

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE OF JASON WAKEFIELD AND STEPHANIE GIBBONS

Ephesians 3:14-19

Everything's wine and roses today. Everything's dressed in white, pruned, plucked, polished. Everything glimmers with the wistful optimism of a children's story. Everything's "Happily ever after." And that is why I feel so bad. I hate to do it, but I have to water down the wine and stink up the roses. I have to scuff up what's been polished. I have to tell that children's story to grow up. Why? Because "happily ever after" only exists on the other side of matching and nicely polished coffins, unless Jesus comes first.

Your family is going to fall short. It is going to fall short of your expectations and of God's. The first will bring you sadness; the second condemnation. How do I know that? Because "*flesh gives birth to flesh.*" It's the story of your parents' families, and their parents' families, and so on and so forth.

Adam blamed Eve when he fell into sin. Sarah nagged Abraham to help God's promise along by having a child with Hagar, and then got mad at him for doing just that. Rebekah tricked Isaac into blessing the wrong son. Laban, Jacob's father-in-law, tricked Jacob into marrying the wrong daughter. Job's wife told him to curse God and die. Aaron and Miriam openly complained about their brother Moses' wife. Abigail's husband opposed the Lord's anointed. Michal despised her husband David as he worshipped the LORD. Esther's husband unwittingly persecuted and almost destroyed here people. Hosea had a wife named Gomer, and if that's not bad enough, she ran around on him. Even Joseph at first looked to divorce Mary quietly after the Annunciation. How'd you ever make it through Sunday School still wanting to get married?

And it doesn't get easier when children come: Cain kills Abel, Ishmael taunts Isaac, Jacob and Esau fight already in the womb, Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery, Aaron builds a golden calf while Moses is on Mt. Sinai with the one true God. And that's just the first five books of the Bible.

Trust me, I'd love to be up here telling you "happily ever after," but you're going to wake up tomorrow husband and wife for the first time, with no make-up or breath mints, with morning hair and sleep in your eyes, and it's not going to be pretty. We're not in Paradise anymore, all because our first family fell short.

I could make a joke here, but there's nothing funny about what you're up against. I could quote some sweet and sentimental line from a love song, but you've asked me to preach Bible, not Backstreet Boys. I'd offer rose-colored glasses or some fig leaves to hide the problem, but God's law focuses our eyes just fine, and you remember what He did with the fig leaves.

So what? I could end here, but if that wouldn't turn reception wine into water, and bitter water at that, I don't know what would. But this marriage stuff can't be all Moses

and no Christ, can it? Our Lord's first miracle was at a wedding after all. Our Lord did call Himself our heavenly Bridegroom. Our Lord has invited us to a wedding feast. And that's why we thank God for "therefore"s

"For that reason," or "therefore," "I kneel before the Father, from whom the whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name." The Dogmaticians explain that this text is about the mystical union. And that's great, so long as we know what it means. To put it simply, this text is about the mystery that Christ dwells in us through the mysteries of God. Christ moves into the shanty of your heart to make it His temple. And when Christ moves into the neighborhood, the housing value goes up, because the Spirit doesn't come to spruce things up; the Spirit comes to tear down and rebuild, and that is what He's done in you, and that is all in Christ, by Christ, through Christ, and for Christ, your Brother in human flesh who gave you a divine Father in a heavenly Family.

"This love surpasses knowledge." That God should die for man to live, that doesn't fit inside your noggin. But it doesn't need to: it fits into your ears, onto your forehead, into your mouth. *"This love surpasses knowledge,"* but it humbles itself to be born of a Virgin, to be obedient to death, even death on a cross, to come through tap water turned water of life, through bread and wine turned Body and Blood, through sinful men turned stewards of the mysteries of God, to short-falling families turned family of God, all through the plain Word and call of Christ.

So what about the wine and roses? The Rose of Sharon gives you wine red with His Passion. What about the white? *"Though your sins be red as scarlet, Christ makes them white as snow."* What about all the pruning and plucking and polishing? Through the washing of water with the word, Christ has made you presentable, not only for one big night, but for eternity, as His eternal bride *"without stain or wrinkle, or any other blemish."* What about the "Happily ever after?" This time it's for real, and not just what you say at weddings, because this is your second wedding, and there's no scandal about it. You've both been married since before you could say, "I do." You are married to Christ, who dwells in your hearts through faith and loves you with a *"love that surpasses knowledge."* And you'd better not divorce Him to marry each other. No, He is the third string in the cord. He is the hope for the Family. He is the Family name, the Family meal, and the Family story, all because He hung on the Family Tree.

There are a lot of reasons to rejoice today. Rejoice because today you enter into what God instituted in Paradise, before the world ever knew a single sin or bore a single curse. Rejoice because today you receive each other, not simply as a husband or wife, but as a brother or sister in Christ. Rejoice because, while every family falls short, you kneel before the Father whose arms are always long enough to reach you. You, together with all the saints of God, have been given from Him to grasp, to *"grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ."*

Throw out the bitter water of human failure; it has been made sweet by the wood of the cross. The law has hamstrung the “happily ever after” of the fallen world, but “happily ever after” is what Father in the gospel, the power of God, declares you to be in Christ, because you are an invited guest at the wedding feast of the Lamb, even as you have now made Him an invited guest at yours. And that’s your text in a nutshell. No jokes, just promises. You chose a good one. May it take flesh every day in your life together, as the love poured into you in Christ spills over into your love for one another! And the love of Christ never falls short. Amen.