4*

- i. Isaiah begins to use a particular set of language in response to the coming Messiah of chapter 53.
  - i. Israel and Jerusalem are barren (verse 1) and not able to bring forth life.

- ii. Israel and Jerusalem are separated from her husband (verse 1 and 4) which has led to her being barren.
- iii. Israel and Jerusalem are silent, not worshipping or praying to the Lord. Rather they have left the Lord, joined themselves to other lovers, and therefore they have been left barren and lifeless (verse 1).
- j. Verse 4 speaks to how God will remove the reproach and shame of Israel's youth (Egypt) and her widowhood (the coming Babylonian Exile). He then launches into one of the most dramatic proclamation of God's bridegroom heart in all of the Old Testament.

***"For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is His name; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth." - Isaiah 54:5***

- k. Isaiah lays bare the heart of the Messiah described in the previous chapter. He is the Lord of heaven and earth, the Maker of all things, and He is also our Husband! He is a jealous Bridegroom who will come in the zeal of His love and redeem His people from the hand of wickedness and sin.

***"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its bud, as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations." - Isaiah 61:10-11***

- l. He continues into the next chapter:

***"For Zion's sake I will not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burns. The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory. You shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord will name. You shall also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. **You shall no longer be termed Forsaken, nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.**" - Isaiah 62:1-5***

- m. We continue to see this language of God as a bridegroom in the Book of Jeremiah as well. Jeremiah is raised up just before the invasion of Babylon to try and turn the heart of the nation back to God.
- n. Jeremiah's first message was that of repentance for sin. Why was God calling the nation to repent and return back to Him?

*"Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'Thus says the Lord: "I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown." - Jeremiah 2:1-2*

- o. Jeremiah begins his ministry with a plea from the Lord that He still remembers the days when the earnestly sought Him and loved as they journeyed out of Egypt. They left after 400 years of bondage and immediately they were taken to the mountain of the Lord (Exodus 19) where they would meet their Bridegroom and Husband and enter into covenant with Him.
- p. The Lord remembered those days and longed for those days of love and intimacy again. When they were delivered from their enemies and they had no love but the Lord.
- q. Then Jeremiah gives one of most heartbreaking cries from the heart of God in the entire Bible. You can hear the voice of a heartbroken husband in this simple plea.

*"Return, O backsliding children,' says the Lord; for I am married to you." - Jeremiah 3:14*

- r. The Lord pleads with His people to return to them with all of their hearts. His heart aches with pain as they continue in their adulterous ways of harlotry and whoredom.
- s. All the while their first love, their true love, and the One the loves them is crying out for them to return to Him.
- t. Later in His ministry Jeremiah begins to prophesy about the coming of Christ and the new covenant that would be instituted. He again references the generation that came up out of Egypt and how He was a husband to them.

*"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah - not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord." - Jeremiah 31:31-32*

- u. Lastly, and maybe most powerfully, we see the prophet Hosea not only gaining a revelation of God as a bridegroom but he actually gets invited by God to experience the emotions of God.

*"When the Lord began to speak by Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea: 'Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the Lord.'" - Hosea 2:2*

- v. Hosea was to go and make Gomer, a prostitute, his wife and love her as his own and be a father to her children. God wanted Hosea to know what it was like to be married to a bride that continually gives herself away to other lovers and is not faithful to their marriage covenant.
- w. The Father then begins to declare His heart and intentions to win over Israel again in love. He refuses to stand by and let her continue to run after other lovers. His love is jealous and relentless.

*"Therefore, behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns, and wall her in, so that she cannot find her paths. She will chase her lovers, but not overtake them; yes, she will seek them, but not find them. Then she will say, 'I will go and return to my first husband, and then it was better for me than now.' For she did not know that I gave her grain, new wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold - which they prepared for Baal." - Hosea 2:6-8*

*"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her. I will give her her vineyards from there, and the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, as in the days when she came up from the land of Egypt." - Hosea 2:14-15*

- x. Hosea then continues with his prophecy as the Lord declares what will happen when Israel comes into a revelation of His heart for them. The result of His pursuit is remarkable.

*"And it shall be, in that day,' says the Lord, 'that you will call Me 'My Husband,' and no longer call Me 'My Master,' for I will take from her mouth the names of the Baals, and they shall be remembered by their name no more...I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord.'" - Hosea 2:16-17 & 19-20*

- y. Finally, after inviting Hosea into His bridegroom heart of love, we see God tear the veil back and fully expose His longing heart for a bride that is solely His and belongs to no one else. He commands Hosea go and win Gomer's heart back by redeeming her at a high cost to himself just as He would someday do in and through Christ on the cross.

*"Then the Lord said to me, 'Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the Lord for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans.'" - Hosea 3:1*

## 2. Jesus Our Bridegroom

- a. We have said that Jesus is God's Word declaring the character, nature, and heart of God to all of humanity. Christ is ever speaking to us things that pertain to the heart of the Father through both His deeds and His speech.
- b. The prophets spoke of the God of Israel not only as the sovereign Creator or righteous Judge but also as a lovesick Bridegroom with a heart burning with jealous love. No other god makes such a statement. All "gods" claim to be lord but only Yahweh also declares Himself the husband of His people.
- c. In step with Hebrews 1:1 Christ came declaring an even greater revelation of the bridegroom heart of God than the prophets did. In Christ we see the Bridegroom stepping out of His chamber and making Himself known and visible to His bride.
- d. The same one who told Hosea to "go" has now come Himself to purchase back the love of His bride that has wandered and whose heart has gone astray.
- e. In fact the first revelation that Christ gives of Himself is that of a Bridegroom. The first time we see Jesus manifesting His glory and revealing His identity to us is at the wedding of Cana.
  - i. John the Baptist gave witness that Jesus was the Lamb of God that would take away the sins of the world but this was John's witness not Christ's.

*"On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding... This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed Him." - John 2:1-2, 11*

- f. When we consider this story in light of Christ being the Word of God always speaking to us this story all of sudden makes sense. This is not a random miracle that Christ was forced into without any say. This was how He chose to begin to manifest Himself to humanity, at a wedding.

- i. I can imagine Christ standing in the midst of the wedding feast with music and dancing all around and His mind wandering off into the distant future when one day He will not be the guest but the bridegroom.
  - ii. The music will be the singing of saints and angels mingled together and the dancing will be that of every tribe and tongue celebrating the triumph of love over sin and evil.
  - iii. The wedding of Cana was God's declarative statement that the bridegroom God of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea was now breaking into time and space. He has come to purchase back His bride and betroth her to Himself forever.
- g. We find this revelation of Christ as our Bridegroom at both the beginning of His life and ministry and also at the very end. On the Tuesday before His death Christ began to speak of the Kingdom of God.
- h. Two of the primary portions of teaching on that Tuesday tell us that the nature of the Kingdom of God is comparable to great wedding celebration.

*"And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son.'" - Matthew 22:1-2*

*"Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom." - Matthew 25:1*

- i. In Matthew 22 Jesus, speaking to the nation of Israel, clearly declares that His Father is the king and He is the son in the story. Not only this but Israel had been invited to this wedding over and over again through the mouths of the prophets. In Matthew 25 we see Christ depicted as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber at midnight.
- j. The beginning of Christ's ministry is a declaration of His bridegroom identity, His final public teaching is focused upon the nature of the kingdom as being like a wedding feast, and we see that the consummation of all things is nothing else but a wedding.
- k. When most people read the Book of Revelation they think of judgements, anger, and wrath and while those are prominent themes the climax of the book is a wedding. All of those things are fueled and motivated by a lovesick Bridegroom longing to remove everything that hinders love.
- l. Everything that God has been doing since the formation of Eve from the rib of Adam has been done through the lens of the wedding of the Lamb.

- m. All the promises of God will one day be fulfilled when the Lamb and the Church are married (joined) and will forever dwell together in the New Jerusalem, which is also likened to a bride in Revelation 21:2.

*"I heard...the voice of a great multitude...saying, 'Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! 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.' 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. He said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" - Rev. 19:6-9*

- n. This event is the much anticipated climatic event of all of human history. On this day God and man will dwell together, every tear will be wiped away, all death will be vanquished forever, and every hindrance to love will be eradicated from the earth.
- o. We will see His face and be made just like Him in every way. The veil that was removed from our spirit at the cross will now be torn asunder from before our souls and bodies. From that day forward we will fully experience God and He will fully enjoy us.
- p. And the key to a sustainable and enjoyable prayer life is living within this reality. Knowing that God is our Bridegroom and we are His beloved bride in whom He finds delight and pleasure holds our heart steady over the years and decades.
- q. It also instills confidence in our voice as we petition His throne because we know that we are irresistible to Him in the sense that we are the apple of His eye and one look from us ravishes His heart.
- r. This "bridal paradigm" then should be understood as one of the cornerstones of our faith and our prayer life.

### 3. A Successful Life

- a. It is not that our God has a heart like a bridegroom but our God, as seen in Christ, is a Bridegroom. He is a Bridegroom that will one day return to marry His bride, the Church.
- b. When we have this understanding of Christ so much of the Bible makes sense.
  - i. Why did God create man and woman in the very beginning? Because He is a bridegroom and we are made in His image.
  - ii. Why does continue to forgive Israel despite her constant rebellion? Because He is her .
  - iii. Why does Christ die on the cross? Because He is a bridegroom purchasing/ winning over the love of His bride.

- iv. Why is Jesus coming again? To marry the bride that He won over in love and to consummate the marriage with an eternity of fellowship and communion.
- c. With this understanding of God in our minds we can ask one of the most important questions about our own lives.
- d. **“What is the dream of your life?”** Put another way, **“How do you define a successful life?”**
- e. The reason this question is so vital is that everyone will live their life a particular way according to how they answer this question. This is because everyone innately wants to be successful. No one wants to be considered a failure nor does anyone want to have a life filled with regret.
  - i. Unfortunately many people do end up with lives filled with regret primarily because they answered this question incorrectly.
  - ii. All regret in life is rooted in a wrong definition of success and failure.
- f. It is through the lens of the heart of a bridegroom that Christ gives us His answer to this question.

*“But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?’ Jesus said to him, **“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”** This is the **first** and **great** commandment.” - Matthew 22:34-38*

- g. Jesus defines success in life, not just in our faith but in the totality of our life, as loving Him wholeheartedly. We must therefore reorient our entire lives around this one commandment.
  - i. This may sound simple but in order to love God this way everything will be rearranged including our family, our money, our time, our job, our thinking, our friends, our entertainment, etc.
  - ii. Christ command to love Him should become the north star to how we approach marriage, how we raise kids, how we spend our money, what we do with our time, how we treat our enemies and our neighbors, and the attitude we carry throughout a normal day.
- h. Equally yoked in love: God wants us to love Him with all of our heart and mind, because He loves us with all of His heart and mind. Jesus wants us to love Him in the way He loves us.

- i. He will supernaturally empower us to love Him this way. It takes “God to love God.” The anointing to receive God’s love and to return it to Him is the greatest gift the Spirit imparts to us. The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit according to Romans 5:5 and it is through our ongoing encounter with the loving bridegroom God that we are enabled to love Him in return.
- j. Your voluntary love is the one thing that God cannot have or gain with His own sovereign power. The dignity of being a human is that we are allowed to choose whom and what we love, including God.

#### 4. The First Commandment

- a. Loving God wholeheartedly (that is with our entire being) is what God wants first from us. It is His first priority in all that He does. As Hosea discovered God will use any means possible, even pain, suffering, and discomfort to bring for love in His bride.
  - i. This is because He is a bridegroom and all any spouse wants from their partner is pure wholehearted love.
- b. If God could have you become successful at one thing in life it would not be work, parenting, ministry, helping the poor or preaching the gospel, it would be loving Him. This is how God defines success.
  - i. What I find far too often is that when I ask people to describe their dream in life or what a successful life looks like very few people ever say having a heart fully in love with God.
  - ii. Most give their answer in terms of family, comfort, or simply obeying God or becoming the “best” Christian possible.
- c. God will do what He must to create a heart of love within His bride. He cares more about our hearts being filled with love than He does about our comfort or our feeling blessed.
- d. Many people spend hours of prayer and days of fasting asking the Lord what His will is for their life. What they really mean is, “What is my ministry assignment?” But God is more interested in your heart burning in love for Him than He is in your ministry assignment.
- e. A man or woman walking out their “calling” with a dull heart brings God no glory. But you can place a man or woman with a fiery heart of love in any context and God will be glorified in and through them.

- f. God's will for you life is wholehearted love and devotion. God's dream for you life is Matthew 22:37-38. If you make that your priority you will run right into your ministry assignment.

#### 5. The Great Commandment

- a. Not only is this God's first priority and how He defines success but a heart full of love is also how God defines greatness in His kingdom. Simply put the greatest thing you could ever do with you life is go after this commandment.
- b. None of us could control our natural God given talents and giftings. Some people are natural athletes while others are naturally smart. Some see life with an artistic flare while others see life as one giant logical progression. You had no control over your talents, giftings, personality, or temperament. Those were all given to you by God.
- c. The reason God, unlike man, does not define greatness by any of those metrics is that different people were given different graces and it would be unfair to judge greatness based on a gift. If greatness was defined by athletic ability most artists would be considered failures. Likewise if success is defined by ministry impact and reach the vast majority of lay people and pastors would also be considered failures.
  - i. Reaching millions with the gospel, although powerful and something we should strive for, is not God's measure of greatness.
- d. Love is the level ground upon which we all stand therefore it is how God defines greatness. Our greatest calling in the grace of God is to respond in wholehearted love back to God through the power of the Holy Spirit as we receive His love in our hearts.

#### 5. Mary of Bethany

- a. Possibly the best example of this in all of Scripture is Mary of Bethany. The first time we meet Mary is in Luke 10 when Jesus comes into her home and we are told that Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to Him speak.

*"Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also **sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word...But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.**" - Luke 10:38-39, 42*

- b. Mary, as we discussed last week, sat at the feet of Jesus allowing His word to get inside of her. As Jesus spoke it was revealed to her that this was the Christ and her heart burst with love for this Man.
- c. Mary's heart was so moved with love for Jesus that it caused Him to spend some time there the week before He died. Mary seemed to understand something that no one else did, that Jesus was about to die and the love in her heart spilled over for all to see.

*“Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard anointed the feet of Jesus, and wipe His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil...But Jesus said, ‘Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.’” - John 12:3 & 7-8*

- d. As Christ was revealed to Mary love was awakened in her and it propelled her to do what most thought to be ridiculous, but it wasn't ridiculous it was just love.