

## United with Jesus Christ

In chapter 6, we learned about the meaning of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection for our sins, using baptism as an example. We believed in Jesus Christ and were resurrected and justified in death with Christ Jesus. Now we live by the reign of His grace. Therefore, we are to live holy lives as instruments of righteousness and slaves of God.

In today's chapter 7 passage, the Apostle Paul uses the legal validity of marriage and bereavement as an analogy to repeatedly describe the Christian who has been delivered from legalism and lives in the world of grace. He does his best to make it easy to understand that we are under the reign of grace. He uses the institution of marriage as an example of one of these.

Look at **verse 1. "Do you not know, brothers and sisters – for I am speaking to those who know that law – that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives?"** Here "law" can be understood to be the law of the time. We are fortunate to live in a nation governed by the rule of law, so we are well aware of the validity of the law. And we know that law applies to those who are alive. Here the Apostle Paul explains the situation of a bereaved woman with an example. The laws of marriage and divorce in ancient Rome would have been more absolute than in our time.

Here is another mini-drama. Once upon a time, there was a poor woman. She was married to a strict man named Rippo (law in Japanese). He was a perfectionist. She cleaned up all day long and waited for her husband. But when Mr. Law(Rippo san) came home, he wiped the window with his finger and yelled at her, "Look, you didn't even clean the window today. I know you played all day long!" She was yelled at by him. But the next day, she wanted to be praised by her husband so she tried her best to prepare dinner. However, he returned to the table ~~with~~ saying "This miso soup is not tasty enough." And whenever he saw their children's performance, he criticized her, "You don't work and stay at home, but you can't even raise your children well." He blamed her for the child's performance. He would not tell her what she should do, but would only criticize her. She became increasingly bitter, depressed, and unable to meet her husband's demands. In ancient times, the law of marriage would have been absolutely binding. In the woman's case, divorce was strict and there was no way to leave her strict husband except by bereavement. She could not be free while she was still alive. In her despair, God in heaven must have understood her grief, because Mr. Law suddenly died.

Look at **verse 2. "For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long**

as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of that binds her to him (2)." The wife who was married to Mr. Law was firmly bound to her husband by law, but when her husband dies, she is freed from that law. Look at verse 3, "So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man." This needs no explanation. As a widow, she can remarry.

Look at verse 4. "So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God (4)." This verse is the most important one today. Let me review it for a moment. We learned that we are dead to the law through the cross of Jesus Christ in Romans 6:4. "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (4)." Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose again so that we might live in newness of life. And we are united to the body of Jesus Christ. This union means that we are united with Jesus Christ in a strong bond, like a marriage. And just as a woman who remarries is not controlled by the influence of her ex-husband, so we can live a new life.

To continue the story about the bereaved wife, she really happily remarried. She remarried a man who was very kind, rich, and loved her very much. As you know there is a woman in Ruth who is famous for remarriage in the Bible. This is not a mini-drama, but a beautiful love story in the Bible. Ruth and Ruth's mother-in-law, Naomi, were both widows. They had been bereaved of their husbands. If they had children, there would have a little hope, but they were childless. It happened that they immigrated to Moab, a foreign country, to be happy, but their life was miserable.

By the way, what an amazing, more beautiful story than Cinderella's here. Ruth met "Boaz," who had the right to take over the house through her mother-in-law. This Boaz was from Bethlehem and was a man of honor, wealth, and respectable, and he had the legal right to marry Ruth. Finally, Boaz married her and completely restored her from hardship and dishonor. And later, a child was born. The child's name was 'Obed'. Later, a descendant named David would be born through him. Ruth's life was completely changed after her remarriage to Boaz, and she was blessed with a fruitful life.

This beautiful story is a very favorite Bible story of the Jews. The reason is that it is the story of the person whose life became happy the fastest in the Bible. This is why it is recited at every "Festival of harvest" of the first fruits.

The person like "Boaz" who appears here is our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is much

kinder and more powerful than Boaz. He loved us and died on the cross, and resurrected and set us free from the darkness that had taken over the world. To believe and live in Jesus Christ is to be spiritually remarried to Him and to live by grace.

How then should we live? Look at verses 5 and 6: "For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that bore fruit for death (5). But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code (6)."

Before we believed in Jesus Christ, we had fruit that leads to death. But through Jesus Christ, we live a new life following the Holy Spirit and bearing the fruit of Him. In the previous example, the law was commanding us to 'do this', but it didn't help us. But Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to help us live holy lives like the Bride of Jesus Christ. **John 16:13, "But when the, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will tell you what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come."** With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can bear much fruit.

In **Galatians 5:18-24**, we read about the "fruit for death" and the "fruit of the Holy Spirit". The fruit for death is sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, drunkenness, orgies and the like. The fruits of death are many! What are we also stuck with here? Now, let me tell you about the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. How happy we would be if we had such wonderful fruits of the Holy Spirit in our lives!

So, how can we produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit? It is the same principle as marriage. In order to have a happy marriage, we need to get to know each other day by day. We need to spend time together and share both hardships and joys. **John 15:4, "Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."**

How do we remain in Jesus on our daily life? Surprisingly, we may not spend much time reading the Bible and praying. The Bible is a letter from the invisible God. So, we should read it to know God's thoughts. Prayer is a conversation with God. Recently in our house, even though we are sitting at the same table, my children are playing with their cell phones without conversation even though we are in the same house. We may not be saying a word to Jesus even though we are with Him. We might say like this, "We attend to the church every week. It's enough." We should not be silent like Kyushu men. Talk to God a lot. Also, we need to pray that we can do all these things in our lives with the help of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will teach us about Jesus and God more clearly.

As my testimony, I used to read the book of Ruth from chapter 1 to 4 many times in one go when I was depressed. I was reading it thinking that I would love to remarry a wonderful husband like Boaz. I read Ruth and other scriptures of the Bible together. By the way, an amazing thing happened. Was Yoko able to remarry? No. But I realized that the Boaz of Ruth was Jesus Christ. I am so grateful that I met Jesus, more wonderful and powerful than Boaz.

From today's message, we learned that we are forgiven of our sins and justified by the grace of the cross of Jesus Christ, and we have become His bride. Revelation 21:2-3, I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband (2). And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, God himself will be with them and be their God (3). We will soon meet our husband Jesus Christ in the form of a bride. Therefore, we are to dress and get ready as a pure bride. The bride also goes on a diet and works hard before the wedding, but this diet is not a painful one, but a period of enjoyment and happiness. In this way, the holy life is not a painful one but a very enjoyable and joyful one. Please pray that all of us will live the holy life joyfully as the Bride of Jesus Christ.

Let's pray.

Beloved Heavenly Father, thank you for freeing us from sin. And thank you for receiving us as the bride of Jesus Christ. May the Holy Spirit lead us to live holy and joyful lives like a bride waiting for her Bridegroom. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

