Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Some of you will know that the acronym used for the doctrines of grace is TULIP. And we have now finished with Head 1 of the Canons, which deals with the **U** of TULIP – **Unconditional Election**. And we saw that this was about God choosing to save some of fallen humanity before the creation of the world. And we saw that this choosing was not about anything in those He chose, but about His sovereign good pleasure. That is why it is referred to as *unconditional* election. And we also saw that this doctrine ought to be a source of comfort for believers because their salvation is anchored in the actions of their sovereign, loving, and unchanging God.

Well, now we come to Head 2 of the Canons, which deals with the **L** of TULIP – **Limited Atonement**. And atonement is about Christ’s work on the cross to secure the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. And the key focus of this doctrine, in its simplest form, is: **For whom did Jesus die**? If you have ever had a conversation with another Christian about election, they probably brought up **John 3:16**. Right? You said that God chose *some* to salvation, and they said, “But doesn’t John 3:16 say that ‘*God so loved the world’*”? And there are actually *seven* places in the New Testament that speak about Christ’s saving work and the “world.” And there are *five* places that speak about Christ’s saving work and “all.” For example, **1 Timothy 2:4** says that God “*desires all people to be saved*.” So, next Sunday, God willing, we will focus on the “world” and “all” passages to see what they *are* saying and what they *are not* saying.

But today we want to focus on the passages of Scripture that speak about Christ’s saving work and a **definite** or **particular** group of people. And we want to see two things in particular: First, that God’s eternal plan for the cross was the salvation of a definite group of people, and second, that Christ died for that group. And that group is the elect, which is why this doctrine is called *Limited* Atonement – Christ did not die for everyone but for a *limited* number of people – the elect.

And the way we are going to see this is with **a wedding theme**. It is wedding season at church at present: Marcus and Jessie married yesterday, and I am preparing wedding sermons for Eric and Jess and Stephen and Kimberley. And these are truly joyful occasions for them and us. And as we shall see, marriage is a reflection of the relationship between Christ and the elect. So, today we are going to see **how Scripture uses the theme of marriage to teach the doctrine of Limited Atonement**.

1. So, let’s begin by briefly reviewing **how prominent marriage is in the Bible**.
   1. What is the first marriage in the Bible? Adam and Eve. That’s page 1 – Genesis 1! And it is very clear from what God says to Adam and Eve, as He married them, that marriage is a very important part of His design for humanity.
   2. And as we continue in Genesis, we have those beautiful accounts of a search for a bride for **Isaac** and then also for **Jacob**. You boys and girls will remember that Jacob worked seven years to marry Rachel, only to be tricked into marrying Leah, and then he worked another seven years so he could also marry Rachel. It is an amazing story!
   3. And speaking of amazing marriage stories, the climax of the **Book of Ruth** is her marriage to Boaz.
   4. And from Solomon, we get the **Song of Songs**, which is a whole book about a bride and groom’s love for each other as a picture of Christ’s love for the church.
   5. And in a number of the **prophets**, God’s relationship with Old Testament Israel is described as a marriage, and there are allusions to Christ and the church, as we saw in our earlier Isaiah readings.
   6. In the **Book of** **Hosea**, Hosea is told to marry a prostitute and to keep bringing her back to the marriage home, despite her infidelity. And Hosea is a picture of Christ who came to cleanse and restore His bride, which we will say more about later.
   7. And when Jesus came to earth, **where did His first miracle take place**? At a wedding – He turned water into wine.
   8. And He often used marriage in His **parables** to teach something about the kingdom. And in **Matthew 9**, He referred to Himself as the bridegroom.
   9. In **Ephesians 5**, we have specific teaching about marriage. And husbands are told to love their wives “*as Christ loved the church*.” And the one flesh relationship of husband and wife, as a picture of Christ and the church, is described as a profound mystery.
   10. And then, finally, as we read earlier in **Revelation 19**, the moment that the church is presented to Jesus in heaven is described as the marriage of the Lamb. And the church is described in **chapter 21** “*as a bride adorned for her husband*.”
   11. So, marriage is an incredibly important biblical theme. And we are meant to see how it reflects the relationship between Christ and His bride – the church.
       1. So, those getting married and those of us who are married need to understand that our marriages are a kind of ‘***living sermon***.’ We have a responsibility to reflect the gospel in the way that we live together as husband and wife. And that is why dysfunctional marriage, living together outside of marriage, adultery, spousal abuse, same-sex marriage, and divorce are all **distortions** of God’s good design that hide the gospel.
       2. Now, there is forgiveness in Christ for our many marriage failures. And there is also the possibility of renewal and fresh beginnings. But let’s pray that our marriages may *reveal* Christ and *not hide* Him.
2. Well, now that we have noted the prominence of marriage in the Bible, we are ready to see how it reveals the doctrine of limited atonement. And we will do this under two headings: First, let’s consider **God’s Plan to Provide a Heavenly Bride**.
   1. And I am going to start by giving you a sentence and you can choose how to end it. Here is the sentence: “The creation of the world seems to have been especially for this end, that \_\_\_\_” How would you end that sentence? What is the end or goal or purpose of creation? Well, that sentence was written by the American preacher and theologian, Jonathan Edwards. Here is how he finished it: “The creation of the world seems to have been especially for this end, that the eternal Son of God might obtain a spouse.” And it was quite some time ago now, but in our Gospel of John sermon series, we spent several weeks working through John 17 and thinking about exactly that – that God created the universe to provide the Lord Jesus with a heavenly bride! You see, in **John 17**, the Lord Jesus repeatedly speaks about those who the Father had given to Him:
      1. In **verse 2**, He speaks about how the Son came “*to give eternal life to all whom you have given Him*.”
      2. In **verse 6**, He refers to “*the people whom you gave me out of the world*.”
      3. In **verse 9**, He refers to “*those whom you have given me*.”
      4. And these are all past tense statements – He *had* been given these people.
      5. And in **verse 24**, Jesus tells us when this giving took place; He says, “*Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world*.”
      6. And we see this truth echoed in other places in Scripture also:
         1. In **John 10:29**, Jesus describes the elect as His “*sheep*,” saying, “*My Father, who has given them to me*…” And again, it’s past tense – “*who has given them to me.*”
         2. **Ephesians 1:4** says: “*Even as [the Father] chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world*.”
         3. And **Revelation 13&17** speak about “*the Book of Life,*” in which the names of the elect were written “*before the foundation of the world*.”

So, before the creation of the world, the Triune God planned or purposed to provide the Lord Jesus with a heavenly bride. And the names of all who would be part of this heavenly bride were written in the Book of Life.

* 1. And one day, as we read earlier in **Revelation 19&21**, the end goal of this eternal plan will come to pass: “*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 … And I saw the holy city … coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband*.” Finally, the goal of creation, the purpose of the Father from before the foundation of the world, will be realized – Jesus will be with His bride; the elect; the church.

1. Now, I hope you are already starting to connect the dots between this eternal marriage plan and the doctrine of Limited Atonement. But before we complete the link, we also need to consider **Christ’s Work to Cleanse His Filthy Bride**.
   1. I expect that an absolute nightmare for the brides who are getting married in these next weeks would be **a dirty wedding dress**. Can you imagine spilling something on your pristine, white wedding dress just before the service? What a disaster! And you would quickly have to Google how to clean tomato sauce or wine or mud off a wedding dress. Well, in **Ezekiel 16**, the Lord describes the nation of Israel as His precious bride. He says, “*I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you … and you became mine … I clothed you … in fine linen and covered you with silk*.” But then the Lord describes Israel as like a prostitute who gave herself to other gods through idolatry. He says that she removed her fine garments and wallowed in blood. And so, He would send Israel into exile as punishment for her spiritual adultery. But the Lord would not abandon His bride. He said, “*I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will … establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD … when I atone for you for all that you have done, declares the Lord GOD*.” So, the Lord Himself would come to cleanse and restore His bride. That was the promise of God made around 600 years before Jesus was born.
   2. And it is not just Old Testament Israel that is guilty of sin. As **Romans 3:23** says, “*For we all fall short of the glory of God*.” And **Isaiah 64:6** describes even our best efforts to obey God as like “*filthy rags,*” because of how sin clings to all that we think and say and do. So, listen now to what it says in **Ephesians 5:25-27**: There, husbands are commanded to love their wives “*as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 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 splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish*.” So, Jesus is the fulfilment of that Ezekiel prophecy; He came to earth to wash or sanctify or cleanse or purify His bride.
      1. And He did this with His blood. **Revelation 5:9-10** says of Jesus, “*By your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation*.”
      2. **Revelation 7:14** says this of God’s elect ones: “*They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*.”
      3. It was on the cross, by His blood, that Jesus sanctified or cleansed or washed His bride.
      4. And how do we know that He did this, completely and fully? Because He said, “*It is finished*.”
   3. So now, in view of all that we have seen, let me ask you this: When Jesus was on earth, did he know who they were whom the Father had given Him? When He was on the cross, did He know who He was dying for? As He sits in heaven, today, does He know who His bride is? The answer is: Yes, yes, yes, and yes!
      1. In **Matthew 1:21**, Joseph was told to name Him Jesus, “for He will save His people from their sins."
      2. In **John 10**, He said, “*I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me … and I lay down my life for the sheep … My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand*.”
   4. Congregation, the view of most professing Christians today is that Jesus died on the cross for *everyone*. His death atoned for the sins of *everyone*. So, in their view, it possible for everyone to be saved. But the only ones who will be saved are those who choose to believe in Jesus. And God in no way controls this. So, and I am just using these numbers for illustration purposes, Jesus shed His blood for 100 Trillion people, all of humanity, but only 50 trillion or 25 billion or maybe 75 trillion, might believe and benefit from what He did. But Jesus did not know who He was dying for and He will not find out who His heavenly bride is until the Day He meets them at the wedding Supper.
   5. Well, I hope you can see from all we have learned today that is wrong, *very* wrong. Jesus came to earth to die for His bride; His sheep; His people; the churc; the elect. He knew, exactly, who they are that the Father had given to Him. Not one drop of His precious blood was wasted on a person who is not chosen for heaven. And today, in heaven, He is watching over the church, He is interceding for the church, and He is ruling over governments on behalf of the church. And just as Marcus and Eric and Stephen know exactly who will walk through the door at their wedding, Jesus knows who will be presented to Him at the wedding Supper of the Lamb! And this, brothers and sisters, is what is meant by Limited Atonement. Jesus died to secure the forgiveness of sins and eternal life ***only for His bride***.

Now, once again, as we draw to a close, I need to be clear with you. What we have seen today is God’s perspective. *Jesus* knows all those who are His bride; the church; the elect. And we are taught this in the Bible for our encouragement and comfort, and so that we might praise Him as the God of our salvation. But we do not have access to the Book of Life. What we have is Romans 10:9: “*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved*.”

So, consider that your **wedding invitation**. On your RSVP card, it says, [your name]: “*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will”* be part of the bride that is presented to Jesus at the wedding Supper of the Lamb. Have you sent back your RSVP? Will you be at that wedding? Have you repented of your sins and believed in Jesus?

If you have, then know this: Jesus knows your name! He had you in mind as He hung on the cross. And earlier we read these words of His from **John 17:24**: “*Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am*.” He cannot wait for the moment when the door to wedding Supper room opens and you walk in! Amen.