

Marriage of Jonah Benjamin Phelps-Roper and Julia Marie Burton Jaques
November 19, 2023

Dearly beloved, we “are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an unnumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.” (Hebrews 12:22-24). This is the reality of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We gather today in the presence of God and all the inhabitants of heaven to witness the joining together of Jonah Benjamin Phelps-Roper and Julia Marie Burton Jaques in marriage. The members of this body of Christ give our assent, and attest, that this marriage is appropriate and scriptural: neither of you is bound to another spouse, and you are equally yoked together in Christ (you have each made, and currently maintain, a good profession of Christ in your words and your deeds).

Marriage was the first covenant between human beings, being instituted by God Himself in the Garden of Eden, and His standard applies to every human who would enter into this covenant: one man, one woman, one lifetime.

“And the LORD God said, *It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him...* And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, *This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.*” (Genesis 2:18, 21-24).

This covenant is emblematic of Christ and His bride, the church. Therefore, as we rejoice with this man and this woman on this joyous occasion, I pray that our hearts would also be renewed with a fervent love for, and a longing to see, our Bridegroom.

“Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And

he saith unto me, Write, Blessed *are* they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.” (Revelation 19:7-9)
Jonah, please take the ring that you have brought and place it upon Julia’s finger while I recite the vows that you are hereby entering into with her as your wife:

Do you, Jonah Benjamin Phelps-Roper, take this woman, Julia Marie Burton Jaques, to be your wife; to love, nourish, and cherish her above every other creature, and to render unto her due benevolence; to dwell with her according to knowledge, giving honor unto her as unto the weaker vessel; to have your heart safely trust in her; to provide for her temporal and spiritual good; to be not bitter against her, and to deal not treacherously against her in any way, but rather to remember that she is your companion and the wife of your youth and of your covenant; and to keep yourself only to her as being heirs together of the grace of life, until the day comes that Christ returns in power and glory or that God Almighty sees fit to separate you from her in death?

Julia, please take the ring that you have brought and place it upon Jonah’s finger while I recite the vows that you are hereby entering into with him as your husband:

Do you, Julia Marie Burton Jaques, take this man, Jonah Benjamin Phelps-Roper, to be your husband; to love him above every other creature, and to render unto him due benevolence; to reverence and submit yourself to him as the guide of your youth and as your head, even as Christ is the head of the church; to adorn yourself with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, being in subjection to him, as it is fit in the Lord, not having a contentious, brawling or angry spirit, but rather obeying him with a willing heart, doing well, and not being afraid with any amazement; and to keep yourself only to him as being heirs together of the grace of life, until the day comes that Christ returns in power and glory or that God Almighty sees fit to separate you from him in death?

You are now husband and wife – no longer twain, but one flesh. The membership of this called out assembly of believers now bears witness to this covenant that you have both made before God. We bear witness that you both have done so willingly, with understanding, and in accordance with scripture, and that it is therefore lawful and binding in the eyes of God Almighty.

“Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” (Matthew 19:6)

Sunday, November 19, 2023

This Is A Great Mystery: But I Speak Concerning Christ And The Church. (Ephesians 5:32)

Several years ago, I worked with a young man who, one day, publicly announced to all of his coworkers that he had just gotten engaged and the wedding would be sometime in the next year. A couple older men in the office, both divorced, and both self-identifying as “Christian,” chortled words like this: “Why don’t you save yourself the trouble, go find a woman that you hate, and give her half of everything you own.” And there we have the attitude of this generation towards the marriage bond. It’s become trivial, disposable, the butt of jokes. This is certainly not how God views marriage. Like I mentioned in a previous sermon, sometimes it’s helpful to go back to the Garden of Eden on issues of great importance:

And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. (Genesis 2:21-24)

You’ll note that implicit in these words is the indissoluble and monogamous nature (between one man and one woman) of this bond. And just in case there was any confusion on the matter, Jesus says this:

But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. (Mark 10:6-9)

I’d like to talk about this “one flesh” bond today. But I’m going to put the focus on a much more important bond – that between Christ and His church. Human marriage is an emblem of Christ and His bride, the church. The scripture testifies in many places to that fact, and it was this way from the very beginning – Paul tells us as much in Ephesians 5:32. In the Garden of Eden, the Lord God knew what He was doing and what He was planning for His elect, even before the Fall happened. I’ve always been struck, for example, with the parallel between Adam’s side being opened to remove a rib to make the woman, and Christ’s side being pierced

to secure the salvation of His bride; the parallel between the man leaving his father and mother and Christ “[coming] forth from the Father, and [coming] into the world” (John 16:28); the parallel between God bringing the woman to the man and the Father giving a people to His Son (see John 17); etc.

From day one, marriage has been an emblem of Christ and His church – the whole plan of creation involved this mystery of Christ and His church. It is woven into the very fabric of creation. This is why it is so distressing and offensive when people play fast and loose with marriage (in our day, we see it primarily with fornication, adultery, divorce and remarriage, and same-sex marriage). I mentioned several sermons ago that human marriage is one of the key metaphors used in scripture to demonstrate our union with Christ (along with other metaphors, like body, temple/building/house, vine/branches, putting on clothing), and I hope to throw a little bit of light on that today. Today is a particularly good time to remember this foundational thing, as we celebrate the marriage of these two sheep of God. It is a time of change that impacts the whole body, and we know that Satan loves to exploit times of change. I imagine there is a whole host of emotions pulsating through the body (joy, fear, uncertainty, sorrow, excitement, and perhaps some more patently sinful ones like covetousness, jealousy, pride, discontentment, etc.). So, I say this is a good time to firmly set ourselves on the foundation of Christ and our one-flesh bond with Him. Now, there are a lot of passages that I could talk about, but Lord willing, the way I’m going to approach this is to go through four from the epistles of Paul. As we go through this, I hope you’ll see that there is much doctrine, ethical practice, and comfort grounded on the marital union between Christ and His church. Let’s start with the most comprehensive passage on the matter out of Ephesians 5:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband. (Ephesians 5:22-33)

There is a lot of stuff in this passage about the “one flesh” nuptial union between Christ and His church. I’m not going to go through this exhaustively, but I’d like to offer these thoughts:

- Human marriage is the most personal and intimate of all human relationships. Our being joined to Christ is a personal thing, as opposed to an impersonal thing. In other words, Christ isn’t some far-removed, hands-off King who decided to save some people and put them under the domain of His kingdom to obey Him. I’m afraid that’s how many people view Him, and that kind of thing results in coldness, lifelessness, slothfulness, indifference, lethargy, etc. Imagine the dysfunction of a married couple who don’t really talk to each other and are like ships passing in the night. On the contrary, He is very near us, even living in us, and we in Him. It is personal, intimate. No other metaphor in the scripture conveys this close relationship to Christ like marriage.
- Marriage involves two individuals joined together into one corporate body. Being married does not do away with the fact that there are still two distinct individuals, each with different roles in the relationship. This is important to understand. When people hear the term “union with Christ” they might get some very strange notions and end up with some nebulous mysticism where they’re absorbed into God and all distinctions are lost. It’s like some pantheistic “becoming one with the universe” where God is the universe, I am the universe, and I am God. This metaphor of marriage keeps us from heading down that foolish path. Christ and His church are one flesh, and we will never be separated from one another, but we are still distinct from one another. Christ remains the Lord, and the church submits to Christ.
- The instructions given to husbands and wives in this passage are grounded on Christ and His church. In other words, human marriages are a reflection of Christ and His Church, and not the other way around. For example, it **doesn’t** say, “Christ is the head of the church, even as the husband is the head of the wife.” Rather, it says, “the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church.”
- This is a gracious union, initiated by Christ, sustained by Christ, cared for by Christ, benefited by Christ, etc. He is her head and savior, He loves her and gave Himself for her, He sanctifies and cleanses her so that He may present her to Himself as a glorious church without spot or wrinkle, He makes her holy and without blemish, He cherishes her, etc. In all this, the church is passive, graciously receiving these blessings. The church has done nothing to earn or achieve these things. There is only one activity in the entire passage that the church does in response to Him being the Savior of the body, and that is submission. This shines a bright spotlight on the importance of submission to Christ. We are His church, His bride, and we must learn to submit to Him.
- This is an exclusive union. There is one Christ, one church, and one eternal life together. If the rest of the scripture was silent on the doctrine of the limited design of the atonement, I believe that this passage alone would be enough to prove the case. “Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.” His church consists of those for

whom He gave Himself, no more and no less. He died for His Bride, and only His Bride. The church belongs to Him to the exclusion of all others. The church for whom He gave Himself is the same church to whom He's married. I don't know how many other ways I can say this. But I do know that if someone comes peddling any other doctrine, it is a false doctrine. You better watch out if you start hearing talk of multiple brides, or treacherous language like "it doesn't say He died ONLY for the church," or any other such nonsense. It's no accident that when you start tinkering with God's institution of the marriage bond (fornication, adultery, divorce/remarriage, same-sex marriage, polygamy, etc.), it always strikes at the heart of the exclusive union between one man, one woman, for one lifetime. And that strikes at the heart of Christ and His Bride.

- To build on the previous point, Christ is very jealous to preserve this one man, one woman, one lifetime emblem of marriage. Yes, God tolerated some aberrations to the marriage bond in the OT, but Jesus tells us it was "because of the hardness of your hearts" that this was allowed. (Matthew 19:8). But the coming of Christ has shined some light on this subject, so we have no excuse. If God were to allow an "anything goes" approach to marriage (like we see happening in our generation), it would have profound impacts on many fundamental doctrines. I mentioned limited atonement above. Add to that the perseverance of the saints, salvation by Christ alone, the fact that "there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5), eternal life, losing your life for His sake, and many others. I don't know what to make of same-sex marriage other than it adds to the mix utter confusion and exudes death and barrenness – there's not even a pretense of salvation there.

Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. (1 Corinthians 6:15-17)

This passage sheds a little bit more light on the "one flesh" union. And it harks back to the passage out of Ephesians – "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." (5:30). A "member" refers to "a limb or part of the body." The image is that the church is the bride of Christ, the body of Christ, and each member of the church is a part of that body. So you see, if you are a member of the body of Christ, it is a grievous thing for you to take yourself and become a member of a harlot. The context of the passage is about fornication, which in this case would include any sexual activity outside of marriage. If a member of the body of Christ fornicates, you have dragged the body of Christ and therefore Christ Himself into the bed of a whore. It is a grievous offense. You are supposed to be in a "one flesh" union with the Lord Jesus Christ, but instead, you're becoming "one flesh" with a harlot. His point is, because you share in the body of Christ, you must not share in the body of a harlot.

You see, fornication is not wrong merely because I said so, or because there will be bad consequences, etc. Paul grounds the whole argument on your unity with Christ.

When you engage in fornication, you have created a counterfeit one-flesh union that is reserved for the marriage bed. And let me remind everyone, there is very metaphoric language here. The “one flesh” in this passage is a physical thing, but it parallels the spiritual union that we have with Christ – “he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.” It’s a spiritual thing. But there is something about that spiritual union with Christ that reaches into the physical way that we use our bodies in this life. We may not understand all of this because there is some deep mystery to it, but there’s no mystery to this: Flee fornication! Don’t make the members of Christ the members of an harlot.

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:2-3)

There are some passages that sound like marriage to Christ is a present reality, and other passages (like this one and the marriage of the Lamb in Revelation 19) that sound like the marriage doesn’t happen until the future. I know that others have delivered sermons on that topic, so the only thing I’m going to say about it is to once again remind everyone that we’re talking about metaphoric language and we can learn valuable things from both ways of looking at it, and we need to try to get to the bottom of what each passage is teaching us. I believe this passage uses the metaphor of espousal to represent that time between when we first believe and when we are presented to Christ in heaven (which will ultimately be in the Revelation 19 marriage of the Lamb). And Paul is worried about them. He’s worried that their minds are going to be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ during that interim period. And if the truth be told, it’s the same thing I worry about often. Gill tells us that this simplicity that is in Christ is “*salvation alone by Him.*” Simplicity indeed! Paul is worried of another Jesus, another spirit, another gospel finding its way into the church and corrupting us.

I think a main point here is that turning from Christ to anything else is an act of marital infidelity. If you dabble around with other gods, with idols, with philosophies and vain deceits (Colossians 2:8), etc., you have cheated on the Savior. It spoils our chastity. Just as Eve was beguiled by Satan, we could be beguiled. And I may be pressing things too far, but this beguiling and corruption of the mind that Eve was involved in sure caused problems in the marriage between Adam and Eve! All you have to do is read Genesis 3 and you’ll see that. Fresh from his sin and rebellion against God, Adam immediately throws both Eve and God under the bus: “And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me

of the tree, and I did eat.” (v. 12). Suspicion, blame, friction, etc., have all been introduced into the relationship. That doesn’t make for warm relations. And I’m telling you that when you leave the simplicity of Christ through deceit and corruption for some idol or false doctrine, you also introduce problems. I’m not saying that the Lord God can’t or won’t forgive you for straying – of course He can and He will for any of His sheep, and He’ll go even further than that and He’ll be the one to bring you back. But I am saying you’re introducing unnecessary difficulties into the relationship when you do this.

Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. (Romans 7:1-4)

This is a familiar passage because it comes up often when we’re talking about the sin of divorce and remarriage. And while that’s a truth that the passage is grounded on, that’s not the point of the passage. The point is in verse 4 – “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.” I think the following passages might help us understand what Paul is saying here:

For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me...But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. (Galatians 2:19-20, 4:4-5)

So, I think the sense of the passage is something like this:

- Christ was made under the law. The life that He lived on earth was in perfect obedience to it, and the death that He died on the cross perfectly satisfied all the condemning power of it.
- In being united to Christ, when Christ was crucified, we were crucified with Him. We died with Him.

- Since Christ satisfied all the requirements of the law, and since we died with Him, we are now dead to the law in the sense that it no longer has any power over us as a covenant of works. That is, it can no longer condemn us, and we no longer see obedience to it as a way to earn righteousness in the sight of God.
- Having died to the law, we are now free to marry the risen Christ, to newness of life and bringing forth fruit unto God. This fruit that we bring forth involves being obedient to the law of God for the right reason – that is, out of love for Him. We don't slavishly obey out of fear of condemnation, and we don't self-righteously obey as if this can bring us favor with God – we are dead to the law in those senses. We obey because we love Him.

Now, it's clear in this passage who the "second husband" is – it is "him who is raised from the dead" (that is, the risen Christ). But there is some debate on who the "first husband" is. Some say the first husband was the law, and some say that the first husband was Christ as He lived and died under the law (i.e., Christ before His resurrection). Both have some merit. Either way, there was certainly a relationship with the law that we are now dead to in certain senses. But it is very hard to let go of that relationship with the law. Some of us want to hold onto it with a death grip (no pun intended). And that shows itself in a few telltale ways:

1. Obeying God only out of fear of punishment.
2. Obeying God because we think it will garner favor in his sight or impress Him (or others).
3. Obedience becoming an end in and of itself.

All those are forms of the legalism I spoke about a few sermons ago. But there's no reason for any of it. We have a new husband now. He loves us. He gave Himself for us. He already obeyed for us. He was already condemned for us. Obedience to the law for any reason other than love for Him will get you nowhere.

Thomas Boston has some colorful language for us on the subject: *"In the best of the children of God here, there are such remains of the legal disposition and inclination of heart to the way of the covenant of works [i.e., works-righteousness, working your way to heaven through obedience to the law], that as they are never quite free of it in their best duties, so at sometimes their services smell so rank of it, as if they were alive to the law, and still dead to Christ. And sometimes the Lord for their correction, trial, and exercise of faith, suffers the ghost of the dead husband, the law, as a covenant of works, to come in upon their souls and make demands on them, command, threaten, and affright them, as if they were alive to it, and it to them. And it is one of the hardest pieces of practical religion, to be dead to the law in such cases. This death to it admits of degrees, is not alike in all believers, and is perfect in none till the death of the body."*

So, wrapping things up, there's a lot we can learn from this marriage of Christ and His Bride. We see the grace of God, the personal nature of His salvation, the love of Christ for His church, etc. And we have very practical implications. For example, the command to submit to Him, and the prohibition of the following: fornication, infidelity in leaving the simplicity of Christ, and clinging to the law instead of Christ. It is better than any human marriage could ever be.

I'd like to conclude with just a few more thoughts I had comparing and contrasting human marriage with the marriage of Christ and His bride:

- Both parties in a human marriage are fallen sinners. But Christ is not. So at least in this sense, the metaphor will "limp."
- You go into a marriage knowing that this is something you want to do, but there's only so much you can understand up front. You don't quite know what you're getting into, and you'll find that there's a lot more to it than you were expecting. It is the same for a person to be a disciple of Christ.
- In a marriage, "such shall have trouble in the flesh." (1 Corinthians 7:28). Likewise, "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (2 Timothy 3:12).
- In a marriage, you grow in knowledge and love of one another. Likewise, Paul's prayer was that we might "know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." (Ephesians 3:19) and Peter tells us to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 3:18). This happens progressively over time.
- In a marriage, you generally start off enamored with one another but soon the honeymoon is over, and you realize that you're both sinners. Contrarily, Christ came into it knowing full good and well what we were. In fact, He found the most vile bride He could find, but determined to love her and make her glorious.
- In a marriage, something about your spouse attracts you. Other people might look on the situation in befuddlement. Likewise, with Christ, we look upon him and see one who is "fairer than the children of men." (Psalm 45:2). Others look on Him and their experience is that "there is no beauty that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53:2) or "what is thy beloved more than another beloved?" (Song of Solomon 5:9)
- All things become common in a marriage. In our marriage with Christ, He took our sins on Himself. In exchange, we get Him, all that He ever did, His inheritance, and all the blessings He has. We may boldly claim it all as our own. See 1 Corinthians 1:30; Jeremiah 23:6, 33:16; 2 Corinthians 5:21.
- You're either married or you're not. You don't become more "married" as time goes on. There's no such thing as "partial marriage." Similarly, you're either saved or you're not. You're either joined to Christ or not.

Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices. (Song of Solomon 8:14)