

CCH Sermons on “the Church”#1 Being the Church 09FEB25

Psalm 45:11 “Let the king be enthralled by your beauty; honour him, for he is your lord”.

- I was sent this recently: the “[little book of Marmite tips](#)” from one of my best friends.
 - And with it was a note containing this verse which had nothing to do with Marmite but was far more important. Psalm 45:11.
 - It’s way back before Jesus, speaking about a royal wedding.
 - Not William and Kate, Harry and Meghan
 - but this one is between God’s King in the line of David and his bride.

 - Who is that?
 - Who is the King in the line of David? Ultimately, it’s Jesus.
 - And who is the bride... ultimately, it’s you!
 - If you are a Christian this morning (whatever your marital status)
 - Then in a spiritual way the Lord Jesus is your husband
 - (an analogy that the Bible uses from cover to cover)
 - and you (along with all other believers worldwide) are his bride!
 - I’ve often returned to that verse in my prayers, because it’s talking about you and me and our relationship with Jesus. And I’ve prayed that I would understand more how much Jesus delights in me and you, and that we would honour him as our Lord, friend and spiritual husband.

- For 6 weeks leading up to our Vision Day and Annual Church Meeting in March we are looking at sermons about the church.
 - 4 by me for the adults, and 2 by elders Johnny and Jon for all ages.
 - We’ll try to take in the whole sweep of what the Scriptures teach
 - rather than go through one book of the Bible.
 - We’ll back them up with our dig deeper sheet and lifegroup studies.
 - And there’s one on the way out today (with this powerpoint)

- Well it’s a massive topic, and we won’t cover it all but where should we start?
 - *Worship?* Our church meets on Sunday to praise God.
 - *Evangelism?* Our church seeks to reach out with good news
 - *Discipline?* What the Bible tells us to do when things go wrong.

- But here’s the thing.
 - If we jump straight to what we **do** (and we will come onto that)-
 - = **OUR ACTIVITIES**- we’ll start on the wrong foot, thinking very humanly and organisationally about the church.
 - Better to start where the Bible starts with who we **are**
 - = **OUR IDENTITY**. Which actually starts us in terms of our relationship with our gracious God and how he sees us.

- So before we come onto our later studies on

- **Growing** the Church
 - **Serving** the Church
 - **Maturing** the Church,
 - This sermon is on **being the church**.
 - And I hope it will be super helpful in recalibrating how we view ourselves.
- 2 points. The Church is **Beautiful**, and the Church is a **Miracle**.

1) THE CHURCH IS BEAUTIFUL...

- We've called this series "**Beautiful People**", not because we all look like Hollywood film stars but because Jesus finds us beautiful.
- Song of Songs is an extraordinary and sometimes very racy (!) Old Testament wisdom book that speaks of the marital love of King Solomon and his bride, but it points forwards to King Jesus and his bride the Church.
- The church isn't a building (and we don't have one!)
 - it's his people, his bride. Here's what Jesus thinks about us...

"How beautiful you are, my darling! O, how beautiful! Your eyes are doves". Song 1:15.

- Now isn't that amazing? Jesus delights in you. He finds you glorious.
- That's the first sub-heading...

a) A GLORIOUS BEAUTY

- We come on a Sunday
 - worrying about where to sit
 - or whether we've got enough cups for the coffee,
 - or if all of PA stuff is going to fit back into the new cupboard,
 - We look around the room and thinking "we're a funny old bunch".
- But Jesus's first reaction is one of delight. "Wow!"
 - Just gazing on the church gives him joy!
- In fact 18th century American theologian Jonathan Edwards said the whole world was created so that "*the eternal Son of God may obtain a spouse*"¹
 - I got that quote from this book by Dustin Bengé which has shaped a lot of my thinking in my preparation. I'd recommend the first 10 mins of his free audiobook in the weekly news if you'd like to go further on this.
 - Jesus finds his church glorious.
- ▲ I'll never forget the day around September 2009 when I discovered from a friend that not only did I like Emma (I already knew that) but that she liked me too! I can still take you to the underpass under the A3 near Raynes Park in London where later that day I skipped for joy.

¹ Quoted in Dustin Bengé "[The Loveliest Place](#)" Crossway, p15.

- And the “rest is history” as they say, and a few months later in Richmond park I was down on 2 knees (not one to do things by halves) asking her to marry me.
- And on 9th October 2010 she was walking up the aisle in Chichester Baptist Church looking radiant.
- Well Jesus is way more excited to be married to **us**...
 - (that takes a bit of getting your head around as a bloke)
 - but this is not an individual picture it’s a corporate picture-
 - us all together delighted in by Jesus.
 - A Glorious beauty.
- But hang on.
 - When we look at our own individual hearts if we are honest we have a problem. I’m not very lovely (we often feel not outwardly, but if we are honest and more importantly inwardly- in my selfishness pride and sin) .
 - And when we look at the church more widely we see splits and false teaching and tragic abuse (even within our own circles),
 - And perhaps right here, you’ve fallen out with someone at church and it’s got ugly and you are struggling to forgive them.
- Well we’ll come onto that, and recognising who we are will motivate us to be what we are- the glorious bride of Christ,
 - but first it’s worth reflecting that it is

b) A REFLECTED BEAUTY

- Jesus doesn’t love us because we are lovely in and of ourselves,
 - that we merit his love.
- No, his love for us is an **undeserving grace shaped love**.
 - Like Boaz who loved the surprising Moabitess outsider and
 - like Hosea who loved the unfaithful wife who had become a prostitute, Jesus love for his bride is undeserved.
- He washes us clean in his blood (a very surprising picture Revelation 7:14), and makes us spotless and gives us good deeds to do.
- So any glory we have is given to us, but even more than that, it’s a reflection of his love.
 - Jesus is glorious- reflecting his Father’s glory
 - And we are glorious because we reflect his glory.
- So that when Adam saw Eve for the first time, he said “bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23) - she’s beautiful because unlike the animals she’s a bit like me.
- And Jesus looks at his bride and he sees some of his reflected, *given* glory by *grace*.
- And one day we will be completely perfect – Revelation 21:7

“I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.” Rev 21:2.

- And the image is glorious- a holy people without suffering sin or sadness where every tear is wiped away.
- But We're not there yet, it's...

c) AN UNFINISHED BEAUTY

- Ephesians is a great go-to book on the Church, starting with who we are, and then showing the implications in terms of how we act.
- In chapter 5 as Paul addresses husbands and wives he tells husbands to be the kind of husband Jesus is...

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. Eph 5:25-27.

- Jesus is changing us from one degree of glory to another.
 - But we are not quite there yet.
 - He died on the cross to put us right with God (that's called **justification**- declared not guilty because he paid the penalty in our place), that is finished. We are accepted.
 - and he's changing us from one degree of glory to another (that's called **sanctification**).
- We are already showing God's glory to the world, but...
 - Oh what a day it will be when we arrive at the wedding supper of the lamb and we will be the final glorious bride without blemish meeting our King.
- Amazingly as Christians get older and wrinklier on the outside, we become more and more beautiful on the inside as Jesus changes us!

☞ As we pause and look back on where we have come so far, I wonder if this changes your view of the church. I hope it fills you with delight.

- Perhaps particularly if relationships are a difficult area for you right now.
- ▲ Soon after I left uni, the other 8 people on my Christian union committee all started getting married one by one. In fact I was the last.
- In my prayer letter (I was working in youth work at the time) slightly tongue in cheek I wrote "I'm getting married".
- And then I quoted Revelation 21- one of the verses we have looked at about Jesus and his bride the church. Because all Christians are looking forward to their wedding day!
- That didn't take away the loneliness of singleness, though there were many good things about it too, but it did help towards putting everything in perspective.
 - In heaven I won't be married to Emma, we'll be married to Jesus.

THE CHURCH IS BEAUTIFUL

2) THE CHURCH IS A MIRACLE

- I said that Ephesians is a great book on the theme of the Church, and we studied it the summer that we planted CCH 6 ½ years ago.
- Let's turn back to Eph 2- our second reading on page 1174.

a) THE CHURCH IS A MIRACLE OF GOD'S RECONCILIATION

- Before non-Jews (like us) became part of the family of God we were corpses. We were complete outsiders.
 - We were dead in sin
 - We didn't belong.
 - You could say we were treated with distance by God, and with suspicion by the God's people at the time
 - But miracle of Miracle
 - Jesus died for us.
 - He united us with himself as his bride, so that we are one with Christ.
 - He swooped us up to be with him in the heavenly places
 - He showered us with grace
 - All as a free gift to be received by faith
 - So that no-one can boast
 - And he did that for Gentiles- non Jews who weren't part of his original people.
 - Look at v11-13
 - Wow- reconciled to God.

 - But that's not actually where Paul is going with this.
 - Not only were we **individually reconciled (that is reunited) with God.**
 - But we were reunited with each other.

- ▲ Emma and I watched a National Geographic programme last week called "Europe from above²", and just outside Berlin there is a tumble-down Cold War military reconnaissance site where the US listened in on Russia. It's called Teufelsberg³ or Devil's Hill. It's built on the rubble from WW2.
- As the Cold War ended, and the Soviets became less of a threat, the Berlin wall came down. And East and West Berlin were reunited. You may have seen the scenes.
- And now Teufelsberg is a massive art installation of graffiti.
 - Because there's no hostility there's no need for it any more.

- When Jesus died on the cross, he wonderfully reunited us with God.
 - He did that for sinners from any and every background.

² <https://www.disneyplus.com/en-gb/series/europe-from-above/5e3XczALaXJx>

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teufelsberg>

- And the qualification for getting into his kingdom was (and still is) faith- not ethnicity, or good works, or serving at church, but empty handedly calling upon Jesus.
- And that's something that anyone can do whatever their age, skin colour, background or finances.
- We can come back to God.
 - If you are not a Christian you can come back to God today by simply turning from your sin and trusting Jesus for the rescue that he has won.
 - But more than that, you won't just be reconciled to God, you'll be reconciled to other humans. When the big superpowers are no longer hostile, the walls between people come down.
- In marriage preparation, we often give couples the advice that they need to pray together. Because if they are seeking to draw near to God, then they will actually draw closer to one another.
 - And we use the analogy of the spokes of a wheel.
 - The closer you come to the centre, the closer the spokes come to each other.
 - The closer we come to Jesus, the closer we come to one another.
- And God has brought us close! V13. *"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ."*
- And so the walls that kept us apart- of race, or class or male/female or background have tumbled down!

"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit".

- We are reconciled to God, but we are reconciled (brought back) to one another.
 - How dare we now exclude someone because they don't come from the right background.
 - How dare we treat someone as different because they have a different skin colour.
 - How dare we put up the satellite dishes of suspicion and hostility.
- Christopher Ash in his excellent book "Remaking a Broken World" says *"the ordinary local church with all its imperfections, weaknesses, oddities and problems has within it the seeds, the spiritual and relational blueprint of a broken world remade. Here at last is not just God restraining human strife, but God actively gathering"*⁴
- Isn't that lovely?
 - In a world where

⁴ "Remaking a Broken World", Christopher Ash, Authentic Media, p 138.

- the news is full of murders and division,
 - where the social media channels are full of hate,
 - and the people are full of despair
 - as they see global politicians putting up walls,
 - God is bringing them down, and he's doing it here in this building.
- But one more quick sub point before we apply all this...

b) THE CHURCH IS A MIRACLE OF GOD'S CONSTRUCTION

- The Bible has so many pictures for God's people...
 - A bride
 - A flock
 - A vine
 - A family
- But here we have a house or building. V19-22:

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

- Like any good building that is going to last, you need foundations.
 - ▲I helped build an earthquake proof building in Nicaragua on a Christian project many years ago, and we spent ages pouring concrete into the ground to make the thing stable. It was ages before the first brick was laid. But it was stronger for those foundations.
- Did you see the foundations of the church?
 - It's the Word of God.
 - ("Built on the foundation of the
 - Apostles- that's the NT
 - Prophets - that's the OT)
 - So essential that we have good Bible teaching or we'll grow wonky.
- And did you see the key stone that gives it all the dimensions and stability and angles? The cornerstone - Jesus Christ- you cannot have a church without Jesus.
- And did you see who the building is?
 - You and me ("you too")!!
- And finally did you see who's living in the church?
 - The Holy Spirit.
- Wow!
 - He's here with us now as we gather.

- We don't go to God in the temple (like the OT)
- God comes to us and makes his home with us!
 - Astonishing.
- So as we conclude our first sermon on being the church
 - Have you joined the church? Have you come to the bridegroom?
 - You do so by coming to Jesus, and experience the washing away of your sins by his blood.
 - And you picture that in baptism as you declare your faith in Father Son and Spirit.
 - You are his bride, his body, his building.
 - He delights in you.
 - You are a miracle.
- And if Jesus takes your identity so seriously,
 - Will you not take your identity seriously also?
 - Will you make church
 - and lifegroup,
 - and the prayer meeting
 - the first priority not the last.
 - And will you take seriously your relationships with one another?
- ▲ Francis Chan is a pastor in the States. One of his church elders, Rob became a Christian in prison. Now he is radically changed. But he looks back on his days in gangs which for much of his life were his family. He imagines what they would have said if he'd made his involvement in the gang a one hour activity on a Sunday morning, "Oh sorry I missed gang, life has been crazy this week". No- gang members are absolutely devoted to each other, they have each other's back. They are all in. But Rob has replaced his gang with his new family, the Church. If Christ takes us seriously, how can we reduce church to an optional hour's activity on a Sunday morning?⁵ It's our very identity.
- We are the bride of Christ, a beautiful bride, a miraculous bride.
 - He is passionate about us.
 - Will we be passionate about him, and about one another?
- Let's pray.

⁵ See "Letters to the Church", Francis Chan, David C Cook Publishing, chapter 4.