

Session 1: Importance of Understanding the Bride

I. Introduction

- a. Welcome to the Forerunner School class, *A Theology of the Bride*. I believe this class is really an important one for forerunners, and I pray it will help forerunners understand in great depth what is involved in the bride making herself ready. I know that I still have a long way to go to be fully ready for my Bridegroom King, but the things I will teach in this class have guided me in my pursuit for more than two decades. As the years have gone by, not only have I seen the deep need to make myself ready as a bride, I have also learned more of what is involved in the journey toward bridal maturity. The purpose of this class is to share the principles that I have learned over this time period for the two-fold purpose of helping you make yourself ready and to be an effective voice to help others get ready.
- b. I was surprised when the Lord spoke to me to write a theology of the bride. In developing the curriculum for the Forerunner School, our original plan to explain the bride was to use the class that we developed in 2009 called *Understanding the Bride of Christ*. We have used that class in Africa as part of our Lifeschool curriculum for about ten years and have translated it into five languages. The African pastors have enjoyed it, and it has been used to invite the African church into a bridal pursuit. Our friends in Germany have also used it in training believers there too. So, I was quite surprised when I asked the Lord what He wanted me to write next for the Forerunner School. He said clearly—a theology of the bride for forerunners.
- c. As I meditated on the what and why of this class, it has become clear to me why God wanted me to write a class on the bride, one that systematically walks through the bridal paradigm. The primary reason is that forerunners must have a deep understanding of the various parameters of the bride being made ready. Remember forerunners are friends of the Bridegroom with one of the major assignments of the forerunner call being to help make the bride ready as Christ's eternal partner. If as forerunners we are going to do this, we must first be making ourselves ready and then must partner with the Holy Spirit to make the bride ready.
- d. Furthermore, if we are going to fulfill our role as a friend of the Bridegroom, we must understand the different aspects of what is involved in the bride being made ready. I believe this is why this class is to be a theology of the bride. The word theology comes from two Greek words, *theos* meaning "God", and *logos* meaning "word". Simply, it means the study of God or the study of the words of God.¹ Therefore, the intent of this class is to study the words of God about our bridal relationship with Christ—for the purpose of making ourselves ready and making others ready for Him as His eternal wife. Therefore, to summarize, the objective of this class is to *prepare forerunners as friends of the Bridegroom* so that they can be effective in helping the bride make herself ready for her Bridegroom King.

1. This class is a compilation of things I have learned over the last twenty-five years.

- a. I want to begin this class with a brief summary of my journey to understand the bridal role of the believer. My wife and I started the church that we pastored for more than twenty-five years in 1991. At that time, we held the typical evangelical view of the bride. Basically, we believed that it was merely a way of describing the church with not more to it than that. We viewed it in much the same

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vein as the church as the body of Christ, the family of God, or the people of God. Of course, all of these illustrations of the church have a specific application pertaining to the function of the church. Little did we realize that the bride described much more than just a picture of one aspect of church life. We knew the bride was presented in scripture, but we paid little attention to the overwhelming emphasis the scriptures place on the bridal role of the church.

- b. This all began to change in 1996 when our friends from Australia, Noel and Di Mann, came to visit us for the first time. Noel, who was a forerunner to forerunners, began to speak about many of the topics included in this school. One of those topics was the bride. As he taught at our church and in our private discussions, he unfolded many things to me about the bride and the bride's relationship with the Lord.
- c. As a result of the seeds of his teachings, I began to study the variety of passages and books of the bible pertinent to our bridal relationship with Christ. The Lord put a strong desire within my spirit to dig deeply into our bridal relationship with Christ. The topic has been a passion of mine ever since Noel introduced me to the subject so many years ago.
- d. I share this because my desire in this class is to consolidate the things I have learned into a systematic study of the bride, the relationship we are to have with our Bridegroom King, and the different steps involved in making ourselves ready as a bride for Christ. My desire is to be to you much as Noel was to me to give you a framework for your lifetime of study of the bride. It is a very important topic for forerunners to study, and it will take a lifetime for all of us to fully understand and prepare.

2. Forerunners must be careful not to assume that we are automatically prepared as a bride for Christ.

- a. I want to share a word of caution as we embark upon this study. As forerunners study the bridal paradigm, we must all be aware that being made ready as a bride for Christ is not determined by knowledge about the bridal relationship, but by life. That is, our being made ready is determined by our life being transformed into a bride made ready.
- b. I pray the following passage on a regular basis,

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, *after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified* (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

- c. My point is that learning about the bride and the numerous aspects of our pursuit of being the prepared bride doesn't make us a prepared bride. Nor does being a part of a church that teaches about the bride make us ready as a bride. Nor does being in a school that prepares forerunners. Bridal readiness is determined by the life of Christ becoming real as our life in fullness. The question for all of us is, "Am I growing in living in the truths I am learning and teaching?" This is an essential understanding for all forerunners. None of us want to have taught these beautiful truths from the scriptures and yet be disqualified as Christ's eternal wife.

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- d. With that introduction, let's discuss the importance of understanding the bride.

II. Importance of Forerunners Understanding the Bride

- a. In this section, we will identify eight reasons why understanding the bridal pattern is important to God and must, therefore, be important to forerunners. Forerunners are to be friends of the Bridegroom and as such they must be a strong and persistent voice into the church calling believers to make themselves ready as a prepared bride for Christ. To be such a voice, forerunners must have a deep understanding of the variety building blocks which comprise bridal preparation and function.
- b. Clearly, there is a lot more to becoming the eternal wife of the Lamb than most people think. Some believe that every believer will be the eternal bride. Others believe that a lukewarm pursuit of bridal principles will make them ready. In contrast to these two views, we believe that to be made ready as the eternal wife of the Lamb requires a lifelong devotion and determination to making ourselves ready.
- c. The purpose of this session is not to try to fully explain the topics highlighted. We will do much of that in later sessions. Our point in the remainder of this session is to identify several reasons why it is important for forerunners to understand the bridal model and to emphasize to forerunners that being a voice to assist the bride being made ready is a central component of the forerunner call.
- d. Now, the eight reasons why understanding bridal theology is important to God and the forerunner.

1. First and foremost, a prepared bride is a central tenet of God's eternal purpose.

- a. For those who have studied our teachings on God's eternal purpose, you will remember that we have identified five dimensions of God's eternal purpose. I won't repeat them all here, but I will restate what we wrote about God's eternal purpose related to the bride from our Forerunner School class, *Understanding the Forerunner Call*.

The third aspect of God's eternal purpose is that Christ would have an equally yoked bride. In the council of the Godhead in eternity past, it was determined that the Son would have an eternal bride to be at His side as His wife forever. The Son would love the bride just like the Father loves Him and in return the bride would reciprocate love back to Him. She would love the Son just like the Father loves the Son. The plan includes the bride making herself ready for this wonderful love relationship by allowing the indwelling Spirit to live His life through her. Through this process, the Father will provide Jesus with a pure, spotless, holy, and worthy bride who loves Him just like the Father. As the ages unfold, the prepared bride will be eternally at the side of her Bridegroom King and together they will ever expand the kingdom of God throughout the vastness of creation. Thus, God's eternal purpose includes giving the Son an equally-yoked bride.

- b. In my book, *A Worthy Bride*, I quoted Paul Billheimer. It also describes the bride in God's eternal purpose,

It [the bride of Christ] is one thing and one alone: the eternal companion of Jesus Christ, wholly God and wholly man. The final and ultimate outcome and goal of events from eternity to eternity, the finished product of all the ages, is the spotless Bride of Christ, united with Him in wedded bliss

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at the marriage supper of the Lamb and seated with her heavenly Bridegroom upon the throne of the universe—ruling and reigning with Him over an ever increasing and expanding Kingdom. He entered the stream of human history for this one purpose, to claim His Beloved...Creation has no other aim. History has no other goal. From before the foundation of the world until the dawn of eternal ages God has been working toward one grand event, one supreme end---the glorious wedding of His Son, the marriage supper of the Lamb.²

- c. The preparation of an equally yoked bride to be made ready as Christ's eternal partner is God's primary purpose for the church age. With this as God's objective from before the foundation of the world, there is no doubt that understanding the bridal paradigm is of utmost importance.

2. Second, the bride being made ready is a major theme of Christ's teaching during the last week of His earthly ministry.

- a. Matthew Chapter 21 records Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem a week before He went to the cross. Following his entry into the city, Jesus cleansed the temple for a second time, confronted the religious leaders of the day, spoke about His second coming, and taught His disciples on a variety of important topics. We know from our own experience that if we were leaving home for a long trip, we would say to those we were leaving behind the things of most importance. Likewise, Jesus would have spoken on the issues that He considered the most important for His followers to understand.
- b. In sharing a variety of important issues with His disciples, Jesus declared that the kingdom is like a wedding. Note His words, "Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son'" (Mt. 22:1). In addition, in the few short days He had with His closest followers, He shared two parables specifically addressing the bride and the need for the bride to make herself ready (Mt. 22:1-13; Mt. 25:1-13). In these teachings, He spoke of the need to say "yes" to the invitation to the marriage supper, to put on wedding garments, and to get oil for their lamps.
- c. Because Jesus knew He was soon leaving His followers behind, He chose to speak to those who would carry on His ministry all of the really important things that they needed to know—and being prepared as a worthy bride for Christ was one of those important things—thus, giving more support for why the topic of the bride is important to God.

3. Third, the Bible begins and ends with a wedding.

- a. The Bible begins with a wedding. The first two chapters of the Bible contain the story of Adam and Eve. A wonderful story for sure, but what does that have to do with our bridal relationship with Christ? The apostle Paul said that Adam foreshadows Christ (Rom. 5:14) and that Eve foreshadows the church's bridal relationship with Christ (Eph. 5:31-32). Furthermore, the creation of Adam and Eve and their marriage symbolizes in type and shadow form the relationship of Christ and His bride. Just as Eve was made from Adam while he was in a deep sleep, the church was birthed out of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. As Eve was fashioned from a rib taken from Adam's side, believers are created with the purpose of being eternally at the side of the Bridegroom King as His perfect helpmate and to live forever with Him in intimacy and purpose.

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- b. In the beginning of God's word to man, He lays out His divine plan—to raise up a bride as a suitable helpmate for His beloved Son. The scriptures begin with this powerful plan for Christ's bride.
- c. The scriptures also end with the wedding of Christ and His bride and of their eternal partnership. Three key passages make the point that the scriptures end with great emphasis on the bride and the marriage of the bride to Christ. The first is,

Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God" (Rev. 19:7-9).

- d. This passage alerts us that at the conclusion of the church age, Christ will return in triumph and the marriage of the Lamb to His bride accompanied by the celebration of the marriage supper of the Lamb will occur.
- e. The second of the three passages reads, "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready *as a bride* adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). In this passage, we note the eternal dwelling place of the bride who has been made ready—the new Jerusalem. Here the bride will live eternally with her Bridegroom King, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- f. The third passage appears only five verses from the end of the Bible. In this passage, the Bible concludes with the bride expressing her deep desire for her Bridegroom to come for her so that all that is written about her might become a reality. In this verse, the bride cries out with great passion and a deep longing in her heart saying, "the Spirit and the bride say come" (Rev. 22:17).
- g. There is much that could be said about each of these passages of scripture, but my point for now is that the Bible begins and ends with the marriage of Christ to His bride, them living in full union with each other, and the bride crying out for the fulfillment of these great promises.

4. Fourth, the prepared bride will be presented to Christ at His coming.

- a. The apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians includes these words,

...that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body. FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church (Eph. 5:27-32).

- b. Even though Paul does not use the term *bride* in this passage, the context makes it clear that Paul is unveiling the mystery of Christ and His bride. As such, the passage explains that at Christ's second coming He will present to Himself *His bride* in all her glory, holy and blameless and without spot or wrinkle.

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- c. Some eschatological views state that the nations and the seven mountains of culture will be presented to Christ at His coming. This will not happen, but the holy and blameless bride in all her glory will be given to Christ. As such, we have another powerful reason why the bride is important.

5. Fifth, when the bride is made ready, the Lord will return.

- a. I quoted Revelation 19:7-9 previously, so I won't repeat it here. We will deal with this passage in much detail in later sessions; however, for now I want to make one crucial point. Considering the message of this passage and the context in which it appears, when the bride has made herself ready, the Lord will return.
- b. No matter how dark it gets in the earth, no matter how evil the antichrist system becomes, no matter what is going on around us; Christ will not return until the corporate bride comprised of individual believers has made herself ready. Not the antichrist ruling his kingdom nor any other thing will dictate the Lord's second coming. The bride being prepared is what will activate the second coming of Christ. Again, another very important reason why understanding the readying of the bride is important.

6. Sixth, the prepared bride will dwell eternally in great intimacy with Christ and will be His eternal partner in His ever-expanding kingdom.

- a. Revelation 21:2 which I also quoted earlier speaks of the bride who has been made ready dwelling eternally in the new Jerusalem in intimacy with Christ. The bride will dwell in great intimacy with her Bridegroom King in the eternal city and do so forever!
- b. The bride will also be Christ's eternal partner. As we stated a moment ago, God created Eve to be a helpmate suitable for Adam and together they were to take dominion over God's creation. Let me add to that idea the principle described in Isaiah 9:7. Speaking prophetically of Christ, it reads "There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this." The prepared bride made ready for her Bridegroom will not only dwell in great intimacy with Christ sitting with Him in His throne, the bride will also be Christ's eternal partner—His suitable helpmate---as He forever expands His kingdom throughout the creation.
- c. As much as we enjoy the blessing of the life on earth that God has given us, in one sense our years on earth are an apprenticeship for the real life that will come throughout the ages. Our life on earth is to make believers—the bride—ready. If the church age is the time to make ready a bride for future partnering with Christ, it is certainly an important issue for forerunners.

7. Seventh, the theme of Christ and His bride is a thread which runs throughout scripture from beginning to end.

- a. The thread of Christ and His bride runs throughout the Bible from beginning to end. As we have already stated, the scriptures begin in type and shadow form with the idea of Christ and His bride

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and ends with the bride making herself ready, the celebration of the marriage supper of the Lamb, the bride dwelling eternally in union with Christ in the new Jerusalem, and the bride crying out for these things to come.

b. In addition, several Old Testament books and passages offer tremendous insight into the believer's bridal relationship with Christ. Some that have helped me are:

- *The book of Esther*: This book in a brief story lays out the invitation, preparation, intimacy, and partnership that the bride is to have with her Bridegroom King.
- *The book of Ruth*: This book also in a brief story explains the devotion of the bride to her Bridegroom kinsman-redeemer and the call to pursue the Man Christ Jesus above His salvation, provision and security.
- *The book of Song of Songs*: This book presents in allegory form the journey of bridal love and maturity that the bride must take in order to be prepared to be the wife of the Bridegroom King.
- *Genesis Chapter 24*: This chapter illustrates along with Revelation Chapters 17-18 the need for the bride to come out of Babylon in order to become the wife of the Lamb.
- *The book of Hosea*: This book shows the faithfulness of God to pursue the bride even in her unfaithfulness and entanglement with the world.

c. And, of course, the New Testament continues the thread of Christ and His bride.

- Jesus spoke of the bridal relationship He would have with His followers in several of His parables (specifically Mt. 22:1-13; Mt. 25:1-13).
- John the Baptist spoke of Christ as a Bridegroom and the forerunner as a friend of the Bridegroom.
- In speaking to the seven churches of Revelation, Jesus specifically alluded in several instances to bridal blessings that would come to overcomers.
- Paul wrote that believers are betrothed as a bride to Christ.

d. The repeated thread and overwhelming witness of the scriptures about Christ and His bride most definitely highlights how important the bridal relationship is for forerunners to understand.

8. Eighth, the scriptures teach that those who are wise will make themselves ready without delay.

a. Matthew 25:1-13 presents the parable of the ten virgins. As you are aware, in the story there are five wise virgins and five foolish ones waiting to go out and meet the bridegroom. Like all of Jesus' parables, there is much revelation packed into this brief story. The predominant point of this parable is that the five wise virgins put their energy into getting ready for the Bridegroom whereas

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the five foolish virgins did not. Because the foolish ones delayed too long they were not ready and were not able to enter the marriage supper.

- b. This parable could really be referred to as the parable of the ten Christians—five being wise and five foolish. This parable calls on Christians to wake up, be alert and make themselves ready for the coming marriage of the Bridegroom to His bride—and to do so without delay. This parable makes a very important point for us today and that is that we too must put the energy and effort into making ourselves ready for our Bridegroom. Those who are wise will begin now. The hour is late and it is imperative that the bride begin to make herself ready now. Once again we see the scriptures emphasizing the importance of the bride.

III. Forerunners as Friends of the Bridegroom

- a. I think we all would agree that the idea of a bridal relationship of Christ and His church is a predominant theme of scripture from beginning to end. Christ is a Bridegroom God and the Godhead wants Christ to have a worthy bride prepared for Him to live in intimacy with Him and be His eternal partner. There is no doubt that it is very important for the bride to focus much energy on making herself ready for her Bridegroom King.
- b. In this major effort of the bride being made ready, forerunners serve an important role. You will recall the words of John the Baptist, "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full" (John 3:29). In possibly their greatest role, forerunners are to be friends of the Bridegroom so as to help the bride to be made ready.
- c. Therefore, forerunners must take on their role as friends of the Bridegroom and become a voice in the earth on behalf of the Bridegroom. As a voice to the church in this arena, forerunners must invite believers not only to salvation but to the marriage supper of the Lamb; they must explain what is involved in making oneself ready; and they must describe the role the bride will play both in the end times and throughout eternity.
- d. In order for forerunners to be that voice we must have a deep and thorough understanding of bridal theology and all of the precepts involved in the bridal relationship between Christ and His bride. This is the purpose of this class. Let us dig deeply into the concepts we will share in this class so we can be a knowledgeable friend of the Bridegroom.
- e. To do this, we will continue our study as we explore in the next session the Jewish wedding system and its application to the bride being made ready.

¹ <https://bible.org/article/what-theology>

² Paul E. Billheimer, *Destined for the Throne* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1975, pp. 25-26.