

The Glory of Christ in His ‘Marital Vows’

By Jay Wegter

The sublime subject of the marriage covenant has been on my mind of late, especially since officiating my daughter’s wedding this summer. During that most memorable event, I issued a charge to my new son-in-law to strive to be a ‘type of Christ’ to my daughter. “For, (I stated) the believing husband’s marriage vows are patterned after Christ’s sacrificial love for His church” (Eph 5:22-33). In the title of this month’s article, the term ‘vow’ refers to the promise Christ made to His Father—that He would lay down His life for His bride, the church.

This laying down of His life is at the heart of His glory. For, not only is Christ’s glory joined to the dignity of His Person as Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, and Judge. But, His glory is also centered upon the atoning work He accomplished in order to become our High Priest. Thus, we must behold His glory through both the ‘lens’ of His Person, and His work.

There is a reason why we construct observatories at very high altitudes. The purpose of course is for an unobstructed view of the heavens. Theology is our ‘observatory’ to give us the clearest views of God’s glory. As a young believer, I can remember hearing sermons about the glory of the Lord, but for the life of me, all I could muster up in my mind’s eye was *a celestial light show*. My friends, indeed the Lord dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim 6:16), but that does not really describe the essence of the glory of the Lord.

According to 2 Corinthians 4:6, divine glory is perceived as a ‘reflected glory’ in the face of Christ. Christ reveals God (Heb 1:3). Under the Law, there was the inferior fading glory reflected in the face of Moses. But, now, and eternally, the glory of God in the face of Christ is the blessed view granted to us in the new covenant (Geerhardus Vos, *Grace and Glory*, p. 95).

The glory of Christ, our King and Great High Priest has numerous dimensions. **These facets involve His conquering of the enemies of His bride which held her locked down in spiritual and physical death.** In addition, His glory is associated with the fullness of the Godhead dwelling bodily in Jesus of Nazareth who came to seek and to save (Col 2:9-10).

This glory is filled with great wonder; that a man, Jesus of Nazareth, in His exaltation **should bring human nature into the heart of the Holy Trinity**—and He did so that by the oath of God, every believer might have perfect representation forever. God will not change His mind about this: “Thou art a priest forever according to order of Melchizedek” (Heb 6:17-20).

The marvel that a man born, “Jesus” should become exalted Lord of glory goes back to the eternal counsels within the Godhead. In the plan of God there was a Savior before there was a sinner. For, He was ‘the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world’ (Rev 13:8).

As the ‘lamb of God’, Christ’s high priesthood is like no other. 1) He is both Priest and King. 2) He is both Priest and sacrifice offered by His office as Priest. 3) As the slain sacrifice, He is ‘consumed’ by the wrath of God, yet rises to an indestructible life, ever living to make intercession. 4) Now, as Priest and finished sacrifice, He sovereignly distributes the benefits of His offering. *No one goes to God without going to Him* (Mt 11:25-30).

In anticipating the joy set before Him, He endured the cross without regard for its shame,

for He was looking forward to His regal glory as mediatorial King of His people (Heb 12:1-2). **The cross was His only possible course to become mediatorial King.** Think of it, a King who represents His subjects by the power of His shed blood. Christ's obedience in laying down His life (and taking it up again) has furnished Him, fitted Him, equipped Him to make intercession for His people (Heb 7:25). Our King has taken His stand between our sins and God Almighty.

This marvelous truth of Christ's unique priesthood is articulated by Jonathan Edwards who summarizes much of the book of Hebrews with this thought. **Christ's obedience unto death on a Roman cross has become His 'equipment' to save to the uttermost.** His ability to save to the uttermost, is the capacity won by His obedience—this is His glory (Craig Biehl, *The Infinite Merits of Christ*). How the church needs to feed upon His glory, that she might see the dignity, sufficiency, and might of the One who is taking her from corrupt dust, to flawless glory.

How we need to be often rocked and staggered by a vision of His glory (2 Cor 3:18). For, this world is a wasteland without a crumb for our souls to feed upon. Without this 'beholding', countless professing Christians are trudging along in '*existence mode*'—not fixing their eyes on the glory of the Lord, but just slogging along, only looking at their feet as they place one tiring step in front of another. If that describes you, take heart, in this article it is our goal to collectively lift our eyes to behold the glory of the Lord, and be transformed by it in joy, delight, hope, and consecration.

I. We love, obey, worship, serve, and enjoy a 'covenant-making' God.

God can only be known in covenant. **He only gives Himself within covenants.** He is a covenant-making God. Each covenant He makes contains terms that describe what devotion to Him should look like (whether at Sinai or the Last Supper). When God makes a covenant it is unilateral, He does not negotiate with the other parties. **God's practice of making covenants is a commentary on His condescension.** For in 'cutting a covenant', God binds Himself on His side to the terms of the covenant—He is letting His people know that His faithfulness is predictable. (Note the scores of divine promises of His faithfulness in the Psalms.)

The God of Scripture promises to be faithful provider and protector to those who love Him. In a sense, **He harnesses His own attributes and puts them at the service of His people's care for His Name's sake.** This is why idolatry is so serious a matter. To deny that God has bound Himself by oath to exercise covenant faithfulness is to turn to idols; that is the greatest imaginable slight to God's name.

II. God's covenant with His people is a love relationship which Scripture likens to marriage.

“For your *husband is your Maker*, whose name is the LORD of hosts; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, who is called the God of all the earth” (Is 54:5).

“It will come about in that day,” declares the LORD, “That you will call Me *Ishi* (my Husband) and will no longer call Me *Baali* (my Master) (Hos 2:16) (Hos 5:19-20; Jer 31:32).

The covenants God makes involve mutuality, communion, and fellowship. In other words, the covenant contains the rules and provisions for how God and the creature give themselves to one another in a permanent bond of love. **This is why, the supreme metaphor to describe God’s covenant with His people is marriage—it is the image chosen by God to depict mutual devotion.** How significant it is that the closest earthly relationship, marriage, is what God points to describe our covenant relationship with Himself. What began in the Torah as *“I will be your God and you will be my people,”* becomes consummated to the fullest in the unbroken communion of the eternal state, in heaven (Rev 21:3), then it will be face-to-face (1 Cor 13:12), celebrated at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9).

III. The Son of God entered a kind of covenant with His Heavenly Father in order to redeem the people His Father had given to Him.

In order to form a covenant with us (the gospel of grace), the Father and the Son formed a covenant in eternity past. 700 years before Christ was born, this covenant was described in Isaiah chapter 53. “All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment, He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke *was due?* His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death, because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth. **But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.** As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see *it and* be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors” (Is 53:6-12).

According to Isaiah 53:6, our natural condition is like a sheep separated from its shepherd—our natural state is one of straying, lostness, alienation from God. In the eternal plan of God, Messiah would bring us back to God by radically identifying Himself with the sinner’s plight. For, in His self-sacrificing love, crushing suffering comes upon Him according to the appointment of God. As a mute lamb, He is led to the slaughter bench. ***This is incongruous to natural reason that the Author of life should be sentenced to make the grave His abode.***

Isaiah 53 is filled with the language of substitutionary atonement (11 references in 12 verses)—or vicarious suffering. And, it contains the language of a covenant, or legal agreement. The Son of God voluntarily agrees with the ‘terms’ of the covenant established in the counsels of the Godhead in eternity past. For, Peter says of the death of Christ that He was delivered up by the ‘predetermined plan and counsel of God’ (Acts 2:23).

The heart of this short chapter culminates in verse 10: “But the Lord was pleased to crush (bruise) Him.” It is by this ‘crushing’ that He would establish His church. He would make a sacrifice so highly valued by God that it would grant believing sinners the right to walk the courts of God forever and ever (Keil and Delitzsch, “Isaiah,” pp. 304-342).

The nature of this covenant between the Father and the Son is conditional. For, this is the wording in verse ten: **“IF He would render Himself a guilt offering, He will see His offspring” (53:10)**. Christ shall receive a seed, a progeny if He becomes their guilt offering. In verses 11-12, we see Christ reaping the fruit of His sacrifice in His priestly role—He is the Righteous One who makes others partakers of righteousness through their knowledge of Him.

Christ fulfilling the terms of the covenant is responsible for every dimension and facet of grace: “. . . blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Eph 1:3). **The covenant purpose of God, to bruise His Son at Calvary is the greatest reality in the history of humanity** (it why there is a human history; this reality must fill our consciousness) (Alan Cairns, “The Covenant of Redemption,” www.sermonaudio.com).

IV. In order for Christ to ultimately be ‘wedded’ to His church, He voluntarily took certain ‘marital vows’ which involved laying down His life.

In His high priestly prayer of John 17, Christ is praying about His Righteous Father honoring the covenant vows between the two of them—as He, the Son is coming as a payment of that covenant. In this prayer, we see Christ claiming His reward. Christ anticipates His love gifts and inheritance—the people given to Him before the foundation of the world (‘those whom the Father has given to Me to be with Me’—17:2, 6, 9, 11, 24). **Christ regards His people, the Church, to be the reward of His suffering.**

“I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You; for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received *them* and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me. I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours; and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them (Jn 17:6-10).

“For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth” (17:17) (“I sanctify Myself”—Christ is setting Himself apart to fulfill the work of the cross). “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.” “The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.” (Jn 17:20-24).

In this prayer, our Lord is no longer speaking as a suffering servant, but as the High Priest by means of the work which the Father gave Him to do (17:4) (Paul Orchard, “The Covenant of Redemption,” www.sermonaudio.com). The great burden of Christ is for His church. Our Lord is anticipating rising from the dead and ascending to heaven that He might make representation of what He had done. How marvelous it is that the righteousness reckoned to the believer’s account is rewarded out of Christ’s obedience to His Father (Craig Biehl, *Infinite Merits*). The day is coming soon in which the rightful King will be among His people. In that day, Christ’s prayer will be answered; His people will behold His unmediated glory (v. 24).

After He prays the high priestly prayer of John 17, He crosses over the brook Kidron with His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane. The experience of our Lord and Savior in Gethsemane (‘oil press’), is where a crushing took place in which our Lord sweat great drops of blood (Lu 22:39-46). Gethsemane is where olives were crushed to release their golden oil for anointing and for lighting lamps (no crushing, no oil). Oil is a picture of the Holy Spirit—Christ’s crushing purchased the quickening, illuminating, indwelling Spirit for His people.

During His trial in the garden, He was deeply conflicted as He thought upon the *baptism* He was to undergo (Lu 12:50). We cannot imagine eternal hell compressed into six hours. Concerning this cup of wrath, filled with indescribable suffering—in His full omniscience as eternally God the Son, He had looked into that cup and had agreed to every detail. But, that was in heaven prior to taking on a body of flesh. But, now in Gethsemane, He is an embodied person of flesh and bone, He is fully human with sensitive skin, emotions, and arteries and veins that bleed as well as countless nerve endings. **He has a frail human heart that can burst and break. Thus, in Gethsemane, He’s looking into a ‘virtual cup’, which is revealing the shocking horrific preview of the passion He is about to endure.**

According to Luke’s account, Christ’s looking into the cup produced agony in Him (Lu 22:44). He is peering into the cup as a mortal man, with all the human instincts of self-preservation, survival, and the avoidance of agony and death. He sees in the cup He must drink, that the greater part of His upcoming agony will be the bearing of divine wrath. He must drain the cup to the last drop, or there will be no propitiation (no quenched wrath).

The times when we think about our Lord’s passion, normally at the communion table, we think upon what He suffered for us, that most cruel form of Roman execution. It is easy for us to forget that in His sin-bearing the guilt charged to Him also involved the spiritual, emotional, and physical consequences of sin (the horror of condemnation, abandonment, shame, worthlessness, all amidst excruciating pain). These judgments coursed through His body and soul like bolts of lightning. He bore our sins and their penalty up to the cross (1 Pet 2:24; 3:18). Of this substitution, one divine stated, “When you come to heaven, you will meet a Savior whose hands and feet are scarred by nails, and whose soul is scarred by the wrath of God.”

Though He is the spotless Son of God, pristine and innocent, He recoils from the contents of the cup. Jonathan Edwards, in delving into the nature of Christ’s Gethsemane experience, composes queries which could be expressed as follows: “Why were clots of blood mingled with His sweat?” “What manner of angst could have caused such a trauma to His

body?” Such trauma among martyrs is unheard of. “What kind of strain would cause the capillaries around His sweat glands to hemorrhage?” Edwards brings up a sobering reality. With the sins of all who would ever believe heaped upon Him, so that He became the very curse of God, our Savior contemplates wrath, curse, torment, and death terminating upon Him.

What if, under the crushing strain and stress and agony (the unbearable nature of it), He should give up His spirit before the wrath of God was exhausted and quenched?

What if under the crushing wrath of Almighty God, He should come short of the six hours and release His spirit with the sins of millions of souls upon Him? No, He must drain the dregs of the cup. He must complete the sin-bearing and the forsakenness by His father, until He can cry, “It is finished.” Only then will the veil to the Holy of Holies be rent asunder, announcing a new and living way to God almighty through the veil, that is His flesh, which He has given for the life of the world (John H. Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 3).

My friends, this Gethsemane account of the Son of Man, crushed and betrayed, is absolutely essential to the story of redemption, because it captures the voluntariness of our Savior’s obedience as our substitute. This historical account is punctuated with a most significant phrase, “*not my will but thy will be done*” (v. 42). This phrase highlights our Lord’s willingness to suffer in our place. It focuses our attention upon His desire to take on our sin and death in order to win us to Himself, and it makes His vicarious substitution a righteous and loving act (see 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18).

V. The ‘vows’ which Christ pledged to keep are the epitome of the love of the Father and the Son toward guilty sinners.

“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins” (1 Jn 4:10). **The greatest love story in time or eternity is unfolded in redemptive history.** God Almighty has chosen a bride for His Son (Eph 1:4). In eternity past, there was a covenant among the members of the Godhead—the Son of God will be given a people without number from every tribe, tongue, and nation on the planet (Rev 5:9). These individuals will be formed into a new humanity—made fit for God—to be ‘wedded’ to God.

If this ‘conversation’ between the Father and the Son in eternity past were put in human terms, it might sound as follows: ***My Son, in state in which you find her, your bride will hate you, and she will be dead in sin and corruption (Eph 2:1-3).*** The only way for you to win, and woo, and redeem her is to become the ‘last Adam’ and take upon yourself her condemnation, her death, separation and deserved wrath (in a guilt transfer). You will have to go so low as to be tormented and killed on a Roman cross (Phil 2:8). Your humiliation will require you to become a human corpse carried to a stone tomb by sinners.

But, your death will be her life. Your death in her place will not raise her, nor awaken love in her merely by an example of sacrificial love. No, your death and resurrection for her will produce in your bride a spiritual resurrection in which she will be given a new heart—a new nature by which she will love you forever. Your death in her place will grant her a new heart and thereby draw out her love for you forever. You will be able to say to her as the first husband

said to the first wife: *you are bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh* (Gen 2:23). For, indeed, the church was taken out of the pierced side of Christ.

This depth of Christ’s love for His own is expressed in Ephesians 5:25-27.

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless” (Eph 5:25-27).

Christ is being guaranteed that His sacrifice would effectually purchase His church, and would ultimately be the cause of her glorification (she would be presented to Him publicly without spot or wrinkle). In Ephesians chapter five, the apostle Paul uses the language of intent—*Christ gave Himself with the intent of accomplishing the redemption of His bride* (that He might sanctify, cleanse, wash, glorify, and present blameless and spotless—He gave Himself to accomplish this end—to bring her from dust to glory). **The Hymn, “The Church’s One Foundation” captures the essence of this ‘love plot’.** “The church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ, her Lord; she is His new creation by water and the Word. From heaven, He came and sought her to be His holy bride; with His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died. Elect from every nation, yet one o’er all the earth; her charter of salvation: one Lord, one faith, one birth. One holy Name she blesses, partakes one holy food, and to one hope she presses, with every grace endued (first and second stanza).

VI. The whole cosmos is poised for the glorious return of Christ for His bride, the church; He will return as King to install His Kingdom.

There is ‘*Kingdom thunder*’ on the horizon for the rightful King is returning to receive His bride, but also in wrath to judge those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel (2 Thess 1:6-10). Now in this present, evil age, the bride of Christ is a persecuted alien, and stranger in an enemy-occupied world. God is going to devastate the ecology of this planet during the seven-year tribulation. The usurper, (the devil), and all those who follow him will be cast out. This cursed world will become increasingly inhospitable to its inhabitants. Before Christ returns in glory at the second advent, He’s going to finish taking back the title deed to the earth from the usurper.

In Revelation chapter 21, God says, “behold I’m making all things new.” A new heaven and a new earth is coming, in which righteousness dwells. Only men and women made new will live in this new world. The entire creation is poised for this event when the liberty of the sons of God will be celebrated as the same time as the bondage of decay is lifted (Rom 8:18-25).

APPLICATION: Think just how much our adoration of Christ turns upon His **fitness** to recover, rescue, and raise His Bride who was dead in her sinful corruptions. “For **it was fitting** for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the *sins* of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself” (Heb 7:26-27). So much genuine Christian piety involves exalting Christ by

continually *matching* His perfect suitability to answer every aspect of our ruin. **The saint is always about the business of *matching the dimensions of Christ's Saviorhood with our sinnership—of matching His work of redemption with our ruin.***

A true believer is staggered by the 'vows' Christ took to bring us from dust to glory—to make us part of God's 'forever family'. How we need to rub the spiritual sleep from our eyes and strive for a vivid spiritual sight of this coming glory. For, the more lucid our view of Christ's glory, the more assuredly we will see our destiny and its certainty. We are called to be overcomers who gain victory by exercising clear spiritual sight. Overcomers make it their vocation to view the glory of the Lord, and are thereby transformed (2 Cor 3:18).

In Acts 14:22, the apostle **Paul exhorted the disciples to perseverance**, "After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."*" The apostle Paul warned that perilous times are coming (2 Tim 3:1). Our Savior cautioned that our faith may cost us some of our friends, our relatives, and possibly our lives. How we need to search out the glory of the Lord, for from that vantage point, we can see the battlefield, the war, what is at stake, and the marvel of the coming King and His Kingdom.

From the vantage point of spiritual sight, or vision of His glory comes spiritual affections, from which comes assurance, and the resolve to run the race with single-minded endurance and stamina. This 'kingdom consciousness' is vital to our victory as overcomers who finish well, and who bring to harvest ('eye on the prize') (Gal 6:9). For, we must behold the glory of the King now, in His Word in order to cherish the treasure that is His Kingdom. For, only those who love Zion and her King will exert and expend themselves in order to enter in (Lu 13:24).

I am reminded of a frequent Puritan refrain: *all of this life is preparation for the next life. The greatest act of faith in the believer's spiritual journey is full confidence in Christ at the hour of one's death—every day of life is a gracious gift to prepare for that moment.*

"Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; ²for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:28-29).