

PREPARATION OF THE BRIDE

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"The chariots shall be with flaming torches in the day of His preparation" - Nahum 2:3. This scripture, no doubt refers to the time of the Lord's return and the preparation on the earth that precedes the great event. The fulfillment of it, which is before our eyes, is a sure sign that the Day of the Lord is at hand. But there is a particular preparation, at the same time, to which we call attention with no uncertain sound; namely, the preparation of the Bride to meet the Bridegroom. The former is called "His preparation." But her preparation is just as necessary; for His manifestation awaits her presence with Him. The Man to whom has been given dominion upon the earth is not complete without His Bride - Genesis 1:27,28. We are assured that there is nothing today with which the Lord is more concerned than the preparation of the Lamb's Wife. It is written of her, "His Wife hath made herself ready" - Revelation 19:7.

God's people are awaking to the fact of the imminence of Christ's coming; but the readiness necessary to meet Him, with many, is a minor consideration. The former is good to see. It is indispensable to the latter. For the hope of Christ's appearing, held in living faith, purifies us "even as He is pure" - I John 3:3. This constitutes the preparation of the Bride. She must be as separated as He from the world, in its every phase. This includes not only the world's allurements as to its pleasures and money; but also its wisdom, its thoughts, its fame, its zeal, and its energy. The latter are more than the former; for they may be garbed religiously, and thus not be so easily detected. Nevertheless, they are not hidden from the Lord. The Bride cannot afford to be defiled by any of these things. The time is too short. She must be making ready her wedding garments, the materials of which, we are assured, will be altogether from Heaven - nothing of "the elements of the world" in that wedding trousseau. It will be wholly divine.

THE OUT-CALLING

On every hand is manifested great zeal and energy in the Lord's cause and in the salvation of sinners. But the one great purpose of the age, the Father sending the Holy Spirit in quest of a Bride for His Son, is almost forgotten. She must be a help meet for Him, not an inferior. She must grow up "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" - Eph. 4:13. This constitutes her readiness. The Lamb's Wife is not going to be a babe nor a child. God is not concerned, nor does He want us concerned, with building up something big upon the earth. This is always man's wisdom, for he walks by sight. He must see the result of his work in something big, to which he can point with pride and take to himself the glory. But the Lord is not working that way. If we desire His best, we must look through His eyes and view things as He views them. The Bride has "doves' eyes," Holy Spirit eyes. God is through with the church, viewed as Christendom. He is already outside the door calling individuals to come out, and He will sup with them - Rev. 3:20. He has given her space to repent; but she has not availed herself of the opportunity.

Scripture nowhere tells us that there will be a revival of the Church as a whole. In fact, the opposite is stated. The love of many waxes cold, iniquity abounds, some depart from the faith, and the last days are perilous. Read II Timothy, for a description of the religious condition at the end of this age. The witness for Christ upon the earth has failed. She has a

form of godliness, but denies the power of the Holy Spirit - and so is nothing but "sounding brass, or a tinkling (clanging) cymbal." Notice now, in this connection, that God does not repeat Himself. He is not building up another gigantic apostolic Church in these days. No, indeed! She would prove the same miserable failure again, if she were given the opportunity. God is not doing this. He does a new thing. The end of this age is upon us. The Lord has something new for the next. The Church as a whole is divided. In the beginning, all believers "were together, and had all things common." Their separation to God and fellowship with one another were complete. But this will never be repeated until Jesus comes. Then, the "all things common" will be fulfilled in a far greater measure to Israel, of which the former was only a miniature picture.

As was said, there is absolutely no hope of a restoration of the professing church. Even the desire for large beautifully organized apostolic assemblies will prove a snare and disappointment to us, if we set our heart upon them. Again we repeat, God is not working in this manner. He has proved man in this way many times. There will never be another Luther, Wesley, or Knox to inaugurate movements for their followers to build up into ecclesiastical abominations upon the earth. Many of these different sects were of God in their beginnings (though not as sects); but take notice of their end - "the mother of harlots," destroyed with all her progeny - Rev. 17:5. God is going to judge her false pretenses, and fellowship with a guilty world, and give to her according to her deeds. She is the false bride of Christ. Her claims will have to be annulled before the true Bride can be shown.

OUR HIGH CALLING

Let us then get the mind of God for us as individuals at this time, and not try to imitate those of the past. Let us look alone to our Guide and Teacher who is still with us. God has purposes and plans for us today which, I am sure, are neither sectarian nor selfish. He is a God of variety. He is not at a loss in the midst of the confusion and failure. What He wants, and all He needs, is the "poor and ... contrite spirit" - small enough to be taught and willing to be led. The teaching may not be according to man's wisdom nor his reasoning, and the path in which we are called to walk may be a little thorny and not very popular. But we truly believe that it will be teaching befitting the preparation of the Lamb's Wife to take her place in the ages to come as the companion, the equal and helpmeet, for the Lord. For the marriage of the Lamb shall come, as it is written; and there must be a bride who "hath made herself ready."

The question may arise - How is the above possible, since salvation is entirely by grace? Well, we believe this is the answer. God Himself has made provision for the readiness, but we must avail ourselves of His provision. Salvation has been provided for the world, but all men are not saved. They will not take the grace that the Lord is freely offering them. So it is, in like manner, with believers. All have the calling of this select highly graced company - the Bride. The provision to meet the need of all is complete; but it is not appreciated nor wanted. The separation it effects is too entire. The persecution it entails is too severe. The Prize of the high calling is not run after; hence, will not be won. The race is too long, the boxing too strenuous, for the weaklings of our day. They prefer,

like Lot of old, to sit in the gate of Sodom to judge the wickedness of the world; but they are not separated from it. True judgment would necessitate an immediate separation from such fellowship. But this can only be done when we acknowledge God's judgments upon this world by taking our place in death with Christ and His consequent resurrection. Then it will be no more I that live, "but Christ." This is the provision God has made through Calvary for the reproduction of the Christ life in the Bride. For, notice, she is called "the Lamb's Wife" - Revelation 21:9.

THE QUEEN, THE WOMAN OF DESTINY

In Psalm forty-five, we are given a view of the above much graced company who is to reign jointly with her Consort the King. King's daughters are among the honorable women of the court; but she, the Queen, stands at His right hand. She "is but one; she is the only one of her mother (grace), she is the choice one of her that bare her" - Song of Solomon 6:9. There are daughters and virgins without number; but she is the only One (speaking of the unity of the glorious company) who is chosen to share the throne. She stands beside the King "in gold of Ophir," divinely chosen and enrobed in regal splendor as befitting her rank and sphere. She is even as He. Then follows a list of the absolute requirements of those who will grace that dazzling throne.

"Hearken, O daughter." Listen to My Word, He says. I will tell thee how to measure up to the call of God if thou hast yearning in this direction. "Incline thine ear."

A hearing ear is the first necessity of this queenly company. She must have an ear tuned

in harmony with heaven - an ear that can hear the faintest whisper of the Infinite Spirit. But hearing is not sufficient. The second condition follows. She must "consider"; that is, she must eat the Word which she hears, think upon it, let it lodge in her heart, meditate upon it, ruminate, chew the cud, as it were, and get all the sweetness, strength, and power out of it. Keep it in mind. Then the next admonition will be in order. "Forget also thine own people, and thy father's house." She must put off her old Adamic head, and all the associations and relationships connected with the old creation. "Oh, this is hard," some say. No, it simply means that this choice One puts her Lord and Master first. His people are her people; His house, her house. The Spirit is substituted for the flesh, while the eternal things replace the temporal. She has said, "Goodbye," to all earthly ties, ambitions, pleasures, fame, and riches. Forgetting becomes habitual to this company. Like Paul, this choice woman forgets "those things which are behind." She presses forward. She lets go all that she is and has in the natural. She identifies herself with the rejection of Christ; and esteems the reproach that He has borne, and His fellowship, "greater riches than the treasures in Egypt." "Victory," you say. Sure, this is victory. But it is the privilege of the Queen to enjoy such a state of perfection. This is simply glorying in the grace of God and its enabling, which has made such overcoming possible. The work of the Cross will not have been in vain for such a company. Observe further, that such victory is absolutely necessary; for the King's Spouse must reach the standard that has been enjoined. Only with such can He mate. They alone are able to enter into fellowship and enjoy His love. In fact, these only will He desire for His own. Listen, "So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty." Because she has met all the conditions, fulfilled all the requirements of His loving tender admonitions, is the reason that He will desire her. It

will be this very inward perfection which has been worked in her, which will cause His love to burn toward her and make Him yearn to possess her for Himself. He is this choice Woman's Lord. She owns His Lordship alone - worships, obeys, and yields to Him. He is everything to her - "the Chiefest among ten thousand." He reciprocates this love to the uttermost. "She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework." These fine linen garments are in the process of being made today. They are the result of heeding the above counsel of the Spirit, and are costing her something in the way of pricks and stings.

The needle's constant moving in and out, though necessary, is not pleasant; and it occasions her some tears and groans. But, when we realize that only thus are those embroidered garments to be fashioned, we yield to the pricking. The Queen is to be brought into the King's presence in these beautiful dainty wearables, as though the wrought golden robe were for the gaze of the multitude; while the fine raiment of needlework is for the King alone. He alone will know their worth, and appreciate their value; therefore, He alone will see their beauty.

She must be a partaker of His nature - the Lamb nature. The Bride will most certainly consist of those who have let God have His way with them to the uttermost; not so much in doing great things but rather, we believe, by standing still and letting Him work. He then works in us, rather than for us, a complete renunciation of all that we are and have. All of our own natural goodness, as well as the badness, we will let go. The former is far more difficult than the latter. We do cling to our own self-righteousness. It is the last thing we let go of. But God will have none of it, and neither will the Lamb's Wife. She will take Christ only and always for her preparation; and stand in His spotless righteousness, without fault, in the unsullied light of the throne of God. She sounds out on every hand with clarion voice, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." Her boast is grace alone. With deep exultant joy she confesses that she owes everything to Christ. He is all she needs. Others may boast in their achievements, their self-righteousness, their wisdom, their sufficiency. She is dumb and maligned, rejected, misunderstood and persecuted. She goes the way of her Lord and Life Christ Jesus.

The Bride fills up "that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ" - Col. 1:24. She does it with rejoicing, happy to be a partaker of His sufferings; for "when His glory shall be revealed," she will "be glad also with exceeding joy," for she will share jointly with Him. No doleful dismal lamenter is the Bride of Christ. His joy is in her, and her joy is full. She appreciates His love, and awaits His appearing. She expects to win Christ.

She sings, and singing upward wings - Her anthem Calvary's story. Her eyes like doves', her feet like deer. The race she runs with vision clear; For Christ is all her Glory.

We read in two places, of the Lamb's Wife - Rev. 19:7, 21:2,9-11, she is described as a great and glorious city "coming down from God out of Heaven." But who constitutes the Bride? It is very evident that not all the saints have this royal place. For in Revelation nineteen, we read of "servants," of them "that fear Him," and of them "which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." Furthermore, in Revelation twenty-one, the Bride or Holy City is distinguished from the twelve foundations or twelve apostles of the lamb.

Eve was built of a rib taken from the side of Adam. She became his wife. She is a type of the Bride of Christ, who being taken out of His Body, the Church, divinely chosen and

divinely built. But what particular saints constitute His Bride? Our answer is recorded in Romans 7:1-6. We quote verse four: "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God."

The importance of this truth cannot be overestimated, now that we expect soon to see the Lord. May the Spirit enable the reader to see it. Romans 6:6 teaches that "our old man, or former husband, was crucified with Christ; hence, we are not under law. But, if we do not count the old man dead while we are joined to Christ, we are adulteresses; for no woman has a right to have two husbands. That is why so many do not have victory over sin. They are joined to Christ, but do not count the old husband dead. There is always trouble where there is more than one husband in the same house. Now Christ alone has a right to the headship. He purchased it with His own blood. He cannot accept one as His Wife who has another husband. He would thus commit fornication, and cause her to commit adultery. Of course, that cannot be.

How illogical then, to expect Christ to be our Bridegroom, if we do not count our old man or husband to be dead. Do you see it, friend? If we reckon with God that our old man died with Christ, then we have him no longer as a husband; nor do we longer recognize the old natural life. We are now free to be joined to Christ. We now recognize only His life in us. We are wholly dependent upon Him - our new and rightful and only head. We love Him with an absorbing and adoring love. We trust Him constantly and confidently. He becomes our constant thought and theme, our life and light, our help and hope, our joy and rejoicing, our wisdom and way. This is not simply cold doctrine. It is a living burning experience. "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" - I Cor. 6:17. Such are fruitful ones, who hold Jesus only as their Head.

HER HIDDEN FITNESS

The foregoing is the right and reasonable attitude and relation of a bride to her groom. This is the lawful aspect of it. But the true marriage relation is much deeper than law. There is a profound unfathomable inward separation from all else and all others, into union with Him inexplicably deep and tender. Doubtless, this was the pursuit of the Apostle Paul, in Phil. 3:7-14. Who will take time and patience to consider it with Him?

In the first chapter of this epistle, Christ is set forth as our life; and the apostle expressed his "desire to depart, and to be with Christ."

In the second chapter, He is set before us as our Pattern; and Paul exhorts to "let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." But, in the third chapter, Christ is "the Prize of the high calling of God." To be with Christ is glorious, to be like Him is great; but to "win Christ," as a young woman wins a man, is everything. This is what Paul was running after. He already knew Him as his Savior, his Life, his strength, and his Wisdom. Now he yearns to know Him as his heavenly Bridegroom. He remarks: "What things were gain to me" - his pedigree and his legal righteousness - "those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of

Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things." If we do not suffer in losing, what we give up does not amount to very much. There is a real death in such a giving up; not death to self, but to what we surrender.

But, more than that, he says, "I...count them but dung" - a repulsive mass of corruption - "that I may win Christ, and be found in Him." Then, what most Christians cling to and boast of to their dying day, Paul especially repudiated as the largest part of that dung heap; namely, his own righteousness, which was of the law. We can never win Christ except we wholly renounce all our own natural goodness, sweetness, and pious walk. We cannot glory in what we ever did or did not, or in what we are now doing or not doing. We can only glory in the fact that we died with Christ on Calvary, and that He is our present and eternal life and righteousness.

Now as we maintain this attitude of separation from all things and everybody, and as we choose to repudiate our own righteousness, we are becoming conformed to the death of Christ. God, by His providences, makes us to experience with sorrow, grief, and pain, this death to all. We are made to see with shame how self-righteous we have been, and what a mortification is required to rid us of it all. But God is perfecting us. Christ is being formed in us. We are growing up into Him, our living Head. "Forgetting those things which are behind" - pedigree, friends, prospects, plans, prosperity, usefulness, blessings, attainments, achievements, gifts - all absolutely ALL; and stretching forward "unto those things which are before" - to "know Him, and the power of His resurrection out from the dead (that is, dead saints) "for the Prize" - Christ Himself as our glorious heavenly Bridegroom.

To paraphrase, let us press on then with Paul that, "If by any means we may apprehend or seize hold of that for which we have been apprehended of God in Christ." Let us set our faces like flint by persistent faith in God; and by whole-hearted yieldedness to Him, and by real heart devotion to Him, seek to reach that goal and win the PRIZE. Then we will indeed be apart of that holy city, new Jerusalem, "descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal" - Revelation 21:10,11. "And, behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be" - Revelation 22:12.