

Attendants Of The Bride

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[0 : 0 0] All right. Good morning, everybody. Morning, morning. So kind of the remainder of the service is going to be a bit heavy. I'm just going to let you know, but it's not without hope.

And so thinking of this moment, this Sunday and what's going to be announced, what Brian is going to speak to us today. We, as the elders of this particular site, along with the elders at Moorhead and the broader eldership team, we felt it was best for Brian to come and bring the announcement and speak to us actually, just to give us some like good godly direction in this and hope. And so Brian, if you would come up and the reason Brian's here is one, he is, he's been a friend. He's been a friend to this site. He's been a friend to our eldership team here on our site. Actually, every single one of them can say, you know what? This guy is a close friend and a good friend and a trustworthy friend. And even though you guys in the seats may not have seen and felt his presence like in the flesh, trust me that his fingerprints are on this church in ways, in tangible ways, in direct ways.

He's been an ally and a big help praying and cheering us on. You guys haven't seen that, but I've seen that. We felt that as a, as an eldership team. And just personally speaking, he's been a very good friend just to me. Um, I just think of the ways that he has, I've seen Christ in him, uh, and how some of the things that he has said to me have been so helpful. Not always like, not always in the moment of like, Oh, I didn't want to hear that, but I needed to hear it.

And it has shaped me. And so for that reason, I just want you to open your hearts to him and really listen. Um, this is a tough moment and kind of the unfolding story of this church. Um, but again, like I said, it's, it's heavy, but it's not without hope. And, um, yeah. So Brian, I'm going to turn it over to you. Thanks Jess. Uh, good morning. My name is Brian, like Jesse said, and, um, it's an honor to be here. And I want to kind of get right into that. I'm sure what I have to share with you. I know you're probably wondering, I just want to also just acknowledge if we've got visitors here who for the first time, just want to say, we are so glad you're here. Um, but we also just want to acknowledge that you're here on a, on a, on a Sunday where we're going to, we've got a bit of a family moment and a tough one. And, um, so anyways, we, we, we hope you just can bear with us through some of that. Um, so I do have some, some significant news and some sad news. There's grief in this, but there's also hope. Um, and really the long and short of it is that for some time now, really going back to the beginning of this calendar year, uh, Jesse Kinsler and Alan

Bartz, uh, two of your pastors here have had a very, uh, strained relationship. And I'm, I'm, I'm assuming that's probably news to almost all of you. Um, and that's to their credit for, you know, not bringing that out in front of, in front of everyone. Um, it's really been challenging for their working relationship. And so at first they tried to work this out together, the two of them, which is the right thing to do. And, uh, and then at a certain point, another one of the elders from, uh, from this site was brought in to help try to mediate and bring about reconciliation that didn't resolve the situation. And so, um, pretty soon after that, myself, Scott Byrewaltus, who is the elder that leads our, um, Beaufort congregation and Donnie Griggs, who is the lead pastor for the whole of one Harbor in Moorhead. And he's in Moorhead with me. The three of us, um, were asked to get involved. And, and so we did our best to try to kind of navigate this situation towards, um, reconciliation and restoration. It became clear to us at a certain point that probably some outside help would be, would be good. And so we reached out to Rigby Wallace, who many of you will know because he preached here last year. Yeah. So South African guy, um, that may not bring a lot of clarity. There's more South Africans and I'm from Baltimore, which is like a cosmopolitan place and met zeros South Africans. And then I moved here and they're everywhere, but, um, South African guy. Uh, so anyways, he leads a church in the advanced family of churches that we're a part of and, um, very wise, uh, very wise man and, um, has actually got a lot of experience in navigating churches through this kind of thing. So we asked him to get involved in, uh, March of this year and he's been

involved up to this point. And unfortunately, uh, the issue still isn't resolved. And I, I don't want to get into the details of it because I don't think that's going to ultimately be helpful or honor either of them. This is nothing scandalous.

[5 : 29] This is the kind of thing that's probably happened in any of our lives before where sometimes relationships just get tough and they get hard and there's, there's disagreement and different perspective. Um, but it is, but this is very significant in part because of the warnings that we see in scripture that warn us about the seriousness of division within the church. Um, division can be contagious and it can spread. And we as a whole team and Jesse and Alan, that includes them too, have appreciated that, the seriousness of that. And it's also a big deal because it's been our custom at one Harbor to, uh, we have a slogan and we inherited it from another movement that came before us friendship before function. We want to actually have chemistry on our teams. We want to love one another and get along together. And that's kind of been a hallmark of our leadership culture. And so given these things, uh, and I, I am speaking on behalf of a lot of people who've been involved, but on behalf of all of them, it has seemed right to us to give space for Alan and Jesse, uh, to, to create space so that there can be, uh, reconciliation. And that, that is our hope. We are hopeful for that.

And they're hopeful for that, but we think it's going to be easier for them with some space and taking away the pressures of the working relationship. And you know, that kind of thing is not without precedent. Even in the Bible, we see a story where Paul splits from Barnabas and John Mark because of a disagreement around John Mark. And, but then later Paul and John Mark are reconciled.

And it's kind of a wonderful thing that that story is in our Bible. Um, and so for those reasons, um, it seemed right to all of us that Alan and Shelly and their family would come and be a part of the Moorhead site, which is where I serve and pastor. I want to emphasize a few things and I cannot say this loud enough, but this move is not disciplinary. Um, Alan's going to remain on staff. He is going to remain an elder. So he's going to be a co-laborer with us. Uh, but that, that doesn't make this not painful.

Of course, it's very painful. It's a, uh, it's painful for everyone involved. Um, but it's one that we feel is ultimately in the best interest of Jesse and Alan and ultimately, and most importantly, in the best interest of the church. So we think it's in the best interest of the church, but it is at a cost and it's at a cost to this particular church. Alan and Shelly have been like a pivotal part of this thing. It's like from the very beginning guys have been here from the very beginning. And so I know that he's got relationships with so many of you that I don't even know about, and he is going to be dearly missed. And so it is going to be obviously difficult for their whole family. I was on the phone with Addison just the other day. It's painful for their kids. Um, man, they are going to be dearly missed. They're saying, they're saying goodbye to friends and not, they're not, you know, moving away, but, but they're not going to be here on Sundays. And that that's hard. This process has also been extraordinarily difficult for Jesse and Haley and the other Newburn elders. Um, and really for the leadership team and again, for the church. So I think grief is appropriate. We don't want to, I just want to acknowledge that in moments like this, grief is godly and we can grieve and tears are appropriate. Tears for the, for the Barts and what they're having to give up and say goodbye to. And tears, honestly, for all of you and what you're saying goodbye to. I also want to emphasize that despite the tension that has existed in the relationship between these two men, it's very important that you know that these two guys do not hate each other. And I'm speaking on both of their behalf. They love one another and they both want to be reconciled and they desire that. They've clearly stated that. Um, they have both, yeah, they've both stated that at length, their desire to be reconciled and their love for each other.

The other thing I want you to hear clearly is the decision to do this was made unanimously with the input from all the people that I have already named. So the New Bern elders, um, the broader, what we would call it, this may be new language to some of you, but our directional elder team that gives governance to the whole of one Harbor of which Jesse is a part. And I, and I serve on as well that it includes the consensus of that team. It includes the consensus of Rigby Wallace who from an outside, he was brought in from the outside to help advise us. And he's concurred that this is wisdom and, and, and this is especially important for you to hear it. It's a decision being made by Alan and Shelley as well. It's particularly painful for them, but they have agreed that this is the right, this is the right decision. And so I cannot say how, I can't even express how grateful I am. And I

think the rest of our elders are that all the parties involved have been committed to making this transition peacefully, um, for the sake of the church. So, uh, this is a tender moment and, um, it's going to be very important that we guard our hearts. Uh, God is always up to something. He's always at work, but he's not the only one who's up to something. We have an enemy who's prowling around like a lion looking for people to devour. And he also has an agenda and a plan.

[11 : 12] And the whole point of doing this is to deal with division that has happened, but we could, if we're not careful, perpetuate that division in the church. And so again, I'm speaking for Jesse and I'm speaking for Alan. When I say, I'm speaking on behalf, their behalf, they have no desire for you to take sides. And I, and I certainly have no desire for you to take sides. Um, we have an amazing heavenly father who is involved for the good of everyone and for our holiness. And, uh, so this is a moment for everybody, them included, me included, you included, you included to be prayerful and to be trusting him. And we are going to need to be on guard. We're going to have to watch out for the ways the enemy would want to get it right in our hearts with bitterness, assuming things, assuming motives of other people. I mean, how easy is it for that stuff to sneak in cynicism? Um, and, and, and distrust toward church leadership. That's something to watch out for as well. So to trust leaders, you don't have to believe they're perfect. They're not. And they know that they're not elders are not perfect. They can and do make mistakes, but every elder in our church is submitted to a wider team of elders. And this situation actually points to the need for, and the power of submission, that kind of submission to a broader community. The end of the day, what all the elders in this church want to include Jesse and to include Alan and their families, what, what everyone wants at, at, you know, what we want the most is what is best for the bride of Christ and what is his will for our lives.

And so Alan and Jesse remain submitted to the team, uh, for those reasons. Um, I want to, before we get into the, into the sermon and we're going to, we're going to do something a little bit different today to try to preach God's word into this moment. But before we do that, I want to pray. And I also just want to add a personal note. I've tried thus far to speak representing a lot of different people. Um, but I want to say something on my behalf. I am, um, really good friends with both of these men and with their wives and my kids are friends with their kids. I've vacationed with the Barts in Florida. Jesse and Haley are some of the most faithful friends that we had in 14 years. My family has, has lived in North Carolina. Um, and I have been very involved in this process and it's my desire to remain in friendship with both. So I just want you to hear that from me. I am friends with both of these men and I love them. And I still do. Um, I, I also just personally want to make sure that you're hearing that Alan and Shelly are not being cast out. I am here as a representative of the congregation that is welcoming them in. And so we're going to be together next Sunday, worshipping Jesus.

And the other thing I want you to hear from me personally is that my respect for Jesse and Haley and Elliot and Freddie and this leadership team is extraordinarily high watching the way that they've handled this. And I mean, we've not rushed to this. This has been going on now for about eight months and the way that they've been patient in this and walk through this. I'm telling you, I'm not just a leader in this church. I'm a sheep and I happen to be in Moorhead, but having watched all of this, I would happily be a sheep in this church because I trust the team in this church.

So I want you to hear that from me. So these are heavy things. And I think, um, probably what would be appropriate would be just to pray before we open God's words. Why don't we pray? Heavenly Father, we thank you for your goodness to us. We thank you for the fact that you help us. And you tell us that no matter what we experience, no matter what we do, you will never give up on us.

[15 : 47] I thank you for the help of the Holy Spirit. Lord, I pray that from this moment forward, you would continue to guide this church, our leaders, uh, Jesse and Alan into your ways that you have for us.

We want to pray for reconciliation. We want to pray for a great future for their, for them, their families, and for our church. And Lord, we want to pray that you would help us to see where the enemy would want to sneak in and take advantage and devour the sheep and split the flock. Help us to pay attention, to have our eyes open, to resist the devil. Help us to give charity. Help us to give love, to assume the best of one another. We pray these things in Jesus name. Amen.

These kinds of moments, um, obviously are painful and difficult and to a certain degree awkward, right? There's awkward in this, but there is an opportunity in these kinds of moments as well.

Whenever there's hardship, again, the Lord is always at work and there's an opportunity. And one of the opportunities in this kind of moment is to be reoriented between the relationship between the leaders of the church who are servants, the congregation, and the Lord himself. What should those relationships look like? How do leaders see their calling? How does the church relate to its leaders? And how does the church think about what its leaders are there to do? And, and how do we all appreciate those things together? 10 years ago, actually more than that, 12 years ago, I heard a teaching. I heard a sermon by a pastor named Greg Haswell that permanently changed my understanding of what it means to be a leader in the church. I think about it all the time. Uh, it has, it has given me the language to describe my vocation. And so this morning, I want to share some of that with you.

And I want to build on it with the goal that we leave this morning reoriented, uh, with a richer, more Christ-like understanding of the relationship between Jesus, the church, and the pastors and the leaders who serve her. Um, and also I, I'm hoping that if you are feeling rattled by what I've just announced, that you will actually maybe see some of the wisdom in what has been announced today. So we're going to read from Ephesians 4, uh, verses 1 through 16. Paul writes to the church in Ephesus, and he says, I therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner that is worthy of the calling to which you have been called with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace. There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

[19:11] But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore, it says, when he ascended on high, he, Jesus, when he ascended on high, he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to men. In saying he ascended, what does it mean? But that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth. He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all heavens, that he might fill all things. And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, the teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow, that it builds itself up in love. Man, it's a pretty soaring passage about the church and God's plan for the church. There's one body and there's one spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father. And then in the next verses, after Paul writes those things, he says, look, there's one God, but there's many gifts. And he who ascended, Jesus, in his ascension, left gifts for his church. And those gifts, in the context of Ephesians 4, are apostles and prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers who do what? Well, they equip the saints for the work of ministry.

They're there to build up the body of Christ. And so that's something we're thinking about. Do we think of our pastors and leaders as gifts to us? And what makes them a gift? What's the point of the gift?

Ephesians 4 says, the whole point, the reason they exist is to build up the body into Christ. But understanding how that actually works and understanding how the gifts of the church actually do that requires something of understanding the mystery of the church.

The body of Christ in its fullness is a bona fide mystery. And I can appreciate that it might not seem like that. There's nothing necessarily mysterious, probably, to most folks when they think about all of us getting in the room and singing songs and hearing the preaching of God's word. This may not seem like a mystery. But you know, early in Ephesians, in chapter 3, Paul writes that the mystery hidden for ages, the mystery of God hidden for the ages is revealed in the church.

So much so that he says that rulers and principalities, and so most people take that to mean even angels and demons, they only discover the manifold wisdom of that mystery through the church. So I don't know if you have ever appreciated this, but when you become part of the church, you are part of showing angels something about what God is like. And angels have seen the face of God. And yet they learn something about what God is like from the church. What is it that they would

learn from us? What have we to teach angels? Well, then later in Ephesians, in Ephesians 5, we get part of the answer to that.

[23 : 02] Paul's writing about marriage of all things. He says, when a man and woman come together, they become one flesh. And he said, hey, that one fleshness is a mystery. It's a mystery. But then he says, I'm saying that mystery is actually about Christ in the church. The heart of the mystery is this.

God wants to be united to actual people. And the reason that's a mystery is because nobody in the history, you know, there's people are kind of prone to saying these kinds of things. Oh, there's a lot of different religions. They're kind of all saying the same thing. No, nobody has ever said this.

1 Timothy 3, 16 says, great indeed. We confess as the mystery of godliness. You want the mystery of godliness is the next words are he, Jesus was manifested in the flesh. See, in the ancient world, the flesh was considered lesser than, and the spirit was considered greater than the mystery of godliness is that God put on flesh and was united to flesh. God doesn't mind people. He became one.

That is a mystery that the transcendental spiritual god of all things became a person. And the plan isn't merely for Jesus to wear the flesh, but be united to all flesh. Ephesians, it says that the plan is for him to fill all things. 1 Corinthians 15, it talks, it's the greatest thing in the Bible on the resurrection, the greatest passage on the resurrection. And Paul says that the plan for resurrection is for God to be all in all. Jesus with his people somehow mysteriously united to us in ways that we can barely now even imagine what that will look like. It's a mystery and it's astonishing. You see, God, here's the mystery of the church. God is preparing for his son, an eternal bride. That is one of the primary metaphors that the Bible gives to the church.

We are, for all of eternity, going to be eternally satisfied in him. It means that when we're united to him, we are going to live lives. And you mustn't, you must have a vision for this. Some people think of eternal life as sort of ethereal and sterile. No, no, no. It's embodied resurrection life. You're going to have a body that's going to be like the greatest Olympian, pales in comparison to what you are going to be like with your body and resurrection life. And it is going to be united to the Lord such that every moment will only be better than the last. It's going to be astonishing. It's fun to, I like to do this with my kids. Imagine the best possible thing that the future can be like. The only thing we know for certain is it's going to be better than that. You can't even out imagine resurrection life. And the reason is you're going to be united to the one for whom your heart sings. It's a mystery, but it's going to happen. But even crazier than that is that not only are we going to find our eternal satisfaction in him, Jesus Christ is going to find his eternal satisfaction in us. You know what's going to make

[26 : 07] Jesus, the Lord of hosts content for all of eternity is being united to each and every one of you. The father tells the son, I'm going to find a bride for you, a fitting companion, a fitting bride for the King of glory. And that is the church. We're going to be one day united to him in some mysterious way. Angels and demons could not have imagined that. They would never have, they didn't even see it coming.

The way that God wanted to be united to his people in us in the flesh, but that is the mystery of the church. And so that's what the bride must do. The whole, what are we doing here, guys? What's the point of being in a church? You think it is just to hear some good stories and some good sermons and learn how to be a better person? No, it is so much more. It is to learn how to be what the father has called the bride to be, to become by the power of the spirit, to be transformed by seeing the beauty and glory of the Lord, to be transformed by his spirit, one degree of glory into the next, to be, to come into the fullness of everything that the father has called us to be, to be the bride that the son deserves.

And that is the point of the gifts in Ephesians four. That's why they're there. Now there's many metaphors in the Bible and we don't need to pick and choose. We need them all. And one of the metaphors that comes through primarily in Ephesians four is that of the body, right? So the church, we can think of it like a body. Christ is the head of the body. But the metaphor of the bride, the bridal metaphor in scripture is astonishingly big, bigger than we realize because we're not familiar with ancient Jewish wedding customs. And so we don't even see the bridal imagery in all the places that it exists. We don't see the language of gifts in Ephesians four within the context of bridal pageantry. We don't think about pastors in the context of bridal imagery. But if we do, I would say it will massively affect our views, not only of what Paul's writing in Ephesians four about these gifts,

but also about how the church should use those gifts. And it speaks to moments like we're having today. So let me help you see it by first explaining a bit of how Jews would go about the process of getting hitched, of getting married. When a young man was getting married, a father would take his servants and send them to go find a bride. So you remember the stories of Abraham and Isaac, you know, servants being sent out to find a fitting bride for his son. And once a bride was found, the fathers would make arrangements and eventually they'd get together and the young man and the young woman, they would be introduced and they would be chaperoned. But if everything's going well and everyone seems to be, you know, there's love in the air, then they come to a place where the fathers would say, well, let's get them married. And a price would be set actually, a bride price. The father or the groom would agree to pay a price for the bride. And the reason for that is in the ancient world anyway, sons were financially lucrative. They can go work the fields. And to raise a daughter is not so much of a financial investment in the future of the family. And so the father, the groom is, it's his way of honoring the father of the bride by saying, hey, thank you for everything you've done to prepare a bride for my son. I want to sow into that. And that was the bride price. And then they would have an engagement supper. And this is very important for you to understand because this will make sense of other things in the Bible that you might've missed. But when the engagement supper would happen, they're engaged. So this young man and young woman are engaged. They're not married, but it's considered a legally binding covenant. So like, if you've ever wondered why Joseph is not yet married to Mary, but here she's pregnant, they're engaged. And yet he makes plans to divorce her. It's because they had already been betrothed. And that is a covenant relationship. It was there properly engaged in that engagement.

What happened at the supper? And there was some formality to this. So the groom, and there's different kind of accounts about how this might work, but what people seem to agree on is that there would be a cup of wine and the groom would take some of the wine. And then the cup would be passed to the bride and she would take some of the wine. And when they had both drank of the wine, it was like, that was this part of the sign that it's now official. They are betrothed to one another. So do you see the significance of the last supper? Jesus, he takes the bread and the cup and he gives it to his disciples. And he says, this is the cup of a new covenant. There's a new covenant and we're making it right now in my blood. And they drink of the cup. They say yes. And then the bridegroom, right? The future bridegroom, the groom to be, he would leave gifts. He would leave gifts. He'd give his bride gifts and there'd be a party. And the scripture says that Jesus gives us a deposit, the Holy Spirit. He leaves us with something. And why does he have to leave? Well, you know, at the end of this ceremony, the future, you know, the groom to be, the bride to be, you know, there's romances in the air and they've probably linked in arms. And then there's a point where the groom to be probably leans over and he says, I've got to go.

And the reason is, is that the custom was that the groom to be would go with his father to build their future house or at the very least to build a honeymoon sort of chamber in the father's house.

[31 : 39] And so he would go away, but nobody knew when that process would be finished because it had to meet the father of the groom's standards. Only the father of the groom was the one who could say, we're ready. And it could take up to a year for this to happen. So Jesus tells his disciples, I go to prepare a place for you in my father's house. There are many rooms.

And he says, no one knows when the son will return. Only the father knows. And so if a father of the groom was wealthy or perhaps even a king, he would leave servants, warriors to protect her, handmaidens to help her get nice and beautiful. And so they were servants or attendants of the bride. So Paul writes that when Jesus ascends to heaven, he leaves the church gifts. It was he who gave some to be apostles, et cetera. The Greek word forgave, it actually refers to the kind of giving when you give a gift, a bestowing, a granting. It implies generosity.

Hey, I'm leaving, but I'm generously leaving you servants to prepare you for my return. And so when the bridegroom was finished with his house and his father said, everything is ready, he would return and pick up his bride. But this is kind of, this is a bit of a fun part of the pageantry of all this. During this whole year, the bride's getting ready. She's probably sewing her own gown. She's got these handmaidens to help her get everything ready. But nobody knew when the groom would return. In fact, there was an element of surprise in it. And often he would come at night.

And so this, there was this thing of, you had to be ready because the groom could come at any time. And when he would come, people would hear about it at the edge of town and they would shout to let people know. And the bride would have to be ready. And the attendants would have to

run out.

Those handmaidens would have to run out because there aren't street lamps in ancient Israel. And like there's going to be all these people walking around and they have to run out with their lamps, but they better be filled with oil. They better be ready. Are you seeing all the wedding pageantry that is infused with Jesus tells his disciples? And so who are the players here? Well, you've got the servants that are sent out by the father and those are the prophets of old. The servants set out to find the bride, the prophets of old. And then you have the father, the groom, who of course is God, the father. You have the son who is the groom to be, that's Jesus. You have the bride, who is the church down through the ages of every tribe, tongue, and nation. And then you have these servants.

[34 : 09] And who are they? Well, they are every person who responds to the call to stand up and serve the bride of Christ. That includes pastors and teachers and apostles and prophets and evangelists. And that is what pastors are. They are above everything else. They are attendants of the bride. They are asked to protect and equip her for the sole purpose, the sole purpose of preparing her for that day. Man, how often in the New Testament does it talk about that day? That day when the bridegroom returns, what will he find? That's why we're, that's what we're doing. We're getting ready for that day. So again, let's go back to the story here.

Imagine there's this engagement banquet. The groom to be is canoodling with his betrothed. They both had some wine. They're feeling merry. And he says to her, you know, my dear, my father is sending along 10 of his best warriors to look after you. Now I'm going to be gone a few years, but don't you worry. They've got this. They're here to look out for you. Now, if you are the father of the groom, if you are, if you're the king and it's your son who's supposed to be married to this beautiful bride, which warriors are you going to send? Are you going to send your 10 most handsome, available, strapping young lads? If you're a rich king, you send your 10 best warriors, but if you're a wise king, you make them eunuchs. Because what is the role of a eunuch?

A eunuch cannot take pleasure from someone else's bride. So the groom can say with confidence to his bride, now listen, my father sent his servants, these eunuchs and these handmaidens, and they're here for you. So I want you to listen to them and I want you to obey them. They're here to help you. And if they get out of line, they're going to answer for that. They're going to answer for every single thing they do while I'm gone, but they're here to look out for you. And so I want you to look out for them and make sure that they're well looked after and they've got a place to sleep and food for their bellies. And then imagine he pulls these eunuchs aside. What do you think he says to them? What kind of charge does the bridegroom give to those eunuchs who his father has sent? First Corinthians four says, those entrusted with a charge must be found faithful. I just want to actually acknowledge, because it would be tone deaf not to say this, that we live in an age of extraordinary pastoral abuse. Story after story in the news of pastors and priests who have abused children. And I am so grateful that has not been one harbor story. By God's grace, may it never be. But I want to acknowledge that many attendants of the bride have actually abused her for their own benefit. What will the bridegroom say when he returns? What kind of darkness is reserved for those false men and women who have abused the bride while whispering in her ear, this is what the bridegroom wants? Those who have been given a responsibility must prove faithful and they will be held to account for every single thing that they do.

[37 : 23] Now, in our remaining time from this metaphor, I want to extract just a few principles for us this morning that speak to the moment we're in. First, attendance of the bride are gifts to bless the bride, not the other way around. The church is not a gift to the pastor, so he will have a platform to showcase his gifting. The primary calling of attendance of the bride is service to the bride.

It's service. And so that means that ministry is not a right. It's a sacred duty, a massive responsibility, and a privilege. So should churches, should we as the church encourage our pastors and pray for them?

Absolutely. Absolutely. They need all the help and encouragement they can get, but the church does not exist to validate the needs of its pastors. And it's easy to forget that. And too often, and this could happen to any, this could happen to us. Churches become overly associated with the faces of their servant leaders. The head of the body, the face of the body is Christ, not the servants. Too often, pastors and people within the church think that the church is somehow an extension of the pastor's ministry, like everyone's there to support his thing. Like the pastor is more anointed, more prized, more precious to the bridegroom than the bride. Like the bride is there to make him

look good.

What will the bridegroom say when he comes back and finds the eunuchs and the servants using the bride for their benefit? Now, I don't think we have that culture in this church. I don't think so anyway.

We have gone to great lengths to fight that, knowing it could happen if we don't fight that temptation, but that stuff can sneak in. And in painful moments like this one, it's easy to forget these things. And I have spent a little, man, so much time with your elders processing everything we talked about today. So I'm not talking to them right now. I'm speaking to the rest of you.

[39 : 25] When a decision is made where a pastor needs to step aside for the good of the church, it can be easy in our love for him to rush to judgment, to assume that an injustice has been done, to pick up their offense for them, and to take sides. Now, pastors are people too. And if injustices are done, we need to deal with those things. But the entire premise of the service that pastors give is that whatever the bride needs, the bride gets. And if stepping aside is what blesses the bride, which in this case is what all of the leaders and servants involved believe to be the case, believe what is necessary, then actually it is righteous and it's good. It's one of the reasons Jesse and Alan haven't wanted you guys to take sides in all of this. And I commend them both for that because they know that they are gifts for you and you do not exist to validate them or me or any other leader. Second principle that speaks of the situation is that attendance of the bride should increase the bride's affection for the bridegroom, not themselves. When the king would leave servants for his bride, how do you think he expected those servants and eunuchs to speak of his son? Well, everything that they do should be about increasing her affection for his return. And the spirit of that, I think, was best captured in the scriptures by John the Baptist. In John 3, he's speaking to his disciples and he says, you yourselves bear me witness that I said, I'm not the Christ, but I have been sent before him. The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase and I must decrease.

And the context for that little, the context for what I just read to you was John the Baptist, he had a following. And his disciples are very upset about the fact that people are leaving him to go follow Jesus. And John's like, well, you nuts. This is the whole point. He's not being figuratively spiritual when he says, I must become less. He literally means my ministry must get smaller so that his can get bigger. Can you imagine what would have happened if John had said something different? If John had gotten a little bit insecure, thought, man, I don't even know who I am without all these people following me. Can you imagine the judgment that would be reserved for John if he tried to keep people from adoring Jesus so that they would continue to adore him? One of the worst things an attendant can do is to take pleasure from the bride. And so this is not, this won't immediately look like abuse. This will actually look like sometimes being a great pastor or leader. And we have too many of them. Pastors and leaders who touch the bride and whisper in her ear sweet things, flirt with her, seeking ultimately not her praise of the Lord, but her praise of himself. Again, when the bride room comes back, what will he say to those servants who have inappropriately touched his girl?

Now this is why character is the number one thing necessary for pastors. Competence, yes, but above all trust. The king would have left not just his best servants, but the ones he trusted the most. They must resist the temptation to take praise that is due to Jesus and invite it to themselves. One of the reasons we made the decision we did is to ensure that nothing we do as elders stands in the way of Jesus and the praise that is due to his name.

Next principle, attendance of the bride must work in team. They must. Absolutely imperative that attendance of the bride work in team. In every instance in the New Testament where elders are discussed, they are always discussed in the plural. You will never find in the New Testament a church with a single elder, one person or one man. Now there's a lot we could say about that, which we're not going to do this morning, about why is that. I just, I want to focus not merely on their number, but comment on the absolute necessity for their harmony. A divided team of warriors would be disastrous.

[43 : 56] Can you imagine being the father of the groom and hearing that these warriors you've left are not getting along? What is your first concern? Are they paying attention to her or are they fighting amongst themselves? Are they distracted? The bride is waiting for the return of her groom. These attendants, they have got to be working as a unified team to make sure they are protecting

her and helping her, which is again, one of the reasons I said at the beginning, we have taken that so seriously at One Harbor. Friendship is not a nice to have, it's a must to have. We have got to not just have common vision, we have to love one another. Jesus said the way that people would know we're his disciples is by what? The way we care for and love one another. So when we bring someone onto our team, we have, we talk about five C's. There needs to be calling and character and competency and capacity, but there needs to be chemistry.

We think that in the spirit, it is necessary for us to have mutual affection. In fact, in our partnership class, so many people who become part of this church have said one of the reasons that they feel safe here is because their pastors, the pastors seem to love one another. We actually like hanging out and being together. That's a strength and a gift and a grace, which is why some of the strongest warnings in the New Testament, again, are related to division. The gates of hell cannot prevail against the church, but division can wreck her division from within. So we are told, watch out, don't let it happen. And so when there is a crack in the team, when there's friction, what are we going to do? I have to be honest with you guys, it is tempting to minimize this stuff. It's tempting to sweep it under the rug or to put spin on it and make it sound like nothing's really wrong, everything's fine. In the short run, that would probably be a lot less painful for Alan and Jesse, but they both know and the team knows that in the long run, it wouldn't be. So we're doing what Jesus told us to do. When problems show up, we bring them into the light and we don't fake it. And if the team isn't working well, if the servants are having a hard time getting along, then something has to change. One of the ways we've kind of described this decision amongst ourselves is we kind of feel like, what choice do we have?

Can we let things carry on as they are? No, that would be, we would be totally unaware of Satan's desires and how he would want to exploit this situation to take a tiny crack and rip it into a crevice. We're not going to let him do that. The attendance of the bride must work in team and the unity of the team must be preserved and it's worth sacrificing for. Final principle, the reason that the father has given gifts to the bride is to make the bride ready and beautiful.

And I've basically said as much already. Everything we're doing is about preparing the church for the Lord of glory. He is the fairest of 10,000. He is the hero of our faith.

He is the King of Kings. He is the Lord of Lords. We must do everything we can to be ready for him. And he is helping us get ready for his return. You know how the Bible ends? The Bible ends with a scene from a wedding. Revelation 21, John's having his vision and there's a lot of context for what's happening here, which we won't get into, but I want to read a few verses from Revelation 21 about what he sees. He says, then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more. So all of creation has been made new. And later in this chapter, it actually says that explicitly, all things are being made new. And then he said, I saw a holy city, the new Jerusalem, which is another metaphor for the church. He's talking about the church. I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, the church coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. The mystery is being unveiled. He's going to dwell with them and they will be his people. And God himself will be with them as their God. Unity, the two are becoming one right now. And later in verse nine, then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls of the seven last plagues and spoke to me saying, come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the lamb. What is the best part of a wedding? What's the part of the wedding where everyone stands in awe? It's when the bride is revealed. She comes out in all her glory. That is the most, that's the most emotional moment of the whole ceremony. At my wedding, there was a bit of a mix up. I was standing on the front like a good groom waiting for my bride.

[48 : 50] And I have for a crazy set of circumstances had the good fortune of getting married in one of the most beautiful churches in America. The entire building made out of Florentine marble, astonishing, astonishingly beautiful building. Everything is magnificent. And the moment comes for Kimberly to walk down the aisle, my cousin, who was the wedding coordinator, and I trust will never hear the audio of this sermon, got confused about the music cue to come out. And so probably for one to two whole minutes, everyone is standing and waiting. Now that doesn't seem like a long time, but when you are up front by yourself and everyone's standing and waiting, one to two minutes is like an age.

And it became comedy. I mean, like literally people are laughing out loud, looking at me like, well, well, well, Brian, look who didn't show up. See that moment, that moment was the most important

moment. Well, the most emotional moment of the day. Nobody came to see a beautiful church building.

The beautiful church is the background for this moment when the bride comes down the aisle. And that's what's happening in Revelation. I don't know if you've ever read it that way. The renewal of all things is the backdrop for the bride. She is the main event. Nothing compares to what God has done through the church, for the church, for the sake of his son. It is the culmination of all things. The revelation of the bride. A bride more pure and ready for her Lord than we can even imagine that she would one day be. She has prepared her gown. She is ready. Everything is about that day. Why does the church need apostles and prophets and teachers and evangelists to get ready for that moment? Your elders here at this site, they are great servants. Not because they are spectacular, but because they love the bridegroom. And I am telling you as one of their friends who sat with them. It's so easy for me to say this because I'm not a part of this team. So I can exalt Christ in this team so easily. You can trust this team. They love the bridegroom and are desperate to preserve the beauty of the bride. So we have this great romance, the mystery of the ages, the union of Christ and his church. Friends, what I'm trying to tell you this morning is it's worth everything we have to give. And it is occasionally going to require pain and sacrifice, and it's worth pain and sacrifice. It's worth our time, treasure, and talent. Because together, we as the bride know that the bride price has been paid in full. What was the bride price for us? Nothing less than the death of the groom. The father is so committed to you, so convinced that you, the church that we're a part of, and the broader church through the ages, so convinced that we are the ones for his son that he is committed to paying any price to include the life of his son. And the son agrees. So when we blow it, and when we get things wrong, and we sin against him, and we sin against each other, what do you imagine he says to us?

I'm going to paraphrase something I read in a book that I read kind of about this whole wedding pageantry stuff in the Bible. The author was imagining what I'm talking about right now. What would the bridegroom say when the bride blows it? So he imagines it might go like this. The bridegroom is sitting with the bride-to-be, and he's getting ready to go away, and he says to her, you know, I'm going to pay the price for you. I'm going to drink the cup with you and prepare the place for you. And if you happen to stumble in the year I'm away, I want you to know I'm prepared to totally forget it. [52 : 53] And if I hear while I'm building our bridal chamber that you are not waiting for me at home, but had even gone out with another man, I'm prepared to simply forget it. And if you try to break my covenant, I will not let you break it. I will pay for all of your sins myself. And praise God he has.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you that you are worth all things. You are the fairest of 10,000. You are the Lord of hosts. You are the one for whom our hearts sing. And whatever it is that we do for you, it pales in comparison to what you have done, are doing, and will do for us.

I pray for this church that we would be committed to that day, that we would love one another, that we would face the hard moments well, that we would do everything knowing that on that day, we'll look back and say it was all worth it. I pray that you would minister to each person in this room. I pray that you would minister to the, to Alan and Shelly and to the whole Bartz family. Lord, would your peace be upon this family. For Jesse and Haley and their kids. Lord, we pray as a church that your peace, your great blessing would be upon this family.

For Elliot and, for Elliot and Freddie and their families, that your peace, the peace that transcends understanding would be on their families. And for every person in this church, for the family of this church, we pray that your peace, we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, that your peace and your love would crown this family. We thank you and we praise you. And as we come to this meal, would you bless this meal, prepare our hearts to receive Christ all over again, as we anticipate that future moment, that future day when we are finally fully united to you in Jesus name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. I invite you to take out the cup and you can open the cellophane and take out that piece of bread.

[55 : 12] We're going to take this together. And before we do, just a few words of warning to you. The first is this, if you, if, if, if, if you cannot say that Christ is worth all things, if you cannot say that your entire life is devoted to him and that the greatest thing in your life is that future day that's coming, if that's not the way that you relate to Jesus, then the Bible says you should not take this meal. It will do you more harm than good.

The invitation for you is come, come to Christ, be part of the bride, join the bride, be baptized into the bride, and then come to the table. For the rest of us who are in Christ, there's a warning for us as well, and that is that we never take this presumptuously.

One of the things scripture says is that it is always good to examine ourselves. And that doesn't mean trying to unearth everything wrong you've ever done. The word has been preached. How is it pricking you?

How is it piercing you? What in your heart right now, you know, just needs to be confessed to the Lord. We're also told to examine the body. Man, we've been talking about relationships within the body.

How do you relate to other people in this room? So this is, I'm going to give you a moment to bring all those things to the Lord. And I also want to say this, we've talked about reconciliation this morning. If you feel like there's someone in the room that you need to go and ask forgiveness of, I think it would so honor the Lord to do that before taking this meal.

[56 : 44] Because when we eat this meal, we're not merely remembering something in the past, though we are doing that. We are receiving Christ in a special, mysterious, sacred way, union with Christ.

So I'm going to give you a moment to reflect, to think, to pray, and then we will take this together. Let's pray. It's already been a long, heavy service.

And if you would just bear with me for a few more minutes, Brian, Elliot, Freddie, and myself, we just felt it would be good to just leave with some remarks.

And I'm really representing our hearts as pastors of you guys. Elliot and Freddie and myself, we worked together on this statement. And probably many of us are thinking at this point, how the heck do we move forward from here?

Like, what do we do? How do we respond to this? And I just want to say, I think one appropriate response is that when this service ends, that they feel mobbed by your love, that you go to them, you hug them, and you look at them in the face, and you say how much you love them and what they have meant to you.

[58 : 09] I think that's an appropriate response. We think that is an appropriate response. Give them the gift of your tears and your empathy.

You know, when we ask, and try to seek that question, where do we move forward from here? Here's how I've seen it done poorly in other places.

Well, let's just dust off our hands of this as quickly as possible and just say onward and upward. We're not going to do that. We've chosen not to do that here. We're not going to face this.

Let's pretend this wasn't a big deal and brush past it as quickly as possible. We're choosing not to hide our weaknesses as leaders. We've exposed ourselves, so to speak.

So we're not going to do that. So where do we go from here? It is good for us to mourn together. In the Bible, mourning is always done in community.

[59 : 12] So don't go dark and isolate. Stay connected. We don't need to pretend that this isn't a difficult moment for our church or for you or for us or for them.

We don't need to fake a smile and try to force ourselves to feel joy. Actually, the Bible commends the wise and that they don't do that.

In Ecclesiastes 7, 3 and 4, it actually says, It is better to go to the house of mourning instead of the house of feasting.

For it is through sorrow of the face that we actually move into gladness. Feel the sadness. That's what the wise do. We need to give each other room and grace for how to respond to this.

We aren't cookie cutter people. It's going to hit us differently. But we can be a community of loving empathy. We can give that gift to each other.

[60 : 16] And for some, it may be a time for tears or a time to lament or a time to grieve. All those are good responses. It is okay to feel sadness, loss, confusion, anger, disappointment.

It is even okay to feel some suspicion. None of those emotional responses are wrong. In fact, they can be appropriate. Especially for you that these things may have brought up wounds from previous church hurt.

But these emotions are gifts because they let us know that we're experiencing something that God may have allowed to transpire, but he does not desire. Grief is a gift.

It's a gift from God that used well can awaken us to the fact that something isn't as it should be. And that is a good thing. The gospel, it gives us room to grieve, but it also gives us the direction for our grief.

We share in it with each other and we bring it to God. Come to God with your grief. And let's move forward together toward him.

[61 : 25] Now, I'm going to caution us finally this little bit. I want to caution us and I want to invite us. Here's the caution. Moments like this can harden our hearts. It can.

It can make us cynical. It can even tempt us to withdraw. Just thinking, oh, here we go again. Another church leadership failure. It's always the same. Be on guard against those thoughts. It's going to be tempting to want to go there. It's easy for those things to take root and grow. So let's guard, man. This is a moment where our hearts can get hard.

But you know what? Moments like this don't have to harden our hearts. If we lean into God together, these moments can actually make our hearts softer. We can become more compassionate. We can become more humble, more willing to recognize, you know what? Even from the outside, this could happen to me. But for the grace of God, there go I. So how do we go forward from here? We have to continue loving the world around us, loving each other, and following our King and our Good Shepherd.

[62 : 31] I just want to read a piece of Psalm 23, verse 1 to 4. It says, The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Maybe this part feels the most pertinent in this moment.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you. Are with me. He's with us. His rod and his staff. His staff, they comfort me.

I've got nothing better to say than that. So I want to say this. Let Jesus use this to draw us all near to him. I want to close with an offer for you.

The elders will be up here. Freddie, Elliot, myself, Brian. If you want to come and pray or have questions, that is totally fine. But I would love to see a long line of people coming and loving on them.

[63 : 41] If you need prayer for anything off to the side, maybe you're here and you're carrying something. Man, we don't want to lose sight of that.

There's going to be some folks to the side to pray with you. If it is your first or second time with us, it's been a doozy for sure. We're glad that you're with us.

You can go back to the welcome table in the back. We have folks back there that would love to say hello and meet you. And before you go, before any of us goes, we go out into this world.

But we go with the Father's blessing and encouragement and strength and power. And so we like to say this over you. And it's from the heart of the Father. And so receive it from him.

Our Lord blesses you and he keeps you. His face shines upon you and he is gracious to you. He lifts up his countenance upon you and he sends you in peace.

[64 : 45] Receive his blessing as you go to be a blessing by making disciples and pushing back darkness. All for the sake of the gospel. Thank you.