

Session 1 The Bride of Christ: God's Eternal Purpose

Please refer to the teaching notes for this message.

INTRODUCTION

Session one. We're going to look at the Bride of Christ as being right at the center of God's eternal purpose, which is a very big statement.

Paragraph A. God's ultimate purpose for creation was to provide a family for Himself and to provide a Bride for His Son. He ordained that He would give His Son an eternal companion that would be equally yoked to Him in love, and that she would reign with Him forever and forever on the earth. When God first established the plan of creation: to create the heavens, the earth, the natural realm, and then to create a human race to live in the natural realm, His idea was to join the natural realm and the supernatural realm together on the earth. Human beings would be the vessels for whom He ordained this, and His Son's eternal companion. They would rule on the earth forever with His Son. This was a very aggressive plan. Go back to ages past and think about what it would involve to create a race, a brand new race of beings. There were angels, there were demons, but then a whole new race of created beings would be made in God's image. They would fellowship with God and connect with God at a heart level in a way that angels can't. God would invite these human beings into the fellowship of the Godhead, into the government of the Trinity, and they would participate with Jesus in ruling the earth with His authority forever and forever.

A NEW RACE OF BEINGS TO REIGN WITH HIM

Again, this is aggressive. This is big. This must have shocked the angels when the plan was unveiled for the first time. It's likely that they had no way to comprehend what was happening. A new race of beings, higher than they, would be made in the image of God. This race would connect with God—actually connect with Him at the heart level, at the level of the spirit—with capacities the angels did not have. They would be invited into the government of the Godhead, not just into the fellowship, but into the government of the Godhead, co-ruling this new, natural realm: this realm of heaven and earth to which the supernatural realm would eventually be adjoined in God's timing.

A WILLING BRIDE FOR A WORTHY SON

This is one of the key purposes for which God has orchestrated all human history. We see it written at the end, but it was the plan in His heart from the beginning. "For the marriage of the Lamb has come" (Rev. 19:7a), that the Son of God would have a marriage and a wife. But it's more than this. God would orchestrate history in such a way that the wife would voluntarily be ready and prepared. "And His wife has made herself ready" (Rev. 19:7b).

He wouldn't force her, but He would orchestrate history in such a way that He would woo her to where she would say yes of her own accord. She would make herself ready—under the anointing of the grace of God, of course—but the point in this verse is that she willingly responded. A willing Bride, she said yes of her own accord. God did not violate her free will. That was part of the great, eternal plan. Father God set His heart and His plan in motion. He created the heavens, the earth, and the human race; and then He began to train her so that she would willingly say yes, so that she would be worthy for the worthy Son, a Bride prepared for a worthy Son. That was the genius of the Father, a prepared Bride for a worthy Son.

THE NATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL WILL COME TOGETHER

Revelation 3:21: “She will sit with Me,” said Jesus, “on My throne” (Rev. 3:21, paraphrased). That statement is so big; that statement is so without any precedent in human imagination, that humans would sit with Jesus on His throne in partnership, and in government, forever. She would reign on the earth in the natural realm (Rev. 5:10). In the perfect timing of God, the natural and the supernatural will come together on the earth at the time of the second coming.

“I WILL GIVE YOU THE NATIONS”

Paragraph B. The Father promised the Son an inheritance. “I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession” (Ps. 2:8). The Father ordained that Jesus would have an inheritance, but the inheritance would be in the natural realm. It wouldn't just be an inheritance up in heaven, but an inheritance that would involve the earthly, natural realm. It would be a full possession of the nations, and Jesus wouldn't govern them partially, but He would fully possess them. That's a key phrase: He would possess them. They would be His. They would be totally His: the land as well as the people. As a matter of fact, it is clear from Scripture that the inheritance is more about the people—but it does include the land itself. The title deed of the earth is given to the Man, Christ Jesus. He owns all the property of the earth. It's His. But more important are the people who dwell on the land and the property that He owns. They would be fully His.

THE FATHER SEEKS VOLUNTARY LOVERS

Paragraph C. Jesus' inheritance involves two distinct realities. Number one, His inheritance involves the mandatory obedience of all creation. Paul tells us in Philippians 2:10 that every knee will bow and every tongue confess the Lordship of Jesus—every knee and every tongue—in heaven and on earth and under the earth. Under the earth is where those are being held now who await the lake of fire at the end of the millennial kingdom. This speaks of the unbelievers and demons: those who are under, or down in the center of the earth somewhere. Demons and angels, believers and unbelievers, everyone will obey Jesus. There's no option to that; obedience is mandatory. Even when He sends them to the lake of fire, they go in obedience to Jesus' word. They cannot disobey Him.

HIS PEOPLE WILL OFFER THEMSELVES

Beloved, obedience is inevitable. Even the enemies of Jesus will obey Him. There's absolutely no wisdom in prolonging obedience, because obedience is inevitable. Everyone will fully obey Jesus before it's all over. If we do it now, we have a relationship of love. If we do it then, it's judgment—but it will happen either way it goes. Sin is a bankrupt system. John said in 1 John 2:17 that the lusts of this age are passing away. It's a bankrupt system. Lust will pass away. The Father had something more in His heart, something more in His heart than mandatory obedience. He wanted a people who would be voluntary lovers. They would choose not only to obey, but also to give themselves fully to Him. He tells us in Ezekiel 36, “I will give them a new heart, a new spirit; I will give them a new ability to love You if they say yes to it” (Ezek. 36:26–27, paraphrased). Jesus' inheritance would involve a people who are supernaturally enabled to love Him because they wanted to; they voluntarily chose to love Him. In Psalm 110:3, King David saw that they would volunteer freely to love God. In Deuteronomy 30, the Lord spoke to Moses. He prophesied that at the end of the age, He would circumcise their hearts. They would love God, and their descendants would love God, with all their hearts (Deut. 30:6).

It will happen; God will have a people who are supernaturally enabled to love Him, but only on the condition that they say yes of their own free will. Then, when they do this, the Lord will grant the power and the grace and the mercy. But it's not just that they'll love God; they will be equally yoked to Jesus in love. That's a

staggering statement, that we would be equally yoked to Jesus in love; that we would love Him with our all in the way that He loves us with His all. His all is bigger than our all, but it's still our all that we bring to the relationship.

JESUS LOVES US WITH THE FATHER'S INTENSITY

Paragraph D. Jesus loves us to the same degree that the Father loves Him. "As the Father loved Me, that's the same intensity with which I love you" (Jn. 15:9, paraphrased). Beloved, we can't be loved by Jesus more. Jesus loves us to the fullest degree of intensity with which the Father loves Him, and that can never be improved upon, ever. Jesus spoke this to the disciples on the night they betrayed them. Shortly after this, in fact, He told them, "You will betray Me tonight" (Jn. 16:32, paraphrased). Jesus spoke this to weak and broken people, knowing they would betray Him. His love was bigger than that, because they would return and say yes to Him again. The idea here is that Jesus loves us with the same intensity with which the Father loves Him. Beloved, we have it made. This is a reality right now. No matter what else happens, this is true.

WE WILL LOVE JESUS AS THE FATHER LOVES JESUS

In John 17:26, Jesus is praying, and He says, "Father, the intensity of love which You possess towards Me; place it in them, so that they would love Me with that same intensity. I will love them with the intensity with which You love Me, and they will love Me in return with the intensity with which You love Me" (Jn. 17:26, paraphrased).

Equally yoked in love: it challenges our holy imagination, but it's in the Word of God and it's true. We will love Jesus as the Father loves Jesus—by the power of the Holy Spirit—throughout eternity. Beloved, that's exciting. I always offer John 17:26 as a life verse. I made this my life verse years ago. Not that you need one verse; you can pick a hundred of them. But if you're looking for one verse to make your number one verse in life, I recommend John 17:26. I always throw it out there: that the Father would give the love to you that's in His heart, and that you would love Jesus with that same intensity, that same abandonment.

SHE WILL ATTAIN THE PERFECT MEASURE

Paragraph E. Paul said it (Eph. 4:13). He spoke of being equally yoked in love. But he used different language. He said that we would all attain to the perfect measure of man. This means being mature: mature in love, mature in righteousness, mature in holiness. The Body of Christ in the age to come will have a maturity that equals the measure of the stature of Jesus' maturity as a man. Jesus will be united to a people who have the same maturity level in their humanity that He had in His humanity when He walked on the earth. I can't fathom this; but it's what the Word of God says: equally yoked in love.

A BRIDE WHO LOVES AS HE LOVES

Top of page two. The Word of God commands that we're not to be unequally yoked (2 Cor. 6:14). It's unthinkable that Jesus would be unequally yoked to His Bride. It's unthinkable that He would violate the Word of God in His own marriage. The good news is that He will be equally yoked. He will be with a partner who loves Him with all her heart and all her strength, just as He loves her with all His heart and all His strength. Our currency in the age to come, the only currency we'll bring with us from this age into the age to come, is the love that we cultivated for the Lord in this life. Of course, that love overflows to people. The love we have for people is a reflection and an overflow of the love He has for us, and that we have for Him. We're not going to bring our property, we're not going to bring our reputation, and we're not going to bring our mailing list. We're not going to bring anything except the love we've cultivated for Him in this life. When we stand before the Lord on the

last day, He will only talk to us about the measure of love we developed on the earth. That's the only thing I'll bring with me from this age. I call it the currency of eternity.

THE ONLY INHERITANCE DESIRED

In Ephesians 1:18, Paul prayed that we would know the riches, that we would know the wealth of what it means to be Jesus' inheritance. This is probably the prayer that is most often prayed at IHOP–KC. It's probably the most-prayed of all our prayers (Eph. 1:17–18): that we would know—and whenever the New Testament uses the word *know*, it normally means that we would experience—some of the wealth of what it means to be Jesus' inheritance. This is a prayer I want to urge you to pray for yourself. When we see this, even a little, it changes the way we view ourselves and our future. It changes the way we measure our life. Paul said, “If you know the wealth, the riches, of how glorious it is that you are His prize, that you are the prize He wants from the Father” The Father chose you as the inheritance Jesus wanted most; because the Father knows Jesus very well and the Father gave Him an inheritance that suited Him, that touched His heart. And He gave you to Jesus as a voluntary lover of God, as one who chose—under the inspiration of the grace of God, yes—but still you chose. The Bible makes it clear that we can refuse the grace of God. We can receive the grace of God in vain as believers, and resist its inspiration. But, when we say yes to it and go on to full responsiveness to the Lord, that's the inheritance Jesus wants. That's the only inheritance He wants—you, voluntarily saying yes to Him.

PREDESTINED TO LOVE AS HE LOVES

Ephesians 1:4: The Father chose us, even before the foundation of the world, even before Genesis 1. The plan was set. There would be a people made holy, by the grace of God, and blameless in their love for Him. In other words, there was no compromise, no fault, in their love. Before Adam and Eve were created, the blueprint was already clear. There would be a wedding at the end of natural history, and there would be a people blameless in their love for God. It was the Father's plan. It's the ultimate purpose of His heart: to have a family for Himself and to provide an eternal companion for His Son, a prepared Bride for a worthy Son. This is the great plan for which God is orchestrating all human history. We were predestined—predestined to love as He loves. We were predestined to be conformed to His image (Rom. 8:29). Jesus is love incarnate; He is love, fully manifested in a human vessel. He is love incarnate. The Father predestined, even before the earth was created, when He said, “I will have a people who love as He loves. It will be the overflow of His love in them and My love in them.”

THE PROMISE OF HIS COMPANION LED HIM TO DIE

Paragraph I. John 17. Jesus agrees with this plan. Even before the trauma of the cross—so traumatic that He was sweating drops of blood—He understood what was before Him. This is so stressful on His human frame, in His humanity, that He sweats drops of blood. Just hours before that, He had cried out to God with a clarity of mind on that which He was most focused. He said, “Father, the glory that you gave Me, I have given to them. I have determined that I will share that which You have given Me. I desire that they also whom You gave Me would be with Me where I am” (Jn. 17:24, paraphrased). This was just hours before He sweats drops of blood in the garden of Gethsemane. This is what is preoccupying Him. He said, “Father, I'm doing this so that she would be with Me forever. I understand the plan. I love Your plan. I want My eternal companion: that where I am, she would be with Me. I want to be with her. I want her with Me in My glory forever and forever. That's why I'm going to that cross.”

FOR THE JOY SET BEFORE HIM

Hebrews 12:2: “who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross.” The joy that was set before Him, part of the inheritance He received by going to the cross, was a people equally yoked to Him in love. He said it

just a few hours earlier in John 14:3. This time He's not praying to the Father as He did in John 17. He's talking to the disciples themselves: "I will come again" (Jn. 14:3). They haven't fully understood that He's going to die. He's said it, but they haven't grasped it fully yet. He says, "Don't worry; I will come again. Why will I come again? So that where I am, you will be with Me. I'm doing this for us. I am captured with a vision of who you are to Me. I know who you are. Do you know who you are? I'm going to the cross so I can provide a way, so that I can share My glory with you, so that you would be with Me forever. I'm coming back a second time so that you'll be with Me forever. Do you know who you are to Me? Do you know who you are in the plan of the Father? You are My inheritance; you are My eternal companion. We will be equally yoked in love, together" (Jn. 14:3, paraphrased).

THE FATHER'S INTENTIONALITY IN HUMAN HISTORY

Roman numeral II. We're looking at the big picture of redemptive history, starting in the garden of Eden, right up to the time of the second coming. We have six thousand years, more or less, of redemptive history beginning in the garden of Eden and culminating in the second coming of Christ. History was planned around preparing a Bride for the Son. A prepared Bride for a worthy Son, and you can see the blueprint throughout history. You can see the intentionality the Father had; even in the way that He began human history. It began in a garden, the garden of Eden, with Adam and Eve joined as a bride and a bridegroom. Adam and Eve were a picture of Jesus and the Church. Even in what happened with Adam and Eve, the way God brought forth Eve was a picture of the cross—a picture of what happened to Jesus. God had said concerning Adam in Gen. 2:18, "It is not good that man should be alone." The NASB says, "But for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him," and the NIV says, "But for Adam no suitable helper was found." In the same way, the Father essentially said to the Son, "It is not good that You should rule the earth alone; I will make You a helper comparable to You: one who works well with Your heart and Your ways, one who is built according to Your image so that You can connect at every level" (Gen. 2:20b, paraphrased).

ADAM AND EVE PREFIGURED A PEOPLE MADE SUITABLE FOR JESUS

The Father caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and a deep sleep fell upon Jesus on the cross—the sleep of death. The Father took one of the ribs from Adam's side, and we know from John 19:34 that after Jesus fell asleep in the sleep of death, His side was pierced. He was wounded in His side. Out of that wound, out of that sacrificial death, came forth a Bride, came forth a people purchased by His death. "Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman" (Gen. 2:22). The Father, through the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus, made a way for the righteousness of God to be given, for the Spirit to be poured out, so that a people could be made worthy, made suitable for the Lord. Then the Father brought Eve to Adam.

At the end of natural history, there will be a great wedding feast. The Father has arranged a wedding. He's going to bring this corporate woman to the Man Christ Jesus. All the created order will celebrate: all the righteous created order and all the angels. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife" (Gen. 2:24a). There would be a union.

CLEAVING OF MAN AND WIFE PREFIGURES JESUS AND HIS BRIDE

Paragraph B. Moses is the one who recorded this story in Genesis by divine revelation. Fifteen hundred years after Moses, Paul the apostle gave an interpretation of this passage that I'm assuming Moses didn't understand. By apostolic revelation he adds to that passage the higher intention that was upon God's heart. Yes, it was about Adam and Eve, but it wasn't mostly about Adam and Eve. There was a higher meaning. Paul interprets it as speaking of the relationship of Jesus and the Church. He wrote in Ephesians 5:31–32: "For this reason a man

shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife.” He’s quoting Genesis 2. They will be one flesh. But then Paul says, in essence, “Let me tell you, though, there’s more here than meets the eye. There’s a bigger drama going on in Genesis 2 that Adam and Eve undoubtedly didn’t understand. When Moses recorded the event by revelation, he didn’t understand, either. Let me tell you the great mystery, the great secret plan in God’s heart. This is talking about Jesus and His Bride. This joining together, this leaving father and mother and cleaving, is talking about more than Adam and Eve. It’s talking about Jesus and His eternal companion.”

NATURAL HISTORY ENDS WITH A BRIDE AND A BRIDEGROOM

Paragraph C. Not only did natural history begin in a garden with a bride and a bridegroom; natural history ends in a garden city, the New Jerusalem, the eternal Eden. Natural history began in a garden with a bride and a bridegroom and natural history ends in a garden with a Bride and a Bridegroom, in a garden city. Top of page three. That which began in a garden 6,000 years ago in Eden will end in the New Jerusalem with a great wedding feast, and the New Jerusalem will descend down to the earth.

THE CHURCH IN HER BRIDAL IDENTITY

Natural history ends with the Church in her bridal identity. This is one of the great prophecies, and one of the most informative and significant prophecies that describe the work of the Spirit in the end-time Church (Rev. 22:17). There are so many implications to this one verse. I remember once, some years ago, I gave a message on the fifteen different implications of this verse. There are fifteen. Well, there are probably about a hundred, but I only pointed out fifteen. There are so many points that are implied by this one statement. I’m talking about descriptions of how the Spirit is going to work in the end-time Church. My purpose is to take one of our sessions in this class and really develop this passage. There’s more than meets the eye here. “And the Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come!’” (Rev. 22:17). It’s one of the most, if not the most informative, prophecies describing the work of the Spirit in the end-time Church. This prophecy describes the Church in deep unity with the Spirit: the Spirit and the Bride are saying and doing the same thing—in unity. What the Spirit is saying, the Bride is saying. What the Spirit is doing, the Bride is doing.

There has never been a time in history when the Body of Christ, worldwide, has been in unity with the Holy Spirit at this level. Yes, for a brief moment, after the day of Pentecost, the whole Church was in unity with the Spirit—but it didn’t last long. Sin and disruption broke in and broke up the unity that was there on the day of Pentecost and a short time afterwards. Beloved, that unity is coming back again. The Spirit and the Bride will be saying the same thing and they will be doing the same thing. What is the Spirit saying? The Spirit is crying out through the Bride, “Come, Lord Jesus!” The Spirit will be speaking to the Church her bridal identity. He will be emphasizing, by the Word of God and by the revelation of the Spirit, who the Church is in that hour. This will be the first time in history that the Body of Christ, universally, will understand who they are as the Bride of Christ. The only time in history that will happen is in the generation in which the Lord returns.

GROWING AWARENESS OF THE BRIDAL IDENTITY

As a matter of fact, there’s a new interest, even in the last ten years or so, that’s growing so rapidly. It’s still not the majority of the Body of Christ, but millions and millions of believers, even in the last ten or twenty years, have been captured by the reality of Jesus as the Bridegroom and who they are as a cherished Bride. That is, in itself, a sign of the times. Never in 2,000 years of Church history has the Holy Spirit universally emphasized this. Only one time in history will He emphasize this reality: the reality of Jesus as the Bridegroom and the people of God as a cherished Bride. Notice, it doesn’t say, “The Spirit and the family of God say, ‘Come, Lord Jesus.’” It doesn’t say, “The Spirit and the army.” It doesn’t say, “The Spirit and the kingdom.” It doesn’t say,

“The Spirit and the body,” “The Spirit and the temple,” “The Spirit and the priesthood.” It says, “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come!’” We are the Body of Christ forever. We *are* the kingdom. We *are* the army of God. We *are* the priesthood. We *are* the temple. All of these are descriptions of our spiritual identity; they’re part of who we are before God. There’s one primary universal emphasis in that hour right before the Lord returns: He is going to unveil to the Body of Christ worldwide and who she is before Jesus as the Bridegroom God. Yes, we are a family, yes, a kingdom, yes, a body, yes, a temple, yes, and priesthood—but there’s a new revelation. It’s old in the Bible from the biblical point of view, but it will be new in emphasis. The Holy Spirit will cause the Church—right before Jesus returns—to come to a crescendo, a universal emphasis of this reality. Why? Because it’s part of the vast blueprint of the Father for human history.

KNOWLEDGE OF HER IDENTITY IN DARK TIMES

Paragraph two. This is very strategic, because the generation in which the Lord returns will be the most emotionally broken generation in human history. The Scriptures describe the negative emotions of the generation in which the Lord returns. On the positive side, this will be the time where the first commandment is restored to first place in the Body of Christ, worldwide. The Church will be deeper in love and unity than ever before. They will have a more mature love for God, and therefore for people, and a greater unity with God, and again, therefore with people. On the other side, there will be great anger, fear, lawlessness, betrayal, hatred, perversion, and occult bondage like no other time in history. Daniel describes the generation of the Lord’s return in Daniel 8:23: “In the latter times, when the transgressors have reached their fullness...”(paraphrased). Transgressors, or sinners, will reach their fullness; there will be a fullness of sin unparalleled in history. There is a time coming when sin will reach a fullness far beyond what it is even right now. What is the Lord going to do in the context of such emotional brokenness, occult activity, murder, fear, bondage and perversion? That’s the very hour in human history when the Church will be the most mature in love. How could this be?

Roman Numeral III. The Holy Spirit’s emphasis will be of Jesus as the Bridegroom God, and therefore the Church as a cherished Bride. We can’t see ourselves as a cherished Bride until we see Him as the Bridegroom God. Some people put time and energy into thinking and studying about who they are before Him. I think first we want to focus on who He is—as the Bridegroom God. Then it makes much more sense to see who we are before Him. When we change the way we see Him, it will change the way we see ourselves.

THIS REVELATION IS FOR THE MOST BROKEN GENERATION

The Holy Spirit has been strategically reserving this dynamic revelation of Jesus. Yes, it has been in the Bible for thousands of years—from the Old Testament prophets onward—the revelation of Messiah as the Bridegroom God is an Old Testament revelation. Jesus said it clearly 2,000 years ago. The apostles made it clear also, but the Spirit has never emphasized it for 2,000 years. That is why, today, it throws some people off. They can’t argue with it because it’s in the Old Testament, it’s on the lips of Jesus, and it’s in the teaching of the apostles.

They say, “It’s definitely there, but my Church never taught it.” So, there’s a struggle, but only for a moment. The Holy Spirit has reserved this glorious truth of who Jesus is, as the Bridegroom God, and who we are, as a cherished Bride, for the generation that will be the most broken. That is when the Church will walk in the greatest victory and in the deepest love. It won’t be because of our revelation of being the army of God, but because we see how dear we are to His heart. When we see how dear we are to Him, and the plans that He has made to involve us with Himself forever, then there will be no cost, no price too great in light of that revelation.

“THE KING WHO ARRANGED A MARRIAGE FOR HIS SON”

Paragraph E. Natural history ends with a Bride made ready for a marriage, for a wedding. The Bride is made ready for a wedding. Paragraph F. Jesus began His public ministry at a wedding. His final public teaching was in Matthew 22, where Jesus stood up and said, “The kingdom of God is like a great king, my Father, arranging a marriage for His Son” (Mt. 22:2, paraphrased). That was His final, public utterance to the nation of Israel. He began His ministry at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. His first miracle was at a wedding, and His final teaching was about the wedding.

JESUS BEGAN AND ENDED HIS MINISTRY WITH TEACHING ON THE BRIDEGROOM

Paragraph G. Jesus began His ministry to the apostles back at the very beginning in Matthew 9. He said, “I am the Bridegroom, and you are friends of the Bridegroom.”

They were undoubtedly a little mystified by that. They said, “What do You mean, You’re the Bridegroom and we’re friends of the Bridegroom? How does this work?”

Jesus, at the very beginning of His earthly ministry to the apostles, revealed Himself to them privately as the Bridegroom. Actually, some of the disciples of John were there as well. He ended His ministry to them in Matthew 25:6–13 where He was only teaching the apostles in private. He said, “It’s important that you understand: You must get oil in your lamp before Me as the Bridegroom God” (paraphrased). In His final exhortation before the upper room discourse, before the Last Supper in the upper room, He told them again that He was the Bridegroom, and that it was vital that they maintained a connection with Him as the Bridegroom God by the Holy Spirit. It is called “having oil in their lamps.”

The first one to introduce Jesus’ ministry publically in the Scriptures was John the Baptist. He spoke of Jesus as the Bridegroom, of seeing the Bridegroom and hearing the voice of the Bridegroom. He said, “I have heard the voice of the Bridegroom” (Jn. 3:29, paraphrased). Later, Jesus appeared to John the apostle on the island of Patmos and gave him the book of Revelation, which was the revelation of Himself. It ends with Jesus revealed, and the Bride and the Bridegroom together (Rev. 22:17). My point is this: All of this was intentional in the Father’s plan. The plan was always clear. He has never deviated from His grand intention of providing an eternal companion for His Son. All things are working together for God’s eternal plan.

NEVER HAS IT ENTERED OUR HOLY IMAGINATIONS

Roman numeral III. In 1 Corinthians 2, the apostle Paul said, “Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, it has never even entered into the holy imagination of a single man, what God has prepared for the people who love Him, for His Bride” (1 Cor. 2:9, paraphrased). God has prepared something for the Bride so dynamic that it has never, ever entered into the holy imagination even of the people of God. We see only portions of it. It’s bigger than anyone can imagine—what God has planned for His Bride.

“ALL THINGS ARE YOURS”

Top of page four. Paul goes on, just a few verses later, in 1 Corinthians, chapter 3. He’s in the same conversation, so to speak. He looks at them and says, “For all things are yours” (1 Cor. 3:21). Everything was made for the Body of Christ, for the Bride of Christ. “Whether life or death, things present or things to come, this world or the world after; everything was made for you. God made it with you in mind” (1 Cor. 3:22, paraphrased).

MORE THAN HELPERS

God made the created order, established it, and organized history to prepare, to select, and to train a Bride that would be worthy for His Son. He always had the plan in mind to draw individuals from history to Himself, and then prepare them. It's more than their receiving forgiveness of sin as a free gift. There was more to the plan. They would voluntarily respond to the Lord with abandonment because they would see who Jesus was as the Bridegroom, and they would see who they were to Him. They would understand that no price, no cost was too great for them to obey Him in love. When we see who He is and who we are to Him, we realize that we're not a work force. We're not just laborers in the field whom He's willing to sacrifice for the great cause of world evangelization. Yes, martyrs will die in the cause, but we are not just a work force. We are His Bride. We are those who will be with Him forever. Even though there's trouble and resistance, it's all part of His preparation of the Bride in love.

TWO THOUSAND YEARS' PREPARATION

Some people, when they think of the Body of Christ, think only of a workforce. Jesus thought of an eternal companion. The Father says, "I am orchestrating history to prepare her, that she would be prepared for that Day throughout history." Each generation is working for the next generation. For 2,000 years, there has been a continuum. The Lord has been building one generation after another that would make an impact on future generations, that there would be one, single generation prepared. I'm talking about on the earth, people on the earth saying yes, worldwide, at a level never known before in history—a prepared Bride. They are not prepared because they have a resurrected body that automatically makes them prepared. No. They are prepared by their choices in this age.

Paul says, "For all things are yours: whether ... the world or life or death, or things present or things to come—all are yours. And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. 3:21–23). "You belong to Jesus, and Jesus belongs to the Father; this is how it works" (paraphrased).

SHE WILL WALK IN UNSURPASSED PURITY

The guiding principle of God's activity through creation and His leadership of history is to use His power and His wisdom to select, train, and prepare a Bride for that hour of history. Of course, the Bride is made up of all the saints through history. There will be a group, perhaps a billion—I don't know the number, but it's more than a few thousand on some hillside—there will be a worldwide body in a single generation that says yes to the anointing of the Spirit in the midst of the greatest conflict and the greatest temptation and perversion in the history of the nations. They will walk in a purity never, ever surpassed in history. They will be made up of all the tribes and streams of the Body of Christ worldwide. Paul said, "life, death, things present, things to come, all these dynamics are contributing to creating a context that prepares the Bride to say yes in love" (Rom. 8:38, paraphrased). Life itself, the very reason God gave life, was to prepare the Bride. The reason there's death is that the reality of death actually helps prepare the Bride. God uses all these dynamics—the hard things as well as things positive—even the future dynamics of the end times and the end of the age with the New Jerusalem. All these things contribute to the motivating preparation of the Bride. All of them do.

ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR THE BRIDE

Number five. The reason that God did all this is because you belong to Jesus. You are His inheritance. He wants a prepared Bride for a worthy Son.

Paragraph C. All these work together for her benefit. Paul said, “We know everything works together for the good of those who love God” (Rom. 8:28, paraphrased). God will overrule the negative; He will overrule even our bad choices if we repent of them. He will overrule everything if we set our heart to love Him. It will work toward the grand purpose that we see in the blueprint of God. There’s a wedding feast at the end of history and a prepared Bride for a worthy Son.

GOD ORCHESTRATES HISTORY SO PEOPLE FIND JESUS

Paragraph D. God orchestrated history so that people would find Jesus. In Acts 17:26, Paul says, “[God] has made from one blood every nation of men.” All the different nationalities and types of ethnic groups came from Adam and Noah. God has determined the pre-appointed times and the pre-appointed boundaries for the dwellings of every nation (Acts 17:26). Why did He do it? God moved boundary lines in order to cause the population of one particular nation to grope for the Lord, to ask deep questions, and to find God. When a boundary line moves, even if it only moves ten miles, it means there’s a big war. Whether a boundary line moves a mile or a hundred miles, a lot of people are dying when a boundary line moves. The Lord says, “I allow the boundary lines to shift, and that causes great disturbance. I give the pre-appointed times” (Ibid). This speaks of the times when nations would have prosperity and power, and then the times when they wouldn’t. He says, “I oversee all of those processes.” He does it with an interaction of man’s free will. He doesn’t violate the free will of man. He has a master plan. He’s shaking up nations. For what reason? It was so that the populations of those nations would grope about, so that they would be disoriented, so that they would no longer believe in their former systems of religious thinking, and so that they would ask deep questions about God. The net result is that they would find Him—that they would find Jesus. To find Him doesn’t mean they were only forgiven of their sins; it means they laid hold of Him. He’s raising up a people on the earth who connect with Jesus at a deep level.

GOD’S BLUEPRINT FOR HISTORY

Paragraph E. We’ll end with this. Paul just gave us his interpretation of history. God is orchestrating history, again, to bring into account the free will of men. Sinful men are making real decisions that God allows them to make. God oversees it all. He wants to raise up a people on the earth who find God. Again, to find God means more than praying the sinner’s prayer. It means they connect deeply with Jesus.

History is often interpreted through the lens of significant events, like scientific breakthroughs or economic trends or military crises or political developments. Typically, when the story of history is told, it is centered around the invention of electricity or the steam engine or a new political development, such as the French Revolution, the American Revolution, or the various wars. That is how people normally interpret history: through the moving of kings, evil men, conflicts, economic crisis, or prosperity.

Paul says, “That’s only a secondary way to interpret history. There’s bigger story line. God is preparing a Bride for His Son, and it’s going to end in a wedding.” Natural history will end with a wedding. History won’t end, because we will go on forever and ever, but natural history will end. The Father is moving boundary lines so that people will connect with Jesus—because the Father has an inheritance for His Son—and so that there will be a people who rule with Him forever. Many people can’t see where history is going; they don’t know the master plan, the blueprint from which God is orchestrating the design of history. They look at history and it seems accidental; it seems pointless; it doesn’t seem to be going anywhere. Nations are colliding. It seems like good things fall apart and we start all over again. Many are hopeless and in despair when they look at history.

Beloved, let me tell you something. God is guiding history according to a divine blueprint. He is raising up a wedding feast. He's planning a wedding, and He will have a people who have said yes from every tribe and every nation, and who will belong to His Son. That's the story of history from God's point of view. Amen.