

Strasen Prayer Letter

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Dear friends,

Since 2004, when I began living in Namibia, I have attended all of three church weddings. In Africa, as in most places in the world, weddings are special occasions of joy and celebration. The union of one man and one woman in marriage is realized as the culmination of the wishes of the parents for their children. Yet, relatively few people in Namibia ever get married, at least in the sense that we think of when we think of marriage. It is true that there are more “forms” of marriage agreements in African cultures than I can intelligently comment on. So there are more people who, when asked, would say that they are married than seems to be the case. But still, many women stay single throughout their lives, despite having many children.

I am aware of three kinds of weddings in Namibia. There are church weddings, of course, and these bear a marked resemblance to church weddings in North America. There are magistrate weddings, weddings that we might call justice-of-the-peace weddings. And then there is the traditional wedding, one that is performed without any formal ceremony and without a certificate to prove it took place. These weddings are quite legitimate, however, as they must be approved by the parents of both parties involved.

Most couples in Namibia will never get married in a church, not because they don't prefer church weddings, but because they can't afford them. The preparation cost for such affairs is enormous and prohibitively expensive for most people. The cost of food alone to feed two or three hundred guests makes people think twice before entertaining the notion of having a church wedding.

Though most could not afford to pay the costs imposed by a church wedding, there is one price that must always be paid regardless of what kind of wedding it is. That is the bride price.

Shortly after the wishes of the couple are made known, approval must be made by the parents of the prospective bride and groom. One of the things needing approval is the bride price, the number of cows that must be paid by the groom's family to the bride's family for the privilege of entering into this marriage. Somewhere within the culture of southern Africa there is the notion that a girl has value to her family as long as she is in her parent's home. Historically, that value is probably associated with her ability as a worker in the home and fields, but it is value nonetheless. There is a cost to her family when she is taken out of her home

to live with another. And that cost is measured in terms of real wealth, usually two or three cows. This bride price must be agreed upon and paid by the family of the groom before the wedding takes place.



Curiously enough, the Church has often been called the 'bride of Christ'. As such, a price had to be paid. No, it wasn't a bride price, in the sense of southern African culture. The price paid was that which was necessary to cover the cost of redemption from sin. It was determined by God the Father, but not by virtue of the goodness of the bride. The price set by the Father was inestimably high. It was not measured in so many cows, but in the life of the holy, precious "Lamb of God".

Prayer Concern:

The Dhimba Project requests your continued prayer support for the work of finalizing the New Testament translation. This is turning out to be more difficult than anticipated. We have been struggling with 'parallel passages' for three months now, and there is no end in sight. After that, we have to complete the footnotes. Footnotes have previously been written for the Gospels, Acts, and Revelation, but none of the epistles. After the footnotes and a few other smaller jobs, a final reading and editing of the complete New Testament must be made.

John

*"The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord,
She is His new creation
By water and the Word.
From heaven He came and sought her
To be His holy bride;
With His own blood He bought her
And for her life He died."*

("The Church's One Foundation"
words by Samuel John Stone, 1866)



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