

La H 373 SUBSTANCE OF A SERMON PREACHED BY MR. C. HEMINGTON, AT  
GOWER STREET CHAPEL, LONDON, ON SUNDAY MORNING, 11TH  
OCTOBER, 1891

Text: "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready" (Rev.xix.7).

It is more the last clause of this verse than the whole of it which is upon my mind to speak from - "And His wife hath made herself ready." It reminds us of the all-important question which we have in one of our hymns: "Art thou ready to meet God?" (698). The verse, I need not say, is prophetic; the chapter, the book, is prophetic. We shall deal with two or three particulars which will have more to do with the verse according to the gospel explanation of it than with its prophetic aspect.

My dear friends, we must meet God, and if we meet Him with comfort, peace, and joy, it will be through finding Him to be our God and our justifier. Then we shall be ready to meet Him.

So far as this text goes in its actual wording, it looks as though we must make ourselves ready to meet Him. The bride, the Lamb's wife, the church, makes herself ready; and every believer in Christ, according to the sense of this passage, makes himself ready. That will, of course, require a little explanation, and, with the Lord's help, there will be no difficulty in putting that matter before you in a way sufficiently clear to prevent you from drawing any wrong inference from my remarks.

Beloved, when I say that we must make ourselves ready, I mean this - that, if there is any work of God going on in your souls, you want to be ready to meet God. And I can say this: all my anxiety for years (in my spiritual moments) has been that God will accept me. He will accept us or reject us according to whether we are ready or unready. If we are not ready to meet Him when we go out of the world, God will not accept us when we stand before Him on the last great day - the judgment day. And the secrets of all hearts shall be made manifest when the sheep and the goats shall be separated; when the wicked and the righteous shall be separated as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. One will be on the right hand and the other on the left (Matt.xxv.32,33.Rom.ii.16).

First, then, let me point out to you our unreadiness to meet God, and the total unfitness that there is in us all by nature to meet God. We are all sinners, and sin has stripped,

robbed, and beggared us of all good which we possessed in our federal head the first Adam, in whose loins we were when he fell. So, "by one man's disobedience many were made sinners (Rom.v.19). All died in Adam (I Cor.xv.22). Servants of God cannot too much insist in this day upon our original sin. I may have made the remark in this pulpit before, but it will bear repeating - that the doctrine of original sin is not half enough brought forward and insisted upon; because, unless we are well taught and our minds spiritually enlightened as to the doctrine of original sin, the defilement of our nature, we shall be certain, more or less, to darken the counsel of God's word without knowledge (Job xxxvii.2; xlii.3) whenever we take up the malady of man's ruin. I do not mean that we are always to be telling people what is wrong in their lives, but to tell them that they are wrong in their nature. The fountain is corrupt; and if the fountain were not corrupt, the stream would not be polluted. Everything that is wrong in your life and mine, your actions and mine - all arises from this, that we are defiled in our nature, in our very conception in the womb. "I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psa.li.5). Oh, what an inconceivable depth of iniquity there is in sin! It is an infection. It is that abominable thing which God hates (Jer.xliv.4). God cannot be where sin is, and sin cannot be where God is. One sinner in heaven would defile the whole place, and so would one sin, however much it might, so to speak, lie lurking and concealed in some distant corner of the heavenly world. That one sin would soon spread its noisome, offensive taint throughout the whole realms of glory (Rev.xxi.27).

"Heaven is that holy, happy place,  
Where sin no more defiles" (850)

where saints and angels dwell. Sin has deluged the world with floods of misery, like a thick cloud from the bottomless pit. It has affected the rational atmosphere of man's soul with darkness and ignorance (Rev.ix.2). It has cast a veil over all nations (Isa.xxv.7). Sin is the plague of God's living children (I Kings viii.38). It is their worst trouble, their worst enemy, their worst disease. The apostle Paul, that eminent servant of Christ, could bear all things for the elect's sakes (II Tim.ii.10). He could endure all suffering with a heroism peculiar to a good soldier of Jesus Christ. But indwelling sin - that made such an incursion upon his spiritual enjoyments, waged such a constant war against the spiritual law of his regenerated mind, that it made him, with soul indignation, pronounce himself to be a black sinner. It made him cry out: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me

from the body of this death?" (Rom.vii.24). Sin it is that makes us unready to meet God. It is not our being poor in the world, or being born blind, deaf, or dumb, or so deformed as to be quite unsightly, as some of our fellow creatures are. It is not having, through accident, any part of the body injured that makes us unready to meet God. It is sin. Disease and deformity of body, ignorance and sottishness of mind, being alienated from God by wicked works, are the effects of sin (Eph.iv.18). If man had never sinned, darkness and ignorance would never have beclouded his mind, and sottishness would never have sunk him down in his misery. What makes us unready, then, to meet God is sin; and every vestige and taint of sin in us, in our nature and in our conduct, must be removed and quite taken away, and we must be without one spot of sin in us or on us, before we are ready to meet God.

Has the Lord made you feel this? Has the Lord taught you the mystery of iniquity? Does He lead you from day to day to the fountain? You may have heard what Thomas Goodwin the Puritan did in reference to this subject. He got out of bed one night, fell upon his knees, and confessed the sin of Adam as being his own sin. That man was very much exercised about what we call original sin. We have not such an expression in the Bible as "original sin", but the doctrine is perfectly scriptural. The word "Trinity" is not to be found all through the Scriptures, but the Bible is throughout pervaded by the Trinity, the Three Persons in one Godhead. Augustine was the first one who called the sin of our nature "original sin". It is a very expressive phrase, and it has been preserved in the church of God ever since his days. If God dwells in you, He will humble you, and make you go upon your knees, confess the sin of Adam, and take it upon yourself (Rom.v.19).

Secondly, let us consider the readiness that is required. Kindly try to keep in your minds, not only while I am speaking, to you this morning, but store up by way of remembrance this most humbling, solemn, and infallible truth about yourself - that you are corrupt and vile in your very nature, that you were born in sin and shapen in iniquity, and therefore that in ourselves we are altogether unready to go before God. Now as to the readiness required. We are said to make ourselves ready. You are too well acquainted with my poor ministry, here at Gower Street, ever to suppose that I think the readiness which is here spoken of means any works and performances, preparations and doings of our own, apart from the grace of God. I believe nothing of the kind, and I bless God that He has taught me, and taught you too, that the Ethiopian may wash

himself, but he cannot make himself white, he cannot change his black skin; the leopard cannot wash out his spots (Jer.xiii.23); and we cannot renew our nature, we cannot get sin out of ourselves; all our preparations can never make us ready to go before God. As we read in Paul's Epistle to Titus (and I would say, Thanks be to my blessed God for this portion of the Word): "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Titus iii. 5,6). What a beautiful Scripture is that! Well, it is something like this, just to simplify matters. Here is a poor, ragged, dirty-looking creature; he has nothing to eat and is literally filthy. He applies at the poor-house for a night's lodging, weary, footsore, hungry. He is admitted. But, before he can be allowed to sit down and have any food, he must be washed. Now, then, says Paul: "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (II Tim.i.9). Then our readiness consists in our being saved by the grace of God. God bring us to see this, to keep it in our minds, and to hold it fast! Strictly speaking, therefore, it is God's own work to make us ready. "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph.ii.8,9).

Further, when we are saved by grace, then we are new creatures (II Cor.v.17), and it is in the new creature that our readiness to meet God consists. The Lord keep that in our minds and help you to see that clearly! There is a very great deal said in the present day about being ready to meet God. How often it has been your prayer and mine:

"Prepare me, gracious God,  
To stand before thy face" (471).

My dear, beloved friends, the Lord help you to keep this in your hearts - that the readiness consists in the new creature. In the new creature we are holy, righteous, without sin, not the shadow of a spot to be found in us. Hence our readiness consists also in utter renunciation of self-righteousness, brought by the Holy Spirit to renounce all that we are by nature, all the works of the flesh; and it consists in this: in our being brought to see, and also to feel, that we have no readiness whatever wherewith to come before God but as we are found in Christ (Phil.iii.8,9). Thus our readiness, as I told you, strictly speaking, is God's own work in us.

The church says: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels (Isa.lxi.10). Nothing more beautiful than that! Nothing can be more suitable to us poor sinners than that. Well may the church say, and well may you and I say: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God." Why? Because He hath covered me with the garments of salvation, with His own accomplished work of saving poor sinners through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, the righteousness of His dear Son. The Lord has dealt with me just as the bride and bridegroom adorn themselves; thus my blessed God is decking me for the wedding, and He hath adorned me and made me ready to go before my God.

Then the difficulty, if there is any difficulty in it, as to making ourselves ready: this really means the work of God by faith (John vi.29), by which the new creature, the new man, embraces the Lord Jesus Christ. Real faith goes into the wardrobe of divine grace, finds the wedding garment all ready prepared, puts in on, and says: "you have to go before God; you cannot appear with dirty hands or face. You must go before Him, and in that righteousness be so very holy that God will not be able to see a single spot of filth in you" (Numb.xxiii.21) Faith says: "Look! here it is already provided, poor soul, here is the garment." Faith puts that on; faith embraces it and says: "Let me get right into that covering; let it be put right over me and into me; let it impregnate my very soul, my very heart; let me be brought by the grace of God into that righteousness so as to be 'accepted in the Beloved' (Eph.i.6)." Faith stands and gazes with love and wonder upon the bleeding sacrifice, looks on the atonement, looks on the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and hearkens to the voice of mercy, which says: "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean" (Isa.lii.1). "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" (Psa.xlv.11). Thus it is by faith, you see, beloved friends, we make ourselves ready. By faith we know the work of grace in a sinner's heart.

Mark what I say! Do you mark what the minister says from time to time? Some of you do. And some of you, perhaps, hear things Sunday after Sunday, but what comes of it? Nothing,

nothing! Now where there is no work of grace in a poor sinner's heart, that sinner has nothing to believe in. Say you: "He has the Bible in his house; he comes to chapel." He may believe the Bible in a natural way, but spiritually that man has nothing to believe in; he has no faith to believe with, - all for the want of grace. Faith is the fruit of grace. That sinner is altogether unready to go before God.

Now when there is a work of grace in a poor sinner's heart, and God gives that sinner faith to believe, He draws his faith out into exercise; then that poor sinner goes to God and gets all the readiness he needs. We have to come before God and to make ourselves ready by believing that God has beforehand made us ready. That is how I make myself ready, by believing that the blessed Spirit has made me ready and will enable me to stand before God in the perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Bold shall I stand in that great day,  
For who ought to my charge shall lay.  
While through Thy blood absolved I am  
From sin's tremendous curse and shame"? (103)

Oh, yes; he is now ready to go before God!

Just a few remarks upon the context. This chapter gives a description which is applicable to the great evil of the present day - that is, Popery (or antichrist) and its destruction. "And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are His judgments: for He hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of His servants at her hand" (verses 1 and 2). We may well consider the judgments of God at the present time, and they are very striking. In the political world God has very signally struck down, by the hand of death, great men, great politicians, and has recently arrested the progress of one whose work, designs, and performances I have, in this pulpit, nothing to do with; but he is dead and gone. There are great convulsions in the earth, and will be greater.

"And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever" (verse 3). When a gentleman's mansion is burnt down, you might see the smoke for a month afterwards, and by that you would know what had taken place; that would speak of ruin and destruction. So here, smoke rose up; God had put His foot upon, overturned, and crushed the great whore which had accomplished her work of iniquity.

"And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia. And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye His servants, and ye that fear Him, both small and great. 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" (verses 4 - 6). Solomon says: "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: a time to be born," etc. (Eccles.iii.1,2). God says: "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure" (Isa. xlvi.10). I have often been ready to say: "Why should the Almighty God suffer such a hellish system as Popery to exist all these years? Why should He have suffered Popery, in this enlightened and advanced age, to be so increasing and spreading as it is?" Well, God says: "My counsel shall stand." He has a purpose to accomplish, and is working out His own great purposes (or, we may say, working out His many purposes) by all that takes place upon the face of the earth and in all ages of time. It is a glorious truth: "the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." We are hastening on to the time when this gigantic system of evil - an evil of evils - shall have had its day and shall be no more. And then it shall be more openly manifested that the saints shall be "terrible as an army with banners" (Song vi.4), and when the bride shall meet the coming of the Bridegroom, not His personal coming at the last, but His spiritual coming. And, of course, all this will be done by the word of God. "Out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword (that is, the word of God), that with it (not by His personal presence, but with it) He should smite the nations: and He shall rule them with a rod of iron: and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" (verse 15). So there is a time coming, as the prophet speaks, when Judah and Ephraim shall not be antagonistic to one another (Isa.xi.13).

There is a time coming when the kings and queens of the earth shall be nursing fathers and nursing mothers to the church (Isa.xlix.23); when the church of the living God shall not be a despicable object everywhere, but shall take precedence;\* when the wicked shall be ashes under the feet of the righteous (Mal.iv.3), and when that nuptial bond and conjugal love and relationship between Christ and His church shall be most gloriously displayed. Then the exclamation will go forth:

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\* Some godly men believe that Isaiah xlix.23 was fulfilled in the 4th century after Christ; Christianity became a state religion in 324 under Constantine.

"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready." Christ, then, will have nothing to do with the whore; He is a pure, chaste Husband, and He will have a pure, chaste bride; He will show Himself openly and manifestly to none who have defiled themselves with women (Rev.xiv.4).- false doctrine.

Further, the foolish virgins were always a spurious people in His eyes. The Canaanites, Hivites, and Jebusites were the spurious races. Christ will hold out His hand to His own redeemed and blood-washed people, so that the voice shall be heard: "The marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready" - made herself ready, as I have put the truth before you this morning: regenerated by the Spirit of the living God, brought to confess her filthiness and pollution, led in experience not only to confess her sinful doings, but enabled to embrace His righteousness and to make herself ready by having a living faith wrought in her heart to believe that God, the living God, hath done it. Christ will openly recognize and acknowledge these; and it shall be seen from east to west, and from north to south, that no mortal man ever did, or ever can, get ready except by God's own free and sovereign grace.

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