

## God's Real Transformation

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It is good to be here with you on this eighth day of Unleavened Bread. Please do not think that I am trying to be presumptuous and adding another day to God's holy days. But due to circumstances of Unleavened Bread this year, you probably still have unleavened bread outside of your home.

As we assemble today on the Sabbath, the first of the seven-Sabbath count of Pentecost and immediately following the days of Unleavened Bread, we continue to inhabit unleavened dwellings for the most part, unless we went to dinner last night after the last Day of Unleavened Bread. And when it ended at sunset, we have yet to return to eating the physical leaven that we put out of our homes before sunset a week ago on Friday.

So on this Sabbath day that pictures that time when all be living in peace and unity that can only come when God returns His whole creation from the bondage of lives leavened by sin, it should give us a moment to pause and consider: Will we continue to grow in the unleavened image of the Father and Son (as Kim was just saying), in righteousness or was it just another physical exercise that did not produce anything other than a clean house?

Today, we are going to look at a set of scriptures from a little bit different angle than we normally do, because I would like us to fully appreciate the change that God is creating and already sees in each one of us, as we continue to grow as one body united in grace and knowledge, while preparing to be the virtuous and unleavened life God already expects and sees fulfilled in us.

Before we go there, I would like to draw a picture of the real transformation that God expects in us and our relationship with Them from a fictional transformation that is familiar to most of us. Most of you, especially the older folks, are familiar with the play, "My Fair Lady." It was a musical version of George Bernard Shaw's play, "Pygmalion," which Shaw intended

to be a satirical look at the affectation of the upper class and what he considered pretentious behavior of manners. However, I think within the play is an illustration of a valuable lesson we should carry with us out of the Days of Unleavened Bread. It ended as the weekly Sabbath began last night,

For those who are not familiar with the basic premise of "My Fair Lady," linguistic professor Henry Higgins wagers that he can take someone who is considered one of the lowliest members of society and teach her to speak and act so much like the upper class that no one will be able to tell she is merely a guttersnipe, someone who has spent most of her time in the streets and the slums of the city. He selects the disheveled cockney street urchin, Eliza Doolittle, as the subject of his master transformation into a lady of the cultural elite, while knowing underneath that façade is the lily flower girl.

Following quite a frustrating period of training for both Eliza and Professor Higgins, one night there is finally a breakthrough as Eliza painstakingly begins to repeat one of the training phrases with the aristocratic articulation that delighted Professor Higgins. Her consistent proficiency led him to decide to make a calculated first step in presenting her to the aristocracy in a limited circumstance. Being a member of the gentry himself, Higgins takes Eliza to the Ascot horse race. This thoroughbred horse race was a major event the upper class attended in all their finery. Eliza was dressed as beautifully as the rest, speaking and acting with the mannerisms of aristocracy. Although obviously stilted in speech and manner, very methodically she was greeting people with pre-programmed phrases like, "How do you do?" and "Is not the weather fine today."

But here, within this less than intimate atmosphere of the races, her superficial elegance and beauty was able to hide her ill at ease and unnatural aristocratic behavior. That is, until in the excitement of the moment she scandalized those around her when she excitedly shouted to her horse, who was in one of the races, to "Move its blooming "posterior!" (You can imagine what she said.) Although a bit of a setback, it did not deter Professor Higgins in his determination to transform Eliza from a guttersnipe into someone who would really possess beauty and grace and manner and speech, which, to make a long story short, is exactly what she became.

But there is one more piece to add for our purposes here today. By the end of the process of transformation, what had merely been a project became the apple of Professor Higgins' eye. Any of you who are familiar with the story may remember the very end of the play as Henry Higgins reflection on the transformed Eliza Doolittle and everything about her that delights him, as he says, "A second nature to me now, like breathing out and breathing in." Henry Higgins used his ability to transform Eliza Dolittle to feed his own vanity, but came to realize upon the completion of his project, that she was so precious to him now, she was like the very breath of life.

Brethren, there is a reason I used this introduction today and I hope you see the illustration I was trying to draw. Though there is really no comparison to His work in us, Jesus Christ is transforming His bride into the precious gem and the delight He knew she would become before the project even began. Please consider these points on this Sabbath day, the seventh day in the count of Pentecost, the first of the seven Sabbaths in our count to Pentecost, as the project continues and we become the precious unleavened lives that God knew would delight Him from before the project began.

First, unlike Professor Higgins who was recreating someone into his image to prove a point for his own glory, Jesus Christ's goal is to prepare us to be His bride for the glory of the Father. The second one, we are in the process that will eventually bring a very real and permanent change, from guttersnipes into the very image and likeness of God. Number three, although in the process we may find ourselves uncomfortable in living what we are being led to do and will occasionally regress into an embarrassment to our teacher, He will keep at it. And so must we in the pursuit of righteousness. And four, gradually, with our cooperation which is a very small part, the unleavened life of Jesus Christ that we are learning and living will become as natural to us as it is to Him, but only by the grace of God.

With all this in mind as we keep the first of the seven Sabbaths in our count of Pentecost, it is important to remember that we are being prepared as firstfruits, and the firstfruits are Jesus Christ's precious jewels that make up the bride of Christ that delight Him and will be with Him wherever He goes.

But before we go forward, I would like us to turn to an important foundational scripture to keep in mind throughout this sermon. Please turn with me to Romans 15.

**Romans 15:4-6** For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember, everything in this book was written for us. And as the apostle Paul wrote in I Corinthians 10:11, "for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." I would like to read those same verses to you again from The Message, the Bible in Contemporary Language, because I think it will add a little bit more to it.

**Romans 15:4-6** (The Message) Even if it was written in the Scriptures long ago, you can be sure it's written for us. God wants the combination of his steady, constant calling and warm, personal counsel in Scripture to come to characterize us, keeping us alert for whatever He will do next. May our dependably steady and warmly personal God develop maturity in you so you get along with each other as well as Jesus gets along with us all. Then we'll be a choir—not our voices only, but our very lives singing in harmony in a stunning anthem to the God and Father of our Master Jesus!

Always throughout God's Word is a message of unity to those whom He has called to be ready to receive Christ as His precious single-minded bride, ready to carry out our subsequent responsibilities with Him for the glory of the Father. But I think it may be good to stop here again for a minute to remind ourselves of our less than auspicious beginning. We need to always keep our minds on the work that the Father and Son have been doing from the beginning and by Their grace alone we are being transformed into the perfect helpmate for Jesus Christ. Otherwise, we will merely become a stilted embarrassment to our Teacher.

So please turn with me to our Eliza Doolittle scripture you are all familiar with in I Corinthians 1.

**I Corinthians 1:26-31** For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things that are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, he who glories let him glory in the Lord.

So, as we move forward in this sermon to see the incredible and exalted position that we have as the firstfruit bride of Christ, as a predetermined delight to God from the beginning of the project, we must see this is all for the glory of God. All of this was planned from the beginning with the encouraging details of the project scattered throughout God's Word. So let us take a look at some of the promises that are before us. First, turn with me to Revelation 14. We will be reading verses 1 through 5 and verse 12 and then we will go over to Revelation 19.

**Revelation 14:1-5** Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of the harpist playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among

men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.

**Revelation 14:12** Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

**Revelation 19:6-10** And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true saying of God." And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

In an essay, "Do We Remember Who We Are?" by John Reid, John wrote about these verses.

Revelation 14:1-5 and 12 is about the 144,000 who were described as the firstfruits of God in verse 4. As far as we are concerned, there is no greater group in the history of the world to attain to be part of. Yet it is this very group we have been called to. This select collection of people, redeemed from the earth and without fault before God, have a unique relationship with Him, shown symbolically in their having His name on their forehead. Their reward is to follow the Lamb, Jesus Christ, wherever He goes for, they are His bride, [as John wrote.]

John continues:

Later in Revelation 19:6-10, the apostle John beholds the bride of Christ in all her glory and an angel tells the apostle, "Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb."

John continues a bit further down in the essay in reference to Malachi 3, Hebrews 2, and Revelation 20, he wrote:

Though we are the weak of the world, in God's eyes we are precious—His jewels. Although we are right now a little lower than the angels, we will be set over the works of His hands. What a great honor it is to be part of the firstfruits. Yes, we are very special and because of this, we cannot allow ourselves to let down. We have an awesome future. We will live and rule with Christ.

Brethren, God is doing a very real and very complete transformation from guttersnipes to firstfruits in the bride of Christ who will follow the Lamb wherever He goes. But just what do the firstfruits of Christ do? I would like you to recall the scripture we read earlier from the apostle Paul and specifically the paraphrase of Romans 15:4 from the Message Bible where he said, "Even if it was written in the scripture long ago, you can be sure it's written for us. God wants the combination of his steady, constant calling and warm personal counsel in the scripture to come to characterize us, keeping us alert for whatever he will do next."

You remember Jesus Christ tells us in John 5:17 that He and the Father began their work at some unexplained time in the past and They are still working. At Jesus Christ's coming, then, it only makes sense that His firstfruits bride will have been fully prepared to join their Husband in His work as His perfect helpmate. Not just following the Lamb wherever He goes, but supporting His work, just as a perfect wife supports her husband.

With these things in mind, I would like to point you to a section of Scripture for you to study in detail later with a bit of a different approach than traditionally taught. We may find a prophetic look at the work of the bride of

Christ in an unlikely place, but may in fact find the verses that God gave us personal counsel in the Scripture, keeping us alert for what comes next. Please turn with me to the book of Proverbs.

I remember several years ago a minister in Worldwide gave a very fine sermon on Proverbs and using Proverbs as a teaching tool for your children. One of the things he suggested was using Proverbs every month in its 31 chapter format as a daily teaching tool. Each chapter is so full of instruction and wisdom that you could follow this format with your children from toddler through teen and always have fresh study lessons each day. Nancy and I did use this tool with our children, but not with the consistency we should have employed over the years. But it still is a very good tool for any of you to use and even as adults to do this each day.

But the one thing that really stuck in my mind was the fact that the minister who gave the sermon (and his wife) had only daughters. And he made a point of saying how important it was to him to double up the chapters in those months with less than 31 days so that the virtuous wife chapter was always presented to his girls.

However, brethren, I sincerely believe when you dig into it, you may find quite a bit more personal counsel from our God of what comes next for those being transformed now into the wife that follows and supports her Husband wherever He goes for eternity. Proverbs 31:10 through the end of the chapter may very well be God's description of the bride of Christ and what the firstfruits will be doing as the perfect helpmate of Jesus Christ, following the Lamb wherever He goes in service to all who will follow in the next phase of God's magnificent plan. There are words in there about taking care of daughters and the different things that were involved in it. I think you will find it has got a lot to do with the bride of Christ. Please turn with me to Proverbs 31:10 and we will go through this quickly because I want you to think about it.

**Proverbs 31:10-31** Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life. She seeks wool and flax, and willingly works with her hands. She is like the merchant ships, she brings her food from



afar. She also rises while it is yet night, and provides food for her household, and a portion for her maidservants. She considers a field and buys it; from her profits she plants a vineyard.

She girds herself with strength, and strengthens her arms. She perceives that her merchandise is good, and her lamp does not go out by night. She stretches out her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. She extends her hand to the poor, yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household is clothed with scarlet. She makes tapestry for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple. Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land.

She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies sashes for the merchants. Strength and honor are her clothing; she shall rejoice in the time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness. She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: "Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all." Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates.

As I said, I am encouraging you to dig into Proverbs 31:10-31 yourselves. But I would like to point out a couple of clues God gives us here that we are looking at something much more than a perfect mate for a human being. Right from verse 10, we can see two important clues. Who can find the virtuous woman? is the first phrase.

Please hold your fingers in Proverbs 31 and turn with me to the book of Ruth. As you all probably know, Ruth is a book that is traditionally read and studied at Pentecost because it clearly has types of Christ, the church, the firstfruits, and the unity through the Holy Spirit throughout that book. So here in Ruth is a clue to the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31. In Ruth 3, verse 11, Boaz, who is the type of Christ in the book, tells Ruth the following:

**Ruth 3:11** "And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you request, for all the people of my town know that you are a virtuous woman."

Same word. Perhaps this is nothing or perhaps in this season as we count to Pentecost, there may be some significance to God assigning the same characteristic to the wife of Proverbs 31 as he does to Ruth.

In his commentary on Ruth 3:11, John Macarthur writes: "In all respects, Ruth personifies excellence. The same language has been used of Boaz, a man of great wealth, unlikely translated 'a man of valor,' thus making them the perfectly matched couple for an exemplary marriage."

The second clue in Proverbs 31:10 is in "her worth is far above rubies." In *Strong's* #6443, it comes from the same word as #6434 and it is probably better a pearl. Have you heard that before, brethren? As a matter of fact, the Amplified Bible actually translates this verse, "A capable, intelligent, and virtuous woman, who is he who can find her? She is far more precious than jewels and her value is above rubies or pearls." *Barnes' Notes Commentary* says that the better translation is pearl and *Adam Clarke's Commentary* says, "She is invaluable, her price is are above rubies, no quantity of precious stones can equal her worth."

With this in mind, I would like to read what Martin Collins wrote at the end of a short Bible study on the Parable of the Pearl in Matthew 13. Martin wrote:

Further, we do not choose Christ, but He selects us. Since He is the merchant, the price paid was His life, and the church is the pearl. The church is one body, composed of those He has sought out through the ages to be a habitation of Christ by His Spirit and who will be His bride at His return. The Pearl represents a wonderful picture of the purchase of the church and the preparation for the Kingdom of God. It is encouraging to know that Jesus does not seek us in reluctant fulfillment of duty. Nor is he groping in the dark, hoping that we will respond to His plea, but He seeks us out with an efficient, organized pre-planned goal in mind. He pursues us as a man courts a woman to be his bride, willing to spill His own

blood as her purchase price. What greater price could have been paid for the church than the life of Jesus Christ, the perfect sacrifice?

You may consider this sermon a stretch or you may just find under closer inspection that God is giving us a glimpse of the work that will totally prepare the helpmate of Jesus Christ and what that helpmate will be doing with Him in His work to bring the billions John referenced yesterday into the relationship we now have the privilege to have with the Father and the Son. Look at Proverbs 31:11 again.

**Proverbs 31:11** The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will have no lack of gain.

**Proverbs 31:25-29** Strength and honor are her clothing; she shall rejoice in time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness. She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: "Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all."

A commentary from the Amplified Bible notes that,

This virtuous wife is someone whose work exceeds Miriam, the one who led the nation's women in praise of God; Deborah, the patriotic military advisor; Ruth, the woman of constancy; Hannah, the ideal mother; the Shulamite, a hospitable woman; Huldah, the woman who revealed God's secret message to the national leaders in II Kings 22. And even more than Queen Esther, the woman who risks sacrificing her life for her people.

The Amplified continues,

In what way did she excel them all? In her spiritual and practical devotion to God, which permeated every area of the relationships of her life. [And then the Amplified writes] all seven of the Christian virtues (II Peter 1:5-7) are there like corded thread in the tapestry.

Brethren, I propose to you that here is another place where God may very well be giving His personal counsel in the Scriptures, keeping us alert to what comes next for those He is carefully preparing to be the helpmate of Christ wherever He goes.

I have been very concerned about speaking on this today and I was really encouraged the other day, as a matter of fact, the day before yesterday, when I opened the church website and saw the featured audio that day (on Thursday) was the November 23rd, 2002 sermon by Richard Ritenbaugh, "The Perfect Wife." I had really been concerned about giving this message until I saw that. And especially after I went over the sermon transcript and read the very end of his sermon where Richard said,

Let us finish in Proverbs 31. Obviously, I am not going to go through Proverbs 31. But I want to just read some verses and then close. I had no intention of going through Proverbs 31—that has been done before. I want to just go over there as a capstone to this message.

**Proverbs 31:10-12** Who can refine a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trusts her, so he will have no lack of gain. She does him good not evil all the days of her life.

**Proverbs 31:25-31** Strength and honor are her clothing [notice the positivity here. This is along the same lines as we have been going so far. And I want you to see that this woman is not downtrodden, she is not the dust of the earth. Here, she is a woman who does things God's way.]; she shall rejoice in time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness. She watches over the ways of her household. . . Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all. Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing. But a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her the fruit of her hands and let her own works praise her in the gate.

This section reveals that the worldly view of the biblical wife as some oppressed slave is utterly false. This paints a picture of honor, and praise; of worth beyond measure; of opportunity and blessing; of great fulfillment and satisfaction. Here, if we follow God's instruction, is God's view of the perfect wife.

And I would like to add, if I may, to what Richard said here. This is God's view of the perfect bride of Christ, His helpmate that follows Him wherever He goes, diligently working with Him as the perfect wife of Christ.

So, on this first Sabbath of the seven-Sabbath count to the Feast of Firstfruits, perhaps God has given us a glimpse of the transformation that has been a delightful reality to Him from the beginning, for those who have been called to be the firstfruits and bride of Jesus Christ.