

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 261

The Bride in Union with Jesus

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 18th March, 2007**

Text: *“Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife”*
(Revelation 21. 9).

John, the beloved apostle, was shown many glorious things in heaven. He was shown the glories of heaven itself. He was shown the glory of the Lord the Lamb. And here he was shown the glory of the redeemed safely landed in heaven and their happiness for ever and ever. Now an angel showed him this. The angel said, “Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.” Let us be clear, by “the bride, the Lamb's wife” is meant the company of all God's people in all ages, all His chosen, all His redeemed, all those whom He calls by His grace.

Of course, there are many descriptions of them in holy Scripture. Sometimes they are spoken of as a building built on the sure foundation, the Rock of Ages. Sometimes they are spoken of as the branches of the living Vine. Sometimes they are spoken of as the sheep of Christ's fold and their union with Christ as their Shepherd. So we might go on. But here, the bride, married to Christ, standing in eternal union with Him, never to be separated from Him, loved with an everlasting love. “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church” – His own beloved bride – “and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.” Now this is the view, the blessed view that the favoured apostle had here. He was given a view of the whole blood-bought church of God, the bride of Christ, standing in eternal union, blessed for evermore.

“Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.” Now beloved friends, what the angel said to John, did to John, is what the gospel ministry does. A godly, aged pastor said to me when I first began to preach, “You have just two glorious things to speak of. One is Christ, and the other His beloved church as she stands complete in Christ.” Now this is what the gospel ministry does. It points out who the Lord's people are, their state, their condition, their lot, their eternal blessedness, everything in Christ, their union with the Saviour. “Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.” Now that is just what the gospel ministry does.

Ah, but you see there are times when it goes just beyond the preacher of the gospel: when the Holy Spirit does it, when He takes a sinner by the hand and He says, “Come hither,” and He shows that sinner the bride, the Lamb’s wife, the people of God in all their everlasting blessedness as they are safe in Christ.

I want to linger here a moment or two, because I find that often this is so in the beginning of a work of grace; often it is so in the heart of a young person. I believe there are a few here this morning who can look back to it, when the Lord took us by the hand and showed us that He has a people, when He showed us the everlasting blessedness of that people, and He taught us that they were the only people who were blessed, the only people who knew true happiness. “Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord?” I could take you to the very spot, the place; I could tell you the time when the Lord gave me such a view of the everlasting blessedness of His people as they stand complete in Christ. I will tell you what it was. We were singing hymn 667, “Immortal honours rest on Jesus’ head.” I could not sing it and I was not looking at the words of the hymn. All I could see were those three words at the top of the hymn: “Safety in Christ.” There and then I saw the blessedness of the people of God. Mind you, it was not mine; I could not see it was mine. They were *there*, and I was *here*. I did not belong to them. But I could see them as a favoured people.

But then as the Lord the Spirit carries on His work, it is not just that you see the blessedness of the people of God. It is this: if I live and die and I am not found amongst them, I must perish to all eternity. And that is solemn. But the Holy Spirit does not leave His work there. He brings you to this: that longing desire, that prayer that you might be one of them, that you might be numbered amongst them. “Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.” I wonder if I am touching any hearts this morning. Are there any of you young ones or older ones and you are being brought to see the vanity and emptiness of the world, and you see that God has a people; you are beginning to see the blessedness of that people? But have some of you come to this point, and it is a solemn point, an awful point: what if I am not found amongst them? What if I live and die a stranger to them? And perhaps some of you are coming to that prayerful longing and desire (is there a Ruth here this morning?): “Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.” “With them numbered may I be, now and to eternity.” “O can I bear the piercing thought: what if

my name should be left out?” I wonder if I am touching one or two people here this morning in your burdens, your exercises, your prayers, your desires.

Well then, this is the substance, the spirit of this word: “Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife” – the work of the gospel ministry. But O when the Holy Spirit Himself performs it personally and savingly in your hearts. “Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife.”

Well then, with the Lord’s help I would seek to bid you, “Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife,” first of all as she stood in Adam, innocent, without sin. But then as she stood in the Adam fall. She did not stand long in Adam unfallen, because “sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Now, “Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife” – lost, ruined, guilty, fallen in Adam, without God, without hope in the world. But, “Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife,” as she stood in Christ before the world was created, before Adam fell. And the Adam fall could never eradicate her union from everlasting with the Saviour in bonds of grace that can never be broken.

“In union with the Lamb,
From condemnation free,
The saints from everlasting were;
And shall for ever be.

“In covenant from of old,
The sons of God they were;
The feeblest Lamb in Jesus’ fold
Was blessed in Jesus there.”

O how sacred it is to have believing views of the everlasting standing of the bride, the Lamb’s wife, in Christ even before she fell! “Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife.”

But, “Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife,” as she is born into this world, as one by one the members of Christ’s mystical body, His chosen, are born into this world, “by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” You see this one, you see that one, but you would never know they belong to the bride, the Lamb’s wife, would you? Look at Manasseh, the chief of sinners, who made the streets of Jerusalem run

with blood. You would not have thought that he had a part and an interest here, would you? And what about the dying thief, who spent his whole life in iniquity and is coming down to his last moments? You would not think he belonged to this favoured number. As they are born into this world, born in sin, shapen in iniquity, you would not know that this is the bride, the Lamb's wife. There is a union which stands in the everlasting purposes of God in the covenant of grace from all eternity. But that union has to be made known personally and by experience.

So, "Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife," under the teaching of the Holy Spirit. She does not know she is the bride, the Lamb's wife. She does not know that she has an eternal standing in Jesus. But as the new birth takes place, and as her eyes are opened, all she can see is her lost condition. "Behold, I am vile." You say, "What, this sinner saying, 'Behold, I am vile'?" "Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife." This is the very way she is going to be brought personally into that loving union which was hers from all eternity. By nature she is "as far from God as sheep can run." But now, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, as she realises her unworthiness, as she realises her guilt, she is brought to feel her need of a Saviour. And so in the gospel the Saviour is revealed, and there, led and taught by the Spirit of God, she flees for refuge to that Saviour, and there she has to say, "Other refuge have I none, hangs my helpless soul on Thee." And so by precious faith she is brought into that loving union with this divine Saviour.

Now, "Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife." This union has to be made known in time. We read of, "The day of His espousals ... the day of the gladness of His heart." This is the dear Saviour. This is the Lamb of God. "The day of His espousals ... the day of the gladness of His heart." But you know, it is the day of the gladness of the Saviour's heart when He sees that returning sinner fleeing for refuge to Him. Why, it was for this "joy that was set before Him" that He "endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." "The day of His espousals ... the day of the gladness of His heart." When this sinner that He has loved from eternity, that He died for on the cross, who has been far off by wicked works, but now is returning, coming, cannot do without Him, by faith to enter into union with Him, these are the days of His espousals, the days of the sinner's espousals to Christ.

How Toplady used to love to speak of “the day of his sensible espousals to the Bridegroom of God’s elect” in a little barn in Ireland under a preacher who could hardly write his own name, and the text: “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” This is the bringing into this vital union, the bride being united with the Bridegroom. Are there some of you here this morning who of necessity have to pray, “Loving Bridegroom, ’Tis Thyself we want to know”?

“Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” This fleeing for refuge to Jesus, this sensibly uniting to Him, this resting your everlasting all upon Him, this knowledge that you cannot do without Him.

“Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” In type, in figure, you have this very beautifully opened up in the case of Isaac and Rebekah. Now Isaac had never seen Rebekah and Rebekah had never seen Isaac, but Abraham’s servant went out to seek a bride for his master Isaac. You know the wonderful story, the opening up of divine providence. “I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master’s brethren.” And there in that house Rebekah heard of Isaac. She had never seen him, but as Abraham’s servant began to speak of Isaac, who he was, her heart was enlarged; her love was kindled; she felt her affections being drawn forth. And then he brought forth those precious jewels. He spoke of all the wealth, all the grandeur of Isaac, and he gave her these tokens of his love. And then the great question: “Wilt thou go with this man?” And Rebekah said, “I will go.”

That is what takes place in the heart and in the conscience of God’s people when they are united to Jesus. The gospel ministry speaks of this Man, this glorious Man. The gospel ministry points to the dear Lamb of God. “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” – who He is, what He has done. And the sinner’s desires are kindled and affections drawn forth. It is this Man, this glorious Man that I need. But is He willing to have me? Is He willing to take me? And then at last that great question, not just put forth from the gospel pulpit, but put forth by the Holy Spirit in your heart: “Wilt thou go with this Man?” And faith says, “I will go.” And all the relatives and Satan and sin and the world say, Tarry a little, if it be only for a few days. “Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way.”

“In all my Lord’s appointed ways,
My journey I’ll pursue;
Hinder me not, ye much loved saints,
For I must go with you.”

“Wilt thou go with this man?” And she answered, “I will go.” “Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife.”

But then, “Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife,” “accepted in the Beloved.” O despite all her sin and all her guilt she stands accepted. She is loved with an everlasting love. Her filthy garments of her own covenant of works righteousness are taken away and she is clothed in the pure, white, spotless robe of Christ’s righteousness. All her vile sins are for ever put away. She is, “ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,” made meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light, nothing in herself, but everything in Christ. Now, “Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” “To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.”

But then, “Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” She has to travel through this wilderness. She has to prove that this world is nothing but a waste-howling wilderness. She has not reached heaven yet. There is going to be the conflict. There is the temptation. There are sin and Satan to grapple with. There is self; there is unbelief. “He that endureth to the end shall be saved.” “We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.” “Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” Now can this be the bride of Christ’s love in these sorrows and trials and bewilderment and baffled by Satan and sometimes cast down and sometimes in doubt and sometimes ready to sink? Now can this be the bride, the Lamb’s wife? Can this be the object of His everlasting love?

O but beloved friends, “Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife,” if I may use this word, in her *posture*. What is her posture? Well, listen to the words of the inspired writer: “Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, *leaning upon her Beloved*?” Now this is the bride, the Lamb’s wife. Really, the whole of the Song of Solomon is a very blessed commentary on the bride, the Lamb’s wife. You can really write across the Song of Solomon from verse 1 to the end, “Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” But look at her posture: “Leaning

on her Beloved.” Why does she lean? Because she is so weak and so helpless –

“A weakling, more than strong;
Vents in His bosom all her woes,
And leaning moves along.”

Why does she lean? Because she is ready to sink; she is so weak; she is so helpless; she cannot continue. But it is complete dependence. It is the dependence of true faith. It is the dependence of living faith. And if your religion is real, you will be brought to lean on Christ. You will have to lean on His atonement.

“Compelled I am on Christ alone to hang,
And plead that blood by which the church is freed.”

Now this is the bride, the Lamb’s wife. This is how she travels through this wilderness world. In all her helplessness she has to lean; she must be supported. Otherwise she must sink; otherwise she cannot carry on. But she never can perish leaning on her Beloved. O what a wonderful thing that a wretched, ruined, guilty sinner is permitted – more than permitted – welcomed, invited, to lean on an arm of omnipotent grace! And there she is. Who is she? Who is this coming up out of the wilderness? She is safe, eternally secure. She is as sure of heaven as if she were already there. “Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” “Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?” In every time of need, in every time of sorrow, she leans on His all-sufficient grace. She tells Him all her sorrows, all her woes. She leans upon His loving arm. She knows His understanding, His compassion. And this is the point I like:

“She views the covenant sure;
Her hopes all centre there;
And on His bosom leans secure,
Whose temples bled for her.”

This is a sinner bound for glory. “Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?” “Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife.”

But, “I will shew thee the Bride, the Lamb’s wife,” in prayer. There are one or two places in the Song of Solomon where it says, “Who is this?” In another place it says, “Who is this that cometh out of the

wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?" You say, That is strange language. It is not, you know. There is something going up to heaven, something ascending to heaven, something rising from her very heart to heaven like pillars of smoke. This is how she is coming up out of the wilderness. It is prayer; it is longing; it is desire; it is repentance; it is faith. And these sweet powders of the merchant, this myrrh, this frankincense – why, her poor prayers are fragrant as they ascend to heaven. They are fragrant to the beloved Bridegroom.

"Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife," in prayer. She must pray. She cannot live without prayer. She prays, "Lord, help me," because she is helpless. She prays, "Lord, save me," because she is a sinner. She prays, "Lord, keep me," because she fears she is ready to fall. She prays for great things; she prays for small things; nothing too great, nothing too small. But she knows that the beloved Bridegroom loves her and sympathises with her and knows her need and will answer her prayers. O these prayers of a living soul for mercy, forgiveness, cleansing in the Saviour's blood. And then these prayers for help, for the supply of every need, that the Lord will be with you, that He will uphold you, that He will bring you safely through.

"Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife." The great theme here is love – the Saviour's love to the sinner and the sinner's love to the Saviour. But it is a mystery that the bride, the Lamb's wife is sometimes troubled and tried because she wonders if she really does love the Saviour. It is a mystery, isn't it? Can you remember Bunyan on that point, a sinner wondering if you love the Saviour, and in his usual, quaint way he says, that girl and she is thinking about that boy, and then she starts one day to say, But perhaps he will not like me; perhaps he does not like the look of me; perhaps my face is not right; perhaps I am not really pretty. He says, You ask that girl when she first started thinking like that, and if she is really honest, it was when she first began to love him! How beautifully Bunyan opens up that sinner's concerns: my blackness, my failings; what if He will not receive me? What if He will not love me? Why sinner, he says, it is just because you love Him that you speak language like this.

"Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife." But there is a union here in bonds of grace that can never be broken. The bride,

the Lamb's wife in all her burdens and exercises, her trials, her cares. "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." "These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace." O that is where she finds her peace: in the heavenly Bridegroom. She is safe, eternally secure. The Bridegroom loves her. He died for her. He cares for her. He will supply all her needs. He will never let her perish. He will bring her safely to heaven at last.

"Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife" as she enters heaven, as she is safely landed. We read about it this morning (Revelation 19): "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." This is the welcome of Christ's beloved bride into heaven. All the angels in heaven are singing the Alleluia chorus: "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." This poor bride who here on earth has been buffeted and tried and tempted, but now she is entering heaven. This is all heaven rejoicing: "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come." You see the final consummation, the great marriage day of the Lamb. "The marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready." You say, You cannot make yourself ready. I take it to mean this: the only way she has made herself ready is that she is wearing the beautiful, white robe of Christ's righteousness that He Himself has provided for her, given to her. "And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints."

"No age can change its glorious hue;
The robe of Christ is ever new."

"And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." It will be your mercy and mine to all eternity if we are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb. "He saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." "Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife," as she enters heaven to be in the presence of the heavenly Bridegroom for ever and ever. You know what Rutherford said:

"The bride eyes not her garment,
But her dear Bridegroom's face;

I will not gaze at glory,
But on my King of grace;
Not at the crown He giveth,
But on His piercèd hand:
The Lamb is all the glory
Of Immanuel's land."

"Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife."