

Some of you men have been the best man at a wedding. And you had very specific duties. Hold on to the wedding rings, stand next to the groom, look sharp, and be a witness to sign the marriage license. And, of course, give a toast at the reception.

These duties have changed drastically over the centuries. In Medieval times, a groom quite possibly had to raid a neighboring village or tribe in order to secure a bride for himself. To accomplish this dangerous task, he called upon a trusted friend to assist him. This trusted companion became known as the best man. During the wedding the best man stood immediately to the right of the groom with his hand on his sword at all times to defend the bride in case her family came to take her back. And following the wedding, he would stand guard at the home of the bride and groom so their wedding vows could be consummated without interruption.

Jesus says that “*among those born of women, none is greater than John the Baptist.*” What this means is that John is the best man. Throughout the Old Testament, groomsmen, the prophets, came and went one after another. John, however, is the best man because he stands next to Jesus. When the best man enters the wedding hall, the groom will come next. And so, Jesus follows on the heels of John. And as the best man, John kept his hand on his sword to defend the bride. This was his charge. To be the voice and proclaim loudly and clearly the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.

John came and went. And now other men are given that same charge. They are trained in seminaries and called to be the best man, to defend the bride of Christ at all costs by keeping their hands constantly on the sword of God’s Word.

You are the bride. Jesus went and sought you for Himself. He brought you out of the devil’s realm and became one with you in the wedding service of Holy Baptism, where the best man stood next to the Groom, applying water and proclaiming Jesus’ own words, to consummate your marriage with your Lord.

As in Medieval times, when the families of the bride would come with force to bring her back, so it is today. The devil wants you back for himself. But to do that he must separate you from the Groom. To do this he keeps you too busy for the daily reading of Jesus’ words. Too busy for time with the Groom in His house and at His table. He does whatever it takes to keep the bride away from her Groom.

What, then, if the best man wields his sword against the devil? What does the devil do if the best man does as he is charged and defends the bride? What else except to attack the best man. And so John is thrown into prison. And today, whoever stands next to the Groom to defend the bride is attacked as well.

Now dear bride, remember that you are not married to the best man. You do not belong to him. You belong to the Groom. You are married to the Lord Jesus Christ. And as your Groom, He did, and does, what it took to make you His bride and to keep you forever as His bride.

He shed His blood for you on the cross. He disarmed the devil in doing this by taking away his accusations against you. You are not a perfect bride. You are a sinful bride just as the best man is sinful. But no charge against you can stick because Jesus Himself accepted the accusations that were against you. And He took your punishment. And you, dear bride of Jesus, are declared forgiven. No sin can separate you from your Groom. The washing of your baptism cleanses you of all sin. And this is true every day of your life. You are now, and you remain, Jesus' forgiven bride.

But it is important to remember what you once were. In our text, Jesus tells us. He went to find a bride who was blind, lame, leprous, deaf, dead, and poor. Look, these are the people He seeks and who come to Him. Not those who have everything. Those who have, and are, nothing. Not the greatest, but the very least.

Remember your roots. Remember who you were when Jesus sought you. Never think that He desired you for a bride because you were great, and good, and had so much to offer. No, all you are and have is what your Groom has given to you. "*Go and tell John,*" He said to John's disciples..." *the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.*" This is what Jesus was doing for His bride then, and now.

And so, consider this. Although the best man stands next to the groom, the best man is not the greatest in the wedding. The bride is the greatest. No wonder Jesus says, "*Among those born of women, none is greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.*"

You are greater than John because you are the bride of Christ. And He has raised you up out of your blindness and leprosy, out of your poverty and your deadness, out of your sins, and placed you next to Himself.

Everyone of you is precious to your Divine Groom. And everyone of you is greater than the best man, for you are Jesus' beloved bride, the bride that the best man is charged to defend. Your greatness is not in what you have done, but in who you are in Christ, and in what He has done for you. Amen.