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In and Out of the Wilderness:

Up Close

Exodus 25:1-9, Luke 18:35-43

Pastor Paul Dean

Life is a journey for all of us and for some of us part of the journey we've chosen is to be in a marriage. We have chosen to go through the wedding process and weddings can be really weird. Over all of my years doing weddings, I've almost seen everything. Usually, it's the groomsmen that go down. They might have been out a little bit too late the night before, might be a little bit dehydrated. They lock their knees up and they go down. I've seen people step on other women and step on their own dresses. At rehearsals I even tell everyone - guys don't lock your knees, keep them bent a little bit and if anybody goes down, it's got to be a groomsman because no one wants to see your bridesmaid go down. Even my own wedding started out a little bit weird right in this space about 26 1/2 years ago. My parents walked down the aisle with me and then my wife's parents and her came down, and we met in the middle and all hugged. Now my wife had spent the last six weeks making sure her hair would be perfect using all of the right hairspray, hair clips, gels etc. making sure it would be just right. As my bride to be and my mother embraced, my mother's glasses got stuck in my wife's hair and we were all waiting to see how much hair was going to get pulled out from this thing. And for the very first time in my entire life, I heard my mom swear. She said, "Ohh, Lord help us." That's as close as I ever heard my mom swear. Weddings can get weird.

We're going to step out today and look at a wedding ceremony starting with a courtship, a betrothal, and then a wedding ceremony that took place within the story of God and the Israelites. To do that, we have to understand what a pre-modern Middle Eastern wedding would look like. First of all, they're all pre-arranged marriages. They're arranged by the family. Once the the groom to be in that family kind of picks out the the hopeful bride to be the

father and the the groom to be they go meet the hopeful bride to be and the father takes out a cup fills it with wine and then hands it to a son. So this hopeful groom then walks up to this hopeful bride and gives the cup to this young woman. And now the woman has a choice. She can either deny the cup or she can drink from the cup and if she drinks from the cup, it's all good to go, they're going to get married. These words are then spoken by the groom to be this is a cup of a new covenant I will not drink of this until I see you again. Have we heard that before? Anywhere in Scripture or we're going to lean into that over the next couple of weeks in our podcast. So I invite you to join our podcast. So after that moment happens, the groom leaves the bride and goes and builds a room that's connected to the father's house. Not a separate house, not just on the same property, but a room for the groom and bride to live in that's connected to the father's house. He goes to prepare a place for his bride. And the only person who can tell the groom that the place is good enough is the father of the groom. It may take days, weeks, months, it may take years - the father of the groom says now the room is ready. Whenever the room is ready, the groom to be goes back to the bride to be and then the wedding begins. The bride is consecrated, has a ritual bath, and then as the bride comes out actually into the wedding ceremony, there's the shafar which is a trumpet, that makes a sound and then the bride and groom go under the chuppah. There's a presentation called the Ketubab, which is a written contract that the groom gives the bride telling the bride what this groom is obligated to do, what he committing to do for her health and safety. Not only while when the groom is alive, but when the groom has passed. These are the things that this bride will still have for her health and safety. And then there's a consummation of the wedding. There's an exchange of gifts, and there's a honeymoon. And this honeymoon lasts for a year. A year? You have to remember that they didn't know each other. They did all of this, even having a consummation of the marriage without knowing each other and so they get a year on their honeymoon. Through that year, that groom cannot be drafted into the army, they are

protected. They need a year to get to know each other because this bride is coming into this tribe and coming into this family and they've got to be able to work as one, so it makes perfect sense.

We started this worship series last fall called Trust the Story, and now we've been walking all of this way to get to this point today. And what we're going to see as we zoom out, we're going to see how God has been courting and creating a patroller process for the wedding day. So I'm going to show you a picture of Mount Sinai. This is a picture of Mount Sinai. As the Israelites move to this mountain after they're freed from their captivity, they're not just coming just to get the 10 Commandments. They're coming for something much more. If you take a look at this, there's the people that are entering into the mountain. Guess what's descending on this mountain. It's a cloud. The chuppah. Is coming down over these people, so this patrol starts with Abraham in Genesis Chapter 11. Hundreds and hundreds of years before this takes place Abraham God calls Abraham. God says we're going to arrange a marriage between you. Your people and me, God says I'm the groom. You are the bride. I'm going to arrange this marriage and at some point in time we're going to consummate this marriage. So Abraham, then, on behalf of God, begins to build something. He builds a house. But it's not a physical structure. This House is a people. This House is a tribe. This House turns into 12 tribes. This House then becomes the nation of Israel. And then there is a time of preparation where the bride has no idea where the groom is. This is their time in Egypt. And these people in Egypt have no idea when their groom is going to come. But the groom finally comes. It's called Passover. They're freed. They go to the mountain, and then they go through a ritual of consecration. God tells Moses they need to wash their clothes - my bride needs to be clean. They need to wash the clothes, and then as they come out of that consecration, if you know the story, there is a loud trumpet sound that comes off that mountain, the shafar, plans to welcome the bride into that, and then they go underneath the chuppah, the cloud that descends on the mountain, and as they go into

the chuppah, there is a presentation. There is a contract that comes called a ketubab. We know it as the ten commandments. Pastor Sarah unpacked this for us last week. These are not simply rules like Pastor Sarah said, these are protections, safety, and health protections for the bride, which is the nation of Israel. Think about what they are. The first three talk about their relationship with the groom. The rest of them talk about the relationship with one another. God is providing health and safety for the bride, which is the people God says don't kill each other. Don't steal from each other. Don't envy and covet one another, and worship me alone, because if you start worshipping other gods, guess what's going to happen, you're going to start killing each other. You going to start covering each other, you start stealing from each other. God is trying to provide health and safety for the bride, for the people. That's what they are. And then there's this consummation of the wedding. Which is the Tabernacle? We're gonna walk that through today. An exchange of gifts. We're gonna walk about. Walk that through later on as well. And there's a honeymoon now. It doesn't take a year. They are in a honeymoon for 40 years in the desert. Why? Because these people don't know their God and they keep messing it up. Right when the wedding is taking place, they build a golden calf. They're cheating on God, right in the midst of a wedding. God says these people don't get it, but I'm gonna take them back anyway. We're gonna spend 40 years because that's how long it takes to get Egypt out of these people. This is how long it takes to get empire out of these people and Shalom into these people. So this is a wedding ceremony.

My question to you is who wants to be the wedding coordinator? It's going to take hundreds of years and in some ways the project is still going on to this day. But let's take a deeper dive at the consummation, the building of the Tabernacle. This is a groom that wants to dwell with the people. This is a groom that wants to be with the people and to dwell is not to be passive. The word dwell is a verb. This is an active thing that's going on. The Tabernacle is not passive. God says and take this Tabernacle. Take this

verb that this, this dwelling place and put it in the middle of the people. Put it in the middle so that everybody can see and be reminded that I want to dwell with the people theologically. That's why we have our altar in the middle, to remind us way, way back that we are still part of the story of God dwelling within us. And God says there's going to be a lot of activity going on, a lot of things happen in in this Tabernacle.

Soon we're going to start the book of Leviticus and you're going to see how much activity is going on and what God is actually trying to get people to look at what God is trying to do. While God dwells. See God is not just on a mountain top some far away, God is here with us. God is in the valley, God is in the planes, God is wherever people are. Sometimes we think that God is only at church, that God's only in this building. God is out wherever we are, because this Tabernacle is also movable. It's a tent. It goes wherever the people are, wherever they are, wherever they move, and they can't. They set it up, they go. God is here. God is here now. There are always going to be days when we get upset when someone cuts us off and we blow our horn. But God is there with us, even in that moment. This is how motivated God is to dwell with God's people. God is so motivated that God sends his only son. A new Tabernacle. Flesh and bone. This is what we read in Luke Chapter 18: *"as Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside, begging. When the blind man heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening and they told him Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. Then the blind man shouted Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. Those who were in front sternly ordered the blind man to be quiet. But he shouted even more loudly. Son of David, have mercy on me and Jesus stood still and ordered the man to be brought to him. And when the blind man came near, Jesus asked him. What do you want me to do for you? The blind man said Lord, let me see again. Jesus said to him, receive your sight. Your faith has been saved or your faith has saved you. Immediately, the blind man regained his sight and followed him, glorifying God and all of the people."*

When they saw it they praised God. God in Jesus Christ committed to this marriage covenant. God in Jesus Christ continues this marriage covenant. And God gives it all. Gives it all for us to trust the story. Next, next week at Palm Sunday, where we're going to be called to line, the streets alongside our our ancestors who were lining the streets just like the Israelites back in Egypt, were crying out hosting, not God help us, we pray. To trust the story is to know that God is up close to you. To trust the story is to cry out to God in the first place. As a pastor, one of the favorite things I get to do is to sit with people who are really struggling and I get to say these words, let's go pick a fight with God. Let's go pick a fight with God. And they kind of go, whoa, wait a second. We can't fight with God. But God wants our honest conversation because when we're honest, when we're real, when we give God everything we have, even if we're angry, God says finally you care enough to be in this relationship with me. Let us do this because if you never argue with God, if you never get frustrated with God, then maybe you're not really in that relationship with God. I have to tell you the first time I ever realized that I loved the woman who I'm now married to is when she started to make me frustrated. I had never been frustrated with anybody I had ever dated before. I had not ever been that emotionally involved. And she made me frustrated for little things. Like she wasn't there on time or whatever it was. That's when I realized I really loved this woman. Now we're fine. Now we never have any arguments or fights. It's awesome. But God says if you want to be in a very real relationship with me, one that I am right next to you, I'm with you. Let's have a conversation. You tell me all the good stuff that's going. You can ask me to be there with you, but if you're upset and you're angry, God says. Let me know. Because that's how deep God's love is for you and for me. To trust the story is to know how deeply you are loved. To trust the story. Means that there isn't anywhere you can go where God is not there, even in your joys and your sorrows.