

The Bride of the Lamb

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INTRODUCTION

Every instructed believer is aware that the Church — or Assembly of God — is composed of all believers united to Christ in the glory by the Holy Spirit on earth. Further, that the Church came into being at the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and will be completed at the coming of the Lord, at the rapture.

We know too that the Church is viewed in different aspects, and presented under various figures, in the New Testament. It is viewed as the one flock (John 10: 16); as the House of God (1 Tim. 3: 15); as the one Body (1 Cor. 12: 12, 13); and lastly as the Bride of the Lamb (2 Cor. 11: 2; Rev. 21: 9).

In each case it is the same company of people but viewed in different ways to present different truths. As the one flock the Assembly is viewed as composed of all believers held together by the attractive power of Christ as the one Shepherd, who leads His people through this wilderness world, saving them from the enemy, protecting them from every danger, and leading them into green pastures. As the House of God the Assembly is viewed as the dwelling place on earth of God the Holy Spirit, where the truth is maintained, and a witness borne to the world of the grace of God. As the one Body, of which Christ is the Head, the Assembly is viewed as a company of people nourished by the Head, and in whom all the fulness of Christ is set forth.

As the Bride of the Lamb, the Church is viewed as wholly for Christ the object of His love, and care, and delight. It is this aspect of the Church that we desire briefly to consider. It is an aspect of the Church that, in a special way, brings into display the love of Christ, and for this reason appeals very directly to our hearts.

There is no more intimate relationship than that of a bridegroom and a bride. Hence the perfect suitability of these figures to set forth the love of Christ for His Church. Briefly we may say that the Spirit of God has used this most intimate of all relationships to set forth,

First, the Church as the object of Christ's love, care, and delight.

Second, that in the Church there will be an object *suited* for Christ to love.

Third, that in the Church there will be found *a companion* suited to share with Christ the coming glories of His reign. All that the Bridegroom inherits the Bride will inherit. The sharer of His sufferings in the day of His rejection, she will be the sharer of His throne in the day of His glory. When Christ reigns *over* the wide earth she will reign *with* Him.

CHAPTER 1

CHRIST AND HIS BRIDE

Ephesians 5: 22-32

In this very practical portion of the Epistle to the Ephesians the Apostle is exhorting us as to the conduct that becomes believers in the marriage relationship. In so doing he shows the intimate character of the relationship. There are other relations in life, as parents and children, and brothers and sisters, but in no relationship is the link so close as in that of husband and wife. The Apostle says, "they two shall be *one flesh*:" again he says, "so ought men to love their wives as *their own bodies*." They are viewed as one; hence the Apostle argues, for a man to hate his wife would be to hate his own flesh, an unheard-of thing. On the other hand to love his wife is to love himself.

To enforce these exhortations and show the true character of this time-relationship of husband and wife, the Apostle turns to the eternal relationship of Christ and His Church. This leads to a very beautiful unfolding of the love of Christ for His Church viewed under the figure of a Bride, of which Eve, in the garden of Eden, is used as a striking type. The Apostle passes before us the love of Christ that secures the Bride for Himself; then, possessing the Bride, the love that forms her in suitability to Himself; and finally, having prepared the Bride, the love that will present her to Himself.

First we read, "Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it" (v. 25). The source of all blessing for the Church is the motiveless love of Christ. Before ever the Church was brought into being He loved it with a perfect, divine, and infinite love. He did not first die for it, and cleanse it, and then love it; but He first loved it and died for it, and then cleanses it. And loving the Church He gave Himself for it. He did not only *do* something for it; He did not simply *give up* something for it. His love went a great way further than doing something, or giving up something, for the Church. His love went to the uttermost: He gave *Himself*. All that He is in His infinite perfections; nothing was held back. He gave Himself; more He could not give. And by giving Himself for the Assembly He secures it for Himself, and possesses it by a perfect title. The Church actually exists as the result of Christ's work. Christ has purchased the Church for Himself. Hence, though the marriage has not yet taken place, the relationship between Christ and the Church already exists. The Church is not a company of people who are being put to the test by commands which they have to obey in order to gain the relationship. Christ has brought us into relationship with Himself wholly by His own work, the fruit of His own love. The responsibilities and privileges of the Church flow from the relationship that has already been formed. We belong to Christ, and it is our privilege, as well as our obligation, to be entirely His, and entirely for Him. Christ, we need not say, has ever been faithful in His changeless love, though, alas, how much the Bride has failed in devotedness to the Bridegroom!

Secondly, having so touchingly presented the love of Christ in giving Himself for the Church in the past, the Apostle proceeds to speak of the activities of the love of Christ for His Bride in the present. He tells us that Christ has secured his Bride in order "that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." The love that by death secured the Bride is now occupied in preparing her for the supreme happiness of being with Himself in glory. The Bridegroom would make her a suited object for His love, and capable of responding to His love. To this end love is occupied in sanctifying and cleansing the Bride. The cleansing is not in order that we may belong to Him, but because we are His; and being His He would have us suited to Himself. He would have us in devoted affection set apart entirely for Himself, and cleansed from all that is contrary to Himself.

The means used to bring this about is "the washing of water by the word." The Lord expresses this in His prayer to the Father when He prays "Sanctify them through the truth, Thy word is truth . . . for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth." The Lord sets Himself apart in heaven, that, like Stephen, we might look up through the opened heavens and find in Christ in glory a sanctifying Object. Gazing upon Him in the glory we see what He would have us to be, and beholding the glory of the Lord we are changed into the same image from glory to glory, and thus realize the transforming power of a perfect Object. The "word" too, while directing our gaze to Christ, gives us a true revelation of the perfections of the One we gaze upon, so that we are not left to any sentimental imaginations of our own hearts. On the other hand the word detects and condemns in us, and around us, all that is contrary to Christ and the place where He is.

What a value this gives to the "word"! For it is the "word" which *He* uses for the cleansing of His Church. What confidence should this give in applying the word to our own souls, or in ministering the word to one another — the confidence that we are using that which in grace He uses.

In the light of this Scripture which discovers to us what Christ is occupied with from His place in heaven, we may well challenge our hearts as to what we are occupied with down here. Occurring in the practical part of the Epistle, this unfolding of the love of Christ for His Bride is surely intended to have a very practical effect upon our lives. The question for us all is, Have we before our hearts what Christ has before His? Do we desire to be made suitable to Him, and capable of enjoying, and responding to, His love even now, so that, in the time of His absence, we may be faithful to Christ as a waiting Bride for her absent Bridegroom.

Thirdly, the present activities of the love of Christ for His Bride are in view of what is yet future — "the marriage of the Lamb" — when He will present the Church to Himself a glorious Church, "not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." It is not only that the Church will be in glory, but it will be "glorious." It will be like Christ, fit for His glorious presence. Thus He secured His Bride by Himself; He is preparing her for Himself; and will present her to Himself. His love is the source of all, and what love commenced at the cross, love will complete in the glory.

There is, however, further important truth concerning Christ and the Church in this instructive passage. The Apostle proceeds to tell us that Christ nourishes and cherishes the Assembly, treating us as "members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones." This brings before us another precious truth, distinct from that which we have been considering. We have seen that Christ is fitting His Bride for heaven; now we learn that He is also caring for His Bride on earth. Sanctifying and cleansing are in view of the presentation in glory; nourishing and cherishing have reference to our pilgrim journey on earth. His love not only looks on to the glory, but watches over us as we pass through this dark world from which He is absent, on our way to glory. He knows the circumstances we are in, the trials we have

to meet, our weaknesses and infirmities, and in them all He cares for us and meets our needs; and thus it is He nourishes us. But He also cherishes us; that is He not only meets our needs, but He does so as those who are cherished as being very precious in His sight.

In order to give us a sense of how precious we are in His sight — of the value He sets upon His Assembly — He speaks of us as members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. That is to say, He views us as Himself, for a man's flesh is himself. So that in caring for His Assembly He is caring for Himself. Thus He can say to Saul, "Why persecutest thou Me?" Saul was indeed persecuting the Church, but in so doing he was persecuting Christ.

How precious, as another has said, that "the wants, the weaknesses, the difficulties, the anxieties of the Assembly are only opportunities to Christ for the exercise of His love. The Assembly needs to be nourished, as do our bodies; and He nourishes her. She is the object of his tender affections; He cherishes her. If the end is heaven the Assembly is not left desolate here. She learns His love where her heart needs it. She will enjoy it fully when need has passed away for ever."

CHAPTER 2

THE BRIDE IN THE COUNSELS OF GOD

Genesis 2

The passage that we have been considering in Ephesians 5, closes with a quotation from the end of Genesis 2, where we read, after Eve has been formed and presented to Adam, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." Having quoted this passage the Apostle, in Ephesians 5, immediately adds "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church." This surely warrants us in saying that in Adam and Eve we have a beautiful type of Christ and His Church.

In the garden of Eden with all its divinely ordered arrangements we not only learn what is in the heart of God for man, but what is in the heart of God for Christ. Adam was not the man of God's purpose; he was only a figure of Him that was to come. We might well ask why was this earth with all its created wonders brought into existence? Now that the mystery of Christ and His Church has been revealed we have God's answer; and in picture His answer is given directly creation is completed, and before ever sin came in. God's answer is *Christ and the satisfaction of His heart*. It is true that the Church was counselled before the foundation of the world, for the thought of the Church carries us back to the eternal purpose of God and takes us on to eternity. It belongs to eternity, though time and creation are used to bring the Church into existence. The Church was no after-thought with God. Creation was first in point of time, but the Church was first in the counsels of God, as we may surely gather from Ephesians 3, where we read, that God "created all things by Jesus Christ to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." The Church having been formed, "the heavens and earth which are now" will, in due time, pass away and the Church will remain for the glory of God and the satisfaction of the love of Christ to the ages of ages.

While however we see Christ and the Church presented in a picture we must remember that Eve presents the Church as the Bride of Christ. As we have seen there are other aspects of the Church, but

this we judge, to be the highest conception of the Church, that which is nearest to the heart of God and dearest to the heart of Christ, for therein we learn that God has purposed to secure an object that is entirely suited for the love of Christ. In the Church as the Bride we see, not only a company of people who find in Christ a satisfying Object for their hearts, but, a company of people who become a suited object for the love of Christ. This is the wonder and blessedness of the Church viewed as the Bride of Christ. It is little wonder that the Church should find in Christ an Object of love, but that in the Church an object should be found entirely suited for Christ to love is indeed a great wonder.

With this great thought God opens His book and with this great thought it closes. What God begins with He never gives up. Genesis opens with a picture that discloses this thought of His heart: and though sin and death mar the creation of God, and, in the long sad history of the failure of man and the ruin of the Church in responsibility, the picture is blurred and even lost to view, yet at last this great thought of God emerges into the light, and in the close of the Book we are permitted once again to see Jesus delighting in His Bride, and the Bride waiting for Jesus.

Looking briefly at the picture in Genesis 2, we have in the early part of the chapter a description of the Garden of delights that God provided for man. Eden means "pleasure." It is God's delight to provide for the pleasure of His creature. Thus we find in the garden there is "every tree that is pleasant to the sight," to provide all things beautiful; there is every tree "good for food," to meet all the wants of man; there is the tree of life to give the capacity to enjoy the scene; and there is the tree of knowledge of good and evil with its prohibition, so that all this garden of delights might be enjoyed in relationship with God expressed by obedience to God.

This scene of beauty having been formed, man is placed in the garden to dress it and keep it. Nevertheless, beautiful as the scene is, it falls short of perfection; and for this reason, *man is alone*. His surroundings were perfect, his position was supreme, he was far above the lower creation — but he was alone, and it is not good that man should be alone. There was everything there for the delight of his eye; there was everything there to sustain life; there was the capacity to enjoy his surroundings: but in all that scene of beauty and plenty, there was not an object that could satisfy his heart, for there was nothing there, from the greatest to the least, that could respond to the love of his heart. The man was alone.

But another scene rises up before our souls. A scene of which this is but a beautiful foreshadowing: a scene into which sin can never enter. Perfect as the garden was in itself, it was liable to the intrusion of an enemy, and we know indeed how soon he entered and brought sin and death and ruin into this garden of delights. But the home it foreshadows is not only a place of infinite perfection and eternal delight, but there "deceiver ne'er can enter, sin-soiled feet have never trod" — a scene where there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor any more pain. These things are not there, and can never enter there, for they are passed away. But Jesus is there, the Son of Man will be supreme in that realm of glory, and may we not say He will be there to dress it and keep it; for all the adorning of that scene as well as its eternal security will be the result of His own work,

**No soil of nature's evil,
No touch of man's rude hand
Shall e'er disturb around us
That bright and blissful land.
The charms that woo the senses**

**Shall be as bright as fair,
For all, while breathing round us
Shall tell of Jesus there.**

But even so, if He were there alone would His heart be satisfied? Would *we* be satisfied to find ourselves in a scene of infinite perfection and infinite holiness, if Jesus were not there? And will He be satisfied if we are not there? A scene of infinite perfection would not satisfy the heart: we must have an object for the heart, and must not He have an object for His heart? But how is this object to be secured? This we learn in picture as we see the way that God provided an helpmeet for Adam.

First we learn that the one who is to be his helpmeet must be his "counterpart" or "his like," for thus should we read the last two words of verse 18. The one that can satisfy the heart of Adam must be "his like," and thus have the same thoughts and affections, and be able to respond to his love. For love can only be satisfied with an object that responds to love.

The lower creation is passed before Adam. He gives them each a name — not a fanciful name, for in Scripture a name signifies the distinguishing characteristic of that which is named. Hence in naming the animals we see that Adam had perfect knowledge of the animals. But with this full knowledge he fails to find one "his like." In all that lower creation there was not one that could share his thoughts, feel as he felt, and respond to his love. He was on an immeasurably higher plane than the animal creation.

Hence to provide one "his like," there must be a fresh intervention of God, and in this fresh work three things are clearly seen.

First, Eve was taken from Adam,

Second, Eve was formed for Adam,

Third, Eve was presented to Adam.

Here then we have in picture the three great truths that have been before us in Ephesians 5. First if Eve was to be his like she must be taken out of Adam. Hence the deep sleep and the rib taken from Adam, from which the woman was built. So too, if Christ is to have His Bride — one that is His like — that can respond to His love — she must indeed be of Himself. He must go into the deep sleep of death or remain for ever alone; "except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone." "When Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see *His seed*." His "seed," which must be His like, is the outcome of His death, and love was behind His death, for we read, "Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it."

Further we read, that having taken the rib from man "the Lord God built the rib that he had taken from man into a woman" (N. Tr.). And in connection with the Church, is not this the work that is being carried on at the present time by the Spirit? If through the death of Christ the Bride — one His like — has been secured, at the present time through the work of the Spirit our affections are being engaged with Christ, with the result that Christ sanctifies and cleanses us with the washing of water by the word. Our hearts become powerfully affected by the love of Christ; bridal affections are formed with the result that we are set apart in affection to Himself and cleansed from all that is unsuited to a true and chaste bride.

Lastly there is the presentation of the Bride. Eve is brought to the man. And Adam said "This time [in contrast to the time when the animals passed before him] it is bone of my bones and flesh of

my flesh: this shall be called woman because this was taken out of a man." At last Adam finds one "his like." So, too, the day is coming when the Church will be presented to Christ "a glorious Church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish." It will be of Himself and therefore His like. It will be formed in His affections by the sanctifying and cleansing effect of the word and therefore able to respond to His love. For all eternity Christ is going to have His Bride, like Himself, one that can think as He thinks, feel as He feels, love as He loves, and hence one that is made perfectly suited to be the object of

His love. Then indeed Christ will be satisfied. He will see of the fruit of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.

O day of wondrous promise!
The Bridegroom and the Bride
Are seen in glory ever;
And love is satisfied.

CHAPTER 3

THE CALL OF THE BRIDE

Genesis 24

The 24th chapter of Genesis is of the deepest interest to the Christian, for therein we have a divinely given picture of what is engaging every Person in the Godhead at the present moment.

Occupation with service, constant vigilance against the enemy, and conflict for the truth — entailed by the need of the world, the increasing corruption of Christendom, and the failure of God's people — may so thoroughly engross our thoughts that at times we may overlook what God is doing in spite of all the power of the enemy, the corruption, and the failure. Hence it is no small mercy that God has given us this beautiful picture which present a comprehensive view of the aims and activities of Divine Persons. Thus, losing sight of man and his failure, our souls may delight in God and His purpose, and be calmed and quieted as we realize that what God has purposed He will most surely bring to pass, in spite of failure and opposition.

To enter intelligently into the typical teaching of the chapter we must seize the connection of the passage with the chapters that precede and follow. Genesis 24 forms part of the last section of Abraham's history, beginning with Genesis 22 and ending with Genesis 25: 10. The early part of his history illustrates the individual life of faith, but in this last section we have a comprehensive view of the dispensational ways of God. In Genesis 22 Isaac is offered up, and received from the dead in figure — a striking type of the death and resurrection of Christ. Following upon the offering up of Isaac, we have in Genesis 23 the death of Sarah, and Abraham, "a stranger and sojourner" (v. 4) in the promised land: all being typical of the setting aside, for the time being, of Israel as a nation on the ground of promise, consequent upon the death of Christ. In the call of Rebekah, Genesis 24, we have typically the call of the Church as the Bride of Christ during the time that Israel is set aside. Genesis 25 completes the picture by presenting the marriage of Abraham, and the sons of this second wife, typical of the restoration of Israel and the millennial blessing of the nations.

Confining our thoughts to Genesis 24 we have the unfolding in a picture of the great mystery of Christ and the Church. We see therein the purpose of God and the way He takes to fulfil that purpose.

Let us however keep in mind that it is God's purpose in connection with the Church viewed as the Bride of Christ. As we have seen, this aspect of the Church presents God's purpose to have an object entirely suited for Christ to love. Here then in picture we have the call of the Bride, the adornment of the Bride, and the presentation of the Bride to the Bridegroom in suitability to Himself. Moral suitability to the heart of Christ, and response to the love of Christ, are the outstanding thoughts in connection with the Church as the Bride.

We have seen that Eve, at the creation, speaks of the Bride of Christ. Isaac and Rebekah, eighteen centuries later, again take up the story of Christ and His Bride. There is however a difference, for in Scripture there is no mere repetition; in Eve we see the bride as wholly the result of a divine work which formed her and brought her to Adam: in Rebekah we see the exercise of affection in the bride — the outgoings of love that are called into activity by the servant. If Eve tells us of a divine work for the bride, Rebekah speaks of a divine work in the bride.

The chapter opens with Abraham giving his directions to his servant (vv. 1-9). Then the main portion of the chapter is occupied with the servant and his mission (vv. 10-61). Finally it closes with Isaac and his love for Rebekah (vv. 62-67). Thus in type we have in the first section the Father and His purpose; in the second the Holy Spirit and His work; and in the last, Christ and His affection. Hence in picture we have every Divine Person engaged in securing the Bride.

1

First we learn that the thought of a bride for Isaac originates with Abraham. He it is that commences the story of Genesis 24. He discloses his mind as to the bride for Isaac; he instructs his servant, and sends him on his way. Thus we learn that the thought of a Bride for Christ originates in the purpose of the Father's heart. It is, too, the Father who sends the Spirit to bring the Bride to Christ (John 14: 26).

The second verse brings before us the one whose activities form the prominent part in the story — "the eldest servant" of Abraham's house. Very fittingly his name is not mentioned, for is he not a type of the Holy Spirit who has come, not to speak of Himself, but, to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us?

The activities of the Holy Spirit in this world are many and varied, but in this chapter the Holy Spirit is presented in picture as bringing the Bride to light, awakening affection in the Bride by unfolding the glories of Christ, and then satisfying those affections by leading her to Christ.

Very significant are the directions that the servant receives from Abraham and rich with instructions for our souls.

1. The bride for Isaac must be suited for Isaac and hence must not be taken from the daughters of the Canaanites (v. 3). Such were devoted to judgment and therefore wholly unsuited to Isaac. This would show that the dealings with Rebekah are not exactly a picture of the grace of God bringing salvation to sinners, but rather of the love of Christ appealing to saints. Were it a question of setting forth the grace of God that reaches the vilest sinners then surely the daughters of the Canaanites would have been the very people to whom the servant would have been sent as in the gospel story, in which God takes up a Syrophenician woman — a daughter of Canaan — to show forth His grace.

2. It follows that if the bride is to be suited to Isaac she must be of Isaac's kindred. So the

direction to the servant is, "Thou shalt go unto my country and to my *kindred*, and take a wife unto my son Isaac" (v. 4). We have already noticed that the one who was suited to be the bride of Adam had to be "his like," and to obtain one "his like" Adam had to pass through the "deep sleep." Isaac, too, must in type go through death — must be offered up on Mount Moriah — before he could secure a bride from Mesopotamia. So Christ, the great Anti-type, the precious corn of wheat, must fall into the ground and die or for ever remain alone. When His soul is made an offering for sin then we read, "He shall see his seed." Death which cuts a man off from all hope of a seed, becomes the very way by which Christ secures His seed. And His seed is His like, His kindred, as is the heavenly One so also are the heavenly ones. Thus we see *the Bride of Christ is composed of those who are suited in origin through a divine work for them, and stand in relation to Christ as His kindred through a divine work in them, producing faith in Christ*. On earth the Lord could say, "My mother, and my brethren are those which hear the word of God and do it" (Luke 8: 21).

3. Abraham solemnly warns the servant twice over that he is not to bring Isaac again to Mesopotamia (vv. 6 and 8). Isaac in this chapter sets forth a heavenly Christ and hence after the offering up of Isaac in Genesis 22, his name is not even mentioned until the end of Genesis 24. As Isaac was not again to be linked with Mesopotamia, so there is to be no link with Christ and the world while Christ is on high and the Holy Spirit is here calling out the Bride for the heavenly Christ. Alas! so thoroughly has Christendom lost all true thought of Christianity that its one great effort is to link Christ with the world that has cast Him out. Ignoring the fact that Christ is the Stone rejected by the builders of this world, they seek to make Christ the chief corner stone, as it were, of their great earthly religious systems. His Name is attached to their great religious buildings, their schemes of reformation, their works of philanthropy, and their forms of government. In a word the great effort is to bring Christ back to the world and attach His Name to unsaved and unconverted men of the world with the hope of reforming men, and making the world in which they live a brighter and better place. It is hardly possible to conceive anything more characteristic of the ingenuity of the devil than for the world to attempt to cover its wickedness with a veneer of respectability, by attaching to itself the Name of the One that it has rejected and nailed to the Cross.

However the instructed believer knows by New Testament teaching, as well as Old Testament type, that the Holy Spirit is here, not to bring Christ back to the world, but to take the Bride out of the world to Christ. So we read, "God . . . did visit the Gentiles, *to take out of them a people for his name*" (Acts 15: 14).

4. Finally Abraham says, "The Lord God of heaven . . . shall send his *angel* before thee" (v. 7). The angel would providentially clear the way before the servant, but the servant was personally to deal with the bride, "*Thou shalt take a wife unto my son.*" Both the servant and the angel were wholly occupied in securing a bride for Isaac. In a day to come we know what a large part the angels will take in executing judgment in the world, but to-day they are "sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." As in the picture, so in fact, we see the difference maintained between the providential work of angels and the personal work of the Spirit. The angel of the Lord guides Philip on his way to the desert of Gaza, but the Spirit guides Philip in his personal dealing with the Eunuch (Acts 8: 26, 29).

Clearly then in the directions given by Abraham to his servant, we learn the great mission of the Holy Spirit in this world. He is not here to prosper the Christian in business, or to make us wealthy men in this world, or to make the world a comfortable place for us. He is not here to remove the curse, or hush creation's groan. He is not here to make the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose. He is not here to remove pain, and death, and sorrow, and tears. All this Christ will do in a day yet to come. Nor is He

here to convert the world as some think. He is here to bring to light a people who are suited to Christ for the joy and satisfaction of His heart.

Thus in accordance with these instructions we find that in the course of the story the servant does not interfere with the conditions that prevailed in Mesopotamia. He did not attempt to alter its religion, or improve its social conditions, or interfere with its government. His one business was to secure the bride for Isaac. How much disappointment the people of God would escape if once they realized God's great purpose at the present time, and the special mission of the Holy Spirit in this world.

Believers are oft-times disappointed with themselves. Desiring to do some great work for the Lord, they find they are left to do some quiet work in a hidden corner, and are disappointed. Again they may get sadly disappointed with the local company of saints with whom they walk. They had hoped that God would convert great numbers and bring their little company into prominence as a centre of blessing with the Lord's public approval and instead they find weakness and failure, and are disappointed. Again we may be disappointed with the people of God generally. We perhaps had visions of getting the scattered fragments of God's people together to walk in unity and love, and behold we find only discord and further disintegration and we grow disappointed.

Again the people of God may entertain great hopes from the mission field. With thousands of missionaries working in all parts of the world they had hoped that the strongholds of heathendom, Buddhism and Mohammedanism would be broken down before the light of Christianity, and yet they find these false systems are hardly touched, and they are disappointed.

Others again have entertained the thought that after nineteen centuries of the light of Christianity the world would be morally better, and instead they have to admit that never was society more corrupt, lawlessness so prevalent, and unrest so general, hence they are disappointed.

If, however, we abandon our own thoughts and rise up to God's thoughts we shall not be disappointed. Our expectations are oftentimes too limited, our outlook too circumscribed. We think of the present moment and look only at things seen. Let us, however, "look beyond the long dark night and hail the coming day." Let us see to what great end God is working, so that, out of the wreck and ruin of this world, He shall secure a Bride that will be suited for the love of Christ. What a thought, that the Spirit of God is here to form bridal affections in the hearts of believers in view of the day — the great day — the day of the marriage of the Lamb!

To this end the Father sent the Spirit. To this end the Spirit is working on earth. To this end Christ is waiting in heaven. And will the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit fail in this great end? Will Divine Persons be disappointed? Impossible! Every purpose of God will have its glorious fulfilment. Nor shall we be disappointed if we think God's thoughts with God, and keep in view God's great purpose — the marriage of the Lamb.

2

Passing to the second section of the chapter (vv. 10-61), we have the deeply instructive account of the way the servant carries out his mission. He comes to Mesopotamia well equipped for his service, "All the goods of his master were in his hands" (v. 10), reminding us that the Holy Spirit has come to teach us "all things," to guide us into "all truth," and to show us "all things that the Father hath."

Arrived at Mesopotamia the servant carries out his mission in dependence upon God, and hence is found in prayer. His prayer shows how thoroughly he is engrossed with one object. He does not pray for himself; and though he mentions "the daughters of the men of the city," yet he does not pray for them. He prays that he may be led to the one that is appointed for Isaac. It is well to note that the

servant is not there to *select* a bride from the daughters of the men of the city, and then make her *suited* for Isaac. He is there to find the one that is appointed for Isaac. And the sign that she is the appointed one will be that she is *marked by grace*. This surely is the force of the prayer, "Let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I *will give thy camels drink also*: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac" (v. 14). He will ask to be allowed to drink from her pitcher, and if she not only grants his request, but volunteers to do more than he asks, it will be the sign that she is characterized by the grace of God — that there is a work of God in her, and that she is thus of Isaac's kindred. For grace goes beyond our requests (Matt. 5: 38-42).

So it came to pass. Rebekah — one who is of the kindred of Isaac — is brought to light. Having found the appointed bride, the servant at once distinguishes her from all others by adorning her with the golden earrings and the bracelets. The hand and face bear witness to the work of grace (v. 22).

3

This, however, is only the beginning of the servant's work. No word has been yet uttered concerning Isaac. These further communications depend upon *the welcome that is extended to the servant*. If he is welcomed he will speak to them of Isaac, but he will not force his company upon Rebekah, "*Is there room* in thy father's house for us to lodge in?" (v. 23).

Very blessedly Rebekah's answer again goes beyond the servant's request. He only asks for "room"; she says there is *provision* as well as room (v. 25). Laban too can say to the servant, "Come in thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without?" So we read "The man came into the house."

Do we not discern in this part of the story the secret of our little progress in the knowledge of Christ, and why our affections are oft-times cold. We hinder and grieve the One who alone can powerfully affect our hearts with the love of Christ. A Divine Person — the Comforter — has come from the Father, from Christ, from heaven, but do we make Him welcome? Do we make "*room*" for Him?

It is well to take home to ourselves this great question, "Is there room?" Are we prepared to put ourselves about to make room for the Holy Spirit? The flesh and the Spirit "are contrary the one to the other" (Gal. 5: 17). We cannot entertain the Spirit if ministering to the flesh. To make room for the Spirit, and to be minding the things of the flesh is impossible. Are we prepared to refuse the indulgence of the flesh in the passing things of time, in order to make room for the Spirit to lead us into the deep and eternal things of God? Are we making provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof, or are we making room and provision for the Spirit. "Room" and "provision" were made in the house of Bethuel for the servant of Abraham, with the result that the servant is able to speak of Isaac, to engage the affections of Rebekah with Isaac, and to lead her to Isaac.

Having come into the house (v. 32), the first thing the servant does is to bear witness to Isaac. He reveals the mind of his master concerning Isaac, and in so doing he takes of the things of Isaac and shows them unto Rebekah. He speaks of all the wealth of his master, and then says all this wealth has been given to Isaac, "Unto him hath he given all that he hash." And well we know that all the Father's things have been given to Christ, as the Lord can say, "All things that the Father hath are mine," and then, speaking of the Holy Spirit, can add, "He shall take of mine and show it unto you" (John 16: 15).

What, we may ask, must have been the effect upon Rebekah of hearing this witness to Isaac? Did it simply *increase her knowledge* of Isaac? This doubtless was one result, but it surely did more, much

more, for it awakened love to Isaac. And love having been awakened, the servant brings forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gives them to Rebekah. He adorns her with the beautiful things that came from Isaac. Thus too the Spirit would deal with ourselves. He unfolds to us the mind of the Father concerning Christ: He takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us. Thus He awakens love to Christ, and then He adorns us with the beautiful things of Christ. He makes us the witnesses of redeeming love — the jewels of silver; the witnesses of divine righteousness — the gold; and the witnesses of practical sanctification — the raiment.

4

There follows, in picture, a further action of the Spirit. The servant has found the bride of the kindred of Isaac; he has distinguished her from all others with the earrings and the bracelet; he has awakened affection for Isaac; he has adorned her with the beautiful things of Isaac, now *he will lead her to Isaac* (vv. 54-60).

The servant says, "Send me away to my master." He had come to Mesopotamia to secure the bride, and having accomplished that end he would fain be away. He had not come to tarry in Mesopotamia. The mind of the servant was to secure the bride, leave the scene, and return to his master. It was not to secure the bride and settle her in the old home, but to secure the bride and lead her to a new home. And very blessedly *he forms the same mind in Rebekah*. He longs to be away and reach Isaac, and he creates the same desires in the heart of Rebekah. He wills to go, and she is made willing to go. Her relatives can understand that the servant would be away to his master, but they would fain retain Rebekah awhile — at least ten days. So they call the damsel and enquire at her mouth, only to discover how well the servant's work had been accomplished, and that his mind had been formed in her mind, so that if he was longing to go she was ready to go.

If we allow the Holy Spirit to have His way — if we hinder Him not — He will form our minds according to His mind. To think as He thinks about Christ; to disengage our hearts from the things where Christ is not, to engage them with Christ where He is.

Rebekah was not a penniless orphan; she had indeed a father and mother, a home in Mesopotamia with prospects of wealth and possessions in the land of her birth. To enjoy all these blessings she had no need to leave her native land and face a wilderness journey. Nevertheless all is left. She forgets her own people and her father's house, and she faces a wilderness journey to reach a person whom she has never seen. Such is the mighty attractive power of a person when faith and affection for that person have been awakened.

In like manner the Holy Spirit has come to bring our hearts under the constraining influence of the love of Christ. He is here to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us. He is here to lead us into the deep things of God — things which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man." He is able to so strengthen us in the inner man, "that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith that being rooted and grounded in love, we may be fully able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth and length, and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowing."

All this He is able and ready to do. How is it then we are so little attached in affection to Christ, and detached from things here? Is it not that we hinder? Hence the servant's word, "*Hinder me not,*" should have a powerful voice for us. We may say we cannot enjoy these things apart from the Spirit's work and we cannot make the Spirit work. This may be true: but alas we can hinder the Spirit working. We can cling to the world, the politics of the world, the religion of the world, the pleasures of the world, and we may even be so engrossed with right things — country, kindred, and father's house —

that we hinder the Holy Spirit.

Whether we allow the world to hinder, or not, depends not upon the world but upon ourselves. The brother and mother may seek to detain Rebekah. This they admit, for they say, "we will call the damsel and enquire at her mouth." If like Rebekah our answer is "I will go" then indeed the Spirit will so powerfully affect our hearts, that all the power and attraction of the world will be unable to detain us.

Thus it came to pass, "Rebekah arose . . . and followed the man." She put herself entirely under the guidance of the man, with the result "the servant took Rebekah and went *his way*" (v. 61). Not her way but his way. We are not always prepared for the way of the Spirit. It is a way that goes entirely across the will of the flesh. Further we do well to remember that following the leading of the Spirit does not mean following some "inner light." If following the Spirit we shall walk according to the Word. The Spirit does not lead apart from the Word nor contrary to the Word.

The immediate result of following the man was that Rebekah found herself in a wilderness scene. She had neither the home of Laban nor the house of Isaac. So with ourselves, as one has said, "We have neither the earth in which we are, nor heaven to which we are going." However, as she travelled the desert journey of four hundred miles she had a bright prospect before her, and on the way she had the servant to talk of the things of Isaac and show them unto her. At the end the person who had won her heart was waiting to receive her.

5

In the close of this beautiful story Isaac personally comes into view. In all these wilderness scenes Isaac has taken no active part, though not unmindful of all that was taking place. He comes from the well Lahairoi — a word of deep significance, for it means, "the well of Him that liveth and seeth" (Genesis 16: 14). How good to know as we travel on our way, that at the end of the journey we shall find One who has not been unmindful of His people. He sees and He lives, yea the word is "He ever liveth" (Heb. 7: 25).

But further Isaac came to meet Rebekah, for she asks, "What man is this that walketh in the field *to meet* us?" We travel on to the great meeting, but let us not forget that He is coming to meet us. The picture presents Isaac as one who was waiting for and wanting his bride. Our desires after Christ may often be feeble, but His longings are toward His Bride. He can say, "If I go away I will come again and receive you unto Myself."

And the meeting time is not far off. When at last Rebekah lifted up her eyes and saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel for the journey was over; and when at last we see Him face to face our journey will be over. And it will not be long, the night is far spent, the day is at hand. When the moment comes our translation will not take long; only the twinkling of an eye and we shall be there.

After the meeting Rebekah took a veil and covered herself. The bride made herself ready and the marriage followed, for "Isaac took Rebekah . . . and she became his wife and he loved her." So too after our wilderness journey is over, after the great meeting, when for the first time we see Him face to face — when He receives us to Himself — then we read, "the marriage of the Lamb is come and His wife hath made herself ready." The Church will be presented to Christ all glorious not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing — "holy and without blemish." Then indeed it will be manifest that Christ has found an object suited for His love, and responsive to His love, and He will be satisfied. He will look upon His Bride and say, "I am satisfied." "He shall see of the fruit of the travail of His soul and be satisfied."

As this glorious prospect opens up before our vision, how all the lustre of this world grows dim; how dull its fairest prospects, how poor its riches. How vain its passing pleasures, and how empty its honours in the light of these coming glories.

H. S.