

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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GOD, THE HUSBAND OF HIS PEOPLE.

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## A Sermon

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C. H. SPURGEON,

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"Although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord."—Jeremiah xxxi. 32.

SIN is greatly aggravated by the mercy of God, of which the sinner has been a partaker. Sin in a child of God is peculiarly sinful. Instead of its being a trifle, as some men seem to think, it is a very solemn matter indeed. To have had deep draughts of divine love, and then deeply to offend against that love, is no light thing. This seems to have been the crying part of Israel's sin. "Although I was an husband unto them."

Brethren and sisters in Christ, God's ancient people Israel seem to have lived and passed across the page of history on purpose that they might remain for ever the picture of ourselves. Whenever you read of their backslidings, of their idolatries, of their provoking of God's Spirit, you may shut the book and say, "Within my heart there is all this, and my life is as like to this as in a glass face answers to face." We must not be slow to condemn their sin, but we must always remember that there are two culprits at the bar, and that when we condemn them we also condemn ourselves.

Now, at this time, we shall, first of all, spend a few minutes in considering the indictment which God brought against his people Israel—they had sinned—"although," said he, "I was an husband unto them"; secondly, *we shall have to plead guilty to the indictment for ourselves*; and then, thirdly, we shall offer some suggestions

of amendment that should arise out of the painful and penitent reflections of this evening. First, then, let us consider very earnestly and humbly:—

I. THE INDICTMENT WHICH GOD BROUGHT AGAINST ISRAEL.

Their sin was aggravated because God was a husband unto them. How was this? He was a husband to them in that *he set his special love upon them*, as a husband does upon his bride. He found them, as he saith, in a desert land, in a howling wilderness. He found them, as we know, literally, in the land of Egypt, in the house of bondage, where their lives were made bitter in the cruel slavery of making bricks for their tyrant masters. But he so loved them that, with a high hand and an outstretched arm, he redeemed them. All his plagues he brought on Pharaoh and upon the field of Zoan; he magnified his power, even on the tribes of Pharaoh, and at the Red Sea he glorified himself by the destruction of all the hosts of Egypt. But as for his people, he led them forth like sheep, by the hands of Moses and Aaron. A husband, having loved his bride, and finding her in slavery, would never cease until the utmost that could be done had been done for her liberty and happiness; and God was thus a husband unto his people. He saith, "I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee."

He was a husband unto them, further, *in that he made them, and them only, to be his special people*. As the husband turns not his eyes to others, but sets his heart upon the one peculiar one, so did the Lord towards his people Israel; and what people were like unto them—what people to whom God manifested himself so clearly? There were other nations greater than they, but God did not send his truth unto them, but they lived and perished in darkness. But God, in his sovereign grace, set his heart on Israel; Israel he loved, and Israel alone.

He was a husband unto them, in the next place, *in that he remained faithful to them*. He had taken them, as it were, for better or for worse, and worse it was with terrible preponderance. They grieved his Spirit, and provoked him to anger, yet he cast not away his people. Even to this day he is still a husband unto Israel, and the day shall come when the scattered and the dispersed of Judah shall be gathered with all their brethren into their own land, and where they sat down, and wept, and mourned over the desolation of their cities, they shall once again wake the harp with joy and gladness. God has been a husband to that people in the faithfulness which he exhibited towards them.

He was their husband, too, in this sense, *that he communed with them most lovingly*. There were divers appearances which the Lord made to his people by his prophets, and he did great wonders, and wrought many signs and miracles. Besides that, he revealed himself in the tabernacle and in the temple: in the sacrifice and in the offerings. True, in not so clear a light as he has revealed himself to us, but still with marvellous brightness as compared with the darkness in which the whole world was lying. As a

husband revealeth himself in love unto his spouse, so did the Lord as a husband unto his ancient Church.

In addition to this, *he took care to provide for his people Israel*, as a husband doth, when with all his worldly goods he doth endow her whom he hath chosen. What people were like to them, who did eat angels' food? Yea, they ate manna to the full. If they wanted water, the rock furnished it to them: he brought oil out of the flinty rock when they needed it. All that they wanted in the wilderness was supplied bounteously to them. Their garments waxed not old, neither were their feet sore by the space of forty years, though they passed through that howling wilderness whence no supplies could be drawn. No people were ever better provided for than they, for even their luxury was sometimes at least gratified; when they asked for flesh, the quails descended, and they were fattened thereon.

In addition to that, the God who had become their husband *protected them*, as the husband does his wife. He chased the Amalekites before them: he suffered no people to withstand them when they went forth to battle, and the Lord led the van. Though he chastened them before their enemies, for their sins, yet when they returned he made one of them to smite a thousand and to put ten thousand to flight. Marvellous were the deliverances which the Lord wrought for his people. Time would fail us to tell of Gideon and of Barak, of Sampson and of Jephtha, and of all that the Lord, the husband of Israel, did in the deliverance of his spouse.

Nor did he rest *until he had brought his people Israel into that quiet and settled state which is the expectation of those who enter into the conjugal relationship*. Under their own vines and their own fig-trees he made them to sit down and rest. He brought them to a land that flowed with milk and honey, out of whose hills they could dig brass. He drove out the heathen before them, and gave them their land for an heritage, even an heritage for ever for his people Israel, and there the spouse of God might long have enjoyed her rest and her peace, had it not been that she broke her covenant, although he had been an husband unto her.

Now, beloved, just think, before we turn away from this, what a wonderful picture this is of how the Lord has dealt with such of us as are his believing people. Think of his love to us *when he brought us out of Egypt*. We do remember well, some of us, the days of our bondage, for the iron entered into our soul. We can never forget those deep convictions, those terrible lashings of the law, and our own hard-working endeavours to make bricks without straw, that we might save ourselves by our works. How gloriously he brought us forth! How he made us to eat of the paschal lamb, and how the blood-mark was put upon the lintel and the two sideposts, and we learned what it was, for God to look upon the blood and to pass over us. And what a triumphant day that was when all our sins were drowned in the shoreless flood of the Saviour's atonement! What a shouting went up from our

hearts that day, louder and sweeter than even that of the daughters of Israel when they followed Miriam with their tabrets and timbrels to the dance! We did say then, and in recollection of it we will say it again now, "Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously!" As for our sins, the depths have covered them; there is not one of them left. Those Egyptians whom we saw through our tears, we shall see no more for ever.

From that day, how God has been pleased to prove that he is a husband to us, *by his special love to us!* We never can doubt that doctrine of his special love. I hate to see a contracted mind that will not tolerate the thought that God has a benevolence towards all his creatures. His tender mercies are over all his works, but do let us never in the thought of that, forget that there is also a peculiar and special affection which he hath towards his own chosen whom he brings to Christ. He loves not the world as he loves his spouse. God hath no affection towards the ungodly such as he hath towards those whom he hath united unto himself, and made to be his, as the spouse is to her husband, in a vital, conjugal, affectionate, intense, eternal union.

God has been a husband to us certainly, in that not only has he chosen us specially in his love, but also in *that he has been marvelously faithful in that love.* I can scarce speak to you without feeling the tears well up to my eyes when I think of my own unfaithfulness to him who loved me or ever the earth was. Oh! which is the stranger of the two, that he should love us, or that we should treat him so unfaithfully?

"Yet, though I have him oft forgot,  
His loving-kindness changeth not."

Precious truth! He has been a husband unto us. He has never thought of divorce. Is it not written that "he hateth putting away"? And so he doth, and he hath not put us away, but we are as dear to him now as we were of old, and as we shall be when we stand before his face without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.

Remember, my brethren, also, in thinking over how God has been a husband to us, as he was to Israel, that *he has been pleased to provide for us, as he did for Israel.* Providentially, in temporal matters, we have been provided for. Perhaps some of you could not tell how you have been led in a very intricate pathway. There have been times when you have been on the verge of want, and periods certainly when you had nothing to spare. And yet, up to this moment, he that feeds the sparrows and clothes the lilies has not let you starve, and you can sing to the praise of his faithfulness that bread has been given you, and your waters have been sure. But it has been specially so in spiritual things. Do you ever know what it is to be drained right out in spirituals: to come right to the very bottom—lower than the poor widow when she had but a

handful of meal to make one cake, and then die? Alas! some of us know what it is to be brought to extreme spiritual poverty, and a sense of nothingness in ourselves that well-nigh breaks us to pieces, and lowers us into the abyss of despair. But though the tide has ebbed out fearfully, there has always been enough water for every galley of grace to float, and though the night has been very dark, there has always been light enough for the soul to find its way somehow; and though at times the tempest has howled terribly through the gloom, yet there has always been a harbour: so that we have been enabled to outride the hurricane, and so we shall yet outride all the storms we encounter until we reach the port of bliss. He has well provided for us, and therein has he been a husband unto us.

And equally well has he *protected us*. We little know how much we owe to the protection of Providence. We sometimes forget our dangers. I was amused to hear of a sailor when he was out in the Channel, and you would think he was in great danger, saying, "What a dreadful thing it must be to be on land in such an hour, with chimney-pots flying about and tiles falling off the houses. Who knows who may be killed if they are not safe at sea in such a storm!" We do not always reckon upon these immunities from danger which God gives us, or know how much they cost. Indeed, if Providence goes very smoothly with us, we do not seem to notice it at all. A father and a son, living at some distance from each other, agreed to meet half-way on a certain day. The son, after he had saluted his father, said, "I have met with a most remarkable providence on the road; my horse fell three times, and yet I was not at all hurt." "Ah!" said the father, "I have had an equally remarkable providence; I rode my horse all the way, and he did not even stumble." We do not notice the hand of Providence often in that kind of thing as we ought to do. The preservations of our life—oh! we do not know how many there are. Now and then we have a surprising one which we can observe, and we jot that down in our diary; but we have many more which are not noticed by us. And as for spiritual preservations, my brethren, incessantly in danger as we are from temptations from without and corruptions from within, from our circumstances, from the world, from the flesh, from the devil—God has, indeed, been a husband to us, and a wall of fire round about us, protecting us, else we had not been here amongst his people to-night, but we had been numbered amongst the castaways who have gone back into perdition.

So I might continue, for I think we may add that last point. God has given to many of us just *that settled rest* which he gave to his people Israel when they came to Canaan. He has been a husband to us, and as Naomi said to Ruth, "My daughter, thou shalt find rest in the house of thy husband," so have we found rest in Jesus Christ, a peace of God which passeth all understanding, and we have come to a land that floweth with milk and honey. We have crossed the Jordan of doubts and fears, and though we

have not driven out the Canaanites of daily temptation, yet still we possess the land, for we that have believed do enter into rest.

This, then, is the indictment against us, that although he has been a husband unto us, we have not acted towards him as such husbandly love deserves. So we turn now to the next great thought, which is that:—

II. WE HAVE TO PLEAD GUILTY TO THE INDICTMENT AGAINST OURSELVES.

Dear brethren, I desire not to speak so much to you as to myself, and I pray of you that my voice may be accepted as your own voice to yourselves, and wherein anything cometh home to the conscience, open the door to it: let it wound you, and let it grieve you, and let it rouse you to something nobler. God grant that it may.

What have been the peculiar sins that we as Christian people have committed against the love of God, who hath been as a husband to us? Well, first, it is a very grievous offence against the marriage state *when the heart of the bride wanders*—when she is not sure after all that her husband is the man of her choice, and the man whom, above all others, she esteems. Now, such an offence against our union to God, I am afraid, we have commonly committed. Our thoughts have often wandered, wandered from our God. Our dearest earthly friends have sometimes tempted our hearts away. Verily I perceive that children we often idolize: worse still—for in a certain sense it is worse—that more sordid idolatry, the love of gold, the desire to be rich, has led many a soul astray from its chaste, simple, ardent affection to the God of love. Our very books and our studies may decoy us from our God. Yea, our own ministers, whom we love, and even what we hear from them, may stand between us and God. The man that will be an idolater will make a God of anything, as the poor Hottentots do with a bit of rag, which they will call a god, and worship it. We may make a god of anything, and how quick we are to do it! Oh! our God, our God, our God! Dost thou condescend to make thyself a husband to us? Oh! can there be anything compared to thee? What shall we even think of as second to thee? Thou art fulness of joy; thou art infinity of good. What fools, what madmen, what sinners of a scarlet dye are we when we let our heart even wink its eye, as it were, to anything else, much less go astray and miss the love which we ought to give to God alone! That is the first sin of which we may stand convicted—wandering in heart from God, although he has been a husband unto us.

Our second sin, probably, is *that we have been negligent in his service*. It is the wife's joy to please her husband, and unkindness or negligence from her becomes a grievous mischief in the household circle. Now, if God becomes a husband unto us, what ought we to do for him? Methinks he might come to-night and say, "I have somewhat against thee," and he might look us in the face and say, "I have not wearied thee with sacrifice, but thou hast wearied me with thy sins: thou hast brought me no sweet canes,

neither has thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices." Much that we might have done for our Lord's glory we have negligently left undone. Many and many a fair opportunity of speaking well of his great name has slipped by, unused. Brethren and sisters, is it not so? I read once in a letter from a brother that he had attained unto perfect sanctification for twenty years! Oh! if it were true, what would I give if I could say the same! I do not believe it, or that any one of us has for twenty minutes done all that he could for his Master, much less for twenty years. Sins of omission at least there must have been. I dare not look back upon a single sermon without feeling that I ought to have preached it better, nor ever rise from my knees in prayer without feeling that I ought to have prayed more earnestly, and to have come nearer to God. Everything seems marred and spoiled. After perfection we will strive, but who among us has attained it? Have we not been negligent in the loving-kindness which we ought to have manifested toward him who has been a husband to us?

Further than that, brothers and sisters, have we not been very much to blame in *the slackness of our communion*? The wife desires to see her husband. She says:—

“ There is nae luck about the house  
When the gude man's awa! ”

She cannot be satisfied without his presence. She says there is music in the sound of his footstep when she hears it on the stairs. She loves to meet him when he comes home from his daily labour. It is her joy to be in his company. Has it been so with us? Oh! brethren, you have come up sometimes to this Tabernacle, and you have listened to me, but you have not had any desire to get near to God, or, if you have, it has been a very faint desire, and you have gone away without seeing him. And day after day will pass with some professors without a word with the Master, without a single glimpse of the Saviour. They seem to be content when the great good Lord, who is a husband to them is far away. It must not be so any more. Let us confess the sin. I fear it is so with most of us.

A further sin against God, our husband, is this, that I fear *we have often been loose in our trust in him*. It would be a sad thing if the wife did not believe her husband's word, and if she could not trust her husband's heart. Now, it has been so between us and God sometimes. He cannot lie; moreover, he has given us two immutable things wherein it is impossible for him to lie, that we might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to the hope that is set before us in the gospel. He has never broken a promise yet. If we never doubted God till God gave us cause to doubt him, doubting would be all unknown. And yet have we not been base enough, when some new trial has come, to sit down and say, “ Shall I get through this? Will the promise be

fulfilled now Will not the Lord, after all, leave his servant to perish?" Shame on us! Shame on us! Shame on us! The Lord forgive us our unbelief, and strengthen our faith!

Once more, is there not this sin very common amongst professors—that even *the idea of this relationship of God has not crossed some professors' minds?* This is a sweeping charge to bring, but the doctrine of the union of the believer with Christ, and of the marriage of the believer to Christ, is not even thought of by many professing Christians. They are believers in Christ, and they look to the precious blood, but they have not entered into that which is within the veil. They have not sought to know those choicer and deeper things. Well, but is this right, that God should be a husband unto us, and yet that we should not recognise the relation? Married, and not know it? God, your husband, and you never think of him! Does this blessed fact never tone your life, nor give a colour to your actions, never check your hand, nor nerve it for a holy deed? Is this all put away, as if there were nothing in it, but perhaps a pretty fancy, or a word or two that might be listened to, but might be as well forgotten? Oh! brethren, this is sin, indeed, and sure I am that there are few of us but are guilty, probably none of us, for oftentimes we have forgotten this union, though we have known and understood it. We have walked towards God as if we were strangers to him, and there were no relationship by blood between us and our God through Jesus Christ.

Thus have I read the indictment, and thus would I plead guilty. Thus would I weigh, and thus would I ask each professing Christian here to weigh the charges as they come against himself, and say how far they concern him. And now to close. A few words by way of:—

### III. SUGGESTIONS FOR AMENDMENT.

It is idle to be always regretting, but never reforming; to be forever confessing, but never making an advance in the right direction. Now, first, dear brethren,—sitting here to-night while God's gracious rain is falling on the earth, may his rain fall on our hearts—let us *admire the condescension of God* that he should say, "I have been a husband unto thee." It is a depth of grace that he who made the heaven and the earth, and who is infinitely great and glorious, should condescend to come into anything like such a relation as this with his poor creatures whom he has made, and whose breath is in their nostrils. Oh! what a stoop, from the highest loftiness of glory to call himself a husband to a worm.

Adore next, I pray you, *the faithfulness with which hitherto God has carried out this relationship.* I have asked you to remember it; now adoringly bow your hearts at the thought of it. Oh! God, we bless thee thou hast not left us. We praise thy name that thou hast continued so truly a husband to our souls, and that, notwithstanding all our sin, and care, and woe.

Let us, brethren, from henceforth, *seek to love the Lord chiefly.*

A great man, taking his wife with him to a noble entertainment that was given by Cyrus, was asked by her husband on his return what she thought of Darius, and she replied, "I never thought of Darius: I never thought of anybody but my husband." And oh! were it not a grand thing if our hearts chiefly thought of God? Other things must, of course, come across the mind and for a while engross it, but the first free thought of the believer should be of the Glorious One, who loved him from before the world, and will love him when the world has passed away.

And as we set God first in our love, so, next, let us try to-night that we *set him first in all our actions*. "Seek ye first—first—the kingdom of God and his righteousness." Let the supreme aim of life be not business, not the family, not personal pleasure, but our God. Let all be secondary and subordinate to him. Set him on high in your spirit, and let everything contribute to his service and kingdom.

And that being done, let us *seek to dwell with our God*. This is the true and effective way of reforming. Instead of having breaks of communion, little periods of it now and then, like oases in the desert, we should seek to have constant communion with him. What a delightful hymn that is:—

"Sun of my soul, thou Saviour dear" !

We often sing it; I wish we could practise it, and that it were ours always to abide with him, because without him we could not live, and without him we dare not die. May we learn the art of fellowship with God in the turmoils of business. To have fellowship with God in the closet, in the study, or in the chamber is not always easy, but to have fellowship with him in the noise of busy life is difficult, but to this we ought to attain. May we be able to attain to it, so that we may never leave the society of Christ, go where we may.

And, brethren, *if there be anything that we have not done for Christ*, anything that we could do now to-night, anything that we feel we ought to do to-morrow, *let us do it*. Let us not be saying that we have left undone these things, but let us set to work to do them. The wife gives to her husband her whole self; let us give to our loving God our whole spirit, soul, and body. Be it our prayer that there may not be an unconsecrated hair upon our heads, not a single heaving of the lungs, nor a circulation of the blood, but what in the whole God shall be acknowledged. We would not desire to keep even a little spot for the flesh, or make provision for the lusts thereof. Pray that God would sanctify us wholly. Oh! God, do this! And it will be best for us to turn the whole subject into an earnest, loving, longing prayer. Oh! thou who art a husband to my soul, come to me, visit me! I know I have offended thee, but thy mercy is great. Reveal thyself to me! I am cold and dead, and like a clod of earth; but Lord,

thou canst make the clod a star, to burn as fire, and shine as gloriously as the sun. Only thy presence I want, and my sins will flee, and my weakness be swallowed up in strength. If I be unholy, thy presence though Jesus Christ shall put my sins away. If I be dead, thy presence would be my life. Oh! come Lord, come to me for Jesus' sake!

Now, I know, that to some here all this seems like an idle tale. Well, well, dear friends, I wish it were not so! But you must be born again, and until you are born again you will not understand this. But if you do not understand this simple talk which believers have with one another, depend upon it you will never be able to enter where they sing in nobler notes before the throne. God convince you of your need of a Saviour, and bring you to put your trust in Jesus, for there is life in him, and in him alone. Amen.

## Expositions by C. H. Spurgeon.

ISAIAH LV.; JEREMIAH XXX 1—11.

It is the language of infinite mercy, speaking to the abject condition of mankind. We have become naked, and poor, and miserable through sin, and God, instead of driving us from his presence, comes loaded with mercy, and thus he speaks to us.

Verse 1. *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.*

See the freeness of divine love! See how God, who knows the wants of souls, provides all things needful for them—water—the water of life; and, as if that were not enough, the wine of joy, the milk of satisfaction; and he offers these freely. Yea, he stands like the salesman crying in the market, and cries, "Ho! ho! every one that thirsteth!" But, mark, there is no gain for him: the gain is for ourselves; for he saith, "He that hath no money, buy wine and milk without money and without price." All that you want, dear friend, God is ready to give you. Yea, he invites you to come and receive it, and presses upon you the good things of the covenant of grace. Why stand you back? Do you want these good things? Then, come and welcome. It is God who bids you come.

2. *Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?*

Why do you seek to get comfort for your souls where you will never get it? Why do you try to content your immortal nature upon things that will die? There is nothing here below that can satisfy you. Why spend your money, then, for these things, and your labour for nothing?

2. *Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.*

God has real food for your soul—something that will make you truly happy. He will satisfy you, not with the name of goodness, but with the reality of it, if you will but come and have it. You shall have fulness—you shall have delight—if you are but willing to come and receive it.

3. *Incline your ear and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live;*

Then who would not hear—who would not give attention—if by that attention life immortal may be received?

3. *And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.*

Will God enter into covenant with sinful men—with thirsty men—with hungry men—with needy men—with guilty men? Ah! that he will. "I