

Session 9 Our Bridal Identity in the Knowledge of God

INTRODUCTION

From the very beginning, from the eternal councils in the Godhead, long before the earth was created, God the Father determined that He would give His Son an inheritance. He promised Jesus something that Jesus has waited for from ages long ago.

That inheritance is an eternal companion. God promised Him a companion who would rule this vast empire called “the kingdom of God” with Him. This eternal companion is an affection-filled bride who would be equally yoked to Him in love. She would love Him in the way that He loved her. She would love the Father in the way that He loved the Father, and that’s what was moving God the Father when He spoke and brought forth natural creation. He wanted a companion for His son.

THE MARRIAGE OF ADAM AND EVE, THE FIRST HINT OF A DIVINE MYSTERY

It wasn’t good that His Son should rule alone. In Genesis 2 when Adam, the first Adam, who was a type of the last Adam, which is Jesus, was brought forth, the Father declared over him, “It is not good for man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18). He promised then to make a partner suitable for him.

That’s a well-known verse. The Scriptures make it clear in Ephesians 5:32 that when God was talking to Adam, He was talking about Jesus and His bride. That’s what Paul the apostle said 4,000 years later. He said, “You know back in Genesis 2? God was really talking about Jesus and His bride” (Eph. 5:32, paraphrased). Yes, He was addressing Adam, but that’s not all He was addressing. He was looking right into the face of His Son, and saying, “It is not good for Man to be alone. I will make You a partner suitable for You.”

I believe He looked at Jesus and said, “It is not good for You to rule alone. I will make You a partner suitable to You.” That’s the first declaration that we have of the promise, in parabolic form. It’s a parable, because for 4,000 years of the Old Testament, from Adam to Paul, they didn’t understand that He was talking about the Messiah and the redeemed of the human race. When God the Father put Adam to sleep, He pierced His side and took out of it a rib, from which He fashioned and formed a companion. Then, when Eve was brought forth, the Father pronounced over Adam, “You shall leave your father and your mother.” He was giving the order of marriage. He said, “You should cleave unto your wife, and the two will become one.”

It’s the declaration of which Paul says 4,000 years later in Ephesians 5:32, “He was talking about Jesus and the redeemed.” So Jesus was put to death by God the Father. Adam was put to sleep; Jesus was put to death. Adam’s side was pierced, and so was Jesus’. Out of that pierced side and out of that deep sleep of death came forth a bride. Genesis 2 really was a picture of God’s eternal purpose. In the original creation, God the Father was giving a picture of His eternal purpose. It’s not just a coincidence that the picture adds up right. It really was the first hint of the mystery of God hidden from ages past.

THROUGH THE CHURCH, THE MANIFOLD WISDOM OF GOD WAS MADE KNOWN

It says in Ephesians 3:9 that God had a plan, a mystery. A mystery is a plan that He hid. It’s a very determined plan. The blueprint was clear. The Father’s blueprint was very, very clear before Genesis 1, and that’s what Paul says. The mystery of God in the New Testament is a fascinating subject. The mystery is a very determined plan that God hides until a specific point, and very specifically He hid it until His Son took up the form of a man and

paid the price of sin. Then the plan was revealed. The angels didn't know it; the prophets didn't know it. The principalities and powers didn't know it. The Father knew it; the Son knew it; the Holy Spirit knew it, but no one else knew it.

After Jesus became a man and took upon Himself the penalty of sin, and paid for redemption, and paid for His bride, then the Spirit of God revealed it to the holy apostles. The angels said, "So that's what's been going on. We knew You were up to something. We knew something was going on all along." They weren't allowed to look into it with understanding. God said the very bride herself, the Church, would be the vehicle that He would use to make the plan known even to the angels. Of course, in the very act of revealing it to the angels, the Church is stumbling through it, not even certain herself with any great clarity what's going on.

You can write Ephesians 3:10 there, that it was through the Church that the manifold wisdom of God was made known to the powers and principalities. Another verse tells us that the angels long to understand (1 Pet. 1:12). The angels are longing and looking into the Church to have understanding of what's going on. So the angels are watching as dramatic spectators. Of course, they're servants of the bride. They're servants of the redeemed, but they're putting it together as time unfolds. Of course, the Father always knew what He was doing. He knew what the secret blueprint was from the beginning.

THE SON WHO MADE GLAD THE HEART OF HIS FATHER FROM ETERNITY PAST

That's why it's so clear in Genesis 2, because the Lord wanted us to look back at that and say, "You were doing this all along."

He says, "Yes, that's always what I was up to. When I spoke and created the earth and when I brought forth the human race, that's what I was always up to. It wasn't a secondary plan. It was always the first plan, the primary plan: to provide a companion for My beloved Son."

I love Proverbs 10:1. It says, "A wise son makes his father's heart glad" (Prov. 10:1, paraphrased), and there was a wise Son who made His Father's heart glad, and the Father said to Him, "I will provide a companion for You. She will thrill your heart forever."

That's what the whole drama of the human race is about. That's why you live. That's what God had in His mind. That was the genius in the mind of God when you were conceived and brought forth. God says, "I have plans for you; I have big plans for you," and we're stumbling around in the dark thinking, "Oh my life is worth nothing," and the Lord says, "No I have big plans for you."

That's your story. Again, we've seen several times that our life is hidden in Christ (Col. 3:3). It isn't made manifest clearly to the natural mind; it's hidden in Christ; it's locked up until Jesus reveals it by the Word of God in our spirit. The truth of the beauty and the very purpose of our life is hidden and held back. The meaning is held back until we connect with Jesus. Your life is hidden until you connect with Jesus; and, through the written Word of God, the *logos* of God, and the Holy Spirit under Jesus' leadership, we grow progressively into the revelation of our life.

Of course, we don't have the full revelation of it until the day of eternity. We don't really understand. I don't even really understand the stuff that I'm talking about. It preaches easy, but I'm trying to really get this down myself.

Just so you know, as I say this I say to myself, “I really believe it this time. I mean, I’m really going to go for it.” So, I’m still crying out that God would unveil this, the purpose of my life, locked up in these truths, in a greater way.

HOSEA, THE PROPHET OF THE BRIDEGROOM REVELATION

The second chapter of Hosea must have been one of Jesus’ favorite passages of Scripture, if there is such a thing. It’s 700 BC, 700 years before the incarnation, and Jesus is looking down over the balcony of heaven. He hears one of His prophets proclaim what I believe to be the theme, the truth that is dearest to His heart in terms of redemption. Hosea is speaking in Hosea 2:16 about the generation that will witness the return of the Lord. The book of Hosea is fourteen chapters long, and it goes back and forth between two time frames. First it touches 700 years BC, Hosea’s generation, in which Israel was unfaithful. Then, without a moment’s notice, in the next verse it goes right to the end of the age and describes the people of God in the generation in which the Lord returns. It goes a few verses that way and then it switches back to 700 years before the birth of Christ, describing the rebellious nation of Israel in Hosea’s time. Then it switches back to the end of time. It goes back and forth between those two generations: Hosea’s generation and the generation in which the Lord returns.

For any of you who have studied Hosea, that’s a very common way in the prophets. Most of the Minor Prophets go back and forth between their generation and the end of the age. It takes a bit of study and research to figure out which is which, but some of it is very, very obvious, and in Hosea 2:14-23 he’s switching to the end of the age, describing the generation of the Lord’s return. And in verse 16, Hosea says, “It shall be in that day” (Hos. 2:16). What a phrase. He’s talking about 2,700 years later. That phrase is fairly prominent in the book of Hosea, as it is in the Minor Prophets in general, talking about the generation in which the Lord returns, culminating with the second coming. That whole time frame is called, “In that day.”

In Luke 17:26, Jesus talks about the end of the age, and He refers to it in the strangest way. He calls it “the days of the Son of God” (Lk. 17:26, paraphrased). Did you know that there’s still a time frame in natural history that will be called “the days of the Son of God”? And I believe “the days of the Son of God” speaks of those last moments of natural history, that generation. Whether it’s one year or forty years, I don’t know. It’s in those final moments of natural time when the purpose of Jesus comes to maturity. It’s called “the days of the Son of God.” It isn’t talking about His earthly ministry; He’s talking about the end of the age, culminating with His second coming. That’s what Hosea is talking about when he says, “in that day.”

“YOU WILL CALL ME, ‘MY HUSBAND,’ AND SHALL NO LONGER CALL ME, ‘MY MASTER’”

There are so many glorious descriptions found in Hosea 2:14-23. I mean one-liners that possess in them a volume of thought. I mean, these lines could each be a book in the heart of God. Each one of them has such layers of meaning. Hosea, out of his obedience to the Holy Spirit, is delivering these lines. So many of the prophetic descriptions of the end of the age are one-liners of which, if the Lord was standing here, He would say, “I could go on and on and on about each one. Each line is a title of a book that’s in My heart,” the Lord might say. So this is by no means a comprehensive description, is my point.

Here’s the verse that I think is one of Jesus’ favorite passages of the Old Testament: “It shall be in that day,” says the Lord, “that you will call Me, ‘My Husband,’ and no longer call me, ‘My Master’” (Hos. 2:16).

Hosea says, “In that day, when you relate to the Messiah, when you address the Messiah, when you worship the Messiah, you will call the Messiah, ‘My Husband.’ You’ll not only call Him, ‘My Lord and my Master.’” It would be an unbalanced statement to say we will never call Jesus, “Lord and Master,” because in the Book of Revelation, in the eternal city in Revelation 21 and 22, we do call Him, “Lord and Master.” In the poetic language of the Bible, that poetic, prophetic poetry of Scripture that God is emphasizing, I don’t think He’s declaring that we will never refer to Jesus as Lord or Master, but that the dominant, the main identity of the people of God will be wrapped up in this. The defining cry of the people of God before Jesus, the dominant cry will be “My Husband”; that is what they’ll say when they come before Him. There are many facets of Jesus’ personality; there are many facets of His relationship to us. But there’s none higher, in my opinion, than the function of Jesus as the heavenly Bridegroom to the bride, the one in which He left His Father.

THE DOMINANT CRY OF THE SAINTS WILL BE THE CRY OF BRIDAL LOVE

“You shall leave your father and mother and cleave unto your bride” (Gen. 2:23, paraphrased). He will cleave unto to her forever in the highest, most intimate, sacred relationship that God ever declared for the human race: a marriage relationship. It’s the only relationship in which you leave your natural family in order to form a new one. Jesus, the Word of God, said this is the only relationship that can get close to describing the leaving of the incarnation and crucifixion, and the cleaving of what Jesus did to bring forth the human race into redemption, into infinite exaltation. We have no comprehension of how high we’re exalted in the redemptive plan of God. The defining cry, the dominant cry of the people of God in that day—not only the one, but the defining one—will be this cry of worship: “My Husband.” That will be the defining cry of the people of God in that day.

THE LAST GENERATION WILL DECLARE THIS REVELATION

Now, we will call Jesus our husband because we see something in Him that the Church for 2,000 years hadn’t seen very clearly. Every now and then there’s a little group or a ministry or a preacher that rises up who trumpets the message of Jesus as the heavenly Bridegroom and the Church as the Bride of Christ, but it’s just a momentary emphasis that appears in church history for an instant here and there. For example, Bernard of Clairvaux, one of the great mystics of history, who lived in the twelfth century in France, emphasized the Bride of Christ. He was one of the most famous preachers in Catholic history, but it was just a moment on the screen of church history. Every now and then you saw it for a single, shining moment, and it disappears again. Many of the great preachers of the gospel, such as Spurgeon and Wesley and Whitfield and Finney and Jonathan Edwards, hardly ever referenced the subject. For years and years and years you hardly hear it mentioned, and then all of a sudden the Lord will raise up a voice that was just enough to keep it on the screen—just enough to keep the theme alive in church history. But in that day there will be one generation, the generation in which the Lord returns, where across the earth, the dominant understanding, the defining cry of the people of God, will be, “We’re Your bride. You’re many things to us, but foremost You’re our Husband.”

THE POSITION OF INTIMATE UNDERSTANDING OF THE HEART OF GOD

Now, being the Bride of Christ isn’t an issue of male or female. It has nothing to do with gender. Some men say, “Well, I don’t really relate to being the Bride of Christ.”

Well, the women are the sons of God. It has nothing to do with gender; it has to do with proximity of nearness to the heart of God. It has to do with privilege and intimacy. It has nothing to do with male and female. Being sons of God speaks of being an heir. Being the Bride of Christ speaks of that position of nearness and intimacy and tenderness in which God shares everything in His heart and brings you into the experience of intimate

understanding of His heart and empowers you to give your heart fully back to Him. It's things like that that He's talking about.

As I said the other night at the Wednesday night meeting, John was this Rambo apostle, this son of thunder who called down fire, this tough man of whom Jesus said, "You're a fiery man, John. You're a thunderous man." Because he knew of God's desire for him, he could lay his head on Jesus' breast. His masculinity wasn't in any way undermined, but rather was established in that revelation and in that nearness to God, in that posture of leaning on His breast. There's nothing so powerful as a strong man who walks in truth so much so that he can lean on the Lord's breast. John is a picture in the New Testament of what David was in the Old Testament. They stand as the shining examples of intimacy with God and warriors who were lovers, worshiping warriors. That's what I would call it. It's the bridal king, the loving bride, but the king spirit, that royal spirit that was on them. They worshiped, and they were warriors in God, and that spirit dwells upon men and women. Deborah in Judges 5 is a picture of a lover of God, a mighty woman, who was called as a warrior.

So it's the two together. It's the worshiping warrior that we find in David's life and in John's life that's so magnificent. It's so wonderful. Did you know that one day, the whole Body of Christ worldwide will think of Jesus first as their Husband? When they think of Him, that will be the primary thought that comes to their mind. Of course, the Holy Spirit is really excited about this day because the Holy Spirit loves Jesus so tenaciously, and is so loyal to Jesus.

The Father says, "Not yet," during all these generations: "Not yet, not yet. There's a time when I'll let you speak Your whole heart on this subject to the Church, but not yet."

And the Holy Spirit is saying, "Father, oh Father."

And the Son is crying out, "O Father."

And the Father says, "Not yet. There's a wisdom."

Of course that's just a human dramatization. It doesn't really happen that way, but I can just see Jesus 700 years before His birth, bending over the balcony of heaven and hearing Hosea say, "You will call Him, 'My Husband.'"

And I can imagine the Lord going, "Father, let Me say it. Let Me call them."

And the Father says, "No Jesus. Not yet. It's 700 years before You'll be down there calling them to Yourself."

THE DEFINING CRY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST AT THE END OF THE AGE

But it's a description of the activity of the Holy Spirit at the end of the age. That sentence describes the activity of the Holy Spirit, what He's going to reveal to the Church about the Son of God, because we can't call Him "My Husband" until the Holy Spirit reveals more about Jesus than the Body of Christ is familiar with right now. I mean, we have the idea of the bride, but there's a glory and a splendor and a beauty in the Son of God that we haven't seen yet. So this confession presupposes the Holy Spirit's activity of revelation of Jesus as the Bridegroom. In this cry, "My Husband," we see Him differently, but in this cry we see ourselves differently.

This revelation of Jesus, this aspect of the knowledge of God, will redefine our lives as well, because to call Him *Husband* presupposes that we see ourselves as a bride.

There are so many dimensions to this new identity. I mean, it's an identity that has been familiar to God from the beginning, but it's new to us. I believe that the bridal identity will be the defining cry of the Body of Christ at the end of the age.

A LOVER WILL OUTWORK A WORKER, EVERY SINGLE TIME

You know, you can do so much as a servant. You can do so much as a servant, but what you do as a bride is so much more extravagant than what you'll ever do as a servant. Lovers are far more dedicated than workers. There are many examples. I'm thinking of my brother who was paralyzed in a football accident twenty-five years ago, and we've been in hospitals for years, and it's always an amazing thing to me when the worker becomes a lover. Occasionally you'll see the nurse marry the patient, and when the worker becomes a lover the quality of the work increases significantly. It's an amazing thing to watch that. I've seen that several times over the years where she would check in and go down the list and memorize what she's supposed to do and all of a sudden her heart is awakened. Then she doesn't need any checklist anymore. She doesn't need anyone overseeing her work. The energy and the diligence are so profound. What we will do as lovers will be so much more powerful than what we do strictly as servants and workers. The nature of the work changes when you fall in love. The power to endure, the interpretation of the endurance and the trial, is all different when you're a lover.

THE CHURCH WILL OVERCOME IN LOVE AT THE END OF THE AGE

I believe the Lord will say of that generation, as He said of Job to Satan, "Have you considered this generation?" Job was the most righteous man in all the earth, and I think the Lord will say, "The most righteous generation in all of history, have you considered her?"

And Satan will say, "Oh, I can get them to deny you."

And Jesus will say, "No, you can't."

There's going to be a certain drama, and Satan will be given a certain liberty to assault, with rage, the Body of Christ at the end of the age. She will overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of her testimony, and she will not love her natural life even unto death (Rev. 12:11). She will die in her loyalty, and the Church will overcome in love in the end of the age. Satan will be defeated by voluntary lovers on the earth, and God will end natural history with Satan being given every opportunity to destroy the Church, but the Church triumphing over him. There will be many martyrs, but they will triumph in love. They never hesitated, never drew back. Of course, the confidence of the Father and Son is that the Father knows He's going to reveal the beauty of Jesus to the Church, and awaken her heart in love, and there's no chance the Church will ever draw back.

I believe the book of Job is a prophetic book. The Lord is going to tap Satan on the shoulder and say, "Have you considered the most righteous generation in history? Give it your best shot. There's not a chance she'll draw back from Him. Not a chance." God is going to crown human history with that experience of the end-day church.

THREE BASIC IDENTITIES THAT DESCRIBE THE REDEEMED

So you'll no longer call the Lord only, "My Master, my Lord." I think there are three basic identities in the Word of God, and you can fit so many things under this. I think there are three basic identities of the people of God, and all of them are present in the eternal city. These identities aren't just for this age; they're eternal.

We're servants of the Lord. We're servants. We're servants before a master. We're subjects before our King and our Lord. That's typically how we get introduced into the kingdom of God, as servants. Martin Luther came along in the 1500s with the message of justification by faith, and he taught us the priesthood of all believers: everyone can hear God and do the works of the kingdom. That's what John Wimber has been so brilliant in proclaiming: "Everyone can do the stuff." That's really the message of Martin Luther. You don't have to be a priest or go to seminary; everyone can do the stuff. Everyone can. That's the priesthood of all believers. Everyone is accepted in the empire. We're all employed in the family business. We can all do the stuff. We're servants of the Lord. We have been authorized to enter the kingdom. We're citizens of the empire and we have a work permit. We can do things in the name of the King that really change people's lives. We can really use His authority. We have been given a heavenly work permit. We're servants. He's our Master. He's the Boss and we're joyful servants, but we have been given this awesome privilege, this work permit, this citizenship into the great empire, and it's a wonderful thing.

That's only our first identity. Our second identity is that we're children before our Father. It's more than being accepted into the empire and into the family business with a work permit, so that we can use the authority to do the stuff. The Father says, "No, it's more than that. The very seed of God is in you" (1 Jn. 3:9, paraphrased). The Greek word for *seed* is *sperma*; the very *sperma* of God has been dropped into the human spirit; which makes us totally distinct from the angels, because the angels are servants of God. They have a work permit; they're a part of the kingdom; they're a part of the empire, and while we're like them inasmuch as we're both servants who can use the Father's authority and do the stuff, we're very much separate in the sense that we're sons. We're children. We're offspring. The angels say, "Wow, there's a big gulf between having a work permit and being in the family."

See, when the angels worship before God, they call God, "He who was, and is, and is to come." They call Him, "Holy, Holy, Holy," "He who sits upon the throne." They call Him all these majestic titles that we're certainly permitted to use, and it's edifying to use them.

But Jesus says, "When you approach the throne of majesty, the majesty on high, you say, 'Our Father who art in Heaven'" (Mt. 6:9, paraphrased). You don't have to address the Lord in the same way the angels do. The angels never call Him, "Our Father." They call Him, "He who sits upon the throne," but when you address Him, you say to the Majesty who sits on high, "My Father; our Father."

JESUS WON'T EFFECTIVELY MANIFEST HIS AUTHORITY WITHOUT US

That's our second identity: children in the family, the family name, in the embrace of tender mercy, in the discipline of the Father training us to be an heir to inherit all things. But there's a third identity. It's a bride before a bridegroom. Even more intimate than a father/child relationship is the relationship of a bridegroom to the bride. That's the most intimate of all. It's far higher than the servant, far more intimate than the relationship of a father to a child, because as a bridegroom they're partners in the fullest sense of the word. This is unthinkable: Jesus calls us "co-heirs" (Rom. 8:17). That means co-signers. Jesus said, "The check needs two signatures before it's valid. I won't go forward without your signature."

It's unbelievable. A co-heir is an unthinkable thing for God to declare to the human race. "I won't rule unless your signature is on the check. I won't effectively manifest My authority without her."

That's higher than the child/father relationship. I don't know if *higher* is the right word. It's different; it's more intimate. So there are three basic identities that describe the redeemed on earth, and the same basic identities, every one of these confessions, is found in Revelation 21-22 in the eternal city. All three of them endure forever. In heaven there will still be a servant/Master relationship, which means He's the Boss and we're grateful. We're so happy to do anything, with the gratitude of the servant. It's the idea behind Luke 17:10: the servant who works all day, comes in, and serves the master. He eats last and takes the last seat, and Jesus said, "He did only what he ought to have done in gratitude" (Lk. 17:10, paraphrased). It's the dimension of one who takes directions from the master, who is so happy in the last place because we did that which we ought to have done. We're so grateful just to be able to associate with the Master. That attitude of gratitude and obedience, that Master/servant identity, will exist in the eternal city.

"TO THE ONE WHO OVERCOMES, I WILL GIVE TO SIT WITH ME ON MY THRONE"

The Father/child identity will exist as well. We will call Him, "Our Father," in eternity. That's in Revelation 21-22. I've studied those chapters to find out how the people of God relate to God in the eternal city. All three of those identities are there, but we looked the other day at Jesus' promise to the one who overcomes in Revelation 3:21.

By the way, I don't believe those who overcome are a special, elect group within the Church. I believe it's the redeemed in the context of the unredeemed human race. It's the ones who don't quit. It's the ones who hold their testimony until the end. It doesn't mean this specially elect, mature group which constituted just a small elite. When you study all the statements about overcoming to the seven churches in Asia in Revelation 2 and 3, they're describing the redeemed. "The one who overcomes will inherit the eternal city" (Rev. 3:12, paraphrased). Well, that's the redeemed. We all inherit the eternal city. So I don't believe that the overcomer is a special, elite group. I believe the overcomer is the redeemed who hold their testimony to the end, which is all the saints throughout history.

Anyway, this is unthinkable. It's the very last statement Jesus gave the Church, the corporate church, addressing the Church as the Church. It's the very last sentence of His address to the seven churches of Asia. He says, "To the one who overcomes, as I sat with My Father on His throne, so you will sit with Me on My throne" (Rev. 3:21, paraphrased).

As I mentioned the other day, no one sits in the presence of God. They're either lying prostrate or they're standing in respectful reverence. There's only one group that will ever sit in the presence of the majesty of God. It's the bride. Jesus said, "You will sit with Me."

I can imagine the angels saying, "Sit? No Lord, they can't sit in the presence of His majesty on high."

The Lord says, "Yes. Yes. She's the royal bride. She's the queen from history. She'll sit with Me."

And, again, this is the cry from John 17:24, right before the cross, when Jesus said, "Father, I desire that where I am, she would be with Me, that she would see and experience all of My glory" (Jn. 17:24, paraphrased). That's

His final cry before the cross. “Father, I desire that where I am she would be with Me, that she would behold all of My glory, that she would experience it, that she would be involved in it with Me.”

I believe that when Jesus said this in John 17:24, He was thinking of Revelation 3:21. “She will sit with Me, not just on any throne, but on My throne” (Rev. 3:21, paraphrased). The uncreated God will share a throne with broken, sinful people of the human race, washed and cleansed and exalted.

BROKEN MEN AND WOMEN, EXALTED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD

This is your life. This is your story. Again, I imagine the angels saying, “How can this be, sitting in the presence of God on God’s throne?” Lucifer gambled everything to share that throne and lost it all (cf., Isaiah 14). God pursues us to the ends of the earth to give it to us freely. That which Satan longed for with such covetousness, such zeal, and bargained his eternal destiny to obtain, was reserved only for the Body of Christ. He said, “I will ascend and sit upon the throne of the Most High God.” He ascended and took his chances, and he’s cast into the lake of fire forever and ever because of that presumptuous breach of divine order, because he would presume to take the place occupied, in the affection and order of God, only for the Bride of Christ.

That’s why Satan has such rage against the Church, because what he gambled everything for and lost, we don’t even care about. We would rather go fill our lives with the lust of the flesh and the pleasures of this age, and Jesus is pursuing us, chasing us to the ends of the earth. I can hear Him say, “Do you know who you are?”

And Satan says, “Such fools, such idiots. I’ll destroy them. They consider as nothing that which I gambled everything for.” He hates us with perfect jealousy and rage because he knows who we are far better than we do.

Jesus says, “Not only will I pursue you.” I mean, that’s awesome. But far more awesome is this: “I will lay aside the form of God. I’ll step into human history. I will wrap myself in the garments of humanity. I’ll walk on the earth in the form of the creature. I will live perfectly and be crushed by the wrath of God so that I can pursue you to the ends of the earth and give it to you freely.”

Satan sees this and he’s so angry. He has such perfect jealousy and rage against the Body of Christ. I mean, He didn’t just pursue us; He became Man. We can’t comprehend what that means. We can’t begin to comprehend what happened in the incarnation, that He could somehow wrap Himself in the garments of humanity and then be crushed by God’s wrath. The uncreated Son of God, the One filled with glory and splendor, who spoke and created the earth, could somehow be contained in some mysterious way, and be crushed by God’s wrath in order that your life could be infinitely exalted at His right hand, sitting on a throne with Him.

FOREVER WE WILL BE HAPPY TO TAKE THE LAST SEAT

Well, that’s the confession that we’re going to have at the end of the age: “My Husband, my Husband.” I believe this is one of Jesus’ favorite verses. When He looked down He thought, “Oh Father, My heart is ravished.” My heart is pounding within me when I hear Him say that, and the Father says, “Well, You can go down in 700 years, not now. In the fullness of time, You can go.”

Turn to the Song of Solomon. Where’s that? Oh yeah, right after Psalms and Proverbs. That’s it, right after Psalms and Proverbs. I believe this is the bridal generation. That’s the phrase that I like to use when I pray. I really believe it. We’re the bridal generation. Yes, we will be servants. Yes, we will do the stuff with gratitude, and we’re happy to take the last seat. Forever we will be happy to take the last seat—forever. Of course, we will

be given the first seat, but we will be so grateful just to be in the family business, just to use the authority like the angels.

INTIMATE PARTNERS WITH THE GOD WHO LOVES US

But God says, “No, you’re not just servants, and I’m not just your Master.” We’re children before our Father, embraced in the family, in tender affection.

Not only that, but the most intimate thing imaginable: the bride and Bridegroom, leaving and cleaving, sharing all, co-heirs, intimate partners filled with affection. Fantastic! Isn’t that awesome? That’s who you are. Next time you look in a mirror, say, “Hmm, I can’t wait for the new body, but man, I love my destiny.” You know, that’s what I say when I look in the mirror. I love who I am. I can’t wait to get that new body, though.

THE SONG THAT GOD CALLED, “THE GREATEST OF ALL SONGS”

OK, the Song of Solomon. I’m just going to advertise this and share a verse with you. This is my favorite book of the Bible. In our Bible school in Kansas City, I teach twenty sessions on the Song of Solomon. This is my joy and delight, to go through it verse by verse. It starts off like this: “The song of songs” (Song 1:1). God titles this eight-chapter song, “The greatest song of all songs in redemptive history.” I believe the title is very significant. Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords. We know about the holy of holies. Here we have the song of all songs, the ultimate superlative. In all of redemptive history there’s one song that God defines as the ultimate song that ever existed. It’s eight chapters. It’s not a short song; it’s eight chapters long. It’s the longest song in the Bible. It’s the ultimate song, not just in the Word of God; it’s the ultimate song in history, in my opinion. It starts off with the bride as a maiden. She’s not mature. She’s standing before the Father.

“LET HIM KISS ME WITH THE KISSES OF HIS MOUTH”

You know, Solomon wrote this. I imagine that the very thing that happened to Solomon when he began his earthly reign is the thing that happens to the Bride of Christ when she begins her journey and her progression into love with Jesus Christ. At the very beginning of Solomon’s reign, what happens? In 2 Chronicles 1, the Lord appears to Solomon and says, “Solomon, anything you want, you can have. You name it. Whatsoever thing you ask for, it’s yours.” Solomon asked for wisdom and knowledge and discretion and understanding. The Lord said, “That’s really good. I’ll give it to you, and I’ll give you all the other stuff, too.”

So I imagine the bride in the same position before the Lord, and the Father says, “Tell Me anything you want.” “Whatsoever things you ask for in My name, believing, you can have” (Mk. 11:23, paraphrased). He’s going to make that promise real to the end-time church, as He has throughout history, and the Church is going to appear before the Lord and say, “This is what we want: Father, let Your Son kiss me with the kisses of His mouth” (Song 1:2, paraphrased). In other words, “Not the kiss of the hand, not the kiss on the feet of the servant, not the kiss on the cheek of a friend or a sibling or a family member. I want the most intimate thing that God will give the human spirit. That’s what I want.”

I believe this will be the crescendo, the crescendo cry, the dominant cry of the Church in the end-times and in the last generation. They will cry for the most intimate thing that God will give the human spirit.

You know, people say, “I can’t imagine Jesus kissing me on the mouth.” That’s good. You’re not supposed to imagine that; that’s not what it’s about.

It's God putting His hand upon our heart, enlarging our capacity to receive intimacy from Him and to give intimacy back. So don't picture being kissed on the mouth. It's a metaphor of God giving the most intimate thing to the human spirit, for the human spirit was designed for this. He puts His hand on our hearts. He communicates intimacy to us and empowers us to give everything in intimacy back to Him. That's what I believe the kiss is. The mouth speaks, not only of intimacy, but of the word of God: that which proceeds from the mouth of God, His word. The word of God, the Logos of God, is the agency the Holy Spirit uses to bring this twofold intimacy into greater experience: the kisses of the mouth.

THE PROGRESSION OF HOLY PASSION INTO FULL, MATURE LOVE

This eight chapters is just the unfolding; I call it the progression of holy passion. It's the unfolding. I believe there are a number of steps that are one unbroken progression right into full, mature love. There are so many ways to look at this. My hobby is the Song of Solomon. It isn't just my favorite book; it's actually my hobby. Anywhere I can go, I get commentaries on it. Right now I have, I think, 132 commentaries on the Song of Solomon. My goal is to get every English commentary in the world on the Song of Solomon. I'm getting close, I think. I've got people researching Oxford and Harvard libraries and the Internet and everything. Every now and then I find one I don't have and we order it and I Xerox it and I send it back, because most of them are out of print.

So I've had the chance to study the Song of Solomon from many, many different angles. There are so many bizarre commentaries on the Song of Solomon I never knew existed. I mean, there are so many weird ones. You read them and you think, "I never even thought about that." There are literally fifteen total different interpretations of this song in commentaries circulating around the world. So what I'm saying is, I've had the chance to see it in many different ways. There are many valid interpretations as well. And the interpretation the Holy Spirit has given me is one unbroken journey of progression, glory to glory, into mature love.

It starts with a cry for a kiss in Song of Solomon 1:2. I think this cry is going to crescendo in your lives, if it hasn't already, and in the lives of the Church worldwide in the bridal generation. It's bridal language, and when that cry crescendos, when it comes to fullness, I believe in all the nations of the earth, the redeemed will cry out, "Father, let Him kiss me." Whether they use the same language or not doesn't matter; whether they use the word *kiss* doesn't matter. It's the cry of the heart.

Finally, when this thing crescendos by the power of the Spirit, the Father will look at the Son and say, "Now, go and answer her."

Then He comes and splits the sky, it's filled with flaming fire and all the angels and the glory of God, and He brings the bride to Himself, right in the air, for all the unbelieving nations to see, and He embraces her and answers this before all the world. That's my rendition of the second coming.

Anyway, the Song of Songs starts with a kiss, but it ends with a seal. It starts with a kiss and ends with a seal. I would encourage you—you don't have to do it in the next year or two, but somewhere in the next five or ten years—to begin the journey of studying the Song of Solomon, because you'll sing this song forever. This is the song of all songs. This song isn't going to fade away. It will be in the top ten list; it will be the number one song forever, in my opinion. According to God, it's the song of all songs; so it isn't going to fade away. It's good to go ahead and learn it, and to start singing it. When you stand before the Lord, you'll say, "Oh, I know that song. I sang that one down on the earth."

You know, heaven has a top-ten list. It would include some of the songs in the book of Revelation, and, undoubtedly, some of the really hot psalms. But this always is number one to the Lord, in my opinion. So go ahead and learn it. It's a little strange at first. When I first began to study it, I was a little confused. I thought, "I don't understand it all." I was really confused by the language, but after a while you'll get familiar with it and it will become familiar. Once it becomes familiar, it begins to settle and unfold. So, don't be impatient with yourself if there's a struggle for a while.

Well, it ends. The journey is now over—the journey into voluntary and mature bridal love.

“WHO IS THIS COMING UP OUT OF THE WILDERNESS?”

In Song of Solomon 8:5-7, the journey ends, and then in verses 8-14 there's one final intercessory cry, where the bride cries in intercession for the rest of the Church. But her journey actually ends in Song of Solomon 8:5-7. I believe it's a rhetorical question. I believe the Holy Spirit is asking it. It doesn't matter what your Bible says, you know, because they'll say, "The bride or the bridegroom or the chorus, or the daughters of Jerusalem." That's just one man's opinion. All the translations are different. The reason I say that is because one time I said, "I think it's the Holy Spirit," and they said, "No, in my Bible the footnote says..."

I said, "That's just some man who got paid \$500 to write an outline for that translation, and they paid him and he gave it to them. It's not like the inspired text."

That was new information. They thought the outlines were inspired, too. They're not. So I believe the Holy Spirit is looking over church history, over all of human history, and He asks a rhetorical question. He proclaims, "Who is this coming up from the wilderness?" It's the wilderness of this fallen world. "Who is this ascending in victory? Who is this one coming forth out of testing and tribulation?" It speaks of the whole natural age, of all the thousands of years of the human race. It speaks of your particular journey. It speaks of your facing sin and temptation and trials. There's someone standing at the end of history, coming up, ascending in victory from the wilderness of this age. Look at her. She's leaning on her Beloved. She has a leaning and a loving heart. At the end of time, she has ascended from the wilderness. She's leaning and she's loving: two things that by nature, by our sinful nature, we don't do well. We're independent by nature, but the Holy Spirit has so orchestrated the plan of our life that we end up with a leaning and a loving heart at the end of our lives. We don't lean easily, we die hard, but the Holy Spirit is stronger than we.

“SET ME AS A SEAL UPON YOUR HEART, AS A SEAL UPON YOUR ARM”

We will be leaning and loving. He will be our Beloved before it's over. I'll skip some things, but in verse 6, Jesus is now speaking, although some people think it's the bride. I could talk for an hour on why it isn't the bride speaking here, but I'm not going to do that. It's Jesus speaking here. Jesus invites the bride, "Set Me." That should be a capital 'M'. "Set Me as the seal upon your heart. Set Me as the seal upon your arm. For love"—you can write the phrase, "My love"—"is as strong as death. My jealousy is as cruel as the grave. Its flames are a flame of fire. It's a most vehement flame" (Song 8:5-6, paraphrased), or, "the very flame of God." The Hebrew says, "vehement flame," or, "flame of God."

There's a reason why either one of those, from the Hebrew, will work. Different versions say it differently. "Many waters." These are negative waters, by the way, of oppression, of temptation, of trials. "Many waters

can't extinguish, can't put this love out. Many floods"—persecution—"cannot drown this divine love. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised" (Song 8:7, paraphrased).

JESUS IS THE SEAL ON THE HEART OF GOD'S PEOPLE

So Jesus ends the journey of the bride saying, "Set Me." Jesus is the seal on the heart of God's people. Now a seal in the ancient world was a very, very powerful document. A king would write up a legal contract with another king, an alliance of some sort. I mean, it was a very, very important transaction, because if that seal, if that document wasn't preserved in its integrity, nations would go to war. The other king had to know exactly what the first king was saying; so they would write a document. They would put it in a scroll and they would put a wax seal around it and would send maybe a thousand men to deliver this sealed document to the other king. Typically the king would never leave his palace, because someone might ambush him on the road and kill him. In the ancient days they didn't have jets and security like they do now, and so they really counted on a sealed document to stop wars.

When that king put his signet on the wax seal and sent it maybe with a hundred or a thousand warriors, and they would bring it to the other king, if that seal was broken, every one of the soldiers were executed on the spot. You couldn't have a broken seal, because the document might be tampered with and it's too important. Everyone would die. In other words, the seal of a king was God's protection over the contents. The seal of a king was God's guarantee that the thing had integrity and truth in it. The seal of the king was backed up by all the power and authority of that king. If anything went wrong the king would execute, with his authority, anyone who violated its integrity. So a seal was a big deal. When Solomon talked about a seal, he understood that it was a big word.

Jesus says, "I'm the seal. I'm the guarantee. I'm the protection. All of My authority is behind what I'm saying here. I'm the seal on your heart"—of course that's the affections. "I'm the seal on your arm"—that's your ministry. That's the working together. He says, "I'm going to put the seal of My love to keep your heart right, and even your ministry won't burn you out and will bring others into the love of God. I'm going to seal your arm."

Well, it's a fiery seal instead of a wax seal. It's a seal of fire. Of course that's a supernatural thing. There's no such thing a seal of fire. There are only wax seals.

LOVE IS THE VERY FLAME OF GOD

Let's look at the end of verse 8:6: "Its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame, the very flame of God himself" (Song 8:6b, paraphrased). The seal is the very power of the fire of God, the Holy Spirit Himself moving on the human heart. Now this seal is the fire of God's love. It's as strong as death. It's as cruel or demanding as the grave. Here's the question: How demanding is death? Death demands everything, right? When death has its way, nothing escapes its grasp. Death is comprehensive. This is a positive statement: the love of God is equally comprehensive; nothing will escape its grasp. There's no sin stronger than the love of God in your life, when the love of God has its full way.

You say, "Well man, I've got this really big problem, with anger or with lust or with this or with that."

And the Lord says, "Everything will be conquered by My love," just as everything in the natural is conquered by death. Nothing can escape it. It's comprehensive. That's a very powerful statement.

MANY WATERS CANNOT QUENCH THIS LOVE

Then He goes on in verse 8:7 and shows how supernatural it is, because water puts fire out by nature, right? If you get enough water, fire will go out, unless it's God's fire. If you empty a sea upon a fire, the fire will go out sooner or later, and God says, "Well there's one fire that's contrary to nature." It's the fire of God. Even if you pour the ocean on it, it can't drown it. So the waters of temptation, of affliction, or the floods of persecution, nothing can extinguish this. Nothing is more powerful than this fire.

THE POWER TO LOVE IS THE ONLY REWARD THAT LOVE DESIRES

Then it ends with a really wonderful parable. "If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised" (Song 8:7b).

Let's say a young couple receives the news that their five-year-old child has a deadly disease, and the doctor says, "Well, it's curable, but it will be expensive. You have to sell your five million-dollar house and you have to relinquish your five million-dollar bank account reserves, and for ten million, we can heal the disease."

So they instantly say, "We sell the house. We'll live in an apartment. We will give all of our reserves."

They give the ten million, and then the neighbor hears about it and says, "That's so incredible, what you did for your daughter."

The man looks at him and says, "No. I despise any recognition that that was noble. For the very love I possess for my daughter is my reward. I don't want any recognition that I gave up anything."

So it's the kind of love that would give up all of our inheritance; everything that we possess we would lay on the line, and like Paul we say, "We consider it rubbish. We despise any recognition that it was noble to do that," because the power to love is in itself the only reward this love wants. That's what it's talking about. There's no recognition of sacrifice, no self-congratulations, in this kind of love.

A CALL TO PROCLAIM THE MESSAGE OF THE SONG OF SONGS

I want to pray this verse over you. But first I want to end with a story. It was July of 1988. I was in my office praying, and I was praying this very passage, Song of Solomon 8:6-7. I was pairing it with John 17:26, my favorite verse, my life verse. I said, "Oh Father, the love that You have for Your Son, put it in me; put it in me."

Then I prayed, "Seal me, oh Jesus, with fiery love." I went on and on. It was really an unusually powerful time. Lots of times my prayer time is unanointed, and many times over the years it's been boring and my mind wanders. This was an unusual time of the tenderness of God resting on my soul. In fact, since I was in my office, I picked up my phone and told the receptionist, "I don't care who calls, please, no one. The Lord is touching me and it's so precious, I don't want to talk to anyone. Just tell them to wait an hour or two and I'll get back with them."

The receptionist said, "No problem at all."

I was giving myself to this. I was gently weeping and I said, “Oh, I love this. This is what life is about.” I asked the Lord, “Set me. I set You as a seal. Be the seal. Oh, that no sin, that no trial could overflow this love. Oh Father, put the love that You have for Your Son in me.”

Ten minutes later, the phone rang. You know, it’s amazing how quickly you can go from anointing to anger. I was mad. I thought, “How could...” I mean you’re just a second away all the time, you know what I mean? I said, “I can’t believe it.” I lost all the sense of His inspiration instantaneously, as soon as I thought this. Our hearts are weak, aren’t they?

I gave a very ordered, “Hello?” I was nice on the outside.

Some of you know who Bob Jones is. He’s a man who was very powerfully used as a prophet in our midst for many years. The receptionist said, “He just called and he says it’s an emergency. He said that he just heard the audible voice of the Lord for you.” The receptionist says, “I thought it would be OK if I let God in!”

I said, “Well, that’s really good.” I said, “If God calls, always let Him through.” You know, don’t tell God to wait. I thought, “You know, that was really good. That was a good quality decision, using his own wisdom, etc.”

I said, “That’s good. Let God in. That’s good.”

So I said, “Hello, Bob?”

Bob said, “Something very powerful just happened this morning.” He said, “I woke up. I was wide awake.” He said, “I’m getting ready to go on a ministry trip. My bags weren’t packed yet, but when I was lying there, I heard the thunderous, audible voice of the Lord, wide awake, and He gave me a message for you.” He said, “I looked at the clock and I said, ‘Oh no!’ and I jumped up and packed my bags and my ride came. All the bags are in the car and we’re running late and the Lord spoke to me and He said I have to tell you now. We have to stop the car. I told the man, ‘Let me run in for ten seconds. Let me call Mike and I’ll be right back,’ and he said, ‘I’m really in a hurry.’”

I said, “Well my goodness, what was it?”

There I was reading Song of Solomon 8:6. He said, “The Lord told me to tell you—I heard this audibly—Song of Solomon 8:6.”

I thought, “Whoa,” and I didn’t say anything.

Bob Jones went on, “That’s God’s agenda for the Church worldwide in this generation.” He said, “I don’t even know what it is.” He said, “I haven’t even had a chance to look at it, I’m running so late. “I thought there were only four chapters in Song of Solomon.” He said, “There are eight chapters in it?”

I said, “Oh yes.”

He said, “Oh, well there had to be.” He said, “It kind of mystified me, because I didn’t think there were eight chapters, but if the Lord said it, there had to be.” He said, “Well, you probably don’t know what that verse says.”

I didn’t say a word to him. There I was, still kneeling. I had just picked the phone up. I was kneeling, looking at Song of Solomon 8:6, and I was weeping over it. Bob Jones said, “The Lord told me that’s what’s on His agenda worldwide, whatever it is. Then the Lord told me to tell you that this is the main focus of your ministry. This is what you’re to do as your main focus the rest of your life, whatever that verse means.” Then he said, “Got to go!” He hung up and left.

I was sitting there just staggered. I thought, “What was that?”

THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL RESTORE THE FIRST COMMANDMENT TO FIRST PLACE

So, with that, I want to do two things. I want to pray for you this verse, but there are those of you in this room whose main focus is to bring an emphasis on the first commandment, because it really is the first commandment—being wholehearted lovers of God. Song of Solomon 8:6 is the first commandment. Those of you who feel that’s your main focus of ministry, it doesn’t mean you won’t do the other facets, it doesn’t mean you won’t teach on Him and emphasize Him here and there, but it’s your main focus of ministry. I asked Him, “Lord, would You bless me just praying over people who have this same primary focus?” The Lord said that He would bless that.

So I would like to do that. Even in the sharing of this story, some of you say, “This gives me definition. This gives me words for what my life is about. Yes, that’s what I’m supposed to do too.”

It’s really a blessing if the Lord allows you to have that kind of definition. You know, for years I didn’t know what the focus of my ministry was. So, I don’t know that the Lord will make that clear to you today, but some of you, as I’m speaking, can hear your heart saying, “Yeas, that’s what I’m called to do.”

You may not use Song of Solomon. You don’t have to use these eight chapters. It may be the knowledge of God unto bringing people to the first commandment. I want to prophesy to you. It’s really easy to prophesy this one. The Holy Spirit is going to make the first commandment first again. He’s going to restore it to first place in the Church before the Lord returns.

Amen. Let’s stand.

MINISTRY TIME

Oh Lord, we love You. Lord, first, just as individuals we pray, “Put Your seal, Jesus, put Yourself upon our hearts.”

You know, the seal isn’t your track record of failure. For many people, the seal they carry on their heart is how bad they’ve been. Jesus is the seal, not your testimony of how bad you’ve been. For a lot of people, the seal on their heart is their promises for future ministry. They’re so consumed with what they’re going to be one day. Even your function isn’t your seal; Jesus is your seal. Whatever He has promised you to be and whatever He promised to release through you, that’s good, but make it secondary. That’s not the seal on your heart. In fact,

that will actually keep you from walking in it. Jesus is the seal on your heart, not your future ministry. But this is what so preoccupies the minds of God's people.

Some people say, "Well, what about the struggle I have, the bondage I'm in right now?" That's not the seal; He is. This seal is more powerful than your ministry. It's more powerful than your failure. It's more powerful than your temperament. You say, "Well, I've got a really quiet temperament. I'm not very exuberant. I'm not very passionate." Jesus is the seal, not your temperament.

Now Lord, we come before You and we say, "Jesus, oh, put Your hand upon our heart. Oh, we cry for the kisses from Your mouth, that the very Word of God, the mouth of God, would awaken our spirits to the deepest things God will give the human spirit."

"Father, let Him kiss me." Make it very personal. "Let Him kiss me, God. Let my heart enlarge. Let me receive the intimate things from Your hand and let me have the power to give myself fully back in intimate ways to You."

It's a twofold intimacy. "Let Him kiss me." The cry for a kiss ends with a seal. He puts the seal on your heart. That's the kiss of God.

Now Lord, release Your fire, I ask You. Release Your fire, O God, upon these people now.