

# The Companions as the Bride of the Lord

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon explores the profound relationship between God and His people, portraying the Church as the Bride of Christ called to reflect His glory and purpose in the world.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 54:5, Isaiah 62:5, Jeremiah 3:14, Jeremiah 31:31

**Topics:** "The Bride of Christ", "Companionship with God"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound relationship between God and His people, portraying the Church as the Bride of Christ. He reflects on the Old Testament's depiction of Israel as God's bride, highlighting God's everlasting love and the disappointment caused by Israel's unfaithfulness. The sermon transitions to the New Testament, where the Church is presented as the new bride, called to reveal God's glory and expand His family. Sparks urges believers to embrace their identity as companions of Christ, fulfilling their purpose for His pleasure and glory. He concludes with a call to remain faithful and not miss the heavenly calling that God has for each believer.

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## Transcript

(Earlier we said that we should be dealing with the Bride more fully later. We come now to a consideration of this matter.)

"For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name: and the Holy One of Israel is thy redeemer" (Isaiah 54:5).

"For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee" (Isaiah 62:5).

"Return, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am a husband unto you" (Jeremiah 3:14).

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 31:31,32).

"Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the Lord which he loveth, and hath married the daughter of a strange god" (Malachi 2:11).

That is how the Old Testament finishes. Now we will see how the New Testament finishes.

"Let us rejoice and be exceedingly glad, and let us give the glory unto him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready" (Revelation 19:7).

"And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2).

Revelation 21:9 - 22:21.

[We have been seeing what God is doing particularly in the dispensation in which we live. He is constituting a new, heavenly, spiritual Israel. We have seen the failure of the old Israel and the necessity for God to set it aside, but, at the same time, the bringing in of His new heavenly Israel. This is what is called the 'heavenly calling', and we are told that we are called to be 'companions of the heavenly calling', and 'companions of Christ in the heavenly calling'.

We have seen how the New Testament takes over the ideas of the Old Testament and translates them into spiritual meaning. The tides of the old Israel are redeemed and brought over to the new, because, although God may have to give up an instrument that He raises up, He never gives up His thought. He will never give up His intention, and if He cannot realize His purpose in one instrument, He will do so in another.

We have seen that the old Israel was called 'God's family', the 'Lord's house', 'God's heir for His inheritance', 'God's flock' - they were God's sheep - and all these titles are taken up and brought into the New Testament Church. The new heavenly Israel is God's family, God's children, God's house - "Whose house are we" (Hebrews 3:6) - "Heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17), God's flock - "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11).]

Well, now we come to a little fuller consideration of the Bride.

Israel, as we have seen from those various Scriptures, was called God's bride. It says that He was a husband to Israel. You will notice that although Israel was a man literally, it is very often spoken of in the feminine. It is not 'he' but 'she', and it was 'she' who failed God as a wife. He purchased Israel with precious blood to be His bride. We have seen that the Passover was a marriage covenant, and Jeremiah, in chapter 31, says that when God brought Israel out of Egypt, He took her by the hand and became a husband to her. The blood of the Passover lamb was the blood of a covenant of marriage between the Lord and Israel. He betrothed Israel unto Himself that night, and thus she was purchased with His blood.

Very little need be said to those who know the Old Testament about God's love for Israel. It is the most amazing thing in history. When you think of what Israel was, and read the history of those people from their own side, it is the most wonderful thing to hear the Lord saying: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3). God has never given up that love - it is still an everlasting love, but there is a sob in the heart of God. It is a disappointed love.

However, the Old Testament is a wonderful revelation of God's love for Israel: the love of the whole heart of God for a bride. How that love was expressed! See the wonderful protection that the Lord provided for Israel! He protected her all the way along. He provided food and raiment and it says that He led her safely. The tender, providing, protecting love of God is everywhere in the Old Testament.

What was God's thought and intention in betrothing Israel unto Himself? It was that she might be to His pleasure. The Lord took pleasure in Israel, had brought her into being for His own pleasure, to bring satisfaction to His own heart.

Of course, it is a deep mystery why the all-sufficient God should want something for His pleasure. He who possessed all things and really had need of nothing is nevertheless revealed as One who created a people for His pleasure. You see, He created all things for His pleasure. He created the world for His pleasure. He created all that is good in the world for His pleasure. He created man for His pleasure. And all that went away from Him. He was disappointed in it all, so He said: 'I will begin again', and He raised up Israel. His idea was that Israel would satisfy Him where everything else had disappointed Him. The bride was for the Bridegroom's pleasure.

Then, again, Israel was raised up to be the self-revelation of the Lord. God intended to reveal Himself to the whole universe through Israel, to show what kind of a husband He is. Of course, we cannot bring this down to everyday life now, but sometimes you are able to see by the wife herself what kind of husband she has. As you look at her, see how she is provided for and cared for, you are able to say: 'She must have a wonderful husband!' Well, that is what a wife is for!

The divine thought is just that. God wanted to reveal to this whole universe what a wonderful God He is in terms of a husband to Israel. Israel has been raised up, in New Testament language, to "show forth the excellencies of him who called (her) out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

Then Israel was brought into this relationship of the wife of the Lord for the purpose of His increase, His expansion. So to speak, many others outside Israel were to be born unto the Lord through Israel. His family was to expand by means of Israel: "Nations shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising" (Isaiah 60:3). Nations were to be born unto the Lord, and the bride was to be for the Lord's own expansion. These were the things that the prophets said.

Then, last of all - mystery of mysteries! - it was a matter of companionship. None of us can understand why the Lord wanted a companion. It is possible to be a wife and not be a companion. Many a wife is not a real companion to her husband. He does not find her a companion. She is a lot of things, but just that one thing is lacking - real companionship. Perhaps that is the reason for the tragedy of so many broken marriages today. (Of course, it works the other way as well, but companionship is the highest thought in this relationship.) The Lord raised up Israel to be His companion.

It is easy to see how Israel faded in all these matters. The time came when the Lord could no longer take pleasure in her, when she no longer revealed to the world what kind of God He is but turned to other gods, and refused to fulfil the world mission for which she had been brought into union with God. All this resulted in God losing His companion, and the Old Testament closes on that painful note. A horrible thing has happened in Israel. She has left the Lord, her Husband, and gone after 'other lovers'.

So, to the Lord, Israel died. As a nation she is dead to the Lord, "dead while she liveth". The Lord could never marry another while she was alive; that was contrary to His own law. She died, so He could take another wife. You will remember Paul's own words about this: that we are married to the Lord. When this former bride died, God brought in another, a new bride.

The New Testament has a lot to say, as you know, about this new bride. The Lord Jesus in the Gospels calls Himself the Bridegroom. You will remember the parable of the virgins, when the cry went forth:

"Behold, the bridegroom!" (Matthew 25:6). Then we have read these passages in the Book of Revelation about the bride, the Lamb's wife. Some of you are recalling Paul's words in his Letter to the Ephesians: "Christ also loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her... that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Ephesians 5:25,27), and that follows this: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church..."

Well, I think the fact is established, but we have to bring back all those features of this relationship. Why are we joined to the Lord? Why are we what are called Christians? For if we are New Testament Christians we are joined to the Lord in a covenant of marriage. It is "the Church of God, which he purchased with his own Blood" (Acts 20:28).

How many of you go to the Lord's Table at any time? It goes by different names - the Lord's Table, the Lord's Supper, the Holy Communion, and so on. It does not matter so much what you call it, but what you mean by it. Do you know that every time you go to the Lord's Table, His meaning in that is that you are putting your hand to the covenant again and are saying: 'I stand by my marriage relationship to the Lord. This loaf means that I am one flesh with Christ.' We are one body in Him, and His very Body is represented by that loaf. The marriage ordinance of God at the beginning was: "They shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Jesus said: "This (loaf) is my body" (Matthew 26:2,6). When we take the loaf we are meant to be saying: 'I am one body with Christ.' It is the marriage relationship.

When we take the cup, symbolic of His Blood, we say two things: 'I share one life with Him. His life is my life, and that was made by a covenant in His Blood.' That is the deep meaning of the Table of the Lord. Is that what we mean every time we go to it? It is the bride saying: 'I stand by the covenant, I am one with my Lord.'

We often sing: "Jesus, my Shepherd, Husband, Friend", and that is the nature of our union with Him. That is really what it means to be a Christian. May our Christianity be redeemed from anything less than that!

But when the relationship has been established in His Blood, then its purpose begins. We are His for His Pleasure and not our own. He has made us for His pleasure: "Working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight" (Hebrews 13:21) ... "To the end that we should be unto the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:12) ... "that ye may shew forth the excellencies of him" (I Peter 2:9).

This compasses the Christian life. This is why He has drawn us with the bands of love and the reason for our union with Christ: that we should be unto His pleasure, that He may take pleasure in us. The time is coming when He will look at His bride and then He will say 'She is a glorious bride'. He has brought us to Himself for that very purpose: to reveal Himself by means of us.

Perhaps our heads and our hearts are going down now. What a poor revelation we are of our Lord! We are making a terrible mess of this business of revealing Christ, but He is taking great pains with us. Truly it is not easy, and He does not make it so. It seems that so often He puts us into difficult positions in order that we may show forth His glory.

Paul was given "a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me" (II Corinthians 12:7). Do you know what it is to have a thorn in the flesh and a messenger of Satan always buffeting you? Paul says that he went to the Lord three times about this. I do not know whether he meant literally three times, but I think he meant: 'I went to the Lord again, and again, and again! I asked the Lord to remove this thorn and to destroy this messenger of Satan, but He said unto me: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is

made perfect in weakness" (II Corinthians 12:9).

That is strange sovereignty and providence of God! It seems that He sometimes puts difficulties into our lives, and makes it hard for us, and then, in the grace that He shows, we magnify Him. No one knows what Paul's 'thorn' was. A lot of people have had a guess at it, and some think they know what it was, but I do not think anyone really does know. It was evidently something that people could see, and they would say: 'My word, Paul has a hard time with that. I am very glad the Lord has not called me to go that way! That poor man does know what suffering means, but how marvellous is the grace of God in him! Look at his victorious spirit! My, the grace of God in that man is a wonderful thing!' And Paul says: "And they glorified God in me" (Galatians 1:24). Yes, for the self-revelation of the Lord the Church is a suffering Church. This wife of the Lord is a suffering wife, but the revelation of His grace is a wonderful thing.

Then what about His increase through the Church? We have already said much about this. The Lord, through His Church, wants to bring many, many into the Kingdom. Paul said: "The gospel... which was preached in all creation under heaven" (Colossians 1:23), and Peter said: "The Lord... not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9). The Lord would have all men saved, and He has never told His Church to go and pick out one here and one there and say: 'You are the elect. Come out and leave the others.' No, He said: 'Preach the Gospel in all the nations'. Leave the rest with Him!

That is the world mission of the new Israel. But do not just view it in a general way. Get down to it tomorrow morning and make this your personal business: to see if by any means you may be able to bring souls into the Kingdom.

When we have said all that, we come to this supreme thing: He has joined us to Himself to be His companions. That has been our note right through. "We are become companions of Christ" ... "Wherefore, holy brethren, companions of a heavenly calling."

I confess that I do not understand this: that the Lord should want us as His friends, not just officially related to Him, but related to Him as friends. To be a friend of the Lord! I can only say to you: Let us take that word and continually ask ourselves 'How would a friend act in this matter? How would a friend decide? I am called to be the Lord's friend. I must not fail Him in friendship. I must not let Him down. He counts upon me to be His friend.' That is the highest and most sacred part of the whole relationship.

I despair of ever getting over to you what I see in this matter! After all this time, I have not yet touched upon the new Jerusalem! It is a very significant thing that the new Jerusalem is called 'a bride'. The angel said to John: "Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb", and John might have said: 'Now, let us go and see this wonderful woman.' ... "And (he) shewed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." The bride is the city, and the city is the bride. And then you have to read the whole description of the city in Revelation 21 and 22 in order to know what the bride is going to be like. See all the precious stones! This is the preciousness of the Lord Jesus in manifold expression. Peter said: "For you therefore which believe is the preciousness" (I Peter 2:7). There are "all manner of precious stones." It is what Jesus is in His real character revealed in the bride, the city.

Stop thinking about a literal city. This is all a symbolic representation of Christ's bride. All these glories of the city are only the glories of Christ expressed at last in His bride. "He shewed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: her light was like unto a stone most precious." It was shining through all these gems.

All this is what was meant by the Apostle when he said: "That he might present the church to himself a glorious church" ... "a glorious church". The city is the revelation of His manifold glories, and the city is the bride.

Now I have only to close with this final word. These are all very beautiful and wonderful ideas. They are glorious thoughts, but it is just unto this that the Lord has called us. This is the heavenly calling. It is unto this that He wants us to be companions: 'Companions of a heavenly calling' because 'Companions of Christ'.

One hesitates to strike a note that might sound a bit depressing, but be reminded that this great Letter to the Hebrews has many 'ifs' in it. "Whose house are we, if we hold fast our boldness" (Hebrews 3:6) ... "We are become companions of Christ if we hold fast". This Letter is just full of warnings and strong exhortations, and I do not believe that it was written to non-Christians. All the evidences in it are that it was written to true Christians. Therefore, it was saying to them: 'Don't miss your inheritance. Don't fail of your heavenly calling. Do not fail to be true companions of Christ. Do not accept anything less than God's best and His highest.' You can be Christians having much less than God intended. You notice that when the description of the city has been given, it says: "Blessed are they... that may have the right to come in" (Revelation 22:14). There are nations that will not get in. They will walk in the light thereof, but will not be inside. Make sure that you are of this bride. Do not fail the Lord as Israel failed Him.

"Let us... press on to full growth" (Hebrews 6:1 - R.V. margin).

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