

# **WEDDING SERVICE**

**Justin Taylor Ross  
&  
Leah Elizabeth Hitchens**

**Saturday, October 16, 2010  
11:30 a.m.**

**Cuyahoga Valley Church  
5055 W. Wallings Road  
Broadview Heights, OH 44147**

**Rev. Phillip A. Ross, Officiant  
[www.Pilgrim-Platform.org](http://www.Pilgrim-Platform.org)**

## **Greeting**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

We come together today for a formal celebration of love. We come now to ask God's blessing and pronounce God's involvement upon Justin and Leah in the context of Christ's church, the people of God. As we come today to honor their commitment to their love in Christ, I invite all of you to listen carefully to the words spoken here today, the words of the service, and the words of fellowship. Listen to the Word of God, listen to the words of promise and fulfillment in this service, and listen to one another. Listen and respond to one another in the spirit of Christ's love that we celebrate here.

If you are married, I pray that God will renew and strengthen your marriage vows as you listen to this service. And if you have known the pain of broken marriage, by death or divorce, I pray that you will hear the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ, whose love knows no end and who bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness, and by whose wounds we have been healed (1 Peter 2:24).

## **Introduction**

Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the presence of God and these witnesses to join this man, Justin, and this woman, Leah, in holy matrimony, which is an honorable estate. God instituted marriage when He created Eve to be a helpmate for Adam in the Garden of Eden. Marriage is God's plan for the human family, and to receive God's blessing it must be instituted as God has given it in the Bible. Therefore, it is not to be entered in to unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, discreetly, and in the love of God. Into this holy estate Justin and Leah now come to be joined in the name of Jesus Christ.

Who gives this woman to be married to this man? (*Her mother and I do.*)

## **Prayer (David & Terea Williams)**

### **Reading**

Genesis 2:18-25: Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

(*Alex Hitchens, reader*) Psalm 27 – One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple. For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock. And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD. Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me! You have said, "Seek my face." My heart says to you, "Your face, LORD, do I seek." Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger, O you who have been my help. Cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my salvation! Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. Give me not up to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence. I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living! Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

Ephesians 5:1-2 – Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

## **Face To Face**

In the traditional wedding service, one of the most dramatic moments comes as the bride removes her veil, and the couple would look at each other face to face.

Marriage is the lifelong practice of looking at one another face to face, without flinching, without running away, without hiding, and without deception. That is the art of marriage. Justin and Leah, today you begin the long and joyous journey of seeing each other face to face over your lifetime. Look deeply and lov-

ingly, look faithfully and honestly. Be willing to look, and be willing to be seen.

The marriage service contains vows to promise to continue this practice, this art, of facing one another in the warmth and light of God's love. It's not as easy as it first seems, it takes practice. And like anything that you take the time to practice, you will get better at it over time.

In many ways, love sneaks up on us. Not like a thief in the night, or a surprise birthday party, but more like an observation or realization of something extraordinary in the midst of something ordinary. Suddenly, you discover something that you didn't expect. In the midst of something very common, you find something uncommon, something special.

This discovery is not simply about another person. The real discovery is not that you found a wonderful person looking back at you, someone who loves *you*. The real discovery is not that the other person loves *me*, but that *I* love this particular person in some way or at some level that is disturbing. At some point you find yourself disturbed by the idea of life without this particular person.

Love doesn't wait for us to be ready for it. Love doesn't play by our rules or conform to our expectations. Love disrupts our plans and gives us something unexpected, something deeper and more profound than we first thought, something beyond our hopes and expectations. Love takes our breath away in the sense that we fumble over words to express it. We trip over ourselves as we try to accommodate it. Words can't express it or contain it, and so we simply gaze at it face to face.

Wonder of wonders, it consumes us, but does not harm us. It helps us to become more of who we are. We find that our personal identities are more clear, more full, more complete as we face it together. But what is it? What is this thing we call love?

We are tempted to define it as the beloved himself or herself. Standing together face to face we see love in the face of the other person, and at first glance we think that the object of our love is the face of the other. Justin, you have found love in the face of Leah. Leah, you have found love in the face of Justin. And we have gathered together here today to acknowledge and share the realization of the love that we also see in your faces. We are here to support and nurture you in it.

Why do we do this? Because we know love's promises and hopes. We know love's presence and power. We are here to pledge our love and support, and to help you understand that this love that you see is not yours. It does not belong to you. Rather, you belong to It. Sure, we are glad that you have found it in one another. And we celebrate your promise to honor and cherish the love you see in one another til death do you part.

But we are also here to help you understand that the love you see in one another is actually the reflection of a Greater Love. This Greater Love is that which is *reflected* in you. What you see in each other's eyes is the reflection of this Greater Love. It looks like it's in you, and it is! But more importantly, you are in It. It is not that you behold this love in one another, but that It beholds you. It is important to remember this.

Greater love hath no one than this Love. And so we commend this Love to you. And at the same time, we commend you to this Love because this Love knows no end. This Love is eternal. We want to help you learn how to hold on to this Love with all your might, with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength., because this Love will sustain you to the end.

This Love will give you all you need—and more. This Love will insure that you lack nothing as you wait upon one another in love, as your waiting reveals your love, for this Love is worth the wait. So, wait for each other, but not like people waiting for a bus. Rather, wait like a waiter waits a table, like a waitress waits a counter. But don't wait for the other to start waiting first. Don't wait to be served. Take the initiative and be the first to serve the other. Wait upon one another in all things, as if you are waiting upon this Greater Love, as if you are waiting upon royalty—because you are.

And let me encourage you to be jealous, for this Love is a jealous master. Painfully desire the advantage and well being of each other. Protect the well being of the love you serve. Keep it from privation and danger as best you can. Warn it when it strays, reward it for its loyalty, care for it in its need.

Leah, in marriage you are called to obedience to this Love. But being obedient to this Love does not mean being a doormat. This Love does not need blind obedience, it needs open-eyed partnership.

Justin, you are called to serve this Love, to husband it, to be responsible for it, to be able to respond to It with a lifetime commitment to serve its best interests. This kind of service doesn't dominate, it empowers. It doesn't demand, it inspires. This kind of service leads firmly by modeling submission to the Greatest Love. Of course, Leah is also called to serve this Love, just as Justin is also called to live in submission to It.

This Love has authority because it is authentic love. This Love is the First Love, the Original Love, the Love that first loved us so that we can know what real, authentic love is like. This is the Love you see reflected in one another. This Love is the Son of God that shines in the darkness, that overcomes the darkness. This Love is the light of the world and those who follow It, those who serve It, those who are obedient to It, will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

You see, this Love is a gift that possesses those to whom it is given. Usually we think of gifts as something that someone gives us and then we own it. So, we can use it when we want, and put it on the shelf when we are done—like a new bicycle. But this Love is not like that.

This Love is a gift that we do not possess. This Love is a gift that will possess you like it possesses us. It's not like you can come here today and give each other rings and say your vows, and then do whatever you want. You cannot give this Love to one another in marriage because this is the Love that gives you to one another. This Love is not yours to give. Rather, you are Its to give.

Each of you has awakened deep mysteries in each other, a hidden love that is being unveiled today, a love that will not be hidden any more. Today this hidden love steps into the public light of day.

Or rather, today you publicly step into Its light. And stepping into this light, into this Love, you will never be the same. This light will shine into the deepest and darkest recesses of your being. This light will reveal things about you that you don't yet know about yourselves. This light will expose your nakedness, your weaknesses and your faults to one another.

As it does that, as you discover these dark things about yourselves and about one another, know that the light of this Love has already forgiven you. This Love does not think less of you for these dark things, It understands you and desires your well being. This Love will cover your nakedness, strengthen your weaknesses and forgive your faults. In fact, It has already done that for you. You stand here today, face to face, already forgiven. So, I implore you to follow Its lead and forgive one another. As these dark things come to light meet them with forgiveness.

Justin, take leadership of this forgiving love and practice it often and generously—faithfully. Leah, in obedience to Justin's leadership, follow his lead and reflect that forgiveness back to him. And when he forgets or is otherwise unable to take the leadership of forgiveness, be obedient to this forgiving love that has already forgiven you both and take the initiative in extending forgiveness. Help him when he stumbles, don't be stumbled when he needs help.

For now you see in a mirror, dimly, but one day you will see face to face. Now you know in part; but one day you will know fully, even as you have been fully known. One day you will see this Greater Love face to face.

And remember that this Love, this First Love, this Greater Love has a name: His name is Jesus Christ. The fact that this Love has a name makes it personal. He is not an it. He is a Person known the world over as Jesus Christ, Son of the Father, Father of the faithful, Lord of the universe.

### **Charge**

Justin and Leah I require and charge you both, as you stand in the presence of God and these people, to remember that love and loyalty to one another alone will not avail as the foundation of a happy and enduring home. Remember that your love for one another is a reflection of God's love for you both. No other human ties are more tender, no other vows more sacred than those you now assume. If you keep these solemn vows, and if you steadfastly endeavor to give yourselves to the grace of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, your life together will be full of joy, and the home you are establishing will abide in peace.

Herein God will bless your marriage, grant you fulfillment in it, and establish your home in love and peace. Do you now promise to faithfully love God and each other? (We do.)

### **Corporate Blessing**

Will the families and friends of Leah and Justin please answer in support of this couple. Do you offer your prayerful blessing and loving support to this marriage. If so, please answer, "We do." (We do.)

Jesus said, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:9-12).

### **Declaration of Intent**

Justin, do you now take this woman, Leah Elizabeth Hitchens, to be your lawfully wedded wife, to live together in the holy estate of Christian marriage? Do you now promise to love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health? Do you intend to be faithful to her by God's grace as long as you both shall live? (I do.)

Leah, do you now give yourself to this man, Justin Taylor Ross, to be your lawfully wedded husband, to live together in the holy estate of Christian marriage? Do you now promise to love him, comfort him, honor and keep him, in sickness and in health? Do you intend to be faithful to him by God's grace as long as you both shall live? (I do.)

Let us pray: Lord, hear these pledges encouraging and supporting this union of Justin and Leah. Bless them as we offer our prayerful and loving support to their marriage. Bless them as they pledge their lives to each other. With faith in You and in each other, may this couple always bear witness to the reality of the love which we witness this day. May their love continue to grow, and may it be a true reflection of your love and forgiveness for us all; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Vows Of The Marriage Covenant**

I, Justin, receive you, Leah, as my sovereignly chosen wife. I give myself fully to you. Today I establish a covenant of love and faithfulness with you and with God. As your husband, I pledge to love, honor and trust you always and in all seasons. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, I promise to treat you with gentleness and humility. When I'm led astray by my selfishness, I promise to confess and repent, and seek to restore fellowship with you. As biblical manhood exhorts, I vow to be strong, live sacrificially, to bear your burdens and cover over your weaknesses. I promise to treasure our relationship above all earthly things. I promise to pray for you and walk with you all the days of our lives. Finally, I vow to love the Lord our God with all my heart, my mind, my soul, and my strength as my first and highest responsibility. I make these vows to you as, together, we walk in love in the same way that Christ loves us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

I, Leah, receive you, Justin, as my sovereignly chosen husband. I give myself fully to you. Today I establish a covenant of love and faithfulness with you and with God. As your wife, I pledge to respect, obey and trust you always and in all seasons. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, I promise to follow you as you take on the role as leader in our lives. When I'm led astray by my selfishness, I promise to confess and repent, and seek to restore fellowship with you. As biblical womanhood exhorts, I vow to be self-controlled, pure, kind and submissive. I promise to treasure our relationship above all earthly things. I promise to pray for you and walk with you all the days of our lives. Finally, I vow to love the Lord our God with all my heart, my mind, my soul, and my strength as my first and highest responsibility. I make these vows to you as, together, we walk in love in the same way that Christ loves us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

### **Exchange of Rings**

Justin, what will you share to symbolize your love? (This ring.)

This ring is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, signifying to all the uniting of this man and this woman in holy matrimony, through the Church of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Let us pray: Bless, O Lord, the giving of this ring, that he who gives it and she who wears it may abide forever in your peace, and continue in your favor, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Repeat after me: In token and pledge/ of the vow/ between us made,/ with this ring/ I thee wed/ in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Leah, what will you share to symbolize your love? (This ring.)

This ring is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, signifying to all the uniting of this woman and this man in holy matrimony, through the Church of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Let us pray: Bless, O Lord, the giving of this ring, that she who gives it and he who wears it may abide forever in your peace, and continue in your favor, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Repeat after me: In token and pledge/ of the vow/ between us made,/ with this ring/ I thee wed/ in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **Song Communion**

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself" (1 Corinthians 11:23-29).

### **Announcement of Marriage**

Since Justin and Leah in the presence of God and this gathered congregation, have pledged their vows to each other in love and in the covenant of Christian marriage, and have symbolized this union by the giving and receiving of rings, I, as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ, now pronounce you husband and wife, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Those whom God has joined together, let not man put asunder.

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving**

Most gracious God, we give you thanks for your tender love. You sent Jesus Christ to come among us, to be born of a human mother, and to transform the way of the cross into the way of life. We thank you, too, for consecrating the union of this man and this woman in Christ's name. By the power of your Holy Spirit, pour out the abundance of your blessings on Leah and Justin. Defend them from every enemy. Lead them into all peace. Let their love for each other be a seal on their hearts, a mantle about their shoulders, and a crown on their heads. Bless them in their work and in their companionship, in their sleeping and in their waking, in their joys and in their sorrows, in their lives and in their deaths. Nurture them in a community of the faithful gathered about You. And finally, in your mercy bring Justin and Leah to that table where your saints feast forever in your heavenly home; through Jesus Christ our sovereign savior who, with you and the Holy Spirit, reign every day. Amen.

### **Blessing**

May the grace of Christ attend you, the love of God surround you, and the Holy Spirit keep you that you may grow in holy love, find delight in each other always, and remain faithful all your lives.

And may the peace of God be with you now and forever more as you seal your love with a kiss.

### **Introduction**

Ladies and gentlemen, may I introduce to you Mr. & Mrs. Justin Ross.