

Holy Matrimony  
Ephesians 5:21–33  
Sunday, July 11, 2021

On Friday, I officiated my first wedding in *two years*. It was supposed to happen in July of *last year*, but then Covid came up and everything got postponed. This couple has been together for a *long time*, so this wedding was *years* in the making, and when we were finally able to get together and *marry* them, it was such a celebration. It made me think of Jesus and the weddings *he* attended; his first miracle in John’s gospel was at a wedding. And then it made me think of *something else*.

A few years ago, a professor at Harvard Divinity School came forward with this fragment of a scroll that had been given to her. It dates back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century and is apparently from one of the books that didn’t make it into the Bible. This particular writing was in Coptic (that’s like a combination of Greek and Egyptian), and it *said* something that caught a lot of people’s attention – four words that, when translated into English said, “Jesus said my wife....” And then it cuts off.

“Jesus said my wife.” And at the time it brought back this whole debate about whether or not Jesus was married. This has been a topic of conversation within Christianity for *thousands* of years. We see it in popular culture, in books like *The DaVinci Code*, which says that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and had a child with her, and that the church has covered this up for centuries because it would destroy the very foundations of the Christian faith. Every now and then you’ll see a *Time* magazine cover story on it or a *History Channel* documentary. Was Jesus married, and if he *was*, would that *change* anything about what we believe as Christians?

So what I want to do today is just think about those two questions. First, we're going to look at whether Jesus was married, and second we will look at what that means for us either way.

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So first, was Jesus married? We have to start off with what *scripture actually tells us*, which is *nothing*. The Bible does not say anywhere whether Jesus was married. It doesn't say that he *was* married, and it doesn't say that he *wasn't*. It doesn't *mention* a wife, but then again it doesn't mention his *hair* or his shoe size or his last name, but we just assume that he had all of *those*. Most people, however, don't *assume* that he had a wife.

There are a couple of ways to look at this. First, we know from scripture that Jesus was a Jewish rabbi. It was not at all uncommon for Jewish rabbis in the 1<sup>st</sup> century to be married. In fact, it was kind of *expected*. God gives the commandment in scripture over and over again to be fruitful and multiply. And if you were a faithful Jewish rabbi, striving to live out God's law and commandments in your life, then you would have gotten married and had a family so that you could be fruitful and multiply and carry on the tradition, the Jewish faith. So it would not have been *unheard of* or highly *unusual* for Jesus, a 30-year-old Jewish rabbi living in the first century, to be married. It wouldn't have been a big deal. The kind of thing that wouldn't even need to be *mentioned* in scripture.

At the same time, we can also say that Jesus aligned himself with a particular strain of Jewish thought. He hung out with people like John the Baptist, who were what's called *ascetics*. These were basically people who shunned the physical, material pleasures of the world to focus their lives on God. They were like extreme monks. They lived off by themselves, sometimes out in the wilderness or desert. They wore uncomfortable clothes and ate weird food and fasted often. And many or most of them did not marry. They believed that God would be establishing God's

kingdom on earth *soon, imminently*, so what was the point of getting married if everything was just going to end?

Paul in the New Testament was *kind of* like this. He believed that God's kingdom would be coming to earth soon, within his lifetime, so he said, "What's the point of getting married and having kids? If you can *resist* that, do *without* that, great; don't get married. If not, if you can't resist the temptations of the flesh," he said, "go ahead and get married, but it really doesn't *matter*, because all of *this* is going to end soon anyway."

From what we can tell, Jesus kind of fell in with that school of thought. So it wouldn't have been *unheard of* or highly *unusual* for Jesus *not* to be married, if he was forsaking the physical and material pleasures of this life to focus his life on God and the coming kingdom.

So basically, we're right back where we started. Was Jesus married? I think maybe the best answer we can give is *I don't know*. No one can say with *certainty* one way or the other, because *we don't know*. We weren't there, and the evidence that we have does not say either way.

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That being said, does it *matter*? Does it make a difference to our faith if Jesus was married or not? It *might* make a difference to the Catholic Church, because priests don't get married, based in small part on the belief that *Jesus* wasn't married. And if Jesus *was* married, that might change something, but maybe not, because they cite a lot of *other* reasons for priests not getting married.

I think the question that a lot of people are *afraid* of is, "Would it *undermine* or in some way *damage* the Christian faith if Jesus was married?" That's the whole thing behind *The DaVinci*

*Code*; that Jesus was married and had a child and that somehow makes him *less* divine. It makes him *more* human and *less* God.

Some people say that Jesus *wouldn't* have gotten married because he was *God*, he *knew* what he was here to do, that he wouldn't be living out a full life, so he would not have gotten married. But *that* point of view neglects the fact that Jesus was also *fully human*. He was God *in human flesh*, living the life that *we* live, experiencing the things that *we* experience.

And besides, just because Jesus was *God*, he was *divine*, he still had to *eat food*. He still had to *drink* and *sleep* and go to the *bathroom*. He was not *above* all the things of this world. He was right there in the *middle* of them. Jesus was fully human and fully divine, and we can't emphasize one of those things over the other. We have to hold them in balance, in tension.

A lot of people are quick to say that it *wouldn't* make any difference to our faith if Jesus was married. It wouldn't change *anything*. But I think it *would*. I think it *would* make a difference. Because we base our faith on the belief that God entered in to human life, to experience the things that we experience, and wouldn't Jesus being married add a whole other dimension to that? If God entered into the most intimate of relationships to experience the *depths* of human love. Wouldn't God be better able to identify with our experiences, our emotions, our struggles? And that when *we* enter into marriage, if we choose to do so, we are entering into this *holy*, *sacred* relationship that *God himself* was a part of.

I think it changes our faith for the *better*. It adds another level of depth to our faith because it makes God even more relatable. It reinforces our belief that God lived a fully human life in Jesus. God experienced all the things that we experience, including marriage.

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I've been trying to show both sides of this whole thing. I haven't wanted to answer this question *for you* today. I want to help you think about it on your own. And I can see someone coming up to me after worship saying, "Well, *was he?* Was Jesus married? You didn't give us an answer. *Did Jesus have a wife?*" Yes. He did. The Bible talks about it all over the place. It says it over and over again. Jesus' wife is the Church. Jesus is married to *us*.

That's what everybody misses in this whole discussion because they're looking for something *else*; because that's not the controversial answer that generates a lot of buzz. But Jesus refers to himself over and over again as a *bridegroom*. And scripture refers to the *Church* as his *bride*. And this is where we finally jump into our scripture reading for today.

**(READ EPHESIANS 5:21 – 33)**

I think so many times we get hung up on the first thing it says there, "Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord." People hear that and they're like, "First of all, my husband is *not* the Lord, and second of all, be *subject* to him? Does that mean I have to do everything he says no matter what?" That's language that sounds very out of date, very antiquated to a lot of people. I think we get so hung up on *that*, that we just can't get past it, and so a lot of us don't *like* this scripture reading. A lot of people see it as putting women down, and it has certainly been used to *do* that throughout the centuries.

But we have to look at what it says right *after* that first part. It says, "Wives be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord," but then it goes on to say, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." In other words, love your wife so much

that you would give up your *life* for *her*. This isn't about one person dominating or having power or control over the other. It is about two people loving each other in such a way that they are constantly *giving themselves up* for the other. It's about a wife loving a husband so much that she wants to serve him and help him be the best *he* can be, and it's about a husband loving his wife so much that he wants to serve *her* and help *her* be the best that *she* can be.

And this isn't just about *marriage*. It is about the *whole Christian life*. So even if you are *not* married, never going to *get* married, this is still relevant to you. Because Paul says, he quotes a verse from Genesis and says, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." And then he says, "I am applying *this* to Christ and the church." He's applying this idea of *marriage*, of *union* to our relationship with Christ. Notice he's *not* just saying, "I want you to think about your *marriage* in terms of your relationship with Christ." He's saying, "I want you to think about your relationship with Christ in terms of *marriage*."

Like a wife is called to be subject to her husband, he says, *we* are called to be subject to Christ. And just like a *husband* is not supposed to take *advantage* of that and lord it over his wife, but *love* her and give himself *up* for her, Paul is saying *that's* what Christ does for us. We are to *bend our wills to Christ*, as Christ gives himself up for us, pours out his love upon us, and makes us holy.

When we enter into this relationship with Christ, we are entering into a relationship of perfect mutuality. Christ is saying, "Subject yourself to me, bend yourself to my will, as I give myself up for you." It's not *about* Christ having power or control over us. It is *about* two people, you

and Christ, coming together in perfect love and becoming *one*. God does not want to *dominate* your life. God wants to *love you*. And God *showed us that* by giving his life up for us.

God gave us marriage to help us understand our relationship with God. *We*, as the church, we are the bride of Christ. And the whole point of this, the whole point of this *marriage*, the whole point of what we do here, is about us *loving* and *being loved by* Christ so that we become *one* with him. And through experiencing that love with Christ, we grow in our capacity to love *one another* in that same way, in perfect mutuality, not trying to dominate or control the other, but giving ourselves up for each other, loving and respecting each other.

So if someone ever asks you if Jesus was married, if Jesus had a wife, you can say, “Yeah. He *did. Us.*”