

## THE BRIDEGROOM COMETH

The Scriptures teach that there is only one true God, Creator of heaven and earth, and that all men must either render Him the worship and service He is due, or suffer the consequences.

The Bible opens with these words: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." (Genesis 1:1) God is the uncreated Creator of all things. Saint John wrote in his gospel, "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." (John 1:3) God created all things, and He created them for Himself, and this includes both gods and men. Saint Paul wrote to the Colossians "By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him." (Colossians 1:16) There are other gods in the world, and they are powerful; yet, they are God's creatures, and there are limits to their power. The gods are mighty, but God is almighty, and He rules over the earth. King David wrote in the Book of Psalms, "For thou, LORD, art high above all the earth: thou art exalted far above all gods." (Psalms 97:9) In another psalm, it reads, "For I know that the LORD is great, and that our Lord is above all gods. Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places. (Psalm 135:5, 6)

Because God is the Almighty Creator, all men must worship and serve Him, and none others. It says in the Book of Psalms, "For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised: he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the LORD made the heavens." (Psalm 96:4, 5) Again, in another psalm: "O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker." (Psalm 95:6) Not only ought men to worship the one true God, but the gods, as well, ought to worship Him. The Psalmist wrote, "Worship him, all ye gods." (Psalm 97:7)

All men and gods ought to worship God, and Him alone, but rebellious gods demanded that men worship them, and rebellious men submitted to their demands. Saint Paul wrote to the Romans:

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. (Romans 1:21–23)

God would not allow this rebellion to continue forever, however. He would suppress the rebellion, and save the world, and He began Abraham. God said to him:

Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. (Genesis 12:1–3)

God told Abraham to leave his father's people, and his father's land, and to go to a land that God would show him, and God would make of Abraham a great nation, and through Abraham God would save the world. Abraham believed God, and obeyed Him, and so God gave Abraham many descendents. When his descendents, the Israelites, sojourned in Egypt, their number became so great that Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, feared a

rebellion, and so he enslaved them. The Israelites cried out in their distress, and God, because of His promise to Abraham, would deliver them. (Exodus 2:23–25)

God through Moses commanded Pharaoh to let go the Israelites so that they might serve Him, but Pharaoh refused. (Exodus 5:1–5) So, God afflicted Pharaoh until he did let them go. The Egyptians worshiped and served a number of gods, but God by ten plagues demonstrated His power over them. Concerning the tenth, God said, “For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.” (Exodus 12:12) Finally, Pharaoh, his gods’ being defeated, let go the Israelites. Soon after, Pharaoh had a change of heart, and with his army he pursued the Israelites and trapped them by the Red Sea. God through Moses parted the sea so that Israel crossed over, then He caused the waters to return so that Pharaoh and his army were destroyed. Afterward, Moses sang, “Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” (Exodus 15:11)

Moses led the people out of Egypt to Mount Sinai, and there He made a covenant with Israel. He said to them:

Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. (Exodus 19:4–6)

The people, when they heard the terms of the covenant, replied, “All that the LORD hath spoken we will do.” (Exodus 19:8) So, God gave Israel His law, the Ten Commandments, the first being, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” (Exodus 20:3) The second is:

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. (Exodus 20:4–6)

God is, in the best sense, a jealous god. His love for His people is true, and He expects from them the same. He will not allow His people to love and serve another. Yet, within a few weeks, they made an idol of a golden calf, and worshiped it, and said, “These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. (Exodus 32:4) The Lord was angry with them, and sent a plague on them. (Exodus 32:35)

When the time came for Israel to enter into the promised land, Moses renewed their covenant with the Lord. He first reviewed for them their history, reminding them of God’s faithfulness, and their unfaithfulness. He then reminded them of the covenant promises, and the covenant obligations, and He exhorted them to obedience. Then he said to them, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” (Genesis 6:4, 5) There is one true God, and so His people must be completely devoted to Him. Moses said:

Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will

not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known. (Deuteronomy 11:26–28)

God's covenant with His people includes blessing for obedience, and cursing for disobedience. Yet, God does not desire His people to serve Him out of mere fear, but out of love.

After the death of Moses, Joshua led the Israelites to conquer the promised land. When Joshua reached the end of his days, he addressed the people. He said to them:

Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods. And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed. (Joshua 24:2, 3)

Joshua reminded the people that, before Abraham, all the world was full of idols and idolaters. Yet, God called Abraham out of an idolatrous people to make of him a people who would serve the true God only, to give that people a land in which to dwell. Joshua, like Moses, reviewed for the people the history of God's promises and His faithfulness. Joshua, like Moses, called the people to be faithful to God, and to their covenant with Him. He said:

Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. (Joshua 24:14–15)

Joshua called on the people to serve the Lord, and to do so with an undivided heart. To any who served the gods their forefathers served on the other side of the Jordan River, and in Egypt, Joshua said to abandon them, and serve the Lord alone. Just as Moses had laid before Israel a choice, so did Joshua. They had to choose whether they would serve the true god, or false ones. Joshua had already made his choice: his household would serve the true god.

The people replied:

God forbid that we should forsake the LORD, to serve other gods; For the LORD our God, he it is that brought us up and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and which did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way wherein we went, and among all the people through whom we passed: And the LORD drave out from before us all the people, even the Amorites which dwelt in the land: therefore will we also serve the LORD; for he is our God. (Joshua 24:16–18)

The people acknowledged that their God, not some other god, delivered them from bondage in Egypt. They did not forget that they saw Him perform many mighty works, and that He always protected them, and provided for them. They acknowledged it was not by their own power, but by the power of God, that they drove out from the

promised land the heathen nations. They acknowledged that the Lord was the one true God, the almighty God, the faithful God, the benevolent God, and they said they would serve Him, and none other. So, Joshua said to them:

Ye cannot serve the LORD: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If ye forsake the LORD, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good. (Joshua 24:19, 21)

Joshua told the people that being the Lord's covenant people was no easy matter. God is holy. He is perfect in every way, and His law is perfect. God's standard is quite strict: He requires perfect obedience. Furthermore, God does not forgive men their sins, not without repentance and atonement. God is also jealous, and He has every right to be so. He is the one true God, and so He alone is worthy of man's love and service. Moreover, He demands that His people, the object of His affection, be faithful to Him, just as He is faithful to them. Joshua warned the people that, if they should turn away from God, and worship and serve other gods, then, although He had been so good to them, He would destroy them.

The people did not waver. They said, "Nay; but we will serve the LORD." (Joshua 24:21) So, Joshua said to them, "Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the LORD, to serve him." (Joshua 24:22) The people said they would serve the Lord, and so, if they turned away from the Lord to serve other gods, then their own words would be witness against them. The people agreed, and said, "We are witnesses." (Joshua 24:22) So, Joshua said, "Now therefore put away, said he, the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the LORD God of Israel." Joshua told them that, if there were any among them who did serve other gods, then they must turn away from them, and, with all their hearts, fully embrace the one true God. The people answered, "The LORD our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey." (Joshua 24:24) So, Joshua, like Moses, renewed people's covenant with the Lord, and restated for them God's law.

God made a covenant with His people, and gave them His law. the people had not the power to keep it, however, nor was there any real atonement for them when they failed. Yet, the Lord would not leave His people in this helpless state. He would send into the world His Only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to atone for the sins of His people, and to empower them to fulfill His law. Jesus would die to atone for their sins, and after He rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven, He would send into the world His Spirit, to empower God's covenant people to obey Him. Saint Paul wrote to the Romans:

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. (Romans 8:1-4)

So, one who believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and who repents of his sins, has, by God's grace, forgiveness of his sins, and he has the Spirit who helps Him to keep the law of God.

The Christian, by God's grace has forgiveness of sins when he repents, does not mean that He may do whatever he pleases. In his covenant with the Lord, he is always bound to obey. Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to ten virgins. Five were foolish and brought with them not enough oil to keep their lamps lighted until they met the bridegroom for the wedding. Five were wise, and brought enough. While the ten awaited the

bridegroom, the lamps of the foolish burnt out, but the lamps of the wise remained lit. While the foolish left to buy more oil, the wise entered into the house for the wedding, and the door was shut behind them so that, when the foolish returned, entrance was barred to them. When they knocked, the bridegroom said that he did not know them. The parable is a warning to hypocrites, those who have the form of religion, but not the matter. (compare 2 Timothy 3:5) The five wise virgins are Christians who not only agree to the terms of God's covenant, but also meet those terms; they persevere in faith and good works. The foolish virgins are Christians who agree to the terms, but fail to meet them; they do not persevere in faith and good works. The kingdom of God is for the former, and not for the latter. Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, said:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Matthew 7:21–23)

Jesus will one day return to earth from heaven, and He will judge the world in righteousness. (Acts 17:31) Jesus told His disciples, "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." (Matthew 25:13) The Christian, considering that Christ will one day return to judge, ought not to be slothful, but diligent in good works.

Saint Paul wrote to the Thessalonians:

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18)

The faithful Christian need not fear the return of Christ. In fact, it will be an occasion of great joy. Jesus died, but He rose from the dead. The Lord revealed to the apostles that, when He returns, He will first raise from the dead those Christians who had previously died; then they, together with those who have not died, will be caught up into the sky, where they will meet the Lord. Beginning with this blessed reunion, they will all be together forever. When a loved one dies, the death is very difficult for those who survive him, and they mourn the loss. The Christian must understand that, although he has reason for sorrow, he also has reason for hope, which reason others do not have. Every Christian ought to keep this in mind, and also to remind other Christians who need such consolation.

Let us understand that God's covenants have both promise and obligation. Let us live as those who believe in the return of Christ. Let us hope for His return, when we will be reunited with those Christian brothers and sisters whom we love.

Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.