

Hugo Bouter

The Bride at the Well

On the calling of the bride

"And she went down to the well, filled her pitcher, and came up. And the servant ran to meet her and said, Please let me drink a little water from your pitcher. So she said: Drink, my lord. Then she hastened and let her pitcher down to her hand, and gave him a drink".

Genesis 24:10f.

The search for a wife for Isaac

From the story of Isaac's marriage to Rebekah all kinds of lessons can be drawn, both practical and typological. What I would like to emphasize here especially is the connection between the bride and the well of water. We find this twice in this chapter. The servant of Abraham found Rebekah at the spring outside the city of Haran, from which she drew water for the servant of Abraham and all his camels. And at the end of Genesis 24, she met her husband-to-be not far from the spring Lahai-Roi, where Isaac lived.

These incidents are first of all of practical value: it is good when believers see and meet each other at the well from which we all can drink: the living Word of God. As we reflect on the bride at the well, the typological lesson for us as believers, who belong to the bride of Christ, the church, is also obvious. Christ is the Lamb of God, and He has bought us with the price of His life. He died for us and rose again. And God raised Him from the dead, just as Abraham also received his son back from death in a figurative sense (Heb. 11:17-19). After the sacrifice of the Son (Gen. 22), and the setting aside of the people from whom He came as far as the flesh was concerned (Gen. 23) – Israel being temporarily Lo-Ammi – followed the search for

a bride. The Father loves the Son and He has given all things into His hand (John 3:35). He is the Heir of all things, just as Abraham had given to Isaac all that he possessed.

But Christ does not possess this high position, that universal glory alone. It has been God's counsel to place a bride at His side, to make her share in His glory. She bears a special name. She is "the Lamb's wife" (Rev. 21:9). She is united with Him who was dead, but who is alive forevermore. According to the last book of the Bible, the Lamb is the great center of all God's counsels. As Adam and Eve were set over the first creation, so the last Adam and His wife will rule over the new heavens and the new earth.

The desire of the Spirit and the bride

The calling of the bride, the formation and equipping of the church, takes place by the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was sent to this earth by God the Father to prepare a bride for the Son of His love. The servant of Abraham does not come to the fore in Genesis 24, his name is not even mentioned here (it is in Gen. 15:2). He acts only on behalf of Abraham and Isaac. So it is with the Holy Spirit, who acts on behalf of the Father and the Son and claims no honor for Himself. The New Testament, therefore, provides us with no examples of praying and singing to the Spirit. The Spirit is now calling a bride out of this world and making her fit for the Man in the glory, our Lord Jesus Christ.

But where is the bride to be found? Where is the Holy Spirit at work in this world, seeking "the Lamb's wife", the church that answers to the desires of His heart? The answer is very simple. Like Rebekah, the bride of the Son is to be found "at the well". She is gathered around the living well of the Word of God. After all, as believers, we drink from the clear waters of God's Word. The Word of God is living and powerful and it cleanses, refreshes, and quickens us (John 13:10; Eph. 5:26). Moreover, we have been given to drink from God's Spirit (1 Cor. 10:4; 12:13). So the spring has a twofold meaning. It speaks of the pure water of the Word, but also of the life-giving action of the Holy Spirit. This should not surprise us. After all, it is an important principle that the Word and the Spirit cannot be separated. The Spirit works through the Word, and the Word is made alive in our hearts by the Spirit.

Thus, the water Christ gives us quenches our spiritual thirst, i.e., the desire for God, for peace, for forgiveness, for eternal life (cf. John 4:14). The water He gives

becomes in us a fountain of water, springing up into eternal life. But it does not only supply our own needs. The living water also flows from within us to quench the thirst of others. The streams of living water, so to speak, moisten the thirsty ground around us (John 7:37-39). And whoever is thirsty may come. Whoever desires can take the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17).

This important verse in the last chapter of the Bible first shows us how the Spirit and the bride look forward to Christ's return. The Spirit and the bride say together, Come! The bride longs for the coming of her Bridegroom, who as the shining Morning Star announces the end of the night. And it is God's Spirit who proclaims these things to her.

But, of course, it is not good if the church would have no regard for the thirsty people around her. The streams of living water must also reach others. As long as Christ has not returned, the thirst-quenching Gospel is offered to all. It is the "bride" who does this: she draws the living water and shares it with others. The Gospel is offered freely. Whoever is thirsty may come; and whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely, without money and without price.

Genesis 24 is a beautiful Old Testament illustration of this. The bride at the well is willing to share the water with others. She does not think only of herself, but also quenches the thirst of the stranger who asks her, "Let me drink a little water from your pitcher" (v. 17). Rebekah was very willing in this regard. She was eager to do all the work that Abraham's servant hoped for while praying. She was willing to serve and so she proved to be made of the right stuff. Of course, there are other good things about her mentioned in this chapter, and in this way we find even more characteristics of the bride of Christ. But this is the first thing that is presented to us here: the willingness to serve and to quench the thirst of others.

The practical preparation of the bride

A few other "good qualities" of Rebekah can be mentioned, a few things that stand out here in connection with the calling of the bride:

1. there is a family relationship with the bridegroom (v. 4, 15, 24, 27, 47-48);
2. the bride is adorned with the bridegroom's riches (v. 22, 30, 53);
3. she is willing to follow the servant to the land of Canaan (v. 3-9; 37-41; 54-61);
4. she covered herself with a veil as a sign of complete devotion to the bridegroom (v. 64-65).

Each of these things also has a deep spiritual meaning, in relation to the preparation of the bride of Christ. There is kinship with Him in that we hear and do the Word of God, for we are born of God (Luke 8:21; John 1:12-13). There can be no doubt about our relationship with Him; it should be clearly established.

Next we see that the bride is drawn from the present evil world (cf. Gal. 1:4). The Spirit now gathers a congregation for the Son in this dispensation of grace. This company is taken by the hand, as it were, by the Spirit in order to be united with her heavenly Bridegroom. With determination she turns her back on the world and goes out to meet the Bridegroom (Matt. 25:1-6; Rev. 18:4).

It is not a poor and destitute bride that is heading for the Promised Land. The riches of the Son are already given to us now and we should adorn ourselves with them. The precious possessions of Christ are our lawful portion. It is precisely the work of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to take these treasures and show them to us (John 16:13-15). Thus Christ lays His glory upon us and we become His possession. Of this the nose ring speaks particularly (v. 22, 30, 47).

The gold with which the bride is adorned is a picture of divine righteousness and glory (Ps. 45:10). The silver symbolizes the atonement, the price that had to be paid for our redemption (Ex. 30:11-16; 38:25-26; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). The clothes given to her recall the garment of praise, the garments of salvation, the robe of righteousness (Isa. 61:3,10). It is the rich robe with which God Himself has clothed us (Zech. 3:4-5).

Thus the Spirit takes the church, the bride of Christ, and sets it on its way (cf. Gen. 24:61). Under His guidance it is led to meet the Lord. That is the task of the Spirit as our Helper. In this way we get to know Jesus better and better. By the teaching of the Comforter we gain insight into the glories of Christ. All our questions are answered from God's Word. The Holy Spirit guides us and prepares us for our encounter with the Lord of glory, the Man in heaven.

Who is this Man?

The meeting between Isaac and Rebekah took place in the South, i.e. the Negev, not far from the well Lahai-Roi. When Rebekah asked, "Who is this man walking in the field to meet us?" the servant clearly replied, "It is my master". Thereupon Rebekah took her veil and covered herself (v. 62-65).

The lesson for us is that by the guidance of the Holy Spirit we meet our Lord at the spring. As the Spirit shows us Christ's glories from the Word, an encounter takes place while we bow down before Him and consecrate ourselves wholly to Him. This already happens during our lifetime here on earth, when we learn to see Him by the eye of faith. We then realize that we are His possession and that from now on we should live only for this Man (cf. Rom. 7:4). The covering with the veil expresses this in a beautiful symbolical way.

However, the actual meeting between Christ and the church only takes place at the end of this dispensation. The Spirit and the bride will then be taken away from the earth. We shall soon be caught up, "to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:15-18). But the rapture of the church is not the teaching of Genesis 24. The Old Testament types are always about the practical issues of our spiritual life. We "meet" the Lord in the place where He gathers us around Himself, where His Word is at the center. This produces the desire to consecrate ourselves to Him without reservation. The result is a life in His service.

