

The Dignity of Christian Marriage

Exodus 2: 1; John 2: 1, 2, 11; John 4: 46, 54; Romans 16: 3, 4.

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Ex. 2: 1 "And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi."

John 2: 1, 2, 11; John 4: 46, 54 "And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there; And both Jesus was called and His disciples, to the marriage. . . . This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana in Galilee, and manifested forth His glory; and His disciples believed on Him. . . . So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where He made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. . . . This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when He was come out of Judaea into Galilee."

Romans 16: 3, 4 "Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles."

The exercise laid on my heart is that there might be a word spoken which will enhance the dignity of Christian marriage in all our affections and thoughts. I suppose we must face the fact that, in this world with its back upon God and Christ, the ordinance of marriage which comes from God in His rich mercy for His creature, is often entered into without regard to its precedings or its proceedings, and God is very much out of the picture. But beloved brethren, we do well to seek help from God that an institution which came freshly from His own blessed heart, might be held by those who know God in all the dignity of which it is worthy. The Scriptures make it abundantly plain that God has in mind that this mercy from Himself should be extensively enjoyed by His creature, and so we have the word which says that "Marriage is honourable in all," indicating that God has in mind that the blessings of the relationship which He Himself thought of for man, should be widely enjoyed.

Paul narrows the matter by telling us very distinctly that in relation to Christians, marriage is to be "Only in the Lord." That is to say a Christian who wishes to move in relation to God, not only takes with gladness and thanksgiving the blessings of the institution itself, but he or she would desire to move in relation to that institution as in direct subjection to the claims of the Lord. We are assured that our brother and sister have faced that matter.

But the Scripture with which I commenced in Exodus seems to me to narrow the matter still more, and to bring into it a lustre and dignity that we do well to take account of. "A man of . . . Levi . . . took to wife a daughter of Levi." It would indicate, beloved brethren, that not only was there a desire to hold the institution in relation to God Himself, and to accept it as a matter in which the rights of the Lord are to be acknowledged, but it would appear that the service of God itself is in mind in the movement. For the Levites were those who served God, they had to do with the holy things of God, and hence it is a most blessed thing to see a brother and a sister, a man and a woman, taking on this happy privilege as having in mind that the service of the Lord might be enriched. There is the recognition with our brethren of the joy of that which is natural, and also the desire to maintain that which is due to the Name of the Lord, but there is too the distinct desire that, in taking on this fresh link together, there might be a stimulating in their hearts of the preciousness of serving Divine Persons. A man of Levi — he would not be looking primarily for that which would appeal to him naturally, he would not demean the testimony by entering into a matter such as this without regard to what is due to the Name of the Lord; but more than that, our brother and sister would surely desire that their movements might, as

helped of God, increase their usefulness and their ability in the service of God. We are told later on in the Scriptures that the names of these persons mentioned in Exodus 2 were Amram and Jochebed, and we have only to look at those names to see an indication of moral dignity and that the glory of Jehovah has its place. The honouring of the Name of God, and the bringing into evidence that which is due to God in testimony here is wrapped up in these two names. Amram — "an exalted people;" Jochebed — "the honour of Jehovah." And we are assured, dear brethren, that this is something we all need to face, so that, as embracing the privileges and mercies which come to us from God, we may do so in a way which will enhance His glory in testimony here.

In John 2, that well known Scripture, we have some beautiful touches brought before us. I know it is a well-worn Scripture in relation to marriage but the Lord has fixed my thoughts for some days upon this chapter particularly, and I desire help in what I may have to say in relation to it. You will observe that this marriage is set in Galilee. On the one hand we rightly delight in the dignity of this occasion and seek to hold it thus in our minds and affections; but we have, on the other hand, to remember that the setting of the incident in John is in a sphere where Christ is rejected, it is in Galilee. Beloved brethren, as finding ourselves enclosed within these walls, all our hearts are surely beating in unison in relation to the claims of Christ, but we have to take account of the fact that we are actually in a scene which has no regard for the preciousness of Christ, and which rejects all that would minister joy to His blessed heart. It is a scene where Christ is not wanted, where He is rejected. And one would desire for our beloved brother and sister, as facing the fact that they stand with us in a world where Christ is rejected, that in their movements they might make room for Christ to glorify Himself. There is a good deal of detail which has often been noticed in this wonderful incident; I don't wish to go into it, nor do I wish to strain the Scripture; but note it was on the third day. And if our brother and sister, together with ourselves, face the fact that we are in a scene where Christ is rejected, we have the light in our hearts of the present exaltation of that blessed Man in resurrection. We **must** face the rejection, but we rejoice with exaltation in the present place of Christ at the right hand of God.

There was that which was, so to speak, automatic about this wedding. The relatives and the friends came automatically, if I may use that word, even the mother of Jesus is found in that movement. She was there; it was an ordinary matter; a gathering together in an ordinary sense in regard to that which was natural; but not so with Jesus; He was invited. And whilst there is that about every wedding which of necessity must be automatic, a natural gathering together of kindred affections, we observe that a special place is made for Christ. He was invited. One delights to think that our brother and sister, whilst gladly accepting the gathering together of all that is natural in affection for them, have a special desire that this glorious Man the Lord Jesus Christ should have His place, a supreme place, in this ceremony today. He was invited. Now beloved brethren, if Christ is truly invited He must be supreme — and everything must be under His blessed hand. Hence we find there is One blessed Person whose glory is manifested. It is not the bridegroom, it is not the bride; they have their place, and we would gladly give our beloved brother and his dear wife the place that is theirs today; but shining above all that is the glory of this blessed Person; Jesus was invited, and his followers. What a blessed thing for our brother and sister to make a special point of bringing into the matter this glorious Person, Who will insist that every moral question is faced in order that joy might abound (v. 7). We are assured indeed, as knowing something of the history of our brother and our sister, that they too have faced moral matters. So to speak the waterpots have been filled to the brim; they have faced things before God in their individual pathways, and as having faced these matters they are, as now united, desirous of inviting into their lives this blessed Person Who alone can give them a satisfying portion of undiminished joy.

In the fourth chapter of John we have the second sign which Jesus did. It is one thing for our brother and his wife to share the joy of today, but they have to face matters day by day in their pathway. They will find themselves, as we do, in a scene which is marked by moral barrenness and death.. We find Sardis conditions all around us, "A name that thou livest, and art dead." We thus find ourselves in the midst of a condition of things in which there is no response to the heart of the blessed God, and no response to the Lord Jesus Christ. And beloved brethren, the only One who can maintain living conditions in any circle, including the domestic circle, is the One Who was first invited there and Who as coming in brought in abundant joy. I would commend this thought to our beloved brother and sister, and indeed to us all. It should not be on these special occasions only that we invite the Lord to come in, and make room for Him to glorify Himself, to show His glory forth. But day by day as we go along in a scene which is marked by death and a lack of response to Divine Persons, what a blessed thing it is to invite Him in, and to make room for Him to come in, so that we might be found here, in **living conditions**. One would greatly desire that our brethren might know something of the power of this. You will observe that I am not pressing the incident itself, but the moral and spiritual thought in it all, that we should not only invite the Lord on these special days, but that we should make room for Him day by day in our domestic matters, and in every circle we touch, and that we might thus get a fresh touch day by day of the glory of Christ.

Aquila and Priscilla (or, Priscilla and Aquila as it is in the verse we read in Romans) had, I believe, faced in a moral sense all that we have been saying. They were first at Rome, and they proved themselves to be good Roman Christians, subject to the powers that be. What it must have cost them to leave their home and surroundings and go elsewhere at the behest of Claudius, we cannot tell. But they were subject, seeking to move here in relation to the will of God. We find them next at Corinth, and I am sure that at Corinth the truth of the assembly in a locality was enshrined in their hearts. Then they move on to Ephesus and there room would be made in their affections for the unfolding of that which was so precious to the heart of Christ; including the dignity which was shed upon the marriage tie in that wonderful Ephesian epistle, where we read, "This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the church." We feel sure that this man and his wife had secreted in their hearts all these various exercises, added to and valued day by day as they grew in the light and in the truth of the precious thoughts of God. Is not this where our beloved friends are today? have they not moved in relation to their matters as seeking to be found subject to the will of God? Have they not gone on day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year, seeking to be in accord with the mind of Christ as to His people in a locality, and have they not received into their hearts in the power of the Spirit something of the blessedness of the unfolding of the counsel of God and the wonderful sphere in which He is now glorified and will yet glorify Himself in Christ? Surely they have enjoyed that, and what is to be the response? They are to risk their **neck** for the testimony's sake. I want you to notice carefully that the letter "s" should not be on that word. It is not necks, it is **neck**. The "s" has been added by the translators. Priscilla and Aquila . . laid down (or, risked) their own neck. One neck; that is to say they are both moving together in one direction, they are **welded together** as having passed through the exercises of which we have spoken. They are **welded together** now with one resolve and that is that their affections and their mind — for the neck is that which conjoins the affections and the mind — should be at whatever cost true to the testimony, they will lay down their neck for the testimony's sake. The testimony at that moment was peculiarly related to Paul, but he adds that the whole of the assemblies of the Gentiles gave thanks to God for the wonderful way in which this man and his wife had devoted themselves to the service of the Lord. And so if "A man . . of Levi. . took to wife a daughter of Levi," and if they have known what it is under the hand of God to pass through these exercises, what a wonderful privilege is theirs as united now as man and wife, their lives dedicated to

the furtherance of the interests of Christ in this scene. Aquila and Priscilla are spoken of six times in the Scriptures, three times the woman is put first, three times the man is put first, showing mutuality, one not preponderating over the other. The man taking his rightful place and the woman delighting to be subject to her husband, so that there is no friction, nothing brought in which would militate against the furtherance of the testimony of the Lord.

That was the simple word pressed upon my heart, beloved brethren. May the Lord give us all to face the exercise of it, to face the challenge of it, and to enjoy the blessedness of it. The wonderful dignity of Christian marriage, and the potentiality, how great it is. Think of every household here, affectionately welded together with one firm resolve, to make room for Christ, and to provide an atmosphere into which He may come, and abide and manifest forth His glory.