

Glimpses of the Kingdom

6. The bridegroom and the bride (3) The coming together

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“... and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17).

JUST AS the Almighty describes Himself as our Father, since this is most like (though infinitely more than) the earthly relationship in which we are loved and cared for, so the bond between the Lord Jesus Christ and his Ecclesia is likened to a bridegroom and a bride. The Creator could have made mankind genderless—as the angels may be portrayed—but the fact that He made them male and female was not only for procreation (although even that speaks of love bearing fruit, a wonderful reminder of the creative power that emanates from the God of love). No, the chief way in which man and woman act out an eternal truth is in their coming together. God so loved the world that He created men with free will, freedom of choice; but He longs for them to come to Him, and constantly works towards drawing them to Him. The purpose of creation—indeed, we could say the whole point of the Kingdom—is for God to be all, in all, and that involves the uniting of the Lord Jesus Christ with his own, his true Bride.

To help us in our faith and hope, the wise Father needs to explain to us what will be the ecstasy and fulfilment of that ultimate, glorious, eternal coming together. The only way this could be done is by using human terms of reference, pale and shadowy though they may be. Christ had to learn his destiny too, and, if we may speak of him without disrespect, as an unmarried man he had to be taught about the joy that was being set before him, so that he could endure until that day came. One who is not married has not experienced this consummation; they need to be told about it. And so we have the Song of Solomon, which was written for Jesus as well as for us, depicting what it would actually be like to be with the immortalised Bride.

The excitement and bliss of their great coming together, described so vividly, has been preceded by a prolonged absence, mourned by both parties,

but providing a sense of anticipation which heightens the joy of their eventual union. The Bridegroom was

afflicted for the Bride; he purchased her with his blood. Then the Nobleman went into a far country, to prepare a place for his own, and to receive for himself a kingdom, that Kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. In his absence he had also—paradoxically—still been here, in the person of his angel, in the midst of us, where two or three were gathered in his name, our unseen yokefellow and companion, as well as our advocate with the Father.

When a couple marry, there is the wonder and excitement of getting to know their new spouse in intimate ways which were not possible before the nuptials. Of course the Lord Jesus Christ knows us now—he calls us all by name, the very hairs of our head are all numbered, and all of our names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. But in the Kingdom our Lord will experience being with us, in our incorruptible form, for we shall be like him. He will have fashioned us anew, that we shall be like unto his glorious body. So in the Song, to express this, there is the theme of the Bridegroom exulting in the physical presence of his sanctified Bride, who is described as being fairest among women, without spot and undefiled. She is the only one of her mother, the true Ecclesia, comely as Jerusalem. Her new husband enumerates the various members of her multitudinous Body, each one beautiful and perfect and cherished, for all the saints are individuals to him and to his Father. He voices his profound love for her, his delight in her, echoing the eternal love that the Almighty has for His “peculiar treasure”, all of whom are graven on the palms of His hands. The Bridegroom tells his dove that she has ravished his heart—he is enraptured with her! He describes the look of love that she gives him, and is overwhelmed by it. These are the ways in which the inspired Word articulates the profound heights of tenderness and joy with which the Lord Jesus Christ will be at one with his people, and we should be thankful for it.