**Sermon Title**

**Ephesians 5:25-27**

Let me share a story from Joshua Harris’ book *Stop Dating the Church* (11-12).

Jack and Grace met through a mutual friend. From day one, they seemed to be the perfect match. Grace was everything Jack had always wanted. She was beautiful, outgoing, and caring- always there when Jack needed her.

For the first five months they were inseparable. Jack could hardly think of anything but Grace. He didn’t need to look further, he told friends that “She’s the one.”

Now almost three years have passed. Jack still enjoys the comfort and familiarity of being with Grace, but the spark is gone. Grace’s flaws seem more obvious. He’s not sure he finds her as attractive as he once did. And he’s beginning to resent all the time she wants to spend with him.

One night when she asks if they can define the nature of their relationship, Jack blows up. “We’re together, aren’t we?” he asks angrily. “Why isn’t that enough for you?” Obviously Jack isn’t ready for commitment. And it’s unclear if he ever will be.

Have you ever been in a relationship like this? God has something better for you. He wants you in a relationship defined by both passion and commitment. But before you can take hold of this wonderful plan, you need to know something about this couple. There are millions of Jacks walking around today. And Grace isn’t a girl. Grace is a church.

* As we dive into this message this morning I want to ask you “Are you married to the church or are you just merely dating?
	+ Dating = just with someone
	+ Married = committed to someone
* God has created an institution that is the most precious place on earth and His people should be committed to it and be doing what God has intended for us to do.
* The Scripture this morning gives us an intensity and depth of the love that Jesus Christ has for the most precious thing on Earth, His church or otherwise known as His bride.
	+ Read Ephesians 5:25-33
	+ It’s important to understand that God did not derive His inspiration for loving the church from marriage, but God created marriage to illustrate the love He has for the church.
1. How much does Christ love His church? Verse 25 “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ love the church and gave Himself up for her. “
	1. He laid down his life so that we might be justified, so that we might be made right and now He is at work making us the men and women of God we are called to be.
	2. The Bridegroom’s love for His bride is not flighty or changing, but rather it’s so deep that He gave His life up for the church, He is committed to His Church.
		1. Ex: The Bride & Groom at a Wedding.
		2. God created this marriage institution to show and display His love for the church.
		3. And yet, so many of us treat church like a dating relationship, we like it when we first start, the music sounds “good”, the CAC is wonderful, but when we start talking about true commitment and giving yourself up for the church then we’re like “What one minute, haven’t you seen the problems with this one.”
			1. Ed Stetzer from Lifeway Research says the average church attender stays at a church 18-24 months, are you an average church attender?
			2. Or maybe you’re someone who just like your routine, don’t mess with my routine, because I need my “church fix” for the week.
				1. We long to see everyone love the church as Christ loves the church, we long to see everyone committed to the church as Christ is committed to the church because this is the dearest place on earth. Think about how Christ cherishes His bride.
		4. “For one will scarcely die for a righteous person- though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die- but God shows his love for us (the church) in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:7-8
			1. Jesus loves the church sacrificially and His sacrifice was not for the lovely or the worthy, but the unlovely and unworthy, also known as the church.
			2. God can expect and command this kind of love from us, who belong to Him, because He has given us the capacity to love as He loves.
				1. 1 Thess 4:9 “Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another.”

Hearing how Christ loves His church should affect the way we love God, one another, and the world.

* + - 1. Just like the husband is not commanded to love His wife and be committed to her because of what she has done or not done, He is commanded to lover her because it is God’s will for him to love her.
			2. Colossians 1:3-4 “We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints!”
	1. Transition: His commitment and protection for the church helps cleanse us, purify us, and helps His bride look beautiful.
1. Christ love and commitment to the dearest place on earth cleanses us so that one-day we might be presented glorious (26-27).
	1. “That he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such blemish (26-27)”.
		1. His love runs so deed that He would make us free from spot, wrinkle, and without blemish so that ONE-DAY, on that final day we would look like Christ.
		2. Friends, if this does not get you excited, if this does not stir you up inside, if something does not resonate then you should be troubled.
			1. I want you to be troubled as you recognize that your heart and love for the church might not be like what Christ intends for it to be.
		3. Christ cleanses all spots and wrinkles, because His love churches the church is more than we can imagine.
			1. This paints a picture of a Groom who takes a not-so-pretty orphan who hates Him and He pays for her with His blood to make her a glorious, desirable wife (Romans 8).
			2. How do you see and think about each other, like that?
			3. Ephesians 5 calls us to “Imitators of God.”
			4. Romans 8:29 tells us to “conformed to the image of His Son.”
			5. There is no question that part of being like Jesus is to love what Jesus loves: His Church.
				1. If you love Christ, you should love and be committed to His church, not just put up with the church but have a passion for it.
				2. There is not much thinking at all anymore about the local church, but I want us to have a deep rooted conviction about the importance of the local church and love it as Christ does.

Ex: College Student

Ex: Situation with George Dooms.

* 1. Christ is married to the church, but people want to date the church because it’s the easy way out.
		1. Are you just living with the church? (You have certain activities you do, but you’re not committed to the body).
			1. Ex: Marty
		2. Jesus’ love for us was not a habit, a habit is not the same as love and commitment and God’s heart is not moved by a large group of people who out of habit attend church.
			1. Been married for 25 years …
			2. Colossians 1:9-13
			3. To love correctly is to want only the best for the one you love, is that the type of love you have for the church?
			4. Are you less concerned about what’s there for you and more concerned about how you can be there for the church?
			5. The great news is that Christ seeks to protect us from the world so that we might be holy, have virtue, be pure in every way.
			6. What were things that Christ got upset about in the church?
				1. Division
				2. Abuse of Sacraments
				3. Idol Worship
				4. Religiosity
				5. Everything we see Christ condemning is something that is making the church look ugly, disgusting, and impure.
				6. Church, remember that we are cleansed by the washing of water “by the Word.”
				7. The Word shows us how to be the church, love the church, serve the church, be committed to the church, and we cannot detract from that.
	2. This is not easy for us to take in, because it gets at the heart of a major issue that our Christian American Cult is facing, because commitment is rarely found.
		1. The question we need to be confronted with this morning is, Is God’s design for me to be completely committed to the Church God has placed me in?
		2. Is there a primary place for me to use and express my gifts in the local church?
		3. Does Christ love for the Church seem central throughout the Bible?
		4. Is the local church the primary vehicle that God wants to use in proclaiming his gospel and making disciples of all nations?
		5. With love to the universal church, “am I called to be committed to a specific local body? “
			1. And to all those questions, I shout “Yes”
			2. These standards and truths are not something we have created, but these are from God’s Word.
	3. So what does it mean to love like Christ?
		1. Biblical conviction for God’s Word (Eph 3:7-13; Col 1:15).
			1. The church is the dearest place on earth and the gospel is the most sacred thing in our lives.
		2. Nothing competes with Christ & His Church (Heb 11)
			1. Making the local church the dearest place on earth makes other places like the football field, softball diamond, or race park not the dearest place. Nothing competes.
		3. Demonstrated with action, not religion. (Eph 4:16)
			1. Finding your place as a member here, find your place through service by meeting, knowing, and loving people.
		4. Some of us today have possibly never loved the church, cause we’ve never been taught it’s importance.
		5. Others, might have never begun to love Christ Jesus and allowed Him to rule over your live, because you can’t love the Church til you love Christ and give your life over to Him.