



THE BRIDE

Acts 2:42-47

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My son and his fiancée will be getting married this summer. As the father of the groom, I don't have anything to do with planning the bride's side of the wedding, but I did have some ideas for my future daughter-in-law's wedding dress. Take a look at these and see if you don't agree that these are good ideas.

If you're going to make an entrance, make it a long entrance. And don't get just any veil, get a really big veil. Here, the groom is a chef and made his bride's dress out of cake. Now that's original. I suggested the Queen Elizabeth dress, the shower curtain dress, or the Egyptian mummy dress. But this is my favorite one of all. Now that's a wedding dress.

Everyone loves a wedding and nothing is more beautiful than a bride on her wedding day. In her father's eyes, she is still a little girl that needs protecting. In her mother's eyes, she is the daughter who is now a woman. And in her groom's eyes, she is the love of his life. He is attracted to her heart as well as her beauty. And he considers her precious and he adores her, and she knows it.

What makes a bride beautiful? It's her radiant smile, her beautiful dress, and that she's never been happier or look lovelier. But there's something else. The bride is beautiful, not just because of her dress or her makeup or her bouquet. The bride is beautiful because she radiates the love of her groom.

Our relationship to Jesus is illustrated by the vine and branches, the shepherd and the sheep, but it's the image of a bride that best captures our relationship with Jesus. The church is the bride of Christ.¹

At the culmination of human history, when Christ returns, the "the holy city, new Jerusalem" will descend from heaven like "a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2, NAS). And an angel will announce, "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (Revelation 21:9, NAS). And there will be a call to worship. "Let us be glad and rejoice, and let us give honor to him. For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb, and his bride has prepared herself. She has been given the finest of pure white linen to wear. For the fine linen represents the good deeds of God's holy people" (Revelation 19:7-8, NLT).

Over the years, I've led Fellowship's membership class and I always began by asking people, "What do you think most people think when they hear the word church?" And the answer was always the same. Hard wooden pews, formality, legalism, rules, boring, irrelevance. Nothing like the beauty of a bride. And this negative perception has been substantiated in a recent book entitled *UnChristian*, in which research shows that our culture has a growing distaste for the church. The researchers found that the general public perceives those of us in the church as hypocritical, only focused on converts, anti-homosexual, sheltered, too political, and judgmental.² And this overwhelming disdain for the church makes it harder for people to see the real Jesus. I grieve the fact that we, the bride of Christ, have made Jesus harder to find. What we have displayed to the watching world has left a bad taste in their mouths. And my burden is that our church would learn how to make Jesus attractive again.³

Acts 2 is a portrait of the bride of Christ. This is what every church in every generation is supposed to look like. And while Acts 2 outlines the values, objectives, priorities, and even a strategy for the church, it also displays the spirit of its people. And it's that spirit which all of Jerusalem found attractive. So today, I don't want to talk about how to design a church, but about the spirit of the people who make up the church.

What made the church so attractive then and what makes the church attractive today?

The answer is much like the love between a bride and groom. The bride is beautiful, not just because of her dress or her makeup or her bouquet. The bride is beautiful because she radiates the love of her groom. And the church is radiant and beautiful and attractive when it radiates the love of the Savior. Every attitude and every action we see in Acts 2 was the outflow of 3,000 people who fell in love with Jesus. ***The more we radiate our love for God, the more people will be attracted to Jesus.***

HUNGRY

What made the church attractive then and what makes the church attractive today? ***A fresh hunger for God***, radiating a love for God.

“They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). They were devoted to the apostles’ teaching: “Don’t stop now, teach us some more.” They were devoted to fellowship: “Let’s spend some more time together.” They were devoted to breaking bread, the Lord’s Supper: “Let’s talk some more about the cross and what Jesus did for us.” They were devoted to prayer: “Let’s spend some more time in prayer, praising God for all He has done and petitioning Him to meet our needs.”

“They were continually devoting themselves.” They were hungry and they were thirsty for more of God. This phrase means to give oneself completely to a task, to be intense and focused, to endure and persevere in pursuit of something important. The Acts 2 believers were persistent in their pursuit of God.

A. W. Tozer was bothered by too many Christians that seemed to “go through life trying to love an ideal and be loyal to a mere principle.”⁴ God is not an ideal or a principle or a character in a novel. “God is a person.”⁵ The Acts 2 Christians were hungry for more relationship, not more activity; for more intimacy, not more information.⁶ They wanted to encounter God as a person, not just understand Him as a proposition.

As a bride and groom hunger and thirst for each other when apart, so should we, as the bride of Christ, hunger and thirst for Him.

- David had this thirst. “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?” (Psalm 42:1-2, NAS).
- Jeremiah knew this hunger. “When I discovered your words, I devoured them. They are my joy and my heart’s delight” (Jeremiah 15:16, NLT).

- Jesus said, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst. (John 6:35, NAS).
- “He satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things” (Psalm 107:9, NIV). And “blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matthew 5:6, NAS).

People are attracted to someone who is fully devoted. When we radiate our love for Jesus, and hunger and thirst for Him, others will notice and be attracted to Him as well. So, do you hunger for more of God? Do you thirst for Him? Do you want to know Him more, to love Him more, to hear Him more, to serve Him more? Our prayer this morning should be “*Lord, make me hungry for You.*”

AWE

What made the church attractive then and what makes the church attractive today? *A sense of awe in the power and presence of God.*⁷

“Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles” (Acts 2:43). They were experiencing God in ways most people did not. Yet not through some cool song or lighting effects, but through “wonders and signs,” miracles, supernatural evidence of God’s power and presence. They went to bed every night amazed. “Can you believe what God did today?”

Living in awe of God is more than being in the certain mood or singing certain songs. It’s living with a sense of wonder, a sense of wow, a sense of reverence. It’s in every moment, with every breath, and through every situation. It’s realizing that God is real, that He is near, and that He cares. It’s this weighty sense that God is huge and that God is present.

David was in awe of God too. He was so amazed that he offered to honor God by building a grand temple. But God wouldn’t let him, because David had been a “man of war” and had “shed blood.”⁸ But the Lord did allow David’s dream to be fulfilled through his son Solomon. So, David spent the last half of his life accumulating tons of materials for the temple. David wanted to build a one-of-a-kind building for a one-of-a-kind God, a building he would never see, because as he would often say, “O Lord, there is none like You, nor is there any God besides You” (1 Chronicles 17:20). David knew awe because the Lord took his breath away. And he penned the lyrics, “Let the whole world fear the Lord, and let everyone stand in awe of him” (Psalm 33:8, NLT).

The Acts 2 Christians were experiencing “wonders and signs.” Why were they experiencing God’s power and how can we experience His power and presence too? Through prayer. “They were continually devoting themselves ... to prayer.”

Jesus promised, “If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it” (John 14:13, NIV). Jesus invited us to “ask.” Like a child making a request of a parent, we have every right to ask. Jesus’ promise is crammed with possibilities. “Ask Me anything ... and I will do it.” Jesus is saying, “Just tell me what you need and I’ll take care of it.” The Lord once said to His people Israel, “Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance” (Psalm 2:8). God was actually saying, “Ask Me for the world, and I will give it to you.”

One of the most prolific authors on prayer was Civil War chaplain E. M. Bounds, who wrote this about God's promise to answer prayer:⁹

"The promise makes prayer irresistible.¹⁰ ... Each believer can claim the promise as his own.¹¹ ... Either this is so or it's not. If not, then there is nothing in prayer. Then prayer is nothing but words, a verbal performance, an empty, useless exercise. But if it is true, then how vast are the possibilities.¹² ... The answer to prayer is the evidence of God's being. It proves that God lives, that there is a God, who is interested in His creatures, and who listens to them. There is no proof so clear that God exists than prayer and its answer.¹³ ... The promises pledge (obligate) Almighty God to answer prayer.¹⁴ ... (When we pray) His word is at stake."

So, what is our prayer? (1) "*Lord, make me hungry for You,*" and (2) "*Lord, let me see Your power.*"

COMPASSION

What made the church attractive then and what makes the church attractive today? ***Compassion for those in need.*** The church gets the attention of the culture when we model the compassion of Jesus to those in need. "And they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need" (Acts 2:45).

They reacted spontaneously, "as anyone had need." They reacted with sacrifice and liquidated their assets to help people. And later on, Acts 4:32 states that "there was not a needy person among them." People reached into their own pockets and spontaneously and sacrificially met any need that popped up. They practiced what Jesus preached. "If you have two shirts, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry" (Luke 3:11, NLT).

The church should have a reputation for compassion.

- Jesus said, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:16, NAS)
- "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?" (James 2:15-17, NAS).
- "Whoever has the world's possessions and sees his fellow Christian in need and shuts off his compassion against him, how can the love of God reside in such a person? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue but in deed and truth." (1 John 3:17-18, NET).

Over a century after the church was born in Acts 2, the philosopher Aristides observed that the church still had a reputation for compassion. "And (if) there is among them a man that is poor and needy and if they have not an abundance of necessities they fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with the necessary food."¹⁵

For months we have been talking about Convoy of Hope. On April 18, Fellowship is partnering with other churches, government agencies, and non-profit ministries to host a ministry fair for our community. Our vision to serve 5,000-7,000 people with free groceries, medical care, job assistance, and even haircuts. This is a way for our church, and for you personally, to show the love of Christ to our community. Please go to the website at RoswellConvoyofHope.com to see how

you can help. Again, the prayer is that Fellowship would have a reputation for compassion.

So, what is our prayer? (1) “*Lord, make me hungry for You,*” (2) “*Lord, let me see Your power,*” and (3) “*Lord, give me a heart for compassion.*”

LIFE-CHANGE

What made the church attractive then and what makes the church attractive today? ***When we display a changed life.***

“And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common ... Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart” (Acts 2:44, 46).

I know this verse is about community. The words “they” and “together” occur 11 times. It talks about what they shared in “common,” about *koinovia*. But it’s that phrase “day by day” that sticks out to me. There was something different about those 3,000 new converts, and it was attractive. Other people saw how they talked with one another in the marketplace. They saw how husbands treated their wives and parents treated their children. They saw them come from the temple like they enjoyed it. They heard the singing and laughter as they gathered from house to house. And other people saw how they loved each other. Jesus predicted that our love for one another would be the most attractive thing about us. “Love one another, even as I have loved you ... By this ***all men will know*** that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35, NAS).

This is what transformed people look like. This is what a person looks like when Christ is fully alive in them. “Day by day.” A changed life.

People wondered, Why do they sing? Why do they sell their possessions? Why do they have no fear of death? Why do they have such peace? It was because of Jesus.

So, what is our prayer? (1) “*Lord, make me hungry for You,*” (2) “*Lord, let me see Your power,*” and (3) “*Lord, give me a heart for compassion,*” and (4) “*Lord, transform me and change whatever You must in me so that others are attracted to Jesus.*”

FAVOR

What made the church attractive then and what makes the church attractive today? A fresh hunger for God, a sense of awe over the power and presence of God, compassion for those in need, a changed life. And the impact? The church of Acts 2 was “having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). More and more people were attracted to Jesus because of the way these first Christians lived their lives.

As a historian and author of Acts, Luke was fond of inserting one verse status reports. In Acts 2:42, “Those who had believed (Peter’s) word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls.” But that was only the beginning, the Holy Spirit sparked something

contagious. In 2:47, “The Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.” Every day Jews, entrenched in traditional religion, came to see Jesus as the Messiah. Miracles began to flow throughout Jerusalem, yet so did persecution. Many Christians were put in jail for their faith, and still in 4:4, “Many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.” In 5:14, “And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number.” In 6:7, “The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem.” It spread to the city of Antioch, where “the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:21). Persecution did not kill the church, nor silence its message. Just the opposite happened. The church expanded dramatically, and lives were changed. And why? Because of the beauty of the bride.

CONCLUSION

What made the church attractive then and what makes the church attractive today is when the bride is presented in all her beauty. The bride is beautiful, not just because of her dress or her makeup or her bouquet. The bride is beautiful because she radiates the love of her groom. And the church is radiant and beautiful and attractive when it radiates the love of our Savior. ***The more we radiate our love for God, the more people will be attracted to Jesus.***

Years ago, Acts 2 made its impact on me as a young pastor. And I wondered, could the church really look like that? If it could, I dreamed of being a part of it. I still have that dream.

- I dream of being a part of a church that attracts people to Jesus.
- I dream of a place where Jesus becomes more and more the focus of all we do. Like John said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). More and more about Jesus and less and less about us.
- I dream of that bride in all her beauty, a church that offers a beautiful and satisfying solution to what the world really needs.
- A place where people hunger for God, who love Him, and who dread the thought of dishonoring Him in any way.
- I dream of a church where people hunger for truth. A place where the Word of God is not just studied, but digested. A place where people are being transformed into the image of Christ.
- I dream of a place of where people live in awe of God. Where worship is characterized by uninhibited joy and humble reverence. Raising our hands one moment and falling to our knees the next. I dream of a church where God’s presence is undeniable and a place where people experience God’s power in ways that make them say, “It can only be God.”
- I dream of place where anyone can find grace and anyone can be forgiven, and a community where everyone is accepted and can find a home in God’s family.
- I dream of a church being a place where people “rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15). A place that is safe to share one’s worries and fears. A place where no one hurts alone. A place where every person is comforted when they need it and challenged when they need it.
- I dream of a church with a reputation for compassion. A place like Jesus described. If someone has two shirts, he will give one to the person who has none. I dream of needy people in our community saying, “I know that church cares.”
- I dream of a church where every person discovers the Ephesians 2:10 purpose for which they were created.

- I dream of a church that is salt and light. A church that not only proclaims the gospel from the pulpit, but a place where every person is burdened for a lost friend or neighbor, where every person is close enough to someone without Christ to be able to share the gospel of Christ.
- I dream of a church where love for Jesus is so real and so genuine and so life-changing that people are not turned off to Christianity, but instead attracted to Him by the way we live.

It's just a dream, but could Fellowship be such a church? What if it were more than a dream? What if it became a prayer? Would you pray for that? Would you pray that Fellowship would become that kind of church, so attractive that it would said of us, "and the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved"?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, make me hungry for You. Give me a fresh hunger for You, for Your Word, and a fresh expectation in prayer.

Lord, make my jaw drop at Your power. Let me see You work in my life. Let me go to bed at night amazed, saying, "I can't believe all that God is doing. Oh, how good is God."

Lord, give me a heart of compassion. Make me the kind of person who will spontaneously sacrifice what I have in order to help someone in need. Show me when I need to give away my stuff or share my resources to help someone else.

Lord, transform me and change whatever You have to in me so that others can see You in me.

Lord, make my life attractive. Oh, don't let my life turn off anyone away from You. Use my life to show people how wonderful You are. Use my life to draw people to You.

In the name of the one who loved us so much, Amen.

NOTES

1. God ordained marriage for ultimate oneness; physical oneness, emotional oneness, spiritual oneness. And in Ephesians 5, Paul talked about the oneness between a husband and wife to illustrate the oneness between Christ and the Christians. Ephesians 5:25-27 instructs husbands to love their wives like Christ loved the church. In doing so, Paul repeated the metaphor of the church as the bride of Christ. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 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” (Ephesians 5:25-27, NAS). “This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:32, NAS). See also 2 Corinthians 11:2. Just as a husband and wife are one, so Christ and His church are one. Just as a husband and wife are intimate, so Christ and His church are intimate. Just as a husband chooses a bride, so Christ chooses us. Just as a husband wants his bride to know how much he loves her, so Christ wants His bride, the church, to know how much He loves her.
2. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What A New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007, 2008), pages 29-30.
3. In the words of John Stott, the church was created to be a “counterculture”; offering an attractive, beautiful, God-filled alternative to what the world offers. But not a legalistic, militant, or pietistic alternative. The Greek word for church is *ekklesia* and means the “called out ones.” We are called out of the world and yet also sent into the world; sent into the world to model this attractive, beautiful, God-filled alternative (see John 17:15, 16, 20:21). [John Stott, *The Living Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007), page 12.]
4. A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, Inc., 1982), page 50.
5. *Ibid.*, page 13.
6. See *Satisfy the Soul* by Dr. Bruce Demarest, pages 94f.
7. To stand in awe of God is to feel both love and fear at the same time. It is the combination of feeling respectful and feeling afraid at the same time. Of feeling protected and intimidated at the same time. Of shuddering and smiling at the same time. Knees knocking and hearts pounding at the same time.
8. See 1 Chronicles 17 and 28:3.
9. E. M. Bounds, *The Possibilities of Prayer* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980 edition), Some quotes have been modified with updated language.
10. *Ibid.*, page 16.
11. *Ibid.*, page 26.
12. *Ibid.*, pages 40-41.
13. *Ibid.*, page 86.
14. *Ibid.*, page 96.
15. *The Apology of Aristides On Behalf of the Christians.*