

The Bride Of Christ (Part One)

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As we begin this sermon on the second day of God's holy Feast of Tabernacles, please turn with me to Revelation the 19th chapter, verse 1.

Revelation 19:1-8 After these things, I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven saying, "Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God, for true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her." Again they said, "Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever! And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, "Amen! Alleluia!" Then a voice came from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!" 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."

Brethren, this is the bride of Christ that has done whatever it takes under the direction of the Bridegroom to be fully ready when Christ returns. He has supplied all the fine garments to be worn by His bride. The bride has carefully participated in the preparation to be the fulfilling and perfect helpmate of Jesus Christ within all that He could provide.

As noted in the previous two sermons that I gave just before the Feast on the marvelous works of God that He purposely made to be remembered, we examined a really fine example of the participatory training of Moses within the holiness of God.

Once God had brought Moses to be ready in humility, he was then called into the holy presence of God, and he was meticulously prepared to begin making proper leadership decisions in accord with God's will. His training in leadership within the marvelous works of God prepared him to anticipate each move he needed to make in leading others forward, faithfully following God's lead.

This is an early example of a faithful helpmate. Those who have been called into the holy presence of God through Jesus Christ have the incredible privilege to learn the same lesson now, to learn to make decisions that are in line with God's will, putting away presumptuously doing things that reflect a contrary heart of unbelief.

This is one of the main reasons God has summoned His people into all the places He has declared as holy under His name this week. This is a place set apart for rejoicing and refreshment, as well as intense training to be the bride of Christ.

But it is also important to keep in mind that we are not always going to get it right in this life where we are still subject to the pulls of the self-satisfying carnal nature, including the angry impatience shown in Moses even at the end of his life's journey and faith.

But by being together here this week, God has given us time to refresh and revitalize with our eyes intensely focused on the road, His road ahead.

Although Revelation 19:7 tells us the bride has made herself ready, verse 8 shows us it is only through the humble cooperative effort with Jesus Christ, who supplies everything we need to finish the training of perfection, that this will be an accomplished end.

At this point I would like you to hear again an inspiring comment of proper training and self-sacrifice that I used in the introduction to a sermon 15 years ago. I thought it was important to bring this very inspiring speech to the fore again as we consider our cooperative preparations as the bride of Christ who will have made herself ready to meet the Bridegroom at His return.

A good many of you probably have heard this before, but I think today as the trials and tribulations for both young and old get more difficult within the circumstances of this presumptuously anti-God world, we need to consider these words applying them to our own vital training to rule with Christ in service to all who will come after us.

In the spring of 1993, former President Ronald Reagan gave the following commencement address to the graduating class at The Citadel. You may have all heard this, maybe even recently, but I think it is important for us to listen to this now and consider ourselves.

The Citadel has consistently been ranked as the best public university in the South by *U.S. News and World Report*. The university has trained some of the top civilian and military leaders in the history of the United States, as well as 23 countries around the world.

President Reagan began his address to the graduates this way:

The Citadel's roll of honor today stretches unblemished from the Ardennes to the thirty-eighth parallel, from Grenada to the Persian Gulf with name after name of those who have served our country bravely in times of war. Names like General Charles Summerall, General Mark Clark, and your own current president of the university, General Bud Watts.

Yes, countless soldiers have distinguished themselves on the fields of valor and are part of the century and a half tradition of duty and honor we celebrate today.

But for me [President Reagan continues] there is one name that will always come to mind whenever I think of The Citadel and the corps of cadets. It is the name that appears in no military histories. Its owner won no glory on the field of battle.

No, his moment of truth came not in combat but on a snow-driven peacetime day in the nation's capital in January of 1982. That is the day that the civilian airliner in which he was a passenger crashed into the 14th Street Bridge and plunged into the rough waters of the icy Potomac. He survived the impact of the crash and found himself with a few small group of other survivors struggling to stay afloat in the near frozen river.

And then suddenly there was hope. A park police helicopter appeared overhead trailing a lifeline to the outstretched hands below, a lifeline that could carry but a few of the victims to the safety on shore.

News cameramen watching helplessly recorded the scene as the man in the water repeatedly handing the rope to the others refusing to save himself until first one, then two, then three and four, and finally five of his fellow passengers had been rescued.

But when the helicopter returned for one final trip, the trip that would rescue the man who had passed the rope, it was too late. He had slipped at last beneath the waves of the sinking wreckage.

He was the only one of 79 fatalities in the disaster who lost his life after the accident itself. For months thereafter we knew him only as the unknown hero. And then an exhaustive Coast Guard investigation conclusively established his identity.

Many of you here today know his name as well as I do, for his portrait now hangs on your honor wall, as indeed it should, on this very campus, the campus where he once walked as you have, through the Summerall Gate and along the Avenue of Remembrance.

He was a young first classman with a crisp uniform and a confident stride on a bright spring morning full of hopes and plans for the future. He never dreamed that his life's supreme challenge would come in its final moments some 25 years later, adrift in the bone-chilling waters of the ice strewn river and surrounded by others who desperately needed his help. But when the challenge came, he was ready.

His name was Arland D. Williams Jr., The Citadel class of 1957. He brought honor to his alumni, and his alma mater, and honor to his nation. I was never more proud as President than on the day in June 1983 when his parents and his children joined me in the Oval Office, for then I was able on behalf of the nation to pay posthumous honor to him.

"Greater love," as the Bible says, "has no man than to lay down his life for his friends." I have spoken of Arland Williams in part to honor him anew in your presence here at this special institution. . .

Consider this brethren, the special institution which we have been called at the Feast of Tabernacles into the body of Christ.

. . . into this special institution that helped mold his character. It is the same institution that has now put its imprint on you, the graduating seniors of its 150th year. But I have also retold the story because I believe it has something important to teach to you as graduates about the challenges that life inevitably presents and about what happens to us when we meet them.

Sometimes you see [President Reagan continues], life gives us what we think is fair of the choices that will shape our future. On such occasions we are able to look afar along the path up ahead to the distant point in the woods where the poet's two roads diverged, and then if we are wise, we will take time to think and reflect before choosing which road to take before the junction is reached.

But such occasions in fact are rather rare, far rarer, I suspect, than the confident eyes of one's early twenties can quite perceive. Far more often than we comfortably admit the most crucial of life's moments come like a scriptural thief in the night. Suddenly without notice, the crisis is upon us and the moment of choice is at hand, a moment fraught with the import of ourselves and for all who are depending on the choice that we make.

For we find ourselves, if you will, plunged without warning into the icy water where the currents of moral consequence run swift and deep. And where our fellow man, and yes, I believe [this is President Reagan speaking], our Maker are waiting to see whether we will pass the rope.

These are moments when instinct and character take command as they took command of Arland Williams on the day the Lord would call him home, for there is no time at such moments for anything but fortitude and integrity. Debate and reflection, and a leisurely weighing of the alternatives are luxuries we do not have.

The only question is what kind of responsibility will come to the fore. And now we come to the heart of the matter to the core lesson taught by the heroism of Arland Williams on January 13, 1982.

For you see, character that takes command in moments of crucial choices had already been determined. It had been determined by a thousand other choices made earlier in seemingly unimportant events. It had been determined by all the little choices of years past, by all those times when the voice of conscience was at war with the voice of temptation, whispering the lie that it really doesn't matter. It had been determined by all the day-to-day decisions made when life seemed easy and crisis seemed far away. The decisions that piece by piece, bit by bit, developed habits of discipline or of laziness, habits of self-sacrifice or of self-indulgence, habits of duty and honor and integrity or dishonor and shame.

Because when life does get tough and the crisis is undeniably at hand, we must in an instant look inward for the strength of character to see us through. We will find nothing inside ourselves that has not already been put there.

Brethren, consider here Revelation 19:7.

Revelation 19:7 Let us be glad and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.

President Reagan concluded,

When I was about your age, President Roosevelt said, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." Today in much different times, our prosperous nation has little to fear but complacency itself. We must stay strong and flexible. We must keep our powder dry, and this venerable academic institution has a historic obligation to preserve the liberty of America.

This Feast of Tabernacles, tabernacled with Jesus Christ, has the obligation for us to be ready to serve the Kingdom of God.

President Reagan continued,

Savor these moments. Keep these memories. Remember the works of God [we can add into that, close to your heart], cherish your families and friends because we never know what the future will bring. Live each day to the fullest because it is you who lays solid foundations of a free society.

Brethren, it is you who will be the prepared helpmate of Jesus Christ.

President Reagan said you are ready to build homes. He went on to talk about General Douglas MacArthur, who knew the difficulties of war, who wrote a prayer, and President Reagan said, perhaps we can find something within this prayer from a father today.

He said, here is the general's prayer.

General Douglas MacArthur's Prayer Build me a son, O Lord, who will be strong enough to know when he is weak and brave enough to face himself when he is afraid, one who will be proud and unbending in honest defeat and humble and gentle in victory. Build me a son whose wishes will not take the place of deed, a son who will know Thee, and that to know himself is the foundation stone of knowledge. Give him humility so that he may always remember the simplicity of true greatness, the open mindedness of true wisdom, and the meekness of true strength. Then I, his father, will dare to whisper, I have not lived in vain.

Cadets, live each day with enthusiasm, optimism, hope, and honor. If you do [President Reagan concludes], I am convinced that your contribution to this wonderful experiment we call America will be greater than we ever imagined.

Brethren, we are here today to continue our training with enthusiasm, optimism, hope, and honor to contribute with minds of true wisdom and meekness of true strength to something that far exceeds any of the most magnificent achievements from the minds of men.

We have been called into the holiness of God to have a participatory part in making ourselves ready to be united together with Jesus Christ for service to all those who will come after us.

We need to keep this in the forefront of our minds as we deal with the almost overwhelming times that are ahead and the choices that will need to be made that will make us be ready to be one with Christ as a perfected helpmate.

I would like to quote one more thing from President Reagan as he faced probably the most difficult time of his own life one-and-a-half years later. On November 5th, 1994, a very public personage but a very private man opened up what he would rather have kept in the family at his home at that time.

In a letter to the American people, he wrote:

My fellow Americans, I have recently been told I am one of the millions of Americans who will be afflicted with Alzheimer's. Upon learning the news, Nancy and I had to decide whether as private citizens, we would keep this a private matter or whether we would make it known to in a public way.

In the past, Nancy suffered from breast cancer, and I had cancer surgeries. We found through our open disclosures we were able to raise public awareness. We were happy that as a result, many more people underwent testing, they were treated in early stages and able to return to normal, healthy lives because we opened up.

So now we feel it is important to share with you. In opening our hearts we hope this might promote greater awareness of this condition. Perhaps we will encourage a clearer understanding of the individuals and families who are affected by it.

At the moment [President Reagan said] I feel just fine. I intend to live the remainder of the years God gives me on this earth doing the things I have always done. I will continue to share life's journey with my beloved Nancy and my family. I plan to enjoy the great outdoors and stay in touch with my friends and supporters.

[President Reagan concluded], Unfortunately as the Alzheimer's disease progresses, the family often bears a heavy burden. I only wish that there was some way I could spare Nancy from the painful experience. When the time comes, I am confident that with your help she will face it with faith and courage.

In closing, let me thank you, the American people, for giving me the great honor of allowing me to serve you as President. When the Lord calls me home, whenever that may be, I will leave with the greatest love for this country of ours, an eternal optimism for its future.

I now begin the journey that will lead me into the sunset of my life. I know that for America there will always be a bright dawn ahead. [Brethren, for us there is more than a bright dawn ahead. President Reagan ended] Thank you, my friends. May God always bless you.

Brethren, this is another aspect of our time together this week.

Within President Reagan's letter is a few takeaways for us. As he said, it is important to share it with you. In opening our hearts, perhaps we will encourage a clearer understanding of the individuals and families.

Of course, President Reagan was referring to his own family's trials who were upon them, specifically in the form of Alzheimer's diagnosis and the unknown immediate difficulties ahead. But for us who are gathered here today and throughout this week, while considering these words, when the time comes, I am confident that with your help she will face with courage.

We gather in God's holy time to help one another in this time of preparation of making ourselves ready as the bride of Christ. We are here this week as part of the training of the bride of Christ to learn how to help others to face the darkest moments of life in the world with great faith and courage. This is a part of the work of the bride of Christ to make ready, learning to put on the fine linen of sincere empathy toward the needs of our brethren.

This does not mean that we are here to be sullen and downcast this week. Quite the opposite. We are here, we have all been invited by God this week into the time that He has set aside for rejoicing and refreshment.

Regardless of where we are this week by the mercy of God, we dwell within His holy time set aside for jubilant thanksgiving, for His great works to be remembered, time used to make ourselves ready to be the perfect helpmate of Jesus Christ at His return.

I have taken quite a significant portion in this introduction and what I consider an exceptionally inspirational allegory to be found in both President Reagan's speech in 1993 and in his letter one-and-a-half years later in '94, an allegory that extends to the preparations that we are going through right now and making ourselves ready within the work that only God can do to be the perfected helpmate of the King of kings, as we just heard in the song, coming to reign.

This is the first in a two-part series of sermons that I will finish, God-willing, on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles regarding the bride of Christ that has made herself ready. But today I want to set the foundation for the next sermon, which I hope is going to help us understand more thoroughly what we should be doing now in training, considering the specific works of Christ's helpmate for eternity.

So first, please turn with me to I Corinthians the 15th chapter and we will be picking it up in verse 19.

I Corinthians 15:19-26 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are all men the most pitiable. But now Christ has risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom of God to the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.

Brethren, these verses point to a very specific time and a very specific group of individuals who have been called in an order only God Himself has already determined.

It is important that we take time in this sermon, the second day of God's holy Feast of Tabernacles, to remind ourselves why we are here. As Richard has been clearly teaching over the last couple of years, I think the main focus of the holy days is Jesus Christ.

Within that we need to fully appreciate the very special relationship that we have been called to have with Him now in order that we can fully appreciate the very special training that God is providing to a very carefully selected handful compared to all who will ever live.

If we are to get the most out of this time here this week, as well as throughout this short lifetime we live, we must understand the distinct and priceless gift that we have been given right now. We are preparing to be Christ's helpmate for eternity and a living witness of the perfecting work that only God can do through Jesus Christ.

With this in mind, please turn with me back to Genesis 1:26. We are going to hit a couple of really familiar scriptures because I want to lay out God's plan for everybody.

Of course, this is God's general purpose statement.

Genesis 1:26-27 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image according to Our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle over all the earth, over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Now turn with me all the way to the other end of the book in II Peter chapter 3. Remember, I am trying to help us to realize the whole overall plan of God.

II Peter 3:8-9 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

And now to I Timothy 2, verse 3.

I Timothy 2:3-4 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Brethren, this is God's very clear intention for all mankind, not just for us, but for all men.

But as He calls each in his own order, we must keep in mind our very special part in this as a group, and each of us individually, if we stay the course in humility because He is preparing us to be something that is almost beyond our ability to fully comprehend and appreciate as we come together this week for this very purposeful training and rejoicing.

Marriage throughout the Bible is pictured as the closest of relationships, and I want to spend a few minutes at this moment focusing on the type of the bride of Christ. It appears in the Old Covenant God made with Israel.

These are fairly well known scriptures to us all, but I would like us to take a few minutes looking at this relationship that God had with a physical people, although I do not want to dwell on this other other than to show that God's selection is on the part of Israel, what He is going to do with them going forward, but I just want to show what He gives us in type in Israel.

So turn with me please first to Exodus the 19th chapter.

Exodus 19:1-8 In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai. For they had departed from Rephidim, had come to the Wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness. So Israel camped there before the mountain. And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings [referencing the sermonette], and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep

My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people, for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel." So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the Lord had commanded him. Then all the people answered together and said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do." So Moses brought the words back from the people to the Lord.

Here is the beginning of a betrothal promise between God and physical Israel. This is a type of our betrothal promise. It is a type of the eternal betrothal mutually made with Christ and spiritual Israel.

Let us pick it up again in Deuteronomy 7 within the middle of God's instructions to those He had set apart to be in unity with Him in holiness.

Deuteronomy 7:2-8 "And when the Lord your God delivers them over to you [he is talking about when they came into Canaan], you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them, nor show mercy to them. Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughters to their son, nor take their daughters for your son. For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the Lord will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly. But thus you shall deal with them: you shall destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire. For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh."

They had promised, a physical nation, a type for us, to be His holy and righteous people.

Now let us look at what God thought about His bond with them by turning with me to Ezekiel the 16th chapter.

Ezekiel 16:4-14 "As for your nativity, on the day you were born [God is talking to physical Israel, the way He looked at them] your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed in water to cleanse you; you were not rubbed with salt nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. No eye pitied you, to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you; but you were thrown out in the open field, when you yourself were loathed on the day you were born. And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' Yes, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' I made you thrive like a plant in the field; and you grew, matured, and became very beautiful. Your breasts were formed, your hair grew, and you were naked and bare.

When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine," says the Lord God.

"Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil. I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk. I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and chains on your neck. And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver; and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty. Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you," says the Lord.

This is what God did for physical Israel.

However, on the other side of the covenant, the bride was not to be trusted to remain faithful to Him.

Ezekiel 16:15-16 "But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it. You took some of your garments and adorned multicolored high places for yourself, and played the harlot on them. Such things should not have happened, nor be.

Ezekiel 16:20-22 Moreover, you took your sons and your daughters, whom you bore to Me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. Were your acts of harlotry a small matter, that you have slain My children and offered them up by causing them to pass through the fire? And in all your abominations and acts of harlotry you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare and struggling in your blood."

Ezekiel 16:30 "How degenerate is your heart!" says the Lord God, "seeing you do all these things, the deeds of a brazen harlot."

The chapter then goes on in detail to number all the acts of harlotry and adultery there were caused against a faithful God by faithless people, by His physical bride in the nation of Israel, those that He had called out and set apart. This is a very stern example to us that we should be mindful of as we are here to be trained to be the spiritual bride of Christ.

Please turn with me to II Kings 17, and we will pick it up in verse 7.

II Kings 17:7-10 For so it was that the children of Israel sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and they had feared other gods, and walked in the statutes of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel, and of the

kings of Israel, which they had made. Also the children of Israel secretly did against the Lord their God things that were not right, and they built for themselves high places in all their cities, from watchtower to fortified city.

II Kings 17:13-14 Yet the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah, by all His prophets, every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets." Nevertheless, they would not hear, but stiffened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe the Lord their God.

Finally, turn with me to Jeremiah the 3rd chapter.

Jeremiah 3:1 "They say, 'If a man divorces his wife, and she goes from him and becomes another man's, may he return to her again?' Would not that land be greatly polluted? But you have played the harlot with many lovers; yet return to Me," says the Lord.

Jeremiah 3:6-10 The Lord said also to me in the days of Josiah the king: "Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there played the harlot. And I said, after she had done all these things, 'Return to Me.' But she did not return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also. So it came to pass, through her casual harlotry, that she defiled the land and committed adultery with the stones and trees. And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense," says the Lord.

Brethren, we went through this horrible situation with the type of the bride of Christ, physical Israel, including Judah, that did not hold on to the marriage covenant agreement. They had faithlessly come and they made it in good

faith with God. He made it in good faith, but they played the harlot. They were faithless, they divorced Him.

Even though God in His faithfulness, as Paul tells us in Romans 3, has left Judah in place, keeping some of the laws in their hands, they still are a faithless people, and it is only through His faith that we can see where the Sabbath and the holy days and those particular ordinances are still being kept, but it is not because they are still part of the bride of Christ. They are not part of the bride that He had made physical Israel in separating from the world.

This needs to be on our mind as the reality of the bride of Christ is being created and each of those selected few who have made the New Covenant with Him now. This may seem to be something we would rather not consider as we assemble here this week to rejoice and refresh, but it must be carefully considered as we make all those little choices to remain faithful and prepare to be the perfect witness that Christ is preparing us for as His helpmate in spiritual Israel.

Within the metaphor of Ronald Reagan's commencement address at The Citadel, we are preparing to pass the rope when needed through the careful preparation of God's Word and all the little decisions that we have been trained to make in faith, especially during this holy time of God's Feast of Tabernacles. We are being trained to pass the rope to the people who will come after us in God's order, who are not in the same position we are being trained to be the bride of Christ.

As we continue this week, as some food for thought toward the second part of this sermon about the very exclusive bride of Christ, let us turn to a few more scriptures that we will be tying into this unique group. First of all, turn with me back again to I Corinthians 15 and this time we will be picking it up again in verse 22.

I Corinthians 15:22-26 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, after those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and authority and power, for He must reign till He

has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy will be destroyed is death.

I Corinthians 15:42-49 So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

Please turn with me back to Ephesians 5, verse 25. Again, I am trying to build on a type here, brethren.

Ephesians 5:25-32 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Now turn with me back to Genesis again, chapter 2. We will pick it up in verse 18.

Genesis 2:18 And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."

Genesis 2:21-24 And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

The same One who had formed man out of the dust of the earth and then made a perfect helpmate for him who was just like him, the first man Adam, became the second Adam through whom all will be saved.

I propose to you that in Eve we see the first promise from God of the bride of Christ, who will be just like Him. But unlike Eve or ancient Israel, this bride will always be trusted to do the right thing because Christ will have very carefully worked with her to be just like Him.

I have one more set of scriptures I would like us to turn to as we start drawing towards the end of the sermon on the bride of Christ, who has made herself ready under the careful preparation of Jesus Christ. Please turn with me back again to Revelation 14. We will be reading verses 1 through 5.

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, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists 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.

And now back to Revelation 19, verse 7.

Revelation 19:7-8 "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.

Now turn with me to Revelation chapter 22, verse 16, and I wanted to give you something to think about.

Revelation 22:16-17 "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star." And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

Here, right at the end of the Book, the bride of Christ is the perfect helpmate, helper, and witness to all that would come after as He draws them to the living waters of life.

The bride of Christ has made herself ready by submitting to the perfect preparation through Jesus Christ. We have a unique role as the perfect helpmate of Christ going wherever He goes.

Back in 1992, John Ritenbaugh responded to God's direction for this small group and so many were inspired to ask him to be their shepherd to keep us on the path behind Jesus Christ. John realized that he had been ordained as a pastor, not to preach the gospel to the world (although that has been happening to an extent) as an evangelist, but to carefully prepare those whom God had called and entrusted into his care. Although this was not the only place where the bride of Christ would continue training, he knew this was his primary responsibility before God to those who had been placed in his care.

With this in mind, John wrote *Preparing the Bride*, and in the summary points he noted:

1. Israel failed its witness. The key to effective witnessing is through preparation. And when we neglect our individual relationship with God, the work we do for Him suffers immeasurably.
2. When God prepares a man to do a work, He allows him to live long enough to finish it.
3. The admonitions to the end time church, especially in Revelation and Christ's Olivet prophecy, are unanimous. Hold fast and make sure you are spiritually ready for Christ's return.

Brethren, we are in training to be ready for Christ's return, to be His wife, His helpmate in a way that no other group of those that have been created or are being created in God's image and likeness. This is something that should evoke incredible rejoicing and the great desire this week to use this holy time as God intended it together.

In John's concluding comment in *Preparing the Bride*, he wrote,

Jesus Christ wants us to be refined, to change, to grow in godly character and righteousness, so that we will exemplify Him and be prepared without blemish for His return. He sets a very high standard in Ephesians 4:13, . . . "to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

The bride of Christ is filling out within Christ.

John's concluding paragraph stated in part,

"For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works." [The apostle Paul continues] with a great encouragement to us, he exclaims, "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." Later, he adds, "I can do all things through Christ

who strengthens me. . . . And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." We have every reason to hope [John continued]. God urges us to do our part to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. He never fails at what He sets out to do. [John finished] These times are more confused than normal. Since each person is responsible for choosing, we urge you to ask God for wisdom and give very careful thought to what you allow yourself to be fed.

Brethren, what we are being fed throughout our lives, and very specifically during God's holy time this week, is that God has called the weakest and the basest of men to be the very bride of Christ. He has called you to be the helpmate of Christ and an eternal witness of the work of God to bring all men to salvation.

We have been called to tabernacle with Christ, as Richard has been talking about, to be spiritually as intimate with Him as Adam claimed to be with Eve, "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." We are to be part of Jesus Christ, His bride.

Use this precious time of preparation and joy, knowing that God is carefully, very carefully doing His work so that the bride has made herself ready as the perfect helpmate of Christ. This should be producing both overwhelming joy and the driving motivation to do our part right now, preparing to make ourselves ready to serve as Christ's helpmate, to pass the rope to everyone who will come after us into the Family of God.