

Christ the Best Husband: Or an Earnest Invitation to Young Women to come and See Christ. Preached to a Society of Young Women, in Fetter-Lane.

Psalm 14:10-11 Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear: Forget also thine own people, and thy father's house: So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty, for he is thy Lord, and worship thou him.

This psalm is called the song of loves, the most pure and spiritual, the most ear and delightful loves; namely, those which are between Christ the beloved, and his church, which is his spouse; wherein is set forth, first, the Lord Jesus Christ in regard of his majesty, power, and divinity, his truth, meekness and equity: And then the spouse is set forth, in regard of her ornaments, companions, attendants and posterity; and both in regard of their comeliness and beauty. After the description of Christ, an invitation to his espousals, is given the children of men, called by the name of daughter; and therefore, particularly applicable unto you, my dear sisters, as being the daughters of men, yet not so as excluding the sons of men.

I shall now, therefore, consider the words, as spoken to you in particular, and containing this doctrine;

That the Lord Jesus Christ doth invite the daughters of men to be his spouse; and is exceeding desirous of their beauty; who, forgetting their people and father's house, do hearken, consider and incline to his invitation, and join themselves to him in this relation.

I shall show,

I. How Christ doth espouse himself unto the children, but, more especially, unto the daughters of men.

The Lord Jesus Christ, doth espouse himself unto the children of men, in the world, but the public solemnization of the marriage, is reserved until the last day; when his spouse shall be brought forth to him, in white robes, and a raiment of perfect righteousness, more rich and curious, my dear sisters, than any of your needle-work; and the marriage feast will be kept in his Father's house, in heaven, when they shall be received into the nearest and closest embraces of his love. The marriage knot is tied here, in which are included four things:

First; Mutual Choice,
Secondly, Mutual Affection,
Thirdly, Mutual Union,
Fourthly, Mutual Obligation.

FIRST, my dear sisters, there is a MUTUAL CHOICE, which is not only in Christ, as Mediator, but also by Christ as the eternal Son of God, yea, God himself; notwithstanding all that the polite Arians and Socinians say to the contrary. The Lord Jesus Christ, my dear sisters, doth choose you merely by his free grace; it is freely of his own mercy, that he brings you into the marriage covenant: You, who have so grievously offended him, yet, the Lord Jesus Christ hath chosen you; you did not, you would not have chosen him; but when once, my dear sisters, he hath chosen you, then, and not till then, you make choice of him for your Lord and Husband.

The Lord Jesus Christ when he first comes to you, finds you full of sin and pollution; you are deformed, defiled, enslaved, poor, miserable and wretched, very despicable and loathsome, by reason of sin; and he maketh choice of you, not because of your holiness, nor of your beauty, nor of your being qualified for them; no, the Lord Jesus Christ puts these qualifications upon you, as may make you meet for his embrace; and you are drawn to make choice of the Lord Jesus Christ because he first chose you.

SECONDLY, In this espousal of yours, my dear sisters, there is a MUTUAL AFFECTION; this doth accompany the choice. Your hearts are drawn out after Christ; your souls pant and long for him; you cannot be at rest until you are engaged to this Jesus: You are ready to cry out continually, none but Christ, none but Christ: this is the language of your hearts, if you are truly sensible of your need of him. The more acquaintance you have of this Lord Jesus, the more pleased you are with your choice, and the more your affections are drawn towards him. And where can you place your affections better than upon that Jesus who shed his blood for your sakes?

Surely he deserves both your loves and affections: Go on, go on, my dear

sisters, that your affections may grow stronger and stronger.

THIRDLY, There is not only mutual choice, and mutual affection, but likewise MUTUAL UNION: And here doth the marriage lie chiefly, in this union; Christ and souls are contracted, and the knot is tied so fast, that neither men on earth, how great soever they be, nor devils in hell, though they should combine all their wrath and rage together, still they cannot dissolve, they cannot untie it; no, my dear sisters, it is indissoluble, for the union is, by the spirit, on Christ's part, and by faith on yours: By the spirit, Christ doth lay hold on you; and by faith, you do lay hold on him; and thus the match is made; Christ becomes yours, his person, portion, and all his benefits are yours; and you become Christ's, your persons, your hearts, and all that you have is resigned up unto him, and O that they may be so more and more.

FOURTHLY, There is a MUTUAL OBLIGATION between Christ and his spouse. Christ obliges himself to love you here, he will not, indeed he never will leave you, he will protect you from the malice of the Pharisees of this generation, he will provide for you in all difficulties; he will live with you here, and at last he will take you to himself, to live with him forever. And you are engaged to him to be loving, loyal, faithful, obedient; and you are to stick close to him as long as you live; and then you will find yourselves to be married to the best advantage, both for soul and body, for time and for eternity.

II. Christ doth invite all of you to be his spouse.

And it on this account that he sends forth his ministers to preach. It is this, that makes me thus come among you; that you would accept of this invitation, to which, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I do call and entreat you to take him, on his own terms. He calls all of you, my sisters, whether elder or younger, whether married or unmarried, of higher degree, or of the meanest quality, the poorest servants, yea, the rabble of this world, as the world calls you, who are willing to be espoused unto the Lord Jesus Christ. I say, the poor are as welcome to be Christ's spouse as those that are rich. He regardeth not the rich more than the poor; he chose a mean virgin, espoused to a carpenter, to be his mother; and he chooseth and calleth all such to be his spouse; then be not discouraged at your being despised in the world; for if you are but loved by Christ, and espoused to him, it will be an over-sufficiency for all the trouble that you have met with here.

III. Those who would be espoused unto Christ, must hearken, consider, and incline to his invitation, and forget even their father's house.

Such as would be espoused unto Christ must hearken. "Hearken, O daughter." Many amongst you, my sisters, stop their ears against the calls of the gospel; they shut their ears like the deaf adder, which will not hearken unto the voice of the charmer, though he charm never so wisely. You will not hearken unto the invitations of Christ; you can hearken unto the vanities of the world, and be delighted with the espousals of the world, but never think or are delighted with the espousals of Christ.

It was by the ear, that the temptation of sin was received by the first man, when he departed from God; and by the ear, the invitation to be Christ's spouse must be received, before the heart will be opened to receive Jesus Christ in this conjugal relation.

If you would, my dear sisters, be espoused to Christ, you must consider Christ's invitation. It is not a slight or bare hearing of Christ's invitation, which will be of any service to you, or make up the match between Christ and your souls; no, you must receive Christ in the heart; you must consider the thing itself, the advantages of it, the difference between Christ's invitations and the devil's temptations, or any of the world's proffers.

Those who would be espoused to Christ, must be inclined to accept of Christ's invitation. "Hearken, O daughter, consider and incline thine ear." This is to incline your hearts: You must consent with your wills; there must be a compliance to the motion of Christ, and you must have desires after Christ, and then your hearts will say, "Lord, let us be thy spouse, and be thou our beloved."

You must likewise forget your father's house. "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and forget thy father's house." You are not here to cast off

all affections unto natural relations; but you must forget all relations,

so as to be ready to forgo all their favor, when it standeth in competition with that of the Lord Jesus Christ: and do not let your carnal friends and relations hinder you from closing with, and espousing the Lord Jesus. I earnestly beseech you to suffer the loss of any thing, rather than to lose his favors; you must indeed forget your own people, that is, you must forget all your evil customs which you have learned in your father's house, and forsake all your vain conversation, your reading of plays, novels, or romances; and you must keep from learning to sing the songs of the drunkard; for Christ, if you are his spouse, hath redeemed you.

Such of you, my dear sisters, as are espoused to the Lord Jesus Christ are very beautiful. I do not mean in respect of your bodies; you may have less of external comeliness than others, in respect of your bodies, but as to your souls you will exceed in beauty, not so much in the eyes of man, as in the eyes of God; such have the most beautiful image of God stamped upon them; none in the world beside them, have the least spark of spiritual beauty. Such as are not married to Christ, are unregenerated, they are not born again, nor brought from sin unto God, which must be done before you be espoused to Christ.

And the Lord Jesus Christ desireth to see this beauty in his spouse, for he cries out, "O my dove, thou art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely." He calleth his spouse his love, being the dear object of his love; and he admireth her loveliness; he repeats it twice in one verse, "Behold thou art fair, my love, behold thou art fair." Thus you see he describes their beauty. And then, my sisters, we have wonderful expression of Christ to his spouse, "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse, thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck." Thus you see how pleased the Lord Jesus Christ is with his spouse; and will not you, therefore, be espoused unto the Lord Jesus? I offer Jesus Christ to all of you; if you have been never so notorious for sin, if you have been as great a harlot as Mary Magdalen was, when once you are espoused to Christ, you shall be forgiven. Therefore be not discouraged, at whatever slights and contempts the world may pass upon you, but come and join yourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, and all your sins shall be washed away in his blood; and when once you are espoused to Jesus, you are disjoined from sin, you are born again. You are now, as it were, espoused unto sin; sin is your husband, and you are too fond of it, but when once you are married to Christ, when you are born again, then you may be said to die unto sin; but till then, sin liveth in your affections; therefore, my sisters, give sin its death-wound in your hearts; you have been called by the word time after time, and it has had no effect upon you; but when you are espoused unto the Lord Jesus Christ, then you will be brought to him by his Spirit: You will then lay hold on him by faith, his Spirit will draw you unto himself; he will make you to be willing in the day of his power; he will give you faith in him. Faith is the hand of the soul which layeth hold on Christ; therefore do not rest contented till you have this grace of faith wrought in you with power; do not be contented till you have received the Lord Jesus Christ.

Embrace Christ in the arms of your dearest love; then you love the Lord Jesus Christ with sincerity, when you love and esteem him before father, mother, or all the delights and pleasures of this life, but if you do delight in any thing that this world can produce, more than in the Lord Jesus Christ, you have not true love to him.

If you are espoused to Christ, you have acquaintance and converse with him; you will endeavor to promote his interest, and advance his name in the world; when others are going to the polite and fashionable diversions of life, you will be laboring to bring honor to the Lord Jesus Christ; you will commend your beloved above all other beloveds, and endeavor to bring others into love to him. Can you, my dear sisters, who are now assembled to worship God, show such evidence of your espousals unto the Lord Jesus Christ? O! how joyful, how comfortable an estate is this! Surely this is a marriage worth seeking after; this is the only desirable marriage, and the Lord Jesus Christ is the only lover that is worth seeking after.

Now, my dear sisters, I shall speak a few words to those of you who have not yet espoused yourselves to the Lord Jesus. It is a great sin, and surely you highly affront the Lord that bought you. It is likewise your

folly to refuse and neglect the gracious proffers of being the spouse of Christ; hereby you forfeit all that love which he would bestow upon you; hereby you choose rags before robes, dross before gold, pebbles before jewels, built before a pardon, wounds before healing, defilement before cleansing, deformity before comeliness, trouble before peace, slavery before liberty, the service of the devil before the service of Christ. Hereby you choose dishonor before a crown, death before life, hell before heaven, eternal misery and torment before everlasting joy and glory. And need there a further evidence of your folly and madness, in refusing and neglecting Christ to be your spouse.

My dear sisters, I should exceed the limits of your time, should I particularize all the advantages which you would obtain by being espoused to the Lord Jesus. This is your wisdom; they are foolish virgins who refuse; but you are the wise virgins who have accepted of the Lord Jesus Christ, and have disposed of yourselves to him; you have made the wisest choice; and however the blind world may deem you fools, and despise you as being methodically mad, yet you are wise in the esteem of God, and will, one day, appear so in the esteem of them that now despise you. It is your glory that you are espoused unto the Lord Jesus; and therefore glory is your espousal; glory not in yourselves, but in the Lord who hath thus freely and graciously bestowed these favors upon you. It is your safety to be espoused unto the Lord Jesus Christ, he will protect and defend you even from sin and Satan, and eternal ruin; and therefore thus far you are safe; he hath a regard for you in times of danger from men, and these times of danger seem to be hastening; it is now arising as a black cloud no bigger than a man's hand, and by and by it will overspread the heavens, and when it is full it will burst; but if you are espoused to Christ, you are safe.

Now, my dear sisters, I shall conclude with an earnest exhortation to high and low, rich and poor, one with another, to be espoused unto Christ.

Let me speak unto you, young women, who are not yet espoused unto Christ, in an especial manner. It may be to satisfy your curiosity, has brought many of you here; though, perhaps, this may be the time when you shall be brought home to embrace the Lord Jesus, and be espoused to him. And O, that I may persuade you, by his Spirit, to espouse yourselves unto the Lord of life.

And if you are but brought to close with the Lord Jesus Christ, I shall attain my end, and then both you and I shall rejoice that I preached this sermon to you.

Come virgins, will you give me leave to be a suitor unto you, not in my own name, but in the name of the Lord? O! that I may prevail with you for your affections, and persuade you to give them unto Christ! May I be instrumental of bringing your souls unto Christ! May I be instrumental to join you and Christ together this day!

Be not coy (bashful, shy; showing reluctance to make a definite commitment), as some of you possibly are in other loves: modesty and the virgin blush may very well come you, when proposals of another kind are made unto you; but here coyness is filly, and backwardness to accept of this motion, is shame: you have ten thousand times more reason to blush at the refusal of Christ for your beloved, than at the acceptance; when otherwise the devil and sin would ravish your virgin affections. Never had you a better motion made to you; never was such a match proffered to you as this, of being matched and espoused unto the Lord Jesus Christ.

Consider who the Lord Jesus is, whom you are invited to espouse yourselves unto; he is the best husband; there is none comparable to Jesus Christ.

Do you desire one that is great? He is of the highest dignity, he is the glory of heaven, the darling of eternity, admired by angels, dreaded by devils, and adored by saints. For you to be espoused to so great a king, what honor will you have by this espousal?

Do you desire one that is rich? None is comparable to Christ, the fullness of the earth belongs to him. If you be espoused to Christ, you shall share in his unsearchable riches; you shall receive of his fullness, even grace for grace here, and you shall hereafter be admitted to glory,

and shall live with this Jesus to all eternity.

Do you desire one that is wise? There is none comparable to Christ for wisdom. His knowledge is infinite, and his wisdom is correspondent thereto. And if you are espoused to Christ, he will guide and counsel you, and make

you wise unto salvation.

Do you desire one that is potent, who may defend you against your enemies, and all the insults and reproaches of the Pharisees of this generation? There is none that can equal Christ in power; for the Lord Jesus Christ hath all power.

Do you desire one that is good? There is none like unto Christ in this regard; others may have some goodness, but it is imperfect; Christ's goodness is complete and perfect, he is full of goodness and in him dwelleth no evil.

Do you desire one that is beautiful? His eyes are most sparkling, his looks and glances of love are ravishing, his smiles are most delightful and refreshing unto the soul: Christ is the most lovely person of all others in the world.

Do you desire one that can love you? None can love you like Christ: His love, my dear sisters, is incomprehensible; his love passeth all other loves: The love of the Lord Jesus is first, without beginning; his love is free without any motive; his love is great without any measure; his love is constant without any change, and his love is everlasting.

It was the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, my dear sisters, which brought him down from heaven; and which veiled his divinity in a human soul and body; for he is God over all blessed for ever: It was love that made him subject to hunger, thirst and sorrow; he was humbled, even unto death for you; for you who are espoused to him, he underwent the painful, shameful and ignominious death of the cross: and can you, my sisters, hear this, and not be concerned to think that the blessed Jesus underwent all this for such sinful creatures as you and I are? And when out of love he had finished the redemption on earth, as to what was needful for satisfaction; it was his love that carried him back to heaven, where he was before, that he might make application of what he had purchased, that there he might make intercession for those whom he had redeemed, and prepare a place for them, even glorious mansions with himself, in the house not made with hands, which is eternal in the heavens. It is out of love that he sendeth such tokens to his people from heaven to earth, which he conveyeth through his ordinances, by his Spirit unto them. Surely then none is so deserving as the Lord Jesus Christ for you to espouse yourselves unto: if you be espoused unto Christ he is yours, all that he is, all that he hath; you shall have his heart, and share in the choicest expressions of his dearest love.

The Lord Jesus Christ, my dear sisters, doth beseech you to be his spouse. We ministers have a commission from the Lord Jesus Christ to invite you, in his name, unto this very thing; and Christ's invitations are real; general; frequent; earnest; free.

Christ's invitations of you, to be his spouse, are REAL: and as the thing is real, so you, my dear sisters, are really invited unto it. The Lord doth not mock and dissemble with you, as some pretending lovers, who dissemble love unto virgins, until they have gained their affections, and then falsely and basely relinquish them, never really intending either to espouse, or marry them: but the Lord doth really intend the thing, in his invitations of you; he never cast off any whose consent and affections he had gained. Again,

Christ's invitations of you, my dear sisters, are GENERAL. All of you are invited, none of you are excluded; all sorts of sinners are invited; the most vile and abominable sinners, the most notorious transgressors are invited to be Christ's spouse, and shall be as welcome as any unto the embraces of his love.

Christ's invitations of you are FREQUENT: Jesus Christ calls on you frequently; he hath waited on you time after time, one year after another; and he doth now invite you, by me this day, to come unto Him. Do not slight this invitation, but receive it with joy and thankfulness. Come, I beseech you, to this Jesus, who thus, invites you to be his spouse. Again,

Christ's invitations to be his spouse are EARNEST: he doth call upon you, and not only call, but call earnestly too; yea, he useth many arguments with you; he will press you to come unto him; he is loth (loathe) to take any denial from you: he knocks, and knocks hard at the door of your hearts for entertainment; and surely you will not deny the Lord of life and glory who died for you, and gave himself for you: O my dear sisters, let this be the evening of your espousals to the Lord Jesus Christ.

He invites you FREELY to be his spouse, for all his invitations are free; he doth not expect a portion with you, as worldly lovers do; He wants nothing of you: nay, you must have nothing, if you be espoused unto the Lord Jesus Christ. If you be poor, miserable, blind, naked, Jesus Christ will supply all these defects of his own free mercy; he will fill and supply you with all things out of his treasury; he will make you meet for himself; he will prepare you to live with him for ever.

Consider, if you be once espoused unto Christ, if once joined in this relation, you shall never be separated from him; neither men nor devils shall be able to separate you: none, none, shall disjoin you; and when death doth break all other bonds, it shall not break the conjugal bond between you and Christ, but bring you unto the most full and everlasting possession of your beloved.

And what do you now say, young women? Shall I have a grant for my master, or be sent away with a repulse and refusal; no, I cannot carry such a message to my master; I hope better things of you, my sisters, and things which accompany salvation: methinks by this time ye should begin to have a mind unto Jesus Christ; you look as if you did desire; you hearken as if you would consent. What do you say? Shall the match be made up this evening between Christ and your souls? O that I may be instrumental in joining your hands, or rather your hearts together: O that I may be instrumental to tie that knot, which never can be unloosed.

Some marry in haste, and repent at leisure; but if you were once espoused unto Jesus Christ, you would never repent; nothing would grieve you, but that you were not joined to him sooner; and you would not be disjoined again for all the world.

Shall this be the day of your espousals? Some of you have stayed a long time; and will you defer any longer? If you will not now, perhaps you may never have another opportunity; this may be the last time of asking; and therefore it is dangerous to refuse; some of you are very young, too young for other espousals; but none of you, by dear sisters, are too young to be espoused unto the Lord Jesus Christ: in other espousals, you must have the consent of your parents; but in this you are at your own disposal; you may give, and ought to match yourselves to Christ, whether parents do consent or not.

But if any of you should ask, what you must do that you may be espoused unto Christ? You must be sensible of your need of being espoused to him, and until you are sensible of your need of the Lord Jesus Christ, you cannot be espoused to him: You must have desires after this Jesus, and seek unto him for an interest in him, you must cry nightly unto him to espouse you to himself; put off the filthiness of sin and all its defilements; and then, my sisters, put on the white raiment, and clean garments, which Christ hath provided for you, the robes of his righteousness; in these garments you shall be beautiful; and in these garments you shall be accepted: you must have the wedding garment on; you must put off all your own good works, for they will be but a means to keep you from Christ; no, you must come as not having your own righteousness, which is of the law, but you must have the righteousness of Christ. Therefore, come unto the Lord Jesus Christ, and he will give it to you; he will not send you away without it. Receive him upon his own terms, and he is yours forever: O devote yourselves to him, soul and body, and all, to be his for ever; and Christ will be yours and then happy, happy you, that ever you were born! But if any of you die before this espousal unto the Lord Jesus Christ, then woe, woe, unto you, that ever you had a being in life; but if you go to Christ you shall be espoused unto the Lord Jesus: though your sins have been never so great, yea, the blood of Christ will cleanse you from them; the marriage covenant between Christ and your souls will dissolve all your sins; you will then be weary of your old ways, for all things will become new in your souls.

Now, my dear sisters, I shall conclude by just speaking a word or two to those of you, who are already espoused unto the Lord Jesus Christ.

O admire, admire the rich and free grace, which hath brought you to this relation: Is not this an instance of the greatest of love, that you should be the spouse of the Lord Jesus Christ? You that had no beauty, you that had no comeliness, that was full of sin, that He should embrace such as you and I are; that we should be taken into the embrace of this Lord Jesus. O infinite condescending kindness! O amazing love! Reverence,

reverence, I beseech you, this Lord Jesus Christ.

He is you Lord, and you must reverence him, love and be faithful unto him, be subject to him, and careful to please him in every thing; endeavor to keep up a daily communion with him; look, long and prepare for Christ's second appearance, when the nuptials between you shall be solemnized, and you live with him in mansions of everlasting joys, where you shall love and live with this king of glory for ever and ever.

I know not how to conclude; methinks I could speak to you till midnight, if it would bring you unto the Lord Jesus Christ, and make you be espoused to him, for indeed, that will be the espousal which will turn to the greatest advantage, as you will find by experience, if you will but make the trial; and that you may do so, my prayers and my constant endeavor shall be used.

I will, my dear sisters, spend and be spent for you, and by the assistance of God, will persevere in this that I have begun; and as many of you may have opportunity some evening in the week, without breaking in on the business of life; I shall therefore, my sisters, either be here, or where you shall be publicly acquainted with: I will not mind being reproached or despised: the men of this world may use what language they please; they may say I am a Methodist. Indeed, my sisters, I am resolved, by the grace of God, to use all methods I can, to pluck you from Satan, that you may be as brands plucked from the burning fire: this shall be my method, which I hope will be the means of effectually having your precious and immortal souls.

And if I am the instrument of this, I shall rejoice, yea, and I will rejoice in spite of what men, or devils, can say or do to the contrary: and may the Lord Jesus Christ direct, and assist me at all times, to act what will be most for his glory, and the welfare of your souls: and may you all say a hearty Amen thereto.

"Now the Lord Jesus Christ, who is God over all, blessed for ever, assist and watch over you, keep you from all evil and sin here, and present you before his Father faultless at the great day of account! To this Lord Jesus Christ, the Father, and the blessed Spirit, three persons and but one eternal and invisible God, be ascribed all honor, power, glory, might, majesty and dominion, now, henceforth, and for ever more. Amen, Amen."

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with you all, to comfort under, and deliver you from tribulation; to preserve you to your respective place of abode; and when there, to keep you in his fear, that you may live to his glory; that to live may be Christ's, and to die by your eternal gain; so that you may live with him through eternal ages, and sing Hallelujahs to him for ever. Amen."