

THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB

John was commanded to write,

“Blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”

The blessedness here affirmed doubtless refers to those who will actually be called within the glorious circle of accepted guests at the Lord’s coming. Nevertheless, it is a blessedness for us to contemplate in prospect and in some measure to realize by faith now. Those who are called are called now, and therefore the blessedness may be said to begin now, the only uncertain element in the case being our ignorance of who among those who have been called will be chosen. Every one admitted to the glorious marriage supper will be so admitted on account of the call addressed to him and accepted in these the days of our faith, humiliation, and probation. Assembled round the table this morning, we are in the position of having been called, and as the desire of every sane man must be to have this call consummated and perfected by actual admission to the King’s board, let us consider the matter with reference to this most desirable issue.

In the first place, let us spend a thought or two on what it is we are called to.

“Called to the marriage supper of the Lamb,”

without further information would suggest merely an invitation in the capacity of guests to witness the Lamb’s union with his Bride. No one having knowledge of apostolic applications of the gospel could make the mistake of putting this limited interpretation on John’s words, though some strange ideas are sometimes heard. We have but to ask who is the Bride on the occasion, to see the matter in its glorious light. We have the answer in the same place that speaks of the blessedness of being called to the marriage supper. We are told that the Bride was

“arrayed in fine linen clean and white,”

and that this fine linen, as part of the Apocalyptic imagery, represented

“the righteousness of saints.” (Rev. 19:8)

Consequently the Bride stands for the saints, and when we know who the saints are, we know who the Bride is. There is no difficulty in judging who the saints are, in the abstract, though we may not be able to discern who are such individually. The recorded work of the apostles in the first century is the best illustration of the constitution and characteristics of true saintship. We need not trouble ourselves with ecclesiastical notions on the subject. All who believed and submitted to the requirements of the Gospel were saints, as in the case of the Roman ecclesia (Rom. 1: 7-16); the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:2); the Ephesians (Ephes. 1:1); the Philippians (Phil. 1:1); the Colossians (Col. 1:2), and so forth.

We are here this morning because like those in Rome, Corinth, and other places who became saints in the days of the apostles, we have believed and obeyed

the Gospel of Christ, and are therefore saints in scriptural language. Consequently, we have a special interest in the subject of the Bride brought before us in the words of John. That Bride stands for all the saints in their numerical completeness in the day spoken of by Paul when the Lord comes

“to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe” (2 Thess. 1:10).

Therefore in a sense, she stands for us. To be called to the marriage supper of the lamb, is therefore to be invited to participate in that glorious union that will take place between Christ and all his brethren in the day of his glory, and not merely to look on while the marriage is taking place. The language suggestive of mere guestship is due to the nature of the blessedness in its individual application. The Bride is the symbol: the declaration of blessedness is addressed to the literal constituents of the symbolic Bride, and consequently takes a literal rather than a symbolic cue.

Now there are several important things suggested by the figure which it has pleased the Spirit of God to employ to represent the glorious event of Christ's union with his brethren. We cannot better occupy the time than by dwelling on them. First, marriage is suggestive of a preliminary period marked by the several stages of acquaintance, love and betrothal. There are all these stages in the history of our connection with Christ. At first, we are “without Christ,” a position having “no hope” (Eph. 2: 12). We are ignorant of and uninterested in him, and have no relation to him in any way. We are busy pursuing our own ends, “every one to his own way.” The moment arrives when our attention is arrested, Christ is introduced to our notice. It seems all very accidental and common-place. Could we but see behind the scenes, we might see the situation in a different light. Jesus said to his disciples,

“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.”

If this were true of them, is it not more true of us? It is also written that--

“known unto God are all his works from the beginning,”

and that the saints are--

“the workmanship of God.”

If, therefore, we have been “called to be saints,” does it not follow that the moment of our acquaintance with Christ was the moment of his beginning to seek us? Granted that unjustified men are not in the precincts of the house of Christ, and therefore outside the purview of his priesthood; yet the house of Christ is made up of men once unjustified, and who calls them from the one state to the other, if not he who testified

“I came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance”?

True, this was said concerning Israel, but afterwards the Gentiles were included in the Shepherd of Israel's solicitations by Paul, who said,

“We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20).

This was a general seeking—the seeking of a class as such; but every general form of things comprises the detail, and there can be no question that in this matter there is a process of individual selection included in the general work of the truth. Though many are called to whom Jesus will say at last, “I never knew you”—men gathered in by the work necessary to reach the few chosen vessels, but not contemplated in that work; just as a net let down into the sea to catch a particular kind of fish “encloses all manner of fishes, good and bad”—yet the few whom he will acknowledge in the day of his glory are brought within the power of the Gospel as the result of the ways of Providence. Jesus is the controller and shaper of these ways, and seeks his sheep on dark mountains. The seeking, though special, is veiled; he brings himself under their notice in a perfectly natural way, through the presentation of the testimony. Men of good and honest heart stumble across the truth, as it appears to them, in a very ordinary way, and at a very common-place moment of their experience. There seems nothing unusual in it. In point of fact, a crisis is coming upon them the greatness of which they will afterwards be able to estimate. Christ is seeking them. He is knocking at their door with a very gracious purpose if the dwellers open unto him. He is making himself known, though the fact is unperceived at the time. Looking back, the occupant of the visited house sees it afterwards. Acquaintance is the result. The man comes to know Christ through the testimony to which his mind gradually opens.

“Faith cometh by hearing.” “He heareth the word of the kingdom (which is the word of Christ) and understandeth it” (Matt. 13:23).

Then comes the second stage—the moral result of the truth perceived and received. Love sets in as the fruit of knowledge. We must first know a friend before we can love him. The love of Christ follows introduction and acquaintance. It must be so: it cannot fail to be so where he is thoroughly known. If from whatever cause, we fail to advance to the love stage, our case is abortive. Jesus requires our love; the figure of the coming marriage points to the fitness of it. What use or pleasure could he have in men who knew about him but did not love him? Common reason vindicates the divine requirement in the matter. God is love. His family in its final development will be a family of love, and a man in the family who did not love would be out of place. We look at Paul our example here,

“The love of Christ constraineth us,”

he testifies of his own case, and concerning the brethren, he prayed that they might be

“rooted and grounded in love,” and *“know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge”* (Ephes. 3:19)

John says,

“Love is of God: and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.” I love them that love me,”

is the declaration of the Spirit now corporealized in Christ, the Bridegroom.

Knowledge having brought forth love, love leads to betrothal where the right mind exists. The decision to become Christ's is so described by Paul, who said to the Corinthians,

"I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."

The espousal takes place when the enlightened man or woman enters into covenant with Christ by baptism. The act of baptism, as we all know from the apostolic teaching, is a taking of his name, not, however, with the finality of the conjugal relation which is not reached till the resurrection, but as a preliminary covenant to be afterwards ratified if the conditions are satisfactorily fulfilled. It is being baptised into his death (Rom. 6:3); with the determination on the part of the baptised to be done with the sinful past as entirely as a dead man is done with his life (verses 11-14). If this determination is successfully performed,

"the fruit is unto holiness, and the end everlasting life" (verse 22).

The act of baptism is therefore a betrothal and a "covenant by sacrifice"; a covenant entered into through the sacrifice of Christ. The sacrifice of Christ is, so to speak, placed in the act of baptism, so that qualified people submitting to the act are brought into association with Christ and become acceptable to God in their approach for covenant making. A covenant has two parties to it. In the case in question they are easily discernible. They are the Father, and those who approach Him through Christ in the way appointed. Their respective relations to the covenant are visible in the words of Jehovah, quoted by Paul:

"Come out from among them, and be ye separate":

this is our side: this is what we undertake to do.

"And I will receive you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters":

this is the Father's side: this is what He undertakes to do for us if we carry out our part.

The period of betrothal is the period of each man's probation. The ultimate issue depends upon the divine estimation of this. No man is fit to perform this part of judgement. All judgement is committed to the hands of Christ, before whom we must appear to receive it, and who at his appearing is represented as saying,

"Gather my saints together unto me: those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice" (Psa. 50:5).

The supreme question of the hour in its individual application will be, "How has the covenant been fulfilled?" Have we sustained the part of the chaste virgin getting ready for marriage-presentation to the bridegroom? Have our affections fastened and fed upon Christ our coming husband? Have we been as devoted to his affairs as he wishes?—as tender and loving towards him as he exacts? The answer to these questions will appear in the shape of our lives which will be made manifest by the faithful

reproductive photography of the spirit of God in the hands of Christ. The divine mensuration of love is obedience. A love that is barren of action is useless sentiment, having no value in the divine mode of appraisal.

“This is love, that we walk after his commandments”(2 John 6).

“Let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18).

“Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.”

Consequently, the deeds of our life will be the index of our hearts. If those deeds, written as a whole, are deeds of conformity to the expressed will of Christ, our part of the covenant will be declared performed: not that there will be a perfect performance in any case, for the congregation of the accepted are a forgiven congregation; a blood-washed throng. Their judge is their compassionate high priest who occupies the interval of his absence in making request for his house in his own name; still, there is a point to which obedience and consecration must come before the benefits of the priesthood will be extended. Jesus is the judge of this point, in each case at which he will say, *“Thy sins are forgiven thee,”* and invite the blessed recipients of his favour to enter into life.

Then will be gloriously performed the Lord’s side of the covenant. This is variously expressed in the sure word of promise,

“I will receive you and ye shall be my sons and daughters.”

We are not finally received as sons and daughters till then. The promise of sonship is for those who overcome:

“He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son” (Rev. 21:7).

The question of who has overcome is not settled till the day of account at the tribunal of Christ. Consequently not till then is it made manifest who are the sons of God. Hence, the characteristic of that day is said to be--

“the manifestation of the sons of God” (Rom. 8: 19)

Of the accepted on that occasion, Jesus says,

“They are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.”

There is such a thing as sonship now, as John and Paul testify, but it is not a completed sonship. It is a sonship based upon adoption on account of faith and obedience; a sonship commencing with water-birth. But the sonship that awaits the accepted is a sonship based upon identity of nature, and established by a spirit-birth which produces that identity, for

“that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

To be received as sons and daughters in the day of decision is to be accepted as constituents of the Father's house, and conformed to the likeness of the Lord's glorious nature in fulfilment of that other promise to the victor which says,

“I will write upon him my new name.”

The name of Christ is named on every one who obeys the truth in baptism; but then there is another and a higher sense in which that name has to be named upon us. His nature has to be imparted to us by that operation of power by the spirit which he will perform upon all whom he judges worthy to receive the gift of life everlasting.

Contemplating all such collectively under the figure of a woman, the betrothal ends in glorious and gladsome marriage—the marriage of and with the Lamb. It is for this joyous consummation that Christ's labours towards his true ecclesia are directed,

“that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:27).

The time for this presentation is the time when the Roman Babylon is overthrown and the proclamation is made:

“Hallelujah: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready” (Rev. 19: 6, 7).

Blessed indeed will those be who are called to this feast of love and glory. It is to this blessedness the Gospel invites men: but the invitation falls upon heedless ears as far as the mass of mankind are concerned. If we have been privileged to hear more wisely, let us remember that we sustain responsibility more largely. Having known, loved, and espoused ourselves to Christ, failure of his favour at last will be worse than if we had never heard of him. Be it ours with modest but determined diligence, to get ready for the marriage in the preparation of that

“fine linen, clean and white”

in which the Bride will be arrayed, by which the Spirit of God tells us we are to understand the righteous actions of the saints.

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