

The Bride and the Monster

by Richard E. Bieber

The sermon contrasts the true Bride of Christ with the corrupt Monster within the church, urging believers to discern their identity and calling.

Scripture: Matthew 16:18, John 2:18, Romans 16:17, Ephesians 5:25, Revelation 19:6

Topics: "End Times", "Spiritual Deception"

Description

Richard E. Bieber delivers a powerful sermon on the symbolism of a dream, where a young woman represents the Bride of Christ, initially pure and beautiful, but later corrupted by greed and power. The dream illustrates the ongoing battle between the true Bride of Christ and the deceptive religious system, referred to as the Monster, within the Church. Through biblical references, the sermon emphasizes the importance of discerning between the Bride and the Monster, highlighting the imminent separation of the two entities as signs of the end times and the need for believers to align themselves with the true Bride of Christ.

Transcript

In a dream anything can happen. Animals turn into people. A familiar door in your childhood house leads to a city you never saw before. A lifelong friend suddenly changes into a frightening stranger. It all seems perfectly natural in a dream. Time can stand still, or a thousand years can rush by in an instant. Some dreams visit when we are in a deep sleep. Some dreams come to us when we're wide awake; a vision comes to our spirit, while our natural eye is simply looking out the window as the rain beats down.

A dream is visiting me as I sit here thinking about you, and wondering how you and I fit into it. I believe God wants me to share it with you for reasons that are known to him alone. I see a young woman leaning on a balustrade, looking out over the ocean. No words could do justice to her beauty. She seems to be waiting, for in my dream I know that she is soon to be married. She opens a letter, reads it, folds it, and looks away. Tears fill her eyes. "How much longer?" she sighs.

The chief village of the small island where the young woman lives is built around a magnificent stone structure which appears to be a temple of some kind. Now I see the young woman walking toward the temple. Three men in long black robes stand in the doorway with their arms akimbo, scowling at her. She tries to enter, but they bar her from coming any closer.

As the young woman turns away, passing through the crooked lanes of the village, many people welcome her. She stoops down, lifts a crippled child in her arms, and carries him to a fountain at the end of the lane. She dips his withered leg in the water, and places him gently on the flagstone path. "Walk, Child," she commands, and soon the boy is leaping and dancing and shouting for joy. A crowd gathers. "I want you to come to my wedding," says the young woman to the people who have come to see the miracle. "It will take place very soon, and I want you all to be with me."

There is a lapse of time. Centuries. Twenty centuries. From a distance the woman looks as young as ever. But as she comes closer, I say to myself, "I must have made a mistake. This cannot be the young bride who was waiting for her bridegroom." Deep lines have formed around her mouth. The softness has gone out of her eyes. They have an expression of cruelty.

She approaches the temple. The three men in black robes who once barred her way, step to the side, bow to her, and let her pass through. The woman moves up the center aisle to the chancel. She climbs the steps, moves to the back of a large marble slab supported by four wooden pedestals, and takes her seat, facing the empty pews. On the slab is a profusion of jewelry. Glistening gold, precious stones. Chains, rings, bracelets. Slowly she begins adorning herself with six necklaces, thirteen bracelets, a ring for every finger.

"Are you the bride who once invited us all to your wedding?" I ask. She turns toward me with a face that would frighten Satan himself. Her eyes are like two bottomless pits, the corners of her mouth are curled down in a sneer.

"What do you think?" she replies, and continues with her jewelry.

"But where's the bride? What happened to her?"

In my dream I see the woman turn toward me again. The jewelry is gone. Her face is young and beautiful.

"Have you been looking for me?" she asks in a cheerful voice, clear as a mountain spring.

It is as though two women inhabit the same body. One is young, pure, and clothed in kindness. The other is hard, treacherous, hiding behind a mask which keeps slipping from her hideous face. Is the young bride being held captive in the body of this monster?

In the distance a clock strikes, and I know in my dream that the hour is late. The temple begins to fill with people. They are waiting for the jeweled woman to say something. The three men in black robes move up the center aisle, kneel before the woman, whose face is now distorted by some sort of inner agony. She lifts her hands to "bless" the congregation, which quickly falls to its knees.

"What happened to the bride?" I cry. "Where has she gone? You can't be the bride!"

The three men robed in black rise from their knees, and approach me with hatred in their eyes. Just then the priestess begins to shake violently. She grasps the stone slab and clings to it with all her might, breathing heavily, surveying the congregation with vacant eyes. Beads of perspiration form on her forehead. Is she giving birth? Something inside her seems to be tearing her apart. "No!" she cries. "No! No! No!"

Then I see something that can only happen in a dream. While the priestess clutches the stone slab, another form emerges from her body. Not a baby. A full-grown woman exactly her size steps out of the outline of her form and moves away. Without a word the woman walks down the aisle and steps into the sunlight.

A final shudder passes through the body of the priestess. She stands, erect and calm before the astonished congregation. "Now, at last, I'm free to grow!" she declares. And grow she does. Before our eyes the priestess grows taller and taller until her head is twenty feet above the tallest person in the temple. "My hour has come. We shall now take possession of this island for ourselves." The three men in long black robes fall on their faces before her, and the congregation follows their example.

In my dream I am seized by fear. Whatever is going on in this temple, and whoever this monster-priestess may be, I know I need to flee. I run down the aisle and out the door into the sunlight; and there, surrounded by a cluster of joyful people, is the bride. "My days of captivity are over," she explains. "I am free from the monster at last. Come with me outside the village. It's time to prepare for the arrival of the bridegroom."

Where is the Bride?

The minute you were joined to Jesus Christ through faith you became part of his Body on earth. You were linked, through Jesus himself, to a supernatural organism, a divinely created fellowship of men and women whose lives are nailed to Christ's cross --- spoiled for the world --- and whose hearts are ignited with the resurrection power of God's Spirit. This divine organism differs so vastly from what is commonly thought of as the church that we hesitate to use the word. Yet that's what Jesus calls it. He calls it "my Church."

"...On this rock I will build my Church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it."

Matthew 16:18

It may not look like much to human eyes, but Scripture tells us that by the time Jesus returns, this Church will be magnificent. It will be his Bride. He gave himself up for her. He sanctified her by the power of his Spirit. He cleansed her "by the washing of water with the word." And he is even now preparing to present her to himself "in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, holy and without blemish." (Ephesians 5:25-26)

There will be a wedding feast, as the Bridegroom and the Bride celebrate together.

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying,

"Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory,

for the marriage of the Lamb has come,

and his Bride has made herself ready;

It was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure"---

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

Revelation 19:6-8

Of course this Bride has been on the earth since the day of Pentecost. There hasn't been a day in all these twenty centuries when this miraculous fellowship has forgotten to give glory to its Master. Tens of thousands have laid down their lives for him. Millions have suffered ignominy for his name, joyfully giving testimony to Jesus, the crucified and risen Lamb. But all through the centuries this Church has existed as wheat growing among tares. It has lived inside a monster, a religious system which proclaims Jesus with its mouth, while despising him with its heart.

The Bride is the creation of Christ alone. He called her into existence by the power of his Word. He sustains and guides her by the presence of his Holy Spirit. She lives under the shadow of his cross. She has been crucified to the world and the world to her. Her life is hid with Christ in God, so that when Christ, who is her Bridegroom appears, she will appear with him in glory.

The Monster, on the other hand, is the creation of man. She is the result of human flesh seeking to usurp the authority of the One who alone builds his Church. The Monster is often mistaken for the Bride, since she professes to be the Bride and strives to appear as the Bride. But watch her. See how she behaves. Even though she is a skilled actress, she can't help being what she is. You will know her by her fruit.

Since the earliest days of the Church the Bride and the Monster have, in a mystery, shared the same body. In our Lord's warnings to five of the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 we see hints of the presence of the Monster.

"But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first." Revelation 2:4

"But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice immorality."

Revelation 2:4

"But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practice immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols."

Revelation 2:20

"I know your works: you have the name of being alive, and you are dead. Awake, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God. Remember then what you have received and heard; keep that, and repent."

Revelation 3: 1b-3a

"I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked."

Revelation 3:15-17

These rebukes were given to Christian assemblies in which the Bride and the Monster were both present. The Bride was preparing herself for the return of her Master. She was proclaiming his gospel, walking in obedience to his Spirit. The Monster was busy detracting people from their calling, flattering, seducing, creating division, feeding egos that were vulnerable to the lies of the Enemy.

For twenty centuries the struggle has continued. Humble broken hearts have continued to draw their strength from the Lord Jesus who has never failed to visit whenever two or three are gathered in his name. At the same time, and in all the same places, religious flesh has been busy building a "church" which bears little resemblance to the One who is meek and lowly of heart.

All the attempts which have been made to reform the Church, or to start over with "a true New Testament Church" have resulted in a repeat of the same phenomenon. The cleansing and renewal which have attended every return to the pure Word of God have always been followed by a rip tide of compromise. The Monster and the Bride are destined to inhabit the same body until the hour when God himself will separate them. No human being has been authorized to examine the ten virgins to see which of them has brought oil in her vessel with her lamp. Until the Bridegroom calls his Bride out of the Monster, no human being is capable of discerning without a mistake who belongs to the Bride and who belongs to the Monster.

But the Monster is beginning to shake. She has taken hold of the stone slab with a fierce grip. Her knuckles are white, her face is covered with perspiration. She appears to be in agony. Has the hour of separation come at last? If it has, it will happen without human assistance. And it will happen quite suddenly.

These words are addressed to men and women who have met Jesus and committed their lives to him, but who are having trouble finding their place in his Body on earth. They have found Jesus to be wonderful, but his Church a disappointment. These people aren't looking for perfection. They know that the Church of Jesus Christ is made up of ordinary men and women like themselves. They understand that the Church is a community of saved sinners who are in the process of being sanctified --- people who may have a long way to go before they can be "presented before him in splendor." But the Spirit within them inspires them with an impatience with the status quo as they find it in the Church.

Who can miss the fact that there is upheaval wherever the Word of God is at work in the world today? The Church of Jesus Christ is changing before our eyes. Judgment has begun at the household of God. The light which will one day uncover every secret on earth has already begun to penetrate the Church. It is becoming increasingly difficult for the Monster to pretend to be the Bride. And it has also become more difficult for the Bride to function within the Monster.

As the Spirit of God ignites revival in nation after nation, the old wineskins keep rejecting the new wine, and new wineskins are coming forward to be filled. New forms of church life are emerging. New kinds of worship are enriching the praises that rise from the Bride's heart. The professional priesthood is frequently being by-passed by a flood of grassroots servants who are joyfully gathering the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind to the Bridegroom's Banquet Table. The Lord Jesus is building his Church, and the powers of death are not able to prevail against it.

But there is a danger. The danger is that bright, gifted, sincere men and women are being tempted to "help" the Lord restore the Church to the purity and power we all know it was meant to have. What appears on the surface to be a work of the Spirit of God turns out to be the effort of human flesh. It bears

the imprint, not only of our zeal, but of our ego. We saw the problem and set about to rectify it. Others caught our vision and joined us, and soon we found ourselves at the center of a movement which promised to bring renewal to thousands who have been caught in the stagnant swamp of clericalism and lifeless form.

Soon we were touring the country, helping others to see the path that leads to vital church life. We produced literature. We conducted seminars. We demonstrated how small groups of committed Christians can make the gospel relevant to this "post Christian world." But with the passing of time, what originally began as "God's thing" somehow became "our thing." Our kingdom. Of course we spent much time in prayer, asking the Lord to direct "the work." The work? Whose work?

"Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." (Psalm 127 KJV) We crossed the fine line between allowing the Lord to use us for his purposes as he pleases and subtly trying to bend the Lord's purposes into our vision of how things should be. When we cross this line, we are no longer hastening the kingdom of God, we are enlarging the Monster.

The Bride and the Monster are now in the first stages of separation, and the power behind this separation is the Spirit of the Lord Jesus himself. He does not need our "help." He wants our obedience. He will bring it about. No power in heaven or on earth can stop him. Our task is to think clearly about which entity we will serve. Are we ready to pay the price of being part of the Bride? Or are we wasting our powers building our own kingdoms, which always become part of the Monster?

Signs of Separation

Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour.

I John 2:18

The Emperor Constantine has often been blamed for corrupting Christianity, when he and Emperor Licinius, late in the year 312, published the Edict of Milan, giving freedom of conscience to Christians and allowing them to practice their faith without fear of persecution. It was the beginning of a fateful union between church and state, for which the Church has paid a terrible price.

But long before Christianity won acceptance in the Roman Empire, the Monster was at work building its own kingdom inside the Church. Side-by-side with deeply committed servant-leaders were people who had come into the Body with another agenda. Listen to Paul, writing to the Church at Rome:

I appeal to you, brethren, to take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by fair and flattering words they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded.

Romans 16:17-18

With this warning, as in others like it (Philippians 3:17-19, I Timothy 4:1-3), Paul acknowledged that the Church, even in his day, was far from pure. The spirit of the Antichrist was already at work enticing men and women to put their trust in form, ceremony, works of their own flesh, observing certain days, avoiding certain foods.

But always in the mercy of God, the Monster was allowed to go only so far before it was restrained. As the power of the Roman Emperors declined, the power of the Church increased. By the Eleventh Century the spiritual power of the Church was hard to measure, but its political power was immense. The Monster within the Church seemed to be unstoppable. But in 1054 the Church in the East and the Church in the West broke fellowship and became two separate entities. Five centuries later the Reformation brought more divisions, until today the number of church structures which tie congregations together (and often control vast amounts of money) is almost beyond counting. The Bride has been kept humble, and the Monster has been kept weak, as the outward visible Church has remained splintered into separate denominations, sects, movements, associations, hierarchies.

But something new is happening in the professing Christian Church worldwide. The Bride and the Monster, after inhabiting the same body for nearly twenty centuries, are beginning to show signs of disengagement. On the one hand, people who belong to the Bride are finding unity with each other across all denominational barriers. Certain Baptists, Roman Catholics, Pentecostals, Lutherans, etc. are finding that they have much more in common with each other than with the religious structure which has been "home base" for them all their lives. These people are not interested in forming still another new "church." They know that if they succeeded, it would soon be one more denomination added to a list which is already too long. They know that they are already "one body in Christ and individually members one of another." (Romans 12:5) They are content to let their unity be visible to the eye of God, as they come together in small groups, share with each other in informal settings, witness together at their jobs and in their neighborhoods. They know that the Lord Jesus himself will show them the next step when the time comes. After all, Jesus is the one who builds his Church. And he is able to direct his servants in the building --- on his schedule and according to his guidance.

On the other hand, the Monster is engaged in its own unity movement. This movement too crosses denominational barriers. It would not be too strong to say the unity movement of the Monster follows the agenda of the Antichrist, for its distinguishing feature is a blatant disregard for the person of Jesus Christ and his place in redemptive history. It begins with the "discovery" that "Jesus is not the only way to God," and ends with an open denial of his atoning death, his resurrection and the expectation of his return.

Look for unprecedented church mergers as the Monster begins to grow. Ancient church bodies with traditions rooted in creeds which celebrated the Lordship of Jesus are subtly shifting their theology to accommodate the world. The numerical losses which these compromised churches suffer are only temporary. Once the Monster is free of the Bride's restraining witness it will begin to market its Christless gospel with such effectiveness that General Electric and Procter and Gamble will come for lessons. Don't count the old main-line churches out. They may be dying in their present form. But they are soon to have a "revival" which will astound the prophets of doom who have been writing their obituary.

You and I did not choose to be born into this hour of history. But there is no way we can avoid the choice we will soon be forced to make. Which Church will we be part of? Will we follow Jesus "outside the camp" where, in the shadow of his cross he will revive his Church for the last time, or will we commit ourselves to a less costly "revival" in which the Monster, wearing a mask of unearthly beauty, clothing herself in a shining robe, will welcome most of the living world to her embrace?

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