

SERMON XXVIII.*

*The Church's Marriage to her Sons, and to her
God.*



ISAIAH lxii. 4, 5.

THY LAND SHALL BE MARRIED. 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.

IN the midst of many blessed promises that God makes to his church in this and the preceding and following chapters, of advancement to a state of great peace, comfort, honor and joy, after long continued affliction, we have the sum of all contained in these two verses. In the 4th verse God says to his church, “Thou shalt no more be termed, Forsak-

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en ; neither shall thy land any more be termed, Desolate : But thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land, Beulah : For the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married." When it is said, "Thy land shall be married," we are, by thy land, to understand "the body of thy people, thy whole race ;" the land, by a metonymy very usual in scripture, being put for the people that inhabit the land.

The 5th verse explains how this that is promised in the last words of verse 4, should be accomplished in two things, viz. *in being married to her sons, and married to her God.*

1. It is promised that she should be *married to her sons*, or that her sons should marry her : For as a young man marryeth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee." Or, as the words might have been more literally translated from the original : "As a young man is married to a virgin, so shall thy sons be married to thee." Some by this understand a promise, that the posterity of the captivated Jews should return again from Babylon to the land of Canaan, and should be, as it were, married or wedded to their own land ; i. e. They should be reunited to their own land, and should have great comfort and joy in it, as a young man in a virgin that he marries. But their thus interpreting the words seems to be through inadvertence ; not carefully observing the words themselves, how that when it is said, "So shall thy sons marry thee," God does not direct his speech to the land itself, but to the church whose land it was ; the pronoun *thee* being applied to the same mystical person in this former part of the verse, as in the words immediately following in the latter part of the same sentence, "And as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." It is the church, and not the hills and valleys of the land of Canaan, that is God's bride, or the Lamb's wife. It is also manifest, that when God says, "So shall thy sons marry thee," he continues to speak to her to whom he had spoken in the three preceding verses ; but there it is not the ground or soil of the land of Canaan, but the church, that he speaks to when he says, "The Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory :

And thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed, Forsaken," &c. And to represent the land itself as a bride, and the subject of espousals and marriage, would be a figure of speech very unnatural, and not known in scripture ; but for the church of God to be thus represented is very usual throughout the scripture from the beginning to the end of the Bible. And then it is manifest that the return of the Jews to the land of Canaan from the Babylonish captivity, is not the event mainly intended by the prophecy of which these words are a part. The time of that return was not the time when that was fulfilled in the 2d verse of this chapter, " And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory : And thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name." That was not the time spoken of in the two preceding chapters, with which this chapter is one continued prophecy. That was not the time spoken of in the last words of the foregoing chapter, when the Lord would cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations : Nor was it the time spoken of in the 5th, 6th, and 9th verses of that chapter, when " strangers should stand and feed the flocks of God's people, and the sons of the alien should be their ploughmen, and vine dressers ; but they should be named the priests of the Lord, and men should call them the ministers of God ; when they should eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory boast themselves, and their seed should be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people ; and all that should see them should acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed." Nor was that the time spoken of in the chapter preceding that, " when the abundance of the sea should be converted unto the church ; when the isles should wait for God, and the ships of Tarshish to bring her sons from far, and their silver and gold with them ; when the forces of the Gentiles and their kings should be brought ; when the church

should suck the milk of the Gentiles, and suck the breast of kings ; and when that nation and kingdom that would not serve her should perish and be utterly wasted : And when the sun should be no more her light by day, neither for brightness should the moon give light unto her, but the Lord should be unto her an everlasting light, and her God her glory ; and her sun should no more go down, nor her moon withdraw itself, because the Lord should be her everlasting light, and the days of her mourning should be ended " These things manifestly have respect to the Christian church in her most perfect and glorious state on earth in the last ages of the world ; when the church should be so far from being confined to the land of Canaan, that she should fill the whole earth, and all lands should be alike holy.

So that the children of Israel's being wedded to the land of Canaan, being manifestly not the meaning of these words in the text, " As a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee," as some suppose ; I choose rather, with others, to understand the words of the church's union with her faithful pastors, and the great benefits she should receive from them. God's ministers, though they are set to be the instructors, guides, and fathers of God's people, yet are also the sons of the church. Amos ii. 11. " I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazarites." Such as these, when faithful, are those precious sons of Zion comparable to fine gold spoken of, Lam. iv. 2, spoken of again, verse 7. " Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk." And as he that marries a young virgin becomes the guide of her youth ; so these sons of Zion are represented as taking her by the hand as her guide. Isai. li. 18. " There is none to guide her among all the sons whom she hath brought forth : Neither is there any that taketh her by the hand of all the sons that she hath brought up." That by these sons of the church is meant ministers of the gospel, is confirmed by the next verse to the text, " I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem."

That the sons of the church should be married to her as a young man to a virgin, is a mystery or paradox not unlike many others held forth in the word of God, concerning the relation between Christ and his people, and their relation to him and to one another; such as that Christ is David's Lord and yet his son, and both the root and offspring of David; that Christ is a son born and a child given, and yet the everlasting Father; that the church is Christ's mother, as she is represented, Cant. iii. 11, and viii. 1....and yet that she is his spouse, his sister, and his child; that believers are Christ's mother, and yet his sister and brother; and that ministers are the sons of the church, and yet that they are her fathers, as the apostle speaks of himself, as the father of the members of the church of Corinth, and also the mother of the Galatians, travelling in birth with them, Gal. iv. 19.

2. The second and chief fulfilment here spoken of, of that promise of the church's being married, is in her being married to Christ "And as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." Not that we are to understand that the church has many husbands, or that Christ is one husband, and ministers are other husbands that she hath: For though ministers are here spoken of as being married to the church, yet it is not as being his fellows or competitors, or as husbands of the church standing in a conjugal relation to his bride in any wise parallel with his: For the church has but one husband; she is not an adulteress, but a virgin, that is devoted wholly to the Lamb, and follows him whithersoever he goes. But ministers espouse the church entirely as Christ's ambassadors, as representing him and standing in his stead, being sent forth by him to be married to her in his name, that by this means she may be married to him. As when a prince marries a foreign lady by proxy, the prince's ambassador marries her, but not in his own name, but in the name of his master, that he may be the instrument of bringing her into a true conjugal relation to him. This is agreeable to what the apostle says, 2 Cor. xi. 2. "I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy; for I have espoused you

to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." Here the apostle represents himself as being, as it were, the husband of the church of Corinth; for it is the husband that is jealous when the wife commits adultery; and yet he speaks of himself as having espoused them, not in his own name, but in the name of Christ, and for him, and him only, and as his ambassador, sent forth to bring them home a chaste virgin to him. Ministers are in the text represented as married to the church in the same sense that elsewhere they are represented as fathers of the church: The church has but one father, even God, and ministers are fathers as his ambassadors; so the church has but one shepherd John x. 16. "There shall be one fold and one shepherd;" but yet ministers, as Christ's ambassadors, are often called the church's shepherds or pastors. The church has but one Saviour; but yet ministers, as his ambassadors and instruments, are called her saviours. 1 Tim. iv. 16. "In doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee." Obad. 21. "And saviours shall come upon Mount Zion." The church has but one Priest; but yet in Isai. lxvi. 21, speaking of the ministers of the Gentile nations, it is said, "I will take of them for priests and Levites." The church has but one Judge, for the Father hath committed all judgment to the Son; yet Christ tells his apostles, that they shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

When the text speaks first of ministers marrying the church, and then of Christ's rejoicing over her as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride; the former is manifestly spoken of as being in order to the latter, even in order to the joy and happiness that the church shall have in her true bridegroom. The preaching of the gospel is in this context spoken of three times agoing, as the great means of bringing about the prosperity and joy of the church; that is foretold; once in the first verse, "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth;" and then again in the text, and lastly

In the two following verses, "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night : Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence ; and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

The text thus opened affords these two propositions proper for our consideration on the solemn occasion of this day.

I. The uniting of faithful ministers with Christ's people in the ministerial office, when done in a due manner, is like a young man's marrying a virgin.

II. This union of ministers with the people of Christ is in order to their being brought to the blessedness of a more glorious union, in which Christ shall rejoice over them, as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride.

I. The uniting of a faithful minister with Christ's people in the ministerial office, when done in a due manner, is like a young man's marrying a virgin.

I say, the uniting of a faithful minister with Christ's people, and in a due manner : For we must suppose that the promise God makes to the church in the text, relates to such ministers, and such a manner of union with the church ; because this is promised to the church as a part of her latter day glory, and as a benefit that should be granted her by God, as the fruit of his great love to her, and an instance of her great spiritual prosperity and happiness in her purest and most excellent state on earth. But it would be no such instance of God's great favor and the church's happiness, to have unfaithful ministers entering into office in an undue and improper manner. They are evidently faithful ministers that are spoken of in the next verse, where the same are doubtless spoken of as in the text, "I have set watchmen on thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night." And they are those that shall be introduced into the ministry at a time of its extraordinary purity, order.

and beauty, wherein (as is said in the first, second, and third verses) her righteousness should go forth as brightness, and the Gentiles should see her righteousness, and all kings her glory, and she should be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of her God.”

When I speak of the uniting of a faithful minister with Christ's people in a due manner, I do not mean a due manner only with regard to external order ; but its being truly done in a holy manner, with sincere upright aims and intentions, with a right disposition, and proper frames of mind in those that are concerned ; and particularly in the minister that takes the office, and God's people to whom he is united, each exercising in this affair a proper regard to God and one another.

Such an uniting of a faithful minister with the people of God in the ministerial office, is in some respect like a young man's marrying a virgin.

1. When a duly qualified person is properly invested with the ministerial character, and does in a due manner take upon him the sacred work and office of a minister of the gospel, he does, in some sense, espouse the church of Christ in general : For though he do not properly stand in a pastoral relation to the whole church of Christ through the earth, and is far from becoming an universal pastor ; yet thenceforward he has a different concern with the church of Christ in general, and its interests and welfare, than other persons have that are laymen, and should be regarded otherwise by all the members of the Christian church. Wherever he is providentially called to preach the word of God, or minister in holy things, he ought to be received as a minister of Christ, and the messenger of the Lord of Hosts to them. And every one that takes on him the office of a minister of Christ as he ought to do, espouses the church of Christ, as he espouses the interest of the church in a manner that is peculiar. He is under obligations, as a minister of the Christian church, beyond other men, to love the church, as Christ, her true bridegroom, hath loved her, and to prefer Jerusalem above his chief joy, and to

imitate Christ, the great shepherd and bishop of souls and husband of the church, in his care and tender concern for the church's welfare, and earnest and constant labors to promote it, as he has opportunity. And as he, in taking office, devotes himself to the service of Christ in his church ; so he gives himself to the church, to be hers, in that love tender care, constant endeavor, and earnest labor for her provision, comfort, and welfare, that is proper to his office, as a minister of the church of Christ, by the permission of divine Providence, as long as he lives ; as a young man gives himself to a virgin when he marries her. And the church of Christ in general, as constituted of true saints through the world, (though they do not deliver up themselves to any one particular minister, as universal pastor, yet) do cleave to, and embrace the ministry of the church with endeared affection and high honor, and esteem, for Christ's sake ; and do joyfully commit and subject themselves to them to cleave to, honor, and help them, to be guided by them and obey them so long as in the world ; as the bride doth in marriage cleave and deliver up herself to her husband. And the ministry in general, or the whole number of faithful ministers, being all united in the same work as fellow laborers, and conspiring to the same design as fellow helpers to the grace of God, may be considered as one mystical person, that espouses the church as a young man espouses a virgin : As the many elders of the church of Ephesus are represented as one mystical person, Rev. ii. 1, and all called the angel of the church of Ephesus ; and as the faithful ministers of Christ in general, all over the world, seem to be represented as one mystical person, and called an angel, Rev. xiv. 6. " And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell upon the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people." But,

2. More especially is the uniting of a faithful minister with a particular Christian people, as their pastor, when done in a due manner, like a young man's marrying a virgin.

It is so with respect to the union itself, the concomitants of the union, and the fruits of it.

(1.) The union itself is, in several respects, like that which is between a young man and a virgin whom he marries.

It is so with respect to mutual regard and affection. A faithful minister, that is in a Christian manner united to a Christian people as their pastor, has his heart united to them in the most ardent and tender affection : And they, on the other hand, have their hearts united to him, esteeming him very highly in love for his works' sake, and receiving him with honor and reverence, and willingly subjecting themselves to him, and committing themselves to his care, as being, under Christ, their head and guide.

And such a pastor and people are like a young man and virgin united in marriage, with respect to the purity of their regard one to another. The young man gives himself to his bride in purity, as undebauched by meretricious embraces ; and she also presents herself to him a chaste virgin. So in such an union of a minister and people as we are speaking of, the parties united are pure and holy in their affection and regard one to another. The minister's heart is united to the people, not for filthy lucre, or any worldly advantage, but with a pure benevolence to them, and desire of their spiritual welfare and prosperity, and complacency in them as the children of God and followers of Christ Jesus. And, on the other hand, they love and honor him with an holy affection and esteem ; and not merely as having their admiration raised, and their carnal affections moved by having their ears tickled, and their curiosity, and other fleshly principles, gratified by a florid eloquence, and the excellency of speech and man's wisdom ; but receiving him as the messenger of the Lord of Hosts, coming to them on a divine and infinitely important errand, and with those holy qualifications that resemble the virtues of the Lamb of God.

And as the bridegroom and bride give themselves to each other in covenant ; so it is in that union we are speaking of

between a faithful pastor and a Christian people. The minister, by solemn vows, devotes himself to the people, to improve his time and strength, and spend and be spent for them, so long as God in his Providence shall continue the union : And they, on the other hand, in a holy covenant commit the care of their souls to him, and subject themselves to him.

(2.) The union between a faithful minister and a Christian people, that we are speaking of, is like that between a young man and virgin in their marriage, with respect to the concomitants of it.

When such a minister and such a people are thus united, it is attended with great joy. The minister joyfully devoting himself to the service of his Lord in the work of the ministry, as a work that he delights in : And also joyfully uniting himself to the society of the saints that he is set over, as having complacence in them, for his dear Lord's sake, whose people they are ; and willingly and joyfully, on Christ's call, undertaking the labors and difficulties of the service of their souls. And they, on the other hand, joyfully receiving him as a precious gift of their ascending Redeemer. Thus a faithful minister and a Christian people are each other's joy, Rom. xv. 32. " That I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed." 2 Cor. i. 14. " As you have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye are ours."

Another concomitant of this union, wherein it resembles that which becomes a young man and virgin united in marriage, is mutual helpfulness, and a constant care and endeavor to promote each other's good and comfort. The minister earnestly and continually seeks the profit and comfort of the souls of his people, and to guard and defend them from every thing that might annoy them, and studies and labors to promote their spiritual peace and prosperity. They, on the other hand, make it their constant care to promote his comfort, to make the burden of his great and difficult work easy, to avoid those things that might add to the difficulty of it, and that might justly be grievous to his heart ; and do what in them

lies to encourage his heart, and strengthen his hands in his work ; and are ready to say to him, when called to exert himself in the more difficult parts of his work, as the people of old to Ezra the priest, when they saw him bowed down under the burden of a difficult affair, Ezra x. 4. " Arise, for this matter belongeth to thee : We also will be with thee : Be of good courage, and do it." They spare no pains nor cost to make their pastor's outward circumstances easy and comfortable, and free from pinching necessities and distracting cares, and to put him under the best advantages to follow his great work fully and successfully.

Such a pastor and people, as it is between a couple happily united in a conjugal relation, have a mutual sympathy with each other, a fellow feeling of each others' burdens and calamities, and a communion in each other's prosperity and joy. When the people suffer in their spiritual interests, the pastor suffers : He is afflicted when he sees their souls in trouble and darkness : He feels their wounds ; and he looks on their prosperity and comfort as his own. 2 Cor. xi. 29. " Who is weak, and I am not weak ? Who is offended, and I burn not ?" 2 Cor. vii. 13. " We were comforted in your comfort." And, on the other hand, the people feel their pastor's burdens, and rejoice in his prosperity and consolations ; see Phil. iv. 14, and 2 Cor. ii. 3.

(3.) This union is like that which is between a young man and a virgin in its fruits.

One fruit of it is mutual benefit : They become meet helps one for another. The people receive great benefit by the minister, as he is their teacher to communicate spiritual instructions and counsels to them, and is set to watch over them to defend them from those enemies and calamities they are liable to ; and so is, under Christ, to be both their guide and guard, as the husband is of the wife. And as the husband provides the wife with food and clothing ; so the pastor, as Christ's steward, makes provision for his people, and brings forth out of his treasure things new and old, gives every one his portion of meat in due season, and is made the

instrument of spiritually clothing and adorning their souls. And, on the other hand, the minister receives benefit from the people, and they minister greatly to his spiritual good by that holy converse to which their union to him as his flock leads them. The conjugal relation leads the persons united therein to the most intimate acquaintance and conversation with each other ; so the union there is between a faithful pastor and a Christian people, leads them to intimate conversation about things of a spiritual nature : It leads the people most freely and fully to open the case of their souls to the pastor, and leads him to deal most freely, closely, and thoroughly with them in things pertaining thereto. And this conversation not only tends to their benefit, but also greatly to his.

And the pastor receives benefit from the people outwardly, as they take care of and order his outward accommodations for his support and comfort, and do, as it were, spread and serve his table for him.

Another fruit of this union, wherein it resembles the conjugal union, is a spiritual offspring. There is wont to arise from the union of such a pastor and people, a spiritual race of the children of the congregation that are new born. These new born children of God are in the Scripture represented both as the children of ministers, as those that have begotten them through the gospel, and also as the children of the church, who is represented as their mother that hath brought them forth, and at whose breasts they are nourished ; as in Isaiah liv. 1. and lxvi. 11. Gal. iv. 26. 1 Pet. ii. 2. and many other places.

Having thus briefly shewn how the uniting of faithful ministers with Christ's people in the ministerial office, when done in a due manner, is like a young man's marrying a virgin,

I proceed now to the

II. PROPOSITION, viz. That this union of ministers with the people of Christ, is in order to their being brought to the blessedness of a more glorious union, in which Christ shall rejoice over them as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride.

1. The saints are, and shall be the subjects of this blessedness. Of all the many various kinds of union of sensible and temporal things that are used in Scripture to represent the relation there is between Christ and his church ; that which is between bridegroom and bride, or husband and wife, is much the most frequently made use of both in the Old and New Testament. The Holy Ghost seems to take a peculiar delight in this, as a similitude fit to represent the strict, intimate, and blessed union that is between Christ and his saints. The apostle intimates, that one end why God appointed marriage, and established so near a relation as that between husband and wife, was, that it might be a type of the union that is between Christ and his church ; in Eph. v. 30, 31, 32. "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined to his wife ; and they two shall be one flesh."For this cause, i. e. because we are members of Christ's body, of his flesh, and of his bones : For this cause, God appointed that man and wife should be so joined together as to be one flesh, to represent this high and blessed union between Christ and his church : The apostle explains himself in the next words, "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church." This institution of marriage, and making the man and his wife one flesh, is a great mystery ; i. e. it contains in it a great mystery ; there is a great and glorious mystery hid in the design of it : And the apostle tells us what that glorious mystery is, "I speak concerning Christ and the church : " As much as to say, the mystery I speak of, is that blessed union that is between Christ and his church, which I spoke of before.

This union is a blessed union indeed ; of which that between a faithful minister and a Christian people is but a shadow. Ministers are not the proper husbands of the church, though their union to God's people, as Christ's ambassadors, in several respects resembles the conjugal relation : But Christ is the true husband of the church, to whom the souls of the saints are espoused indeed, and to whom they are united

as his flesh and his bones, yea, and one spirit ; to whom they have given themselves in an everlasting covenant, and whom alone they cleave to, love, honor, obey, and trust in, as their spiritual husband, whom alone they reserve themselves for as chaste virgins, and whom they follow whithersoever he goeth. There are many ministers in the church of Christ, and there may be several pastors of one particular church : But the church has but one husband, all others are rejected and despised in comparison of him ; he is among the sons as the apple tree among the trees of the wood ; they all are barren and worthless, he only is the fruitful tree ; and therefore, leaving all others, the church betakes herself to him alone, and sits under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit is sweet to her taste ; she takes up her full and entire rest in him, desiring no other. The relation between a minister and people shall be dissolved, and may be dissolved before death : But the union between Christ and his church shall never be dissolved, neither before death nor by death, but shall endure through all eternity : “ The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed ; but Christ’s conjugal love and kindness shall not depart from his church ; neither shall the covenant of his peace, the marriage covenant, be removed,” Is. liv. 1..... The union between a faithful minister and a Christian people is but a partial resemblance even of the marriage union, it is like marriage only in some particulars : But with respect to the union between Christ and his church, marriage is but a partial resemblance, yea, a faint shadow of that : Every thing that is desirable and excellent in the union between an earthly bridegroom and bride, is to be found in the union between Christ and his church ; and that in an infinitely greater perfection and more glorious manner : There is infinitely more to be found in it than ever was found between the happiest couple in a conjugal relation ; or could be found if the bride and bridegroom had not only the innocence of Adam and Eve, but the perfection of angels.

Christ and his saints, standing in such a relation as this one to another, the saints must needs be unspeakably happy :

Their mutual joy in each other is answerable to the nearness of their relation and strictness of their union : Christ rejoices over the church as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, and she rejoices in him as the bride rejoices in the bridegroom. My text has respect to the mutual joy that Christ and his church should have in each other : For though the joy of Christ over his church only is mentioned, yet it is evident that this is here spoken of and promised as the great happiness of the church, and therefore supposes her joy in him.

The mutual joy of Christ and his church is like that of bridegroom and bride, in that they rejoice in each other, as those that they have chosen above others, for their nearest, most intimate, and everlasting friends and companions. The church is Christ's chosen, Isaiah xli. 9. "I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away : " Chap. xlviii. 10. "I have chosen thee, in the furnace of affliction." How often are God's saints called his elect or chosen ones ? He has chosen them, not to be mere servants, but friends ; John xv. 15. "I call you not servants ;...but I have called you friends." And though Christ be the Lord of glory, infinitely above men and angels, yet he has chosen the elect to be his companions ; and has taken upon him their nature ; and so in some respect, as it were, levelled himself with them, that he might be their brother and companion. Christ as well as David, calls the saints his brethren and companions, Psalm cxxii. 8. "For my brethren and companions' sake I will now say, Peace be within thee." So in the book of Canticles, he calls his church his sister and spouse. Christ hath loved and chosen his church as his peculiar friend, above others ; Psalm cxxxv. 4. "The Lord hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure." As the bridegroom chooses the bride for his peculiar friend, above all others in the world ; so Christ has chosen his church for a peculiar nearness to him, as his flesh and his bone, and the high honor and dignity of espousals above all others, rather than the fallen angels, yea, rather than the elect angels. For verily, in this respect, "he taketh not hold of angels, but he taketh hold of the seed of

Abraham ;" as the words are in the original, in Heb. ii. 16. He has chosen his church above the rest of mankind, above all the Heathen nations, and those that are without the visible church, and above all other professing Christians. Cant. vi. 9. " My dove, my undefiled is but one ; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her." Thus Christ rejoices over his church, as obtaining in her that which he has chosen above all the rest of the creation, and as sweetly resting in his choice. Psal. cxxxii. 13, 14. " The Lord hath chosen Zion : He hath desired it. This is my rest for ever."

On the other hand, the church chooses Christ above all others : He is in her eyes the chief among ten thousands, fairer than the sons of men : She rejects the suit of all his rivals for his sake : Her heart relinquishes the whole world : He is her pearl of great price, for which she parts with all ; and rejoices in him, as the choice and rest of her soul.

Christ and his church, like the bridegroom and bride, rejoice in each other, as having a special propriety in each other. All things are Christ's ; but he has a special propriety in his church. There is nothing in heaven or earth, among all the creatures, that is his, in that high and excellent manner that the church is his : They are often called his portion and inheritance ; they are said, Rev. xiv. 4, " to be the first fruits to God and the Lamb." As of old, the first fruit was that part of the harvest that belonged to God, and was to be offered to him ; so the saints are the first fruits of God's creatures, being that part which is in a peculiar manner Christ's portion, above all the rest of the creation. James i. 18. " Of his own will begat he us by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures." And Christ rejoices in his church, as in that which is peculiarly his. Isai. lxxv. 19. " I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people." The church has also a peculiar propriety in Christ : Though other things are hers, yet nothing is hers in that manner that her spiritual bridegroom is hers : As great and glorious as he is, yet he, with all his dignity and glory, is

hers ; all is wholly given to her, to be fully possessed and enjoyed by her, to the utmost degree that she is capable of : Therefore we have her so often saying in the language of exaltation and triumph, " My beloved is mine, and I am his," in the book of Canticles, chap. ii. 16. and vi. 3, and vii. 10.

Christ and his church, like the bridegroom and bride, rejoice in each other, as those that are the objects of each other's most tender and ardent love. The love of Christ to his church is altogether unparalleled : The height and depth and length and breadth of it pass knowledge : For he loved the church, and gave himself for it ; and his love to her proved stronger than death. And on the other hand, she loves him with a supreme affection : Nothing stands in competition with him in her heart : She loves him with all her heart : Her whole soul is offered up to him in the flame of love. And Christ rejoices and has sweet rest and delight in his love to the church. Zeph. iii. 17. " The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty : He will save : He will rejoice over thee with joy : He will rest in his love : He will joy over thee with singing " So the church, in the exercises of her love to Christ, rejoices with unspeakable joy. 1 Pet. i. 7, 8. " Jesus Christ ; whom, having not seen, ye love : In whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory."

Christ and his church rejoice in each other's beauty. The church rejoices in Christ's divine beauty and glory. She, as it were, sweetly solaces herself in the light of the glory of the sun of righteousness ; and the saints say one to another, as in Isai. ii. 5. " O house of Jacob, come ye, let us walk in the light of the Lord." The perfections and virtues of Christ are as a perfumed ointment to the church, that make his very name to be to her as ointment poured forth, Cant. i. 3. " Because of the savor of thy good ointments, thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee." And Christ delights and rejoices in the beauty of the church, the beauty which he hath put upon her : Her Christian graces are ornaments of great price in his sight, 1 Pet. iii. 4. And

He is spoken of as greatly desiring her beauty, Psal. xlv. 11. Yea he himself speaks of his heart as ravished with her beauty. Cant. iv. 9. "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."

Christ and his church, as the bridegroom and bride, rejoice in each other's love. Wine is spoken of, Psal. civ. 15, as that which maketh glad man's heart: But the church of Christ is spoken of as rejoicing in the love of Christ, as that which is more pleasant and refreshing than wine. Cant. i. 4. "The king hath brought me into his chambers: We will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine." So on the other hand, Christ speaks of the church's love as far better to him than wine. Cant. iv. 10. "How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! How much better is thy love than wine!"

Christ and his church rejoice in communion with each other, as in being united in their happiness, and having fellowship and a joint participation in each other's good: As the bridegroom and bride rejoice together at the wedding feast, and as thenceforward they are joint partakers of each other's comforts and joys. Rev. iii. 20. "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me." The church has fellowship with Christ in his own happiness, and his divine entertainments; his joy is fulfilled in her, John xv. 11, and xvii. 13. She sees light in his light; and she is made to drink at the river of his own pleasures, Psal. xxxvi. 8, 9. And Christ brings her to eat and drink at his own table, to take her fill of his own entertainments. Cant. v. 1. "Eat, O friends, drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." And he, on the other hand, has fellowship with her; he feasts with her; her joys are his; and he rejoices in that entertainment that she provides for him. So Christ is said to feed among the lilies, Cant. ii. 16, and chap. vii. 13, she speaks of all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which she had laid up for him; and says to him, chap. iv. 16, "Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his

pleasant fruits :” And he makes answer in the next verse, “ I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse ; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice, I have eaten my honey comb with my honey, I have drunk my wine with my milk.”

And lastly, Christ and his church, as the bridegroom and bride, rejoice in conversing with each other. The words of Christ, by which he converses with his church, are most sweet to her ; and therefore she says of him, Cant. v. 16, “ His mouth is most sweet.” And on the other hand, he says of her, chap. ii. 14, “ Let me hear thy voice ; for sweet is thy voice.” And chap. iv. 11, “ Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honey comb : Honey and milk are under thy tongue.”

Christ rejoices over his saints as the bridegroom over the bride at all times : But there are some seasons wherein he doth so more especially. Such a season is the time of the soul's conversion ; when the good shepherd finds his lost sheep, then he brings it home rejoicing, and calls together his friends and neighbors, saying, Rejoice with me. The day of a sinner's conversion is the day of Christ's espousals ; and so eminently the day of his rejoicing. Sol. Song iii 11. “ Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart.” And it is oftentimes remarkably the day of the saints' rejoicing in Christ : For then God turns again the captivity of his elect people, and, as it were, fills their mouth with laughter, and their tongue with singing ; as in Psal. cxxvi. at the beginning. We read of the jailer, that when he was converted, “ he rejoiced, believing in God, with all his house,” Acts xvi. 34.

And there are other seasons of special communion of the saints with Christ, wherein Christ doth in an especial manner rejoice over his saints, and as their bridegroom brings them into his chambers that they also may be glad and rejoice in him, Cant. i. 4.

But the time wherein this mutual rejoicing of Christ and his saints will be in its perfection, is the time of the saints' ..

glorification with Christ in heaven ; for that is the proper time of the saints entering in with the bridegroom into the marriage, Matth. xxv. 10. The saint's conversion is rather like the betrothing of the intended bride to her bridegroom before they come together ; but the time of the saint's glorification is the time when that shall be fulfilled in Psal. xlv. 15. " With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought ; they shall enter into the king's palace." That is the time when those that Christ loved, and gave himself for, that he might sanctify and cleanse them, as with the washing of water by the word, shall be presented to him in glory, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. The time wherein the church shall be brought to the full enjoyment of her bridegroom, having all tears wiped away from her eyes ; and there shall be no more distance or absence. She shall then be brought to the entertainments of an eternal wedding feast, and to dwell eternally with her bridegroom ; yea, to dwell eternally in his embraces. Then Christ will give her his loves ; and she shall drink her fill, yea, she shall swim in the ocean of his love.

And as there are various seasons wherein Christ and particular saints do more especially rejoice in each other ; so there are also certain seasons wherein Christ doth more especially rejoice over his church collectively taken. Such a season is a time of remarkable outpouring of the Spirit of God : It is a time of the espousal of many souls to Christ ; and so a time of much of the joy of espousals : And also it is a time wherein Christ is wont more especially to visit his saints with his loving kindness, and to bring them near to himself, and especially to refresh their hearts with divine communications : On which account, such a time becomes a time of great joy to the church of Christ. So when the Spirit of God was so wonderfully poured out on the city of Samaria, with the preaching of Philip, we read that there was great joy in that city, Acts viii. 8. And the time of that wonderful effusion of the Spirit at Jerusalem, begun at the feast of Pentecost, was a time of holy feasting and rejoicing, and a kind of

a wedding day to the church of Christ ; wherein “ they continuing daily, with one accord, in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness, and singleness of heart,” as Acts ii. 46.

But more especially is the time of that great outpouring of the Spirit of God in the latter days, so often foretold, in the scriptures, represented as the time of the marriage of the Lamb, and of the rejoicing of Christ and his church in each other, as the bridegroom and the bride. This is the time prophesied of in our text and context ; and this is the time foretold in Isai. lxxv. 19. “ I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people ; and the voice of weeping shall no more be heard in her, nor the voice of crying.” This is the time spoken of, Rev. xix. 6, 7, 8, 9, where the apostle John tells us, He “ 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. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him : For the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.” And adds, “ To her was granted, that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white : For the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.”

But above all, the time of Christ's last coming, is the time of the consummation of the church's marriage with the Lamb, and the time of the complete and most perfect joy of the wedding. In that resurrection morning, when the Sun of righteousness shall appear in our heavens, shining in all his brightness and glory, he will come forth as a bridegroom ; he shall come in the glory of his Father, with all his holy angels. And at that glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, shall the whole elect church, complete as to every individual member, and each member with the whole man, both body and soul, and both in perfect glory, ascend up to meet the Lord in the air, to be thenceforth forever with the Lord. That will be a joyful meeting of this glorious

Bridegroom and bride indeed. Then the bridegroom will appear in all his glory without any veil : And then the saints shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father, and at the right hand of their Redeemer ; and then the church will appear as the bride, the Lamb's wife. It is the state of the church after the resurrection, that is spoken of, Rev. xxi. 2. " And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." And verse 9. " Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife." Then will come the time, when Christ will sweetly invite his spouse to enter in with him into the palace of his glory, which he had been preparing for her from the foundation of the world, and shall, as it were, take her by the hand, and lead her in with him : And this glorious bridegroom and bride shall, with all their shining ornaments, ascend up together into the heaven of heavens ; the whole multitude of glorious angels waiting upon them : And this son and daughter of God shall, in their united glory and joy, present themselves together before the Father ; when Christ shall say, " Here am I, and the children which thou hast given me : " And they both shall in that relation and union, together receive the Father's blessing ; and shall thenceforward rejoice together, in consummate, uninterrupted, immutable, and everlasting glory, in the love and embraces of each other, and joint enjoyment of the love of the Father.

2. That forementioned union of faithful ministers with the people of Christ, is in order to this blessedness.

1. It is only with reference to Christ, as the true bridegroom of his church, that there is any union between a faithful minister and a Christian people, that is like that of a bridegroom and bride.

As I observed before, a faithful minister espouses a Christian people, not in his own name, but as Christ's ambassador : He espouses them, that in their being espoused to him, they may be espoused to Christ ; and not that the church may commit adultery with him : It is for his sake that he loves

her, with a tender conjugal affection, as she is the spouse of Christ, and as he, as the minister of Christ, has his heart under the influence of the Spirit of Christ ; as Abraham's faithful servant, that was sent to fetch a wife for his master's son, was captivated with Rebekah's beauty and virtue ; but not with reference to an union with himself, but with his master Isaac : It was for his sake he loved her, and it was for him that he desired her, and set his heart upon her, that she might be Isaac's wife : And it was for this that he greatly rejoiced over her, and for this he woo'd her, and for this he obtained her, and she was for a season united to him ; but it was but as a fellow traveller, that by him she might be brought to Isaac in the land of Canaan ; and for this he adorned her with ornaments of gold ; it was to prepare her for Isaac's embraces. All that tender care which a faithful minister takes of his people as a kind of spiritual husband, to provide for them, to lead and feed them, and comfort them, is not as looking upon them as his own bride, but his master's.

And on the other hand, the people receive him, and unite themselves to him in covenant, and honor him and subject themselves to him, and obey him, only for Christ's sake, and as one that represents him, and acts in his name towards them. All this love, and honor, and submission, is ultimately referred to Christ. Thus the apostle says, Gal. iv. 14. " Ye received me as an angel, or messenger of God, even as Christ Jesus." And the children that are brought forth in consequence of the union of the pastor and people, are not properly the minister's children, but the children of Christ ; they are not born of man, but of God.

2. The things that appertain to that forementioned union of a faithful minister and Christian people, are the principal appointed means of bringing the church to that blessedness that has been spoken of. As Abraham's servant, and the part he acted as Isaac's agent towards Rebekah, were the principal means of his being brought to enjoy the benefits of her conjugal relation to Isaac : Ministers are sent to woo the souls of men for Christ, 2 Cor. v. 20. " We are then ambassadors for

Christ, as though God did beseech you by us : we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." We read in Matth. xxii. of a certain king, that made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to invite and bring in the guests : It is ministers that are these servants. The labors of faithful ministers are the principal means God is wont to make use of for the conversion of the children of the church, and so of their espousals unto Christ. I have espoused you to one husband, says the apostle, 2 Cor. xi. 2. The preaching of the gospel by faithful ministers, is the principal means that God makes use of for the exhibiting Christ and his love and benefits to his elect people, and the chief means of their being sanctified, and so fitted to enjoy their spiritual bridegroom. Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it, as by the washing of water by the word, (i. e. by the preaching of the gospel) and so might present it to himself, a glorious church. The labors of faithful ministers are ordinarily the principal means of the joy of the saints in Christ Jesus, in their fellowship with their spiritual bridegroom in this world ; 2 Cor. i. 24. " We are helpers of your joy." They are the instruments that God makes use of for the bringing up the church, as it were, from her childhood, till she is fit for her marriage with the Lord of glory ; as Mordecai brought up Hadassah, or Esther, whereby she was fitted to be queen in Ahasuerus' court. God purifies the church under their hand, as Esther, to fit her for her marriage with the king, was committed to the custody of Hagai the keeper of the women, to be purified six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odors. They are made the instruments of clothing the church in her wedding garments, that fine linen, clean and white, and adorning her for her husband ; as Abraham's servant adorned Rebekah with golden earrings and bracelets. Faithful ministers are made the instruments of leading the people of God in the way to heaven, conducting them to the glorious presence of the bridegroom, to the consummate joys of her marriage with the Lamb ; as Abraham's servant conducted Rebekah from Padan aram to Canaan, and

presented her to Isaac, and delivered her into his embraces. For it is the office of ministers, not only to espouse the church to her husband, but to present her a chaste virgin to Christ.

I would now conclude this discourse with some exhortations, agreeable to what has been said. And,

1. The exhortation may be to all that are called to the work of the gospel ministry.....Let us who are honored by the glorious bridegroom of the church, to be employed as his ministers, to so high a purpose, as has been represented, be engaged and induced by what has been observed, to faithfulness in our great work ; that we may be, and act towards Christ's people that are committed to our care, as those that are united to them in holy espousals, for Christ's sake, and in order to their being brought to the unspeakable blessedness of that more glorious union with the Lamb of God, in which he shall rejoice over them, as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride. Let us see to it that our hearts are united to them, as a young man to a virgin that he marries, in the most ardent and tender affection ; and that our regard to them be pure and uncorrupt, that it may be a regard to them, and not to what they have, or any worldly advantages we hope to gain of them. And let us behave ourselves as those that are devoted to their good ; being willing to spend and be spent for them ; joyfully undertaking and enduring the labor and self denial that is requisite in order to a thorough fulfilling the ministry that we have received ; continually and earnestly endeavoring to promote the prosperity and salvation of the souls committed to our care ; and, as those that are their bone and their flesh, looking on their calamities and their prosperity as our own ; feeling their spiritual wounds and griefs, and refreshed with their consolations ; and spending our whole lives in diligent care and endeavor to provide for, nourish, and instruct our people, as the intended spouse of Christ, yet in her minority, that we may form her mind and behavior, and bring her up for him, and that we may cleanse her, as with the washing of water by the word, and purify her as with sweet odors, and

clothed in such raiment as may become Christ's bride ; that when the appointed wedding day comes, we may have done our work as Christ's messengers ; and may then be ready to present Christ's spouse to him, a chaste virgin, properly educated and formed, and suitably adorned for her marriage with the Lamb ; that he may then present her to himself, a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, and may receive her into his eternal embraces, in perfect purity, beauty, and glory.

Here I would mention three or four things tending to excite us to this fidelity.

1. We ought to consider how much Christ has done to obtain that joy that has been spoken of, in order to which we have been called to the work of the ministry, viz. that wherein Christ rejoices over his church, as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride.

The creation of the world seems to have been especially for this end, that the eternal Son of God might obtain a spouse towards whom he might fully exercise the infinite benevolence of his nature, and to whom he might, as it were, open and pour forth all that immense fountain of coudescension, love, and grace that was in his heart, and that in this way God might be glorified. Doubtless the work of creation is subordinate to the work of redemption : That is called the creation of the new heavens and new earth, and is represented as so much more excellent than the old, that that, in comparison of it, is not worthy to be mentioned, or come into mind.

But Christ has done greater things than to create the world, to obtain his bride and the joy of his espousals with her : For he was incarnate, and became man for this end ; which was a greater thing than his creating the world. For the Creator to make the creature was a great thing ; but for him to become a creature was a greater thing. And he did a much greater thing still to obtain this joy ; in that for this he laid down his life, and suffered even the death of the cross : For this he poured out his soul unto death ; and he that is the Lord of the universe, God over all blessed for evermore, of-

ferred up himself a sacrifice, in both body and soul, in the flames of divine wrath. Christ obtains his elect spouse by conquest : For she was a captive in the hands of dreadful enemies ; and her Redeemer came into the world to conquer these enemies, and rescue her out of their hands that she might be his bride : And he came and encountered these enemies in the greatest battle that ever was beheld by men or angels : He fought with principalities and powers ; he fought alone with the powers of darkness, and all the armies of hell ; yea, he conflicted with the infinitely more dreadful wrath of God and overcame in this great battle ; and thus he obtained his spouse. Let us consider at how great a price Christ purchased this spouse : He did not redeem her with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with his own precious blood ; yea, he gave himself for her. When he offered up himself to God in those extreme labors and sufferings, this was the joy that was set before him, that made him cheerfully to endure the cross, and despise the pain and shame in comparison of this joy ; even that rejoicing over his church, as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride that the Father had promised him, and that he expected when he should present her to himself in perfect beauty and blessedness.

The prospect of this was what supported him in the midst of the dismal prospect of his sufferings, at which his soul was troubled ; as appears by the account we have, John xii. 47. " Now is my soul troubled ; and what shall I say ? Father, save me from this hour : But for this cause came I unto this hour." These words shew the conflict and distress of Christ's holy soul in the view of his approaching sufferings. But in the midst of his trouble, he was refreshed with the joyful prospect of the success of those sufferings, in bringing home his elect church to himself, signified by a voice from heaven, and promised by the Father : On which he says, in the language of triumph, verse 31, 32. " Now is the judgment of this world : Now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me."

—And ministers of the gospel are appointed to be the instruments of bringing this to pass ; the instruments of bringing home his elect spouse to him, and her becoming his bride ; and the instruments of her sanctifying and cleansing by the word, that she might be meet to be presented to him on the future glorious wedding day. How great a motive then is here to induce us that are called to be these instruments, to be faithful in our work, and most willingly labor and suffer, that Christ may see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied ? Shall Christ do such great things, and go through such great labors and sufferings to obtain this joy, and then honor us sinful worms, so as to employ us as his ministers and instruments to bring this joy to pass ; and shall we be loth to labor, and backward to deny ourselves for this end ?

2. Let us consider how much the manner in which Christ employs us in this great business has to engage us to a faithful performance of it. We are sent forth as his servants ; but it is as highly dignified servants, as stewards of his household, as Abraham's servant ; and as his ambassadors, to stand in his stead, and in his name, and represent his person in so great an affair as that of his espousals with the eternally beloved of his soul. Christ employs us not as mere servants, but as friends of the bridegroom ; agreeable to the style in which John the Baptist speaks of himself, John iii. 29, in which he probably alludes to an ancient custom among the Jews at their nuptial solemnities, at which one of the guests that was most honored and next in dignity to the bridegroom, was styled *the friend of the bridegroom*.

There is not an angel in heaven, of how high an order soever, but what looks on himself honored by the Son of God and Lord of glory, in being employed by him as his minister in the high affair of his espousals with his blessed bride. But we are not only thus honored, but such an honor as this has Christ put upon us, that his spouse should in some sort be ours ; that we should marry, as a young man marries a virgin, the same mystical person that he himself will rejoice over, as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride ; that we should be

his ministers to treat and transact for him with his dear spouse, that he might obtain this joy ; and to transact in such a manner with her as in our treaty with her, to be married to her in his name, and sustain an image of his own endearing relation to her ; and that she should receive us, in some sort, as himself, and her heart be united to us in esteem, honor, and affection, as those that represent him ; and that Christ's and the church's children should be ours, and that the same that is the fruit of the travail of Christ's soul should be also the fruit of the travail of our souls ; as the apostle speaks of himself as travailling in birth with his hearers, Gal. iv. 19. The reason why Christ puts such honor on faithful ministers, even above the angels themselves, is, because they are of his beloved church, they are select members of his dear spouse, and Christ esteems nothing too much for her, no honor too great for her. Therefore Jesus Christ, the King of angels and men, does as it were cause it to be proclaimed concerning faithful ministers, as Ahasuerus did concerning him that brought up Esther, his beloved queen ; " Thus shall it be done to the man that the king delights to honor."

And seeing Christ hath so honored us, that our relation to his people imitates his ; surely our affection to them should resemble his, and we should imitate him in seeking their salvation, spiritual peace, and happiness, as Christ sought it. Our tender care, labors, selfdenial, and readiness to suffer for their happiness, should imitate what hath appeared in him, that hath purchased them with his own blood.

3. Let it be considered, that if we faithfully acquit ourselves in our office, in the manner that hath been represented, we shall surely hereafter be partakers of the joy, when the bridegroom and bride shall rejoice in each other in perfect and eternal glory.

God once gave forth a particular command, with special solemnity, that it should be written for the notice of all professing Christians through all ages, that they are happy and blessed indeed, who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb ; Rev. xix. 9. " And he saith unto me, Write, Bless-

ed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God." But if we are faithful in our work, we shall surely be the subjects of that blessedness ; we shall be partakers of the joy of the bridegroom and bride, not merely as friends and neighbors that are invited to be occasional guests, but as members of the one and the other. We shall be partakers with the church, the blessed bride, in her joy in the bridegroom, not only as friends and ministers to the church, but as members of principal dignity ; as the eye, the ear, the hand, are principal members of the body. Faithful ministers in the church will hereafter be a part of the church that shall receive distinguished glory at the resurrection of the just, which, above all other times, may be looked on as the church's wedding day ; Dan. xii. 2, 3. " Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life ; and they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars forever and ever." They are elders that are represented as that part of the church triumphant that sit next to the throne of God, Rev. iv. 4. " And round about the throne were four and twenty seats ; and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment ; and they had on their heads crowns of gold."

And we shall also be partakers of the joy of the bridegroom in his rejoicing over his bride. We, as the special friends of the bridegroom shall stand by the bridegroom, and hear him express his joy on that day, and rejoice greatly because of the bridegroom's voice ; as John the Baptist said of himself, John iii. 29. " He that hath the bride is the bridegroom : But the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice." Christ, in reward for our faithful service, in winning and espousing his bride to him, and bringing her up from her minority, and adorning her for him, will then call us to partake with him in the joy of his marriage. And she that will then be his joy, shall also be our crown of rejoicing. 1 Thess.

ii. 19. "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" What a joyful meeting had Christ and his disciples together, when the disciples returned to their Master, after the faithful and successful performance of their appointed service, when Christ sent them forth to preach the gospel; Luke x. 17. "And the seventy returned with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name." Here we see how they rejoice: The next words shew how Christ also rejoiced on that occasion: "And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." And in the next verse but two, we are told that, "in that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." So if we faithfully acquit ourselves, we shall another day return to him with joy; and we shall rejoice with him and he with us. Then will be the day when Christ, that has sown in tears and in blood, and we that have reaped the fruits of his labors and sufferings, shall rejoice together, agreeable to John iv. 35, 36, 37. And that will be an happy meeting indeed, when Christ and his lovely and blessed bride, and faithful ministers that have been the instruments of wooing and winning her heart to him, and adorning her for him, and presenting her to him, shall all rejoice together.

4. Further to stir us up to faithfulness in the great business that is appointed us, in order to the mutual joy of this bridegroom and bride, let us consider what reason we have to hope that the time is approaching when this joy shall be to a glorious degree fulfilled on earth, far beyond whatever yet has been; I mean the time of the church's latter day glory. This is what the words of our text have a more direct respect to; and this is what is prophesied of in Hos. ii. 19. 20. "And I will betroth thee unto me forever, yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord." And this is

what is especially intended by the marriage of the Lamb, in Rev. xix.

We are sure this day will come : And we have many reasons to think that it is approaching ; from the fulfilment of almost every thing that the prophecies speak of as preceding it, and their having been fulfilled now of a long time ; and from the general earnest expectations of the church of God, and the best of her ministers and members, and the late extraordinary things that have appeared in the church of God, and appertaining to the state of religion, and the present aspects of Divine Providence, which the time will not allow me largely to insist upon.

As the happiness of that day will have a great resemblance of the glory and joy of the eternal wedding day of the church after the resurrection of the just ; so will the privileges that faithful ministers shall be the subjects of at that time, much resemble the blessed privileges that they shall enjoy, as partaking with the bridegroom and bride, in their honor and happiness, in eternal glory. This is the time especially intended in the text, wherein it is said, “as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee.” And it is after in the prophecies spoken of as a great part of the glory of that time, that then the church should be so well supplied with faithful ministers. So in the next verse to the text, “I have set watchmen on thy walls, O Jerusalem, that shall never hold their peace, day nor night.” So, Isai. xxx. 20, 21. “Thy teachers shall not be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers ; and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.” Jer. iii. 15. “And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.” And, chap. xxiii. 4. “And I will set up shepherds over them, which shall feed them.” And the great privilege and joy of faithful ministers at that day is foretold in Isai. lii. 8. “Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice, with the

voice, together shall they sing : For they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion."

And as that day must needs be approaching, and we ourselves have lately seen some things that we have reason to hope are forerunners of it ; certainly it should strongly excite us to endeavor to be such pastors as God has promised to bless his church with at that time ; that if any of us should live to see the dawning of that glorious day, we might share in the blessedness of it, and then be called, as the friends of the bridegroom, to the marriage supper of the Lamb, and partake of that joy in which heaven and earth, angels and saints, and Christ and his church, shall be united at that time.

But here I would apply the exhortation in a few words to that minister of Christ, who above all others is concerned in the solemnity of this day, who is now to be united to, and set over this people as their pastor.

You have now heard, Reverend Sir, the great importance, and high ends of the office of an evangelical pastor, and the glorious privileges of such as are faithful in this office, imperfectly represented. May God grant that your union with this people, this day, as their pastor, may be such, that God's people here may have the great promise God makes to his church in the text, now fulfilled unto them. May you now, as one of the precious sons of Zion, take this part of Christ's church by the hand, in the name of your great Master, the glorious bridegroom, with an heart devoted unto him with true adoration and supreme affection, and for his sake knit to this people, in a spiritual and pure love, and as it were a conjugal tenderness ; ardently desiring that great happiness for them, which you have now heard Christ has chosen his church unto, and has shed his blood to obtain for her ; being yourself ready to spend and be spent for them ; remembering the great errand on which Christ sends you to them, viz. to woo and win their hearts, and espouse their souls to him, and to bring up his elect spouse, and to fit and adorn her for his embraces ; that you may in due time present her a chaste virgin to him, for him to rejoice over, as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the

bride. How honorable is this business that Christ employs you in ! And how joyfully should you perform it ! When Abraham's faithful servant was sent to take a wife for his master's son, how engaged was he in the business ; and how joyful was he when he succeeded ! With what joy did he bow his head and worship, and bless the Lord God of his master, for his mercy and his truth in making his way prosperous ! And what a joyful meeting may we conclude he had with Isaac, when he met him in the field, by the well of Lahai-roi, and there presented his beauteous Rebekah to him, and told him all things that he had done ! But this was but a shadow of that joy that you shall have, if you imitate his fidelity, in the day when you shall meet your glorious Master, and present Christ's church in this place, as a chaste and beautiful virgin unto him.

We trust, dear Sir, that you will esteem it a most blessed employment, to spend your time and skill in adorning Christ's bride for her marriage with the Lamb, and that it is work that you will do with delight ; and that you will take heed that the ornaments you put upon her are of the right sort, what shall be indeed beautiful and precious in the eyes of the bridegroom, that she may be all glorious within, and her clothing of wrought gold ; that on the wedding day, she may stand on the King's right hand in gold of Ophir.

The joyful day is coming, when the spouse of Christ shall be led in unto the King with raiment of needle work ; and angels and faithful ministers will be the servants that shall lead her in. And you, Sir, if you are faithful in the charge that is now to be committed to you, shall be joined with glorious angels in that honorable and joyful service ; but with this difference, that you shall have the higher privilege. Angels and faithful ministers shall be together in bringing in Christ's bride into his palace, and presenting her to him : But faithful ministers shall have a much higher participation of the joy of that occasion : They shall have a greater and more immediate participation with the bride in her joy ; for they shall not only be ministers to the church as the angels are, but parts of

the church, principal members of the bride. And as such, at the same time that angels do the part of ministering spirits to the bride, when they conduct her to the bridegroom, they shall also do the part of ministering spirits to faithful ministers. And they shall also have an higher participation with the bridegroom than the angels, in his rejoicing at that time ; for they shall be nearer to him than they ; for they are also his members, and are those that are honored as the principal instruments of espousing the saints to him, and fitting them for the enjoyment of him ; and therefore they will be more the crown of rejoicing of faithful ministers, than of the angels of heaven.

So great, dear Sir, is the honor and joy that is set before you, to engage you to faithfulness in your pastoral care of this people ; so glorious the prize that Christ has set up to engage you to run the race that is set before you.

I would now conclude with a few words to the people of this congregation, whose souls are now to be committed to the care of that minister of Christ, whom they have chosen as their pastor.

Let me take occasion, dear brethren, from what has been said, to exhort you, not forgetting the respect, honor, and reverence, that will ever be due from you to your former pastor, that has served you so long in that work, but by reason of age and growing infirmities, and the prospect of his place being so happily supplied by a successor, has seen meet to relinquish the burden of the pastoral charge over you : I say, Let me exhort you (not forgetting due respect to him as a father) to perform the duties that belong to you, in your part of that relation and union, now to be established between you and your elect pastor : To receive him as the messenger of the Lord of Hosts, one that in his office represents the glorious bridegroom of the church, to love and honor him, and willingly submit yourselves to him, as a virgin when married to an husband. Surely the fact of that messenger should be beautiful, that comes to you on such a blessed errand as that which you have heard, to espouse you to the eternal Son of God, and

to fit you for, and lead you to him as your bridegroom. Your chosen pastor comes to you on this errand, and he comes in the name of the bridegroom, so empowered by him, and representing him, that in receiving him, you will receive Christ, and in rejecting him, you will reject Christ.

Be exhorted to treat your pastor as the beautiful and virtuous Rebekah treated Abraham's servant : She most charitably and hospitably entertained him, provided lodging and food for him and his company, and took care that he should be comfortably entertained and supplied in all respects, while he continued in his embassy ; and that was the note or mark of distinction which God himself gave him, by which he should know the true spouse of Isaac from all others of the daughters of the city. Therefore in this respect approve yourselves as the true spouse of Christ, by giving kind entertainment to your minister that comes to espouse you to the antitype of Isaac. Provide for his outward subsistence and comfort, with the like cheerfulness that Rebekah did for Abraham's servant. You have an account of her alacrity and liberality in supplying him, in Gen. xxiv. 18, 19, 20, and 25. Say as her brother did, verse 31. "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord."

Thus you should entertain your pastor. But this is not that wherein your duty towards him chiefly lies : The main thing is to comply with him in his great errand, and to yield to the suit that he makes to you in the name of Christ, to go to be his bride. In this you should be like Rebekah : She was, from what she heard of Isaac, and God's covenant with him, and blessing upon him, from the mouth of Abraham's servant, willing for ever to forsake her own country, and her father's house, to go into a country she had never seen, to be Isaac's wife, whom also she never saw. After she had heard what the servant had to say, and her old friends had a mind she should put off the affair for the present, but it was insisted on that she should go immediately, and she was inquired of, "whether she would go with this man," she said, "I will go." And she left her kindred, and followed the man through all that long journey, till he had brought her unto Isaac, and they

three had that joyful meeting in Canaan. If you will this day receive your pastor in that union that is now to be established between him and you, it will be a joyful day in this place, and the joy will be like the joy of espousals, as when a young man marries a virgin ; and it will not only be a joyful day in East Hampton, but it will doubtless be a joyful day in heaven, on your account. And your joy will be a faint resemblance, and a forerunner of that future joy, when Christ shall rejoice over you as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, in heavenly glory.

And if your pastor be faithful in his office, and you hearken and yield to him in that great errand on which Christ sends him to you, the time will come, wherein you and your pastor will be each other's crown of rejoicing, and wherein Christ, and he, and you, shall all meet together at the glorious marriage of the Lamb, and shall rejoice in and over one another, with perfect, uninterrupted, never ending and never fading joy.