

THE SEVEN CHURCHES.

LECTURES BY
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(REVISED.)

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THE SEVEN CHURCHES.

INTRODUCTORY.

REV. i.

IN taking up this Scripture I do not expect to bring before you anything new, but I desire rather to present afresh that which has been received and known among us for many years ; my reason will become apparent as we go on.

The Book of Revelation is evidently a prophetic word ; it is so called in chap. i. verse 3, “ the words of this prophecy.” Prophecy is brought before us in the New Testament in a double way ; there is the gift of prophecy as in the writings of the apostles and prophets, communications of the mind of God for the church. Apostles and prophets went together in that way. An apostle had a divine commission for the ordering and establishment of Christianity ; he might be a prophet as well, and, indeed, generally was ; the prophet communicated the word of God to those whom he addressed, and their writings were prophetic writings. But prophecy has another character, and this is largely seen in the Old Testament. When that which God

has set up has failed, prophecy comes in to point out the failure and to call to repentance, but it also comes in as a ministry of testimony as to the future, and communicates what God will bring in by Christ. All that has been committed to the hand of man has failed, but all will be taken up and made good by Christ. When once a thing has failed in the hands of man, though God may call to repentance and give space for it, yet, as here in the case of the candlesticks, He does not set up the failed thing—He could not do that. Not that He gives up His purpose, for everything will eventually be headed up in Christ. Meanwhile He gives a prophetic testimony, by which He keeps the truth of His calling before the hearts of the faithful, and leads their minds to the verification of His purpose in Christ.

I would make another preliminary remark. There are two great subjects in Scripture: one, the history of this world as under the eye of God; and the other, His purpose in Christ before there was a world or its history. God has been pleased to make this world, and He must be its supreme Ruler and Governor. It has a course and history, and its history comes to an end. During its history God works out and solves the whole question of good and evil. It is the sphere of the development of His ways with man, and when all is worked out He folds up

the created heaven and earth as a vesture, and there is a new heaven and earth, and the history of this world is concluded. The other subject of Scripture, the eternal purpose of God, can only be dimly perceived in the Old Testament. Here and there one can trace the thread of purpose underlying the history of God's ways in government, but it was veiled and hidden during the various dispensations wherein God was dealing with this world, and with man upon it; Enoch's translation was an example. It is in the New Testament that we find that there was in God's mind a purpose in Christ before the world was, and that man was the being in whom that purpose was to be carried out. There is to be a universe of bliss—a new heaven and earth where everything is eternal, because all will be according to God's eternal purpose in Christ. The millennium is the antechamber, so to speak, to that universe of bliss; it is the time of subduing everything to Christ, the time of heading up all things in Him, but evidently with a view to God's eternal purpose; because when Christ has subdued everything to Himself, He delivers up the kingdom to God even the Father, and the Son no longer exercises *Lordship* as in the Millennium, but takes the original place of man (though ever the Son) in blessed subjection to Him who put all things under

Him, that God may be all in all in the universe of bliss. It is no longer, as in the Millennium, that Christ is Head of different families in heaven and earth, Head of the Jews, Head of the church, Head of the Gentiles, and so on. In the eternal state there is no Jew nor Gentile, it is simply *man*. "The tabernacle of God is with *men*, and he will dwell with them"; and Christ, in whom is God's eternal purpose, retains the place of man which according to that purpose He took, the Head of man, and the church is associated with Him for ever.

These two points are important for us, because we have a double character as Christians. We can regard ourselves as those chosen in Christ before the world was, given to Christ by the Father and drawn by the Father to Him, and belonging, as in Christ, to the purpose which was before the world was. Our place in Christ is the mystery which was hidden from ages and generations, but is now revealed. There was no revelation in the Old Testament of man having a place in the heavenly places in Christ. The earth was given to the children of men. It may be asked, Did not Abraham look for heaven? He looked for *God's* city, and for a better country, and the Spirit adds by Paul, "that is a heavenly" and we now know that the city he looked for he will find in the heavenly Jerusalem. The

revelation of this is not in the Old Testament, all was dimly seen there, we get the light of it in the New Testament. The Old Testament indeed spoke of the exaltation of the Son of man, and of all things being put under His feet; but that a glorified Man should be the firstborn among many brethren, and Head of His body, was not revealed. Even in reading Psalm viii. an Old Testament saint would not have gathered that the Son of man was to be exalted above the heavens where Jehovah had set His glory; the dominion there spoken of does not go beyond that which was given to Adam. All has been brought to pass in Christ. He has gone up far above all heavens, and God's glory set above the heavens centres in Him, the blessed Man of His counsels. Psalm viii. speaks of all things being put under His feet, but it was given to Paul to unfold the fulness of those words and to bring out the purpose of God in Christ. In Daniel vii. we read of "the saints of the high places," but in Ephesians Paul shows us that it is those who are quickened together with Christ who are made to sit down in the heavenly places *in Him*. We may see in Eve being given as a helpmeet to Adam, who was set over the works of God's hands, a type of the church being united to Christ, now that we have the revelation in the New Testament. The

Lord Jesus Christ having been rejected as the Messiah come to Israel according to promise, His death became the open door (the veil having been rent) for the revelation of the purpose of God. The purpose was before the failure, it was ever in God's mind; but He was pleased to work out the question of good and evil and bring it to an issue in the cross, in order that His purpose might be established in redemption.

Then we can look at ourselves in connection with the ways of God upon earth; man has been proved; the Jew totally rejected the offer of Christ in whom was the fulfilment of all the promises, and he crucified the One in whom all was offered. Everything was ruined on that side, and the Jew was manifested to be apostate and perishing. The Gentile had long given up God altogether, he was without God, dead in trespasses and sins. As Christians, we can look at ourselves, though still here, as having been saved out of the ruin of the world by the effectual work of God's Spirit separating us to Christ. He went down into the judgment which lay upon man universally. He went down under the full power of death and rose again, and the work of the Spirit of God leads the soul out from death and doom to the salvation in Christ, and more than that, to know that the portion of believers now is that of association with Christ.

There may be some young believers here who well understand that the Lord Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and to meet their deep necessities, but who hardly understand what is meant by association with Christ. But let me say to you that there is no other place of real blessing for you. You cannot stay in association with this world, though you are in it. This world is a doomed world, it lies under judgment. Man is not only guilty, he is lost—that is his condition, and in the type, what met that was not the blood of the passover lamb, but the brazen serpent lifted up. The point there was the *poison* of the serpent's bite, in other words the poison of sin. Satan's mischief, not working by outward means as by Pharaoh's power, but inwardly, death working in us. It was a *dying* scene when the brazen serpent was lifted up, and a man had to *look up* out of such a scene to the serpent on the pole, and we have to look up out of the perishing scene where men are lost, to Christ lifted up between earth and heaven. Christ, rejected of men, offered Himself without spot *to God*. He was made sin indeed, but He died as an offering to God, and as you look up to Him *lifted up*, you find that the cross of Christ is on the road to heaven. Another scene is opened to you, not man perishing, but God glorified. That is the way in which the

cross is looked at in John's gospel, it is the door into eternal life and the purpose of God. There is no place for you, dear young believer, in this perishing world; it is a rolling sea of sin and death in which men and women are sinking. There is life in Christ, who has been lifted up out of it, and the special place of the church is that of association with Christ. There could not have been such a thought in the Old Testament as saints being quickened with the life of a Man risen out of death, the Spirit being the Spirit of His life in us, and also uniting us to Him. That is God's blessing for Christians now.

Now while the portion of the church is connected with God's purpose for us in Christ, (for as we have seen, it has no portion in this world) yet being actually down here, the church has come into the place which Israel once held in the earth, that of testimony, and the idea of the candlestick is connected with that. The testimony of Israel was to Jehovah, the supreme Ruler of the world He made. He vindicated His title by destroying the great power of the earth in Pharaoh, and in delivering Israel. Pharaoh had said, Who is Jehovah? and that raised the question of Jehovah's rights. Man asserted his lordship in the earth, and Jehovah made good His title both to His people and to the inheritance He gave to them. It is a necessity

for us to understand these rights of God in order to understand the Book of Revelation. These rights of God are now given into the hands of Christ, all is put under His feet, and the church is the witness to the heavenly glory of that blessed Man while He sits at God's right hand until His enemies are made His footstool.

I go back for a moment to the history of this world, in order to show you the two ways in which man asserted himself in independence of God, and both come to their height in the Book of Revelation. The first is in man's *confederation* at the Tower of Babel. By confederation he would make a name, and a reputation for works which reached to heaven. God has given us the outcome of such a principle, "Nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do"; and He broke their purpose by scattering them. The second assertion of himself by man was in Nimrod—imperial power. One man with power became mighty in the earth, even as now a King or Emperor with a great army might do his own will, were there not providential barriers restraining. This culminates in the beast at last.

But though man asserts himself, yet he is not sufficient for himself, he has no thought of God's rights, and consequently falls into idolatry. In the close of this book everything is idolatrous;

Babylon, the outcome of man's confederation, is idolatrous ; and the beast is idolatrous. Joshua xxiv. 2 shows us that even Terah, Abraham, and Nachor served other gods, before the God of glory appeared to Abraham. After the scattering at Babel the earth was parcelled out among the different tongues and families, but with no acknowledgment of God's rights. Then God brings out *His* heir to the world in Abraham, and afterwards He brings the posterity of Abraham out from captivity under the world's power that He might establish them in Canaan. When Israel crossed the Jordan God began to take possession of this world, and to assert His rights. The ark of the *Lord of all the earth* made a way for His people, and the power which held the land was overthrown. What Jehovah began to do in Joshua's day will be finished at the seventh trumpet of chap. xi. of this book. "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ ; and he shall reign for ever and ever." Taking possession of Canaan was God beginning to make good His title to the whole world.

Then Israel were unfaithful witnesses of Jehovah's glory, they did not hold the land for God. There was a momentary and figurative expression of God's rights over all the earth in Solomon, but when the true Heir came they

killed Him, and sent Him out of the earth, but God will accomplish His own counsel, and Christ will reign. The church is not a witness to God's power in overthrowing kings and nations, but to God's power in the overthrow of death, and of him who had the power of death. Of old time He overthrew the power of Pharaoh, and the southern and northern confederacies of the seven nations of Canaan, as well as the kingdoms of Sihon and Og. Now God has raised Christ from the dead, and He has been set far above every principality and power and might and dominion at God's right hand in the heavenly places.

This brings before us another point which could not be made fully manifest in the Old Testament, that it was Satan's power which was behind Pharaoh and the other hostile powers who opposed God's rights in Israel. Now and again the curtain was drawn aside, and Satan is seen acting as in the days of Job or Ahab, but it was the presence of Christ here which detected Satan. How often Satan's power, demoniacal power, comes before us in the gospels ; I do not suppose that it is less to-day, but it was made manifest by the presence of Christ. The first miracle recorded in Mark's Gospel is the casting out of a demon. The man possessed was in the synagogue, and there undetected

till the Lord entered; then the man cried out, "What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth. . . . I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God." The cause of so much mischief in this world was detected. In the early days of the church also Satan was detected by the presence of the Spirit, as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira. Now the place from whence these principalities and powers of evil act is in the heavens, and there can be no full deliverance for this poor world until Satan is cast out of heaven, and Christ and the church take their destined place in the heavens which have been cleared of Satan's power. The Lord anticipated that moment in Luke x. "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven"; the actual casting out is in chap. xii. of this book. Meanwhile the church is down here in witness to the victory which Christ has gained over the power of death and Satan. I am not looking now at the church as united to Christ in the heavenly places, but as in the place of witness down here for Christ. It is now, not the lifting up of Jehovah's arm to overthrow Pharaoh, but Christ has led captivity captive, having stripped every hostile power, and has given the gifts of the Spirit in order that all the power of Satan should be futile against the church.

But now comes the point, Has the church

continued to be a witness of the victory of Christ, and of the place of the glorified Man at God's right hand? It was set here to be a witness, as having been brought by the Spirit into the light of that glory into which He has entered, and which is yet to dawn on this world when Christ rises from God's right hand. The church was set in witness to the rights of Christ, and to maintain it against the whole power of Satan. Has it done so? We shall see as we go on that it has not done so, and where the failure began. The church as united to Christ is not the subject of prophecy, it could not be. What can be prophesied as regards that which is perfect in Christ? but as a candlestick set in responsibility down here to give light for Christ, it becomes the subject of prophecy. In this book we have not the Spirit of God communicating the things of Christ to the church, but a prophetic word given to John by an angel, when the candlestick was failing to give light.

It may help as to the character of prophecy to see how it first came in. There can be no doubt that God committed to Israel a great typical system; they failed again and again but at last He established them in His land as His witnesses, and set His tabernacle of witness among them at Shiloh. It would have been a wonderful thing if there had been a head of such

a system, who would have maintained everything for God; but the first real departure from the calling was in the two and a half tribes settling down on the other side of Jordan apart from the sanctuary and all that was centred there. It is a picture of what has taken place in the church, as we shall see in Pergamos. Afterwards came the breakdown of the whole system of things in Israel. Instead of the priest with Urim and Thummim maintaining everything in the light of God till the earth was filled with His glory, we read that through the priests the offering of the Lord was abominable; then the ark was taken captive by the Philistines, and Ichabod—the glory is departed—was written on Israel; notwithstanding, Jehovah maintained His glory in the face of the gods of the Philistines. Here it is that prophecy begins. Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord. He ministered the word of God. Faith could not find any place of hope in a broken-down system, but in the fact that God had not forsaken His people, but spoke to them through Samuel. He let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground. In this way God brought His word to bear upon the condition of the people, and through prophetic testimony led them to hope for the Lord's Anointed, and the kingdom and priesthood established in Him. How does that work with

regard to the church as the vessel of light? We have to listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. The voice of the Spirit here is prophetic, in the sense of meeting the state of things in the church by the testimony of Jesus. We have the voice of the Spirit recorded; but more, at different times there have been those raised up of God who could bring the prophetic word of the Spirit as to the state of the candlesticks to bear on the faithful, and point to the arising of the bright and Morning Star. Samuel anointed David on God's behalf, and the Spirit's voice leads the awakened saints to say, Come, Lord Jesus! While the successive steps of failure in the church are developed in the seven candlesticks, the prophetic voice of the Spirit gives the promises of Christ to the overcomer. In the last four churches the eye of the overcomer is directed to the Morning Star and the coming kingdom.

I read this first chapter to bring before you the character of this prophetic word addressed to the churches as set here to be a light for Christ. If the church had not been brought into the light of Christ, it could not have been a candlestick. We may ask ourselves individually, How far do people see in us the light of Christ? We may be able to interpret the symbols of this book, and understand mysteries, but apart from

Christ dwelling in our hearts we shall not give much light for Him. It is our demeanour, and what we are set for, that people see. The true light came in with Christ, and was to be continued in His people according to the word in Luke xi., "No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, . . . but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light." The Lord then says, "The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body is also full of light." *The body* is to be luminous, because the eye is occupied with one object—Christ. It is not what we hold as doctrine; but what are we engaged with? What light do we give?

The Lord had before Him seven candlesticks; there were seven actual states existing in the seven churches in Asia which came under His eye, and He searches the state of each judicially, and points out the failure of witness for Him. In Ephesus the church had left its first love. At one time Christ was enough for the church. He was enough to fill the mind and thoughts of the saints, as He was for Mary, who found her part in sitting at the feet of Jesus and hearing His words. As to ourselves, dear friends, is Christ enough for us? Christ speaks of the church at Ephesus as having *fallen*. Perhaps some of us could hardly speak of having fallen,

so little have we thought of belonging to Christ in heaven. One may say, I have known the forgiveness of sins, and I have loved Him for what He has done for me, but I have hardly thought of being attached to Him, of being His. But Christ does not merely point out the failure, but He presents Himself to each church in a character suited to its state, and gives promises to sustain and help the overcomer.

I wanted this first address to be introductory, and therefore I close with one word in regard to the promise to the overcomer. It may, as in Ephesus, be that which every Christian will enjoy—the Tree of Life in the paradise of God—but it is given as a special encouragement to the overcomer in Ephesus. If one were treading a weary road, we know at the end there is home, but if from some vantage point we got a glimpse of home, it would not make home more sure to us, but what an encouragement to pursue our way! To enter into the taste of all that Christ is in the paradise of God would surely recall our hearts to His love, and bind them afresh to Him, and thus our witness for Christ in heaven would be revived. We cannot look for it in the church at large, but may *we* know what it is to have a single eye for Christ, and thus to have bodies full of light, that we may be light for Him down here.

EPHESUS, SMYRNA, PERGAMOS.

REV. ii. 1-17.

IT is not my thought to attempt much exposition of these Epistles to the seven churches, as the generally received interpretation must be familiar to most here. I want rather to look at them in a practical way as having a present bearing on ourselves, so that there may be help and profit for God's people at this time.

I begin with one remark as to the Book of Revelation. Things are presented symbolically, and that is of great value to us. The three churches we are looking at have actually passed away, and if we look at them as portraying three successive states in the history of the church at large, those states have gone by. What we may call the historic church, that which began with the apostles, comes under the judgment of the Lord in Thyatira. The three phases of the historic church which we are considering led to that point. I speak of it as the historic church, because it is that which held the place before men of the church in its responsibility to give light for the glorified Man at God's right hand. We may be now in the days when the Laodicean state has set in.

but the value of the symbol is that we are occupied with the *state* symbolised, and not with this or that *event* in history. It is the moral state of things which is under the eye of the Spirit. The thing symbolised in a candlestick is light-bearing, that is the point specially fixed on our attention by the symbol. One of the most fruitful sources of faulty interpretation with regard to this book has been the seeking to attach events to the various symbols ; an event comes and goes, but a moral state which attaches to the candlestick is that which is pointed out to us, and has its bearing at all times. Even unconverted people will flock to hear a lecture on prophecy if prophecy is interpreted by events, because events have to do with the course of things in the system of this world, and that is what engages people's minds, they are interested in the history of this world. The church has understanding in the mind of Christ ; it is called in this book " the mind that has wisdom." It needs the mind of Christ to understand the teaching of symbols. To give you an illustration of what I mean as to symbolic teaching I will refer to the symbol of the mustard tree in Matt. xiii. In various places in Scripture we see that a great tree is figurative of something which grows up in the earth, and has an important appearance in the eyes of men. Pharaoh is compared to a great tree and

Nebuchadnezzar also, and it is this imposing appearance and spreading greatness that the Lord brought before His disciples in the mustard tree, so unlike to all that He was down here. The great thing is to seize the divine ideas contained in the symbols of candlesticks, angels and stars ; we can then in a measure more readily understand what is addressed to each church, the character Christ assumes to each, and the promises given to the overcomer.

There are seven churches. The number seven gives us the idea of completeness ; hence we get a complete picture of the history of the candlesticks as light bearers set in responsibility down here. In the tabernacle there was a candlestick with seven branches ; it is there presented in its perfection in Christ, what was true in Him should now be true in the church, but what was set to give light has failed. If the day had dawned, and the sun were shining forth in the heavens, a candlestick would not be needed. It is set to give light while Christ is within the veil. A star signifies what is set in heaven to bear rule and authority on the earth during the night (Gen. i. 16, Ps. cxxxvi. 9). It has in it also the signification of light as well as of authority. In the mind of God even at the beginning, heavenly light and rule and order were to be established on earth. In other words, heavenly principles were to govern

down here; it will be so in the millennium. Everyone will admit that heavenly rule and order ought to be in the church. Christ has taken His place in the heavens, Head of all principality and power, and is the Source of light and order for the church's position and path down here; the stars are in His right hand. The angels were symbolic representatives of the state of responsibility, or rather of the church in its responsibility. *They* are addressed, but then it is said that the one who has ears, is to hear what the Spirit says to the *churches*.

If we lay hold of the principle of symbolic address, we may look at Ephesus or Smyrna or Pergamos as historically gone by, but if at any time we are conscious that the Lord's eye rests upon a state such as is brought before us in these churches, it would affect us so that we would not give up the original thought of the church being set to give light for the Christ who is absent, but would seek to be overcomers. I want to press the point of overcoming. Everyone, I think, must see that the moment sin and failure came into the world what was of Satan had to be overcome. Things must take that form. It is not the question of man's competency to overcome, indeed he fell under the power of Satan, but overcoming there must be; therefore in the final issue of things we read "He that overcometh

shall inherit all things : and I will be his God and he shall be my son." What we have before us in these churches is witness for Christ. The moment a person is in peace through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, there comes with it the sense of responsibility to confess His name, and to be a witness for the One from whom he has received peace and blessing. Then it is that the soul is conscious of a hostile power, and of opposition which has to be overcome. Believing in Christ we find the savour of rest, but we are not yet in glory. The assembly is a place where we enjoy the savour of rest ; but there is the world, the flesh, and the devil, and we have to overcome. If you look at those in the line of faith in Heb. xi. you will see that each one overcame. Some might think that Abel had nothing to overcome, but he had to overcome the course of the world represented in Cain. Cain was the elder brother and Abel might have followed in Cain's steps, but he set his face differently and his overcoming cost him his life. Abel died but he overcame, and the man of the world hated and killed him. So in every instance of faith, each was an overcomer. A young Christian has to be an overcomer ; he has, when believing in Christ, to set his face against the stream. It is overcoming in Matt. xi., "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." The whole course

of things in that day was opposed to Christ. It may seem strange to have to speak of overcoming in the church, but the moment there is failure in the witness, failure in fidelity to Christ, there must as in every other case be overcoming.

It is this point of overcoming which makes one division between these seven churches apparent. They are divided into three and four in this way, that in the three first the promise to the overcomer is *included* in what the Spirit says to the *churches*; in the four last what Christ has to say to the overcomer *follows* the Spirit's voice to the churches. They are also divided into four and three. In this view the first four portray the historic church. In Thyatira all has become corrupt, and then for the first time we have the mention of a remnant, "But to you I say, the rest (or remnant) who are in Thyatira." The last three churches refer to a work of God outside of the historic church. The awful corruption of Rome is represented in Thyatira, and the historical church which began with the apostles is judged by Christ, while at the same time there was in it a faithful remnant; in this respect it goes with the last three, where the overcomers all have a remnant character, while in the history Thyatira completes the first four. Nothing can be a greater proof of God's judgment of the state of that which professed to hold the place of the church, than that He should begin a

work outside of it, as in the Reformation ; with that work Sardis is connected. The last three assemblies have the character of that which is outside the historic church, whether it be God's work, or what is of man introduced into it. Looking again at the division of three and four, there is in the first three churches the supposition that there may be repentance, while in Thyatira it is said, "I gave her space to repent and she repented not." Hence in the four last there is no thought of the church's repentance, but the remnant have Christ's coming and the kingdom brought before them. In Thyatira they were to hold fast what they had till He came. While to Philadelphia the Lord says "Behold, I come quickly." Some young Christian may say, how is it that the Lord has not come yet ? Between 300 and 400 years have passed since the Reformation, and the Lord has not come. You must remember that time is nothing with the Lord. Peter tells us that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. God is the God of patience, and He works out His ways both with the history of the candlestick and of the world in patience. But there is another thing, the Lord would count upon the affections of the saints—as if He would say to them, You love me, and will not mind waiting for me ; I have ways to work out, and I have set you in patient testimony to

the world whose iniquity is not yet full. God is patient, and judgment is His strange work. The Lord would thus count upon His people, the period of long suffering is not yet complete, and we wait. Time runs quickly when we are in the enjoyment of love, and if the Lord has our affections, as we enjoy His love, we shall know how to wait. He says "I come quickly." There is no *delay* in His mind. He sits in patience at God's right hand while God's long-suffering is still salvation, but we may surely say that the love which desires to have us is as fresh and bright as ever, and He counts on our loving Him and waiting for Him because we know He loves us.

In the last four churches we have seen there is a remnant character, and the end of the church's history on earth comes into view. However blessed it may be for the Lord to come for His own, yet that the end of the church's witness should have come, and a remnant be owned of the Lord because the church has become an unfaithful witness, is very serious for us to think of. In the last four churches, though Christ still addresses the angel, that which stood in responsibility before Him, yet the Spirit really speaks to the faithful and calls on them to hear; Christ's promise belongs to them. Philadelphia has entirely a remnant character, being set in contrast to the synagogue of Satan. Great mischief has been

done by the idea that the church can be revived as the public witness to Christ. Hence the attempt to set up churches. Of course nothing of the work of God has failed. His work in fitly framing the holy temple goes on though unseen by man. Souls are being built up in Christ, and through grace we are able to go back to the beginning, and learn what the church is in the mind of God, and not from that which is around us. We may seek to be in the truth of the assembly, but we cannot assume to be the candlestick. We have to confess the failure, while owning the responsibility of the church to give light, but we can seek to be true to Christ, and to be overcomers. Christ will be our strength in this desire. Thank God that we are here to-night in something of this character. We want to look things in the face, and see what the history of the church is under the eye of Christ. Christ looks for those who will listen, because the church will not listen. The one who listens has the place of an overcomer before Him; the true character of a remnant lies in this. It is so put in Isaiah 1., "Who is *among you* that feareth the Lord, that *obeyeth* the voice of his servant?" It is much like the character of Philadelphia, "Thou . . . hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name." The opening chapter of Isaiah brings a remnant before us, "Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant,

we should have been as Sodom." Isaiah is the book of the salvation of God for Israel, *but made good in a remnant*. In the last two chapters this remnant is publicly owned and vindicated as against the ungodly nation who claimed to be Israel. So it is in Philadelphia. It is those who are true that are vindicated against those *who say* they are the people of God, but are not. In these days the youngest Christian must not be satisfied with the mere thought of security through faith in Christ, nor can any rest in the thought that they meet with others in a true and right way. It will not do to be content with that. Do you listen to Christ's voice, and hear what the Spirit says to the churches? If not you will be overcome by the world and its spirit instead of overcoming. It is possible that some now breaking bread may, later on, be found out of fellowship through not hearing Christ's words as to Balaam in the Epistle to Pergamos. Balaam's doctrine taught association with the world.

I was saying last week, in speaking of the decline from first love in Ephesus, that at first Christ's love was enough for the church. There was not only proper and consistent conduct, but the heart of the church, so to speak, was bound up with a Man in heaven. None perhaps in Ephesus had ever seen Christ as John had, nor as Peter had; those apostles knew Him personally and loved

Him, but the report had been brought to those at Ephesus by the Spirit, so that Peter's words were true of them "Whom having not seen ye love." According to John xiv. 26, the Holy Ghost had brought to the remembrance of the apostles all that Jesus was on earth, so that by the Spirit they might communicate it. Then according to John xv. 26, the Lord sent the Spirit to bear witness of Him as the glorified Man, and in chapter xvi. the Spirit Himself as having come, glorifies Jesus by taking of His things, the things of the Father and the Son, to announce them to the disciples. Those in Ephesus partook in all these communications, as we may, and they loved the One whom they had not seen; they knew Him in heavenly glory, and their hearts were bound up with Him there, but this had waned, and the eye of Christ detected it.

The Lord's word of promise was that the Spirit should abide with the church consequent on His having gone away, and the Spirit has brought the report of His glory to us down here, but if our hearts seek Him—where is He? If faith is to be in Him—where is He? Our hearts must certainly travel outside of this world to heaven to believe in Him where He is. This gives us that which is vital and abiding as to the truth of the church; if our hearts go outside this world to Him, and others do the same in the faith of their

souls, He becomes a bond of union. In John ix. the man born blind found himself outside of the whole pale of society in this world, but Jesus, who had previously been rejected, found him, and the faith of the one born blind is bound up with the Son of God outside the world. This is in principle the nucleus of the church. The Son of God was enough for the man whom the world would not acknowledge.

Where are our hearts, beloved friends? Is it not true for us "whom having not seen ye love"? Does not the promise also remain true for us "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God"? Ephesus is gone by, the church did not repent and do the first works, but for the overcomer there is the peaceful enjoyment of Christ when conflict is past and there is nothing to overcome, and even now the one whose affections centre in Christ gets a taste of the sweetness of divine love in Christ such as cannot be known except in nearness to Him.

In Smyrna, God allowed the enmity and hatred of man against Christ to come out against the church in a remarkable way. The world would not give the church any footing on earth, but it did get a footing as the witness for Christ, and Christ maintained it here by the Spirit's power. He said to His disciples that if things here were

given up for Him, they should receive a hundred-fold, houses and lands and brethren, but with persecutions. Here in Smyrna we have the persecutions. To make clearer my thought I refer to the covenant made with Abraham (Gen. xv. 18) "Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates." The inheritance thus not only took in Canaan (figuratively the heavenly places) but also the world, the place of Gentile power. The inheritance of Christ is over all things in heaven and earth, and the church inherits with Him. Israel were entitled to the land of Sihon and Og though it was not within Jordan; it was part of the inheritance given to Abraham. The saints have title to use things here, because the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof; they have a right to have a footing on the earth because it is part of their inheritance in Christ, though the heavenly portion only is now entered upon and enjoyed; we are not reigning yet, but we have a title to use things here. Godliness has the promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come; but here was the danger for the church, lest instead of merely using this world they should settle down in it, as the two-and-a-half tribes sought their inheritance on the other side of Jordan, though it was within the limits of the covenant made with Abraham. So Paul said to

the Corinthians, "Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us." The eye of Christ saw the danger to the saints, and allowed the world to be a persecuting world. The portion for Israel at that time was in Jehovah's land and near to His sanctuary, and the church's portion now is where Christ is. The danger was averted for the moment through persecution, but in Pergamos we see that, like the two-and-a-half tribes, the church is dwelling in the world.

And now where are our affections? Every Lord's-day as we break bread, we say in effect that our hearts are with the blessed Man who died, we accept the fellowship of His death; we say, as it were, that we have left the place where He died, and are in association with Him beyond Jordan. Perhaps some of us hardly understand the character of the Lord's supper, some take it as a comfort to their own souls rather than as being in fellowship with His death. Are we attached to Him who died here, but who is glorified above?

Pergamos shows us the church as having accepted position in this world where Christ died. Having a place for flocks and herds was not any harm, but it made the two-and-a-half tribes indifferent to being near the sanctuary. The church was entitled to hold a place here, as being the witness for Christ whom the world crucified, but whom God glorified, and the church was to

hold it in the faith of the Man at God's right hand. The time has not come for us to be in possession of the world, or to have an inheritance there, though we have a title to use it and give God thanks for all. Let me beg you to accept the truth, that we have to set our faces against the course of things here; we have to be overcomers, and maintain our heavenly associations against the doctrine of Balaam.

To Smyrna the promise was a crown of life. Christ had been into death, but was alive, hence the death of the body they need not fear. Satan has no power beyond death, all beyond is in Christ's hands, and the second death has no power over those in Christ's keeping. What is held out to Pergamos is that they should be brought into greater intimacy with Christ through overcoming. The danger in Pergamos was Balaam's doctrine; he counselled unhallowed and idolatrous association with the world. In the church it came out in its ceasing to hold the character of a chaste virgin espoused to Christ, and in settling down where the god of this world had his throne. The hidden manna is God's appreciation of Christ. When Israel did not know what the manna was, God commanded that a pot full of it should be laid up before Him, He would show to them that He understood and knew its worth. It was the grace in which Jesus walked

down here ever pleasing to His Father. Man did not know Him, but the Father knew Him and loved Him. That lowly life down here is over, but the grace of it is treasured up there ; it is hidden from man's eyes ; they neither knew nor appreciated Him when here. Egypt and its fleshpots attracted Israel and made them think lightly of the manna, and Balaam's teaching counselled them to eat things sacrificed to idols. The eye of the church was turned away from Christ by the stumbling block put before it in worldly association. The Spirit's voice would recall the faithful to Christ and to God's appreciation of His hidden and lowly life here, so full of grace, and so well pleasing to God.

Then there is the new name given to the overcomer ; it is the sense of being known by Christ. Peter received a new name from Christ ; he was known in the world as Simon the son of Jonas, but Christ knew him in another way, and called him by a name full of meaning. It is a great thing to have a secret history with Christ ; no two of us could have the same. To be known by Christ is a joy that a stranger does not intermeddle with. May we enter into God's appreciation of Christ, and carry with us the secret of being known by Him. Whatever the world may think or say of us, may we be content with the approval of Christ as we seek to be true to Him.

THYATIRA AND SARDIS

REV. ii. 18—iii. 6.

I WOULD like to refer again to the church of Pergamos in order that I may connect it with that which follows in the chapter, because it is evident that the doctrine of Balaam, which was introduced into Pergamos, became full blown in its results in Thyatira. There is a point which I greatly desire to press, that the church was set here in the place of witness. We must remember that what is before the eye of Christ in these seven churches is far more than our own little circle of things. Though the assembly in one city or country may be addressed, yet the voice of the Spirit takes in the whole of that which has the place before God of light-bearer. In France that which holds *the place* of light-bearer is the Roman Catholic religion. There is a feeble Protestant company in places, but that which is regarded as the church is Roman Catholicism. In this country Protestantism is in ascendancy, and has the place of witness in the eyes of men. It is this point of witness that we have to bear in mind. It is not the question

of meetness for heaven, but of giving light down here. The dying malefactor was made meet for heaven while he hung upon the cross. Christ's death upon the cross established a subsisting righteousness before God, and the malefactor went to Paradise in virtue of what Christ had wrought, while the character of *thief* was dropped in His cross. The malefactor could have no part in witness for Christ, but as a general thing, when people are converted it pleases God to leave them here, so that they may come into the place of witness or light-bearing. The Lord has gone away, but He has interests upon earth, and He has confided these interests to His people, and His people now are not Israel but the assembly. The talents were committed to His servants according to their ability, but *all* are responsible to have their loins girded and their lights burning. Now the question for us is, Do *we* answer to the responsibility in which the assembly is placed down here to be the witness of, and to give light for Christ, and to be faithful in His interests? The servant who took the one talent accepted the place of servant to promote his master's interests, but he proved unfaithful. The assembly has the character of the house of God, and Christ's servants ought to give food to the household—to shepherd the flock of God. Even the youngest believer should

realise that he is in that which is the witness for Christ, and that he cannot sever himself from the corporate responsibility. I cannot in one sense sever myself from that which in the eyes of men has the character of witness for Christ; I may not walk with that which is unfaithful, but as to corporate responsibility, one has to own the failure of the vessel set to give witness as having part in that failure. Supposing in any place reproach is brought on the name of Christ by one or more who bear His name, the reproach should be felt by all who profess that blessed name, though the one who has dishonoured it may not be in our fellowship; before the eyes of men all share in the reproach. Hence we cannot sever ourselves from the responsibility of the public body which professes the name of Christ. I trust we are true and would earnestly judge all that is untrue to Him, but we have to look at ourselves in connection with that which Christ holds as responsible. The unfaithful servant was really no servant at all, but he was judged according to the place he had taken.

With regard to the two churches before us to-night, the interpretation generally given is no doubt right, that in Thyatira full-blown Romanism is before us, and in Sardis Protestantism, and connected with these two, we find two

forms of evil, spiritual wickedness, and worldliness. The worldliness of Sardis is that to which perhaps we are most liable, but we are not exempt from the danger of the spiritual powers of wickedness. I referred to Pergamos, because it was there that the enemy sought to introduce spiritual wickedness. The doctrine of Balaam was held by some in Pergamos—it taught that the church could be in alliance with the world—that the two could be one, and also that tribute in some way or other could be paid to the god of this world. This is now done, his things can be fed on, the pleasures and lusts and vanities of the world over which a Christian garb has been spread can be enjoyed. We have seen that the promise to the overcomer in Pergamos is that he should eat of hidden manna. No one can deny that great blessings attach to Christianity; just as with Israel of old, whether they believed or not, they all had the manna and the water from the smitten rock, but the great majority did not care for bread from heaven. They never understood it nor its origin—they called it manna, What is it? Now the blessings of Christ have come and Christ is professed, but is He valued? Christ has brought the light of God to men—God is giving now in a heavenly way, it is “heavenly gift” (Heb. vi. 4) in Christianity, and the Spirit has come. Even unconverted people become participators in the

blessings of the Spirit's day; not that they have the Spirit, but even professing Christians have come into the sphere of the Spirit's operations in connection with the gospel of Christ. Israel did not value the manna, and Christ was not known when here, but the Father knew Him and loved Him; and the one who overcomes the snare of Balaam is given to enter into God's delight in the One whom the world did not know, and does not know though it professes His name; and if *we* are not recognised by the world, yet it is blessed to have the sense that Christ knows us, that we have a secret history with Him. Not only are we able to say "My beloved is mine," but also that "I am his." If one's heart is lost in the things of this world we cannot know the secret of Christ.

Why I have spoken of the evil in Thyatira being spiritual wickedness is that it is that which characterised Balaam himself. He was an awful character. He had the place of a prophet because of his knowledge of divine things. It is said of him that he heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the Most High, and saw the vision of the Almighty. He was acquainted with the name of God made known to Abraham, and Most High is God's millennial title. The knowledge of divine things gave Balaam a religious reputation, but with him it was joined with enchantments—

Satanic power ; though the Spirit of God forced him to speak the words of God, yet the man himself was under the domination of evil. It is an awful thing to think of a certain spiritual domination over the minds of men which is really Satanic, but which accredits itself by the knowledge of divine things. We see an instance of it in Elymas the sorcerer ; he was a false prophet, a Jew, and a Jew was conversant with the things of God ; he had acquired an influence over the deputy ruler of the island, but the influence was spiritual and Satanic. The Gentiles walked according to the prince of the power of the air, but it was not joined with the knowledge of divine things as with the Jews. People may not believe it, but nevertheless, what came into the church and characterised Thyatira was a systematised power of evil which was of Satan, and which traded on the knowledge of divine things. Rome would boast in its being the custodian of the leading truths of Christianity, which Protestants are giving up ; the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the atonement, and eternal judgment ; but when you come to the use made of divine verities, and to the power which dominates the souls in that system, there is a spiritual power which is not of the Holy Ghost, and which I have no hesitation in saying is Satanic. Paul writes to Timothy of seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, and John speaks of

many false prophets gone out into the world. We see this kind of thing in Thyatira. Jezebel called herself a prophetess; she taught, and *seduced* Christ's servants; they were brought under the power of her wickedness. It was the domination of spiritual wickedness. It is not difficult to see the effect of this spiritual power of evil. There are things taught by Ritualists which common sense would reject as foolishness, but people are held in the chains of a spiritual bondage and believe these things, they are dominated by a false spiritual influence. The spirit of Antichrist is a spirit of delusion, and it is quite possible that it might intrude into our meetings; the little children are warned against it, it is something that denies the true glory of Christ as Son of God. It is a terrible thing to contemplate that Christ's servants were seduced. The *woman* Jezebel exercised a Satanic influence over the *man*. The man is set in responsibility. Some copies read "thy wife Jezebel," that is, of the angel of the church. If the reading be right it shows how the woman had got out of her place, and a system of evil was dominant. It is possible that this system is called Jezebel because of the idolatrous and corrupt influence which she exercised over Ahab. She incited Ahab to murder Naboth, just as the church so-called incited the civil power to murder Christ's true witnesses. Thus we get the terrible spiritual

evil which corrupted that which stood before men as the light-bearer for Christ. We have to take this fact home to ourselves, and own the evil of Christ's name having been degraded by that which stood in the position of witness for Him, but, thank God, there were overcomers. Perhaps the very state of things in Thyatira brought out more devotedness. "I know thy works and the last to be more than the first." Evidently there was devotedness in the midst of corruption. Works are the test of people. "By their fruits ye shall know them." "Whose end shall be," said Paul, "according to their works." The great professors in Thyatira spoke of the remnant who kept *Christ's* works to the end, as those who were in the "depths of Satan." But the Lord evidently charges that upon those corrupted by Jezebel, while in the remnant there was manifested a devotedness which perhaps was unequalled—men went to the stake for Christ's name. There was, I doubt not, trueness and loyalty of heart to Christ, of which perhaps we have no record save that He speaks of them here, "I know thy works, and love, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works, and the last to be more than the first." Truth was corrupted, and Satan sought to blot out everything that was really for Christ, but there were those who were approved of Christ. That which had the name of

church, and stood as the candlestick in the eyes of men is judged, and the remnant is owned. Jezebel is cast into a bed ; she is given up to her corrupt associations, and those corrupted go into great tribulation. Philadelphia is kept out of the hour of temptation, but apostate Thyatira goes into it, while those who have their origin in that system are killed with death. It is no doubt apostasy—moral death.

The promise to the overcomer is very sweet. As we have seen, there was great assumption among those in Thyatira who were corrupted by Jezebel, but the time would come when Christ would reign, and the overcomers would be associated with Him in exercising dominion over the nations. There can be no doubt that the full-blown character of Thyatira is seen in Babylon who dominates the beast ; but the overcomer is to rule the nations with a power that cannot be gainsaid, and yet it will be heavenly authority and rule which is exercised. But that is not the greatest part of the promise. That which excels is the Morning Star. It is Christ *known* in heaven before He *shines forth* in the heavens as the Sun. The sun belongs, so to speak, to all—"there is nothing hid from the heat thereof"—but the morning star belongs to those who watch in the night for the rising of the sun. When the candlestick had failed to give light for Christ, and cor-

ruption and apostasy had come in, then there was nothing for the faithful but to hold fast what they had till Christ came, and they were given the cheer of the Morning Star. There could be no thought of setting up anything as a candlestick, for Thyatira though judged was not *removed* from the *place* of light-bearer, and Christ did not lay on them that burden, but He gave them the light of the Morning Star. If all has gone to ruin on earth, Christ in heaven is the hope of the faithful, not the resuscitation of the candlestick. Many may remember various attempts which have been made during the last sixty or seventy years to again set up the church ; such attempts could only result in increased confusion and failure. What Christ has given to the overcomer is the Morning Star, not the hope of a revived candlestick or light-bearer on earth. Not that the responsibility to give light has ceased, for the last three churches have still the *character* of candlesticks though the light has waned, but the lustre of the Morning Star cannot wax dim, hence in the last chapter we have the *bright* and Morning Star. People ought to see us with our faces turned heavenward in expectation of the Lord's coming ; they ought not to see us attempting to set up anything on earth. Christ directs the eyes of the saints to heaven, there is no prospect for us on earth ; the candlestick has failed,

7 but He has given us the light of the Morning Star.

A few words will suffice as to Sardis. We have seen that worldliness is that which nullified the work of God which had taken place in Sardis. There can be no doubt that Sardis represents to us the outcome of that work of God which took place outside of the great public body, when that had become corrupted and apostate. The result of that work is that which goes by the name of Protestantism. It is not what is called sectarianism—an attempt to form churches on some particular doctrine or principle inside of Protestantism; but there is nothing in those bodies which can be looked at as a corporate whole, having a certain kind of church character in contrast with Romanism. It could not be said that the sects inside Protestantism have any representative angel before Christ; Sardis or Protestantism has.

The Lord presents Himself to Sardis as the One who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars. It does not here speak of the latter as in His right hand, but Christ has the perfection of heavenly light and authority for the church, if those who were in responsibility would count upon Him. Thyatira was under the domination of Jezebel, but Christ possessed all that was needed for heavenly order and direction in the church, and so presented Himself to Sardis. The seven

Spirits of God do not set forth the one Spirit of God as *dwelling in the church*, and revealing to it its proper relationships to God and Christ, as well as being the life and power of those relationships. Here Christ, not the church, has the seven Spirits. In chap. iv. they are seen as lamps of fire before the throne, and in chap. v. as eyes connected with the seven horns of the Lamb. Thus they represent the plenitude of the diverse action of the Spirit in connection with the governmental ways of God upon earth. The Lamb is in the midst of the throne, and God's ways are known to and directed by the One who suffered here. In the early days of the church's history we see the Spirit of God acting for Christ down here in this kind of governmental way. In Acts xiii. we read of Paul and Barnabas being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, and in another case they were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, and when they assayed to go into Bithynia the Spirit suffered them not. This was not communicating the things of Christ to the church, but directing the proclamation of the gospel, and forming assemblies in various places according to the mind of Christ on high, so that the testimony of Christ might be extended as it pleased Him. We see Paul up to a point moving about according to this direction and energy of the Spirit. When he went up to Jerusalem, he was led there by his own spiritual

affections, while the testimony of the Spirit, as this Spirit of direction and government, forbade his going there. We see in his case the distinction between the love of Christ in his soul towards his own countrymen, of which the Spirit was the source, and the direct government of the Spirit acting for Christ down here in all the wisdom of divine ways. In going to Jerusalem, Paul left the path of the direct energy and guidance of the Spirit as ordering the course of the testimony down here, and he went to Rome as a prisoner, and through shipwreck and storm; not in the free energy of the Spirit, but by providential ordering.

Now Christ had all this energy of the Spirit for the church, but Sardis did not avail itself of what Christ had. A dead state characterised it with only a name to live. Such is Protestantism. We know as a matter of history that at the Reformation, though there was a mighty work of God, yet that the movement sought support from kings and emperors, and as a result *national* churches were formed. As contrasted with the corruption of Jezebel, there was a name to live; the absence of gross evil, and the presence of outward morality gave Protestantism a name, but under the eye of Christ there was moral death; the works found in Sardis were not perfect before God. In this day of effort and work, we do well to see that works with us are

the fruit of life. People may protest against popery, and support all kinds of works of benevolence which they esteem to be good as being for the benefit of mankind, but Christ's word to Sardis is, "I have not found thy works complete before my God." It may be said, did not the Lord go about doing good? Yes; but the things He did were always those which pleased His Father. "I do always those things that please him" was the spring of everything with Christ, but in the works of Sardis there was nothing perfect, life was absent. Protesting against evil is not life. It has been said by another, "Hard words against evil are no sign of our own spirituality." It is not that there are not true Christians in the midst of Protestantism; there were names in Sardis which had not defiled their garments, they were not in association with the worldliness of the body; but *Protestantism* is the state judged by the Lord in Sardis, not the living elements which might be found in it. It is clear that Sardis had defiled itself with worldly association. Worldliness and not spiritual wickedness is in question here. The watchword of Protestantism is "The Bible and nothing but the Bible," but without life that is merely holding to the letter. What is set before us here is walking with Christ in white, keeping our garments, with moral purity in our ways, as becomes a chaste virgin espoused to Christ.

I do not know a greater snare for us at the present day than the works of Protestantism ; they may have the character of doing good to our fellow men, but the world can take up that character. The Christian is created in Christ Jesus to good works—good works which God has prepared for us, not man. Sardis is treated by Christ as the world, He will come upon it as a thief, if it does not watch. The world cannot watch for Christ, for it is dead, and if that which bears the name of Christ does not watch, it proves a state of death. The judgment on Thyatira was on account of spiritual wickedness, while Sardis gets the same judgment as the world.

The promise to the overcomer is to walk with Christ in white, and instead of a mere name to live which He will blot out, Christ will confess the faithful, who have refused the world and been true to Him, before His Father and the angels. May the Lord keep the Morning Star before our hearts, and keep us true in our associations, seeking to please Him.

PHILADELPHIA AND LAODICEA.

REV. iii. 7-22.

I WOULD call to mind the two points which were specially before us in the last address : that in Thyatira we get the culmination of spiritual wickedness in that which was set for light ; and in Sardis worldliness, defilement of garments through worldly association. Bear in mind that these states characterise certain periods of the church's history. I gather from consideration of the promise made to the over-comer, that in Thyatira the church got power over the world. In Sardis the world had power over the church ; instead of availing itself of the Spirit's power which Christ had in its plenitude, the church accepted the support of the world and was defiled by it. I doubt not that in those two churches we see the double character of that which now stands *before the eyes of men* as having the testimony of Christ. Certainly Romanism represents the church before the eyes of men in Catholic countries, and in Protestant countries Protestantism has that place.

In the last two churches there is something very blessed on the one hand, and very sorrowful on the

other. There is no ecclesiastical character seen in Philadelphia; Christ regards it as a candlestick, though in the eyes of men it represents neither Romanism nor Protestantism. But if it is not anything in the eyes of men it is acknowledged by Christ, and it is important for us that we should value what has a place before the eyes of Christ, not that which is approved of men. It may be said that we ought to let our light shine before men, that is true; but when that which professes to give light is judged by Christ, then the faithful have to answer to His mind, and to seek to be before His eyes. In Matt. xiii. the Lord gives two similitudes of the kingdom of heaven, which indicate a double form which it would assume. First, there is a great mustard tree which grew from a small beginning, and became an attractive object, so that the fowls of the air sought its shelter. It has been taken to represent the great hierarchical system which gained a position of power and greatness in the world. Secondly, there is leaven, which is more characteristic of doctrine (Matt. xvi. 12), the doctrine of *men*. A given sphere is permeated by the doctrines of Christianity, but as taught by men. Christianity made its way in the earth, but it had human ideas mixed up with it, and hence it became corrupted. These two parables were spoken *to the multitude*. All could note

the growth of a great system, as well as the spread of Christian doctrine where heathenism had prevailed, though it was leavened doctrine. Afterwards *in the house* the Lord spoke two parables *to His disciples*, in which He taught them what had value in His eyes. There was a treasure hid in the field, and Christ bought the field for the sake of the *treasure*. It had value in His eyes, and He hid it. "The world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." The pearl represents that which was goodly (beautiful) in His eyes. He saw beauty, His own image in His people, where men saw none. They could take notice of the growth and spread of Christendom, but Christ was engaged with the treasure, and the pearl of great price.

In Philadelphia we see what is under the eye of Christ, something which He can own and approve. Thyatira and Sardis may still be going on, but Philadelphia answers to Christ's mind. "Thou . . . hast kept *my* word, and hast not denied my name." Keeping *Christ's word* is very different from the mere holding the leavened tenets of a great system of religion. It is of all importance for us to see what Christ approves. The young are growing up in the midst of a system of things which in this country is leavened by worldliness. We are in the last days, when the evils to which men are prone are indulged

in, but a cloak of professed piety is thrown over them ; there is a form of godliness without the power, men are lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God. Hence it is of moment to note the way in which Christ presents Himself as the Holy and the True. In that character He speaks to Philadelphia, and approves its angel as keeping His word and not denying His name.

But there were two things which might constitute a danger to this faithful company. There was another company with pretension to be the hereditary people of God, "who say they are Jews." Doubtless in that day it was the pretension of Judaism, but there is the same pretension to-day in Ritualism. The other danger was lest they should become those "that dwell upon the earth." On such would come the hour of temptation. It is the first time any are spoken of in this book as those "that dwell upon the earth," and there can be little doubt that it stands in contrast to those who dwell in heaven (chap. xii. 12). In each case it is a moral characteristic ; "Our citizenship," says the apostle, "is in heaven." In Luke xxi. we read both of this hour of temptation, and also of the dwellers upon earth. We must remember that though at the same time, yet this hour of temptation differs from the great tribulation which will come upon Jerusalem and the Jews.

Luke does not speak of the great tribulation as do Matthew and Mark. He speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, and the treading down of that city by the Gentiles till the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled; he then at once passes on to the close of the times of the Gentiles; upon the earth there would be Gentile distress and perplexity, the sea of nations heaving and roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming *on the earth*. However much men may try to build up the system of this world, yet if one could get to the bottom of their thoughts, they have a feeling that a crash must come. Things are going at such a frightful pace that it cannot last long; men's hearts are beginning to fail, and to look for things which are coming on the earth. In verses 34-35 we have very definitely before us, that the day of perplexity will come as a snare "on all them that *dwell on the face of the whole earth*." It is a much wider thing than the hour of Jacob's trouble.

Philadelphia had kept the word of Christ's patience, and would be kept out of the hour of temptation. Christ is waiting in patience, and the saints whose citizenship is in heaven are waiting also; they could not keep the word of Christ's *patience* and settle down here. It is a remarkable expression, which we find also in the

Epistle to the Thessalonians, "The Lord direct your hearts . . . into the *patience* of Christ," for so it should be read. Christ is waiting; He is sitting at God's right hand, but He is not sitting there indefinitely; the time will come when He will have His rights where He has been rejected, and affection looks at it in that way. Until that hour comes when He will take up everything, and bring everything into accord with the will of God both in earth and heaven, the faithful have to keep the word of Christ's patience. Philadelphia was doing this, and the Lord undertakes to keep that company out of the hour of temptation which would test the dwellers upon earth.

Now let me say a practical word. There is no doubt that the church, that which is acknowledged to be such by Christ—His bride—is kept out of the hour of temptation; and Philadelphia keeps to the true character of the church in Christ's eye, though it is confronted with the pretension of those who say they are Jews, but whom Christ designates as the synagogue of Satan. The church is kept out of the hour of temptation, but if we in anywise settle down on the earth, we shall more or less get into the difficulties and trials which come upon the dwellers on earth, and we shall fear them. If we walk in the secret of Christ, we need have

no fear. Troubles there may be, but we know what is coming ; Christ is coming and His kingdom. The world does not know what is coming, and they have no support or comfort like those who are in the secret of Christ, kept and cared for by Him. Christ says, "*I will keep.*" We see in the case of Job what I have been speaking of ; he settled down on the earth, and said " I shall die in my nest." The result was that he was in fear of the day of trial, and he had to say " The thing which I greatly feared is come upon me." God would not allow him to settle down on earth and die in his nest. If we settle down on earth we shall always be in fear of things breaking up, but if we are in the secret of Christ we shall patiently wait for Him.

I have dwelt on the second danger first, because of the great tendency to settle down here, and to forget that Christ is coming. The other danger we have seen is pretension, " Which say they are Jews and are not." We have around us that which assumes by hereditary claim to be the people of God, apart from answering to the character of His people. *I* should not like to say of any that they are the synagogue of Satan, but Christ so speaks of those "*which say*" they are the people of God and are not. We need to be kept from the danger of assuming to be anything which is ecclesiastical in mere name

and profession, but which under the eye of Christ is shown to have no moral right to so accredit itself. The Lord owned the Philadelphian company as being those who kept His word, and did not deny His name, and the point for us is the same. Do we answer to His mind and character? Are we seeking to be for Him down here? Christ decided the question between those "which say" and those which kept His word; they had a little strength, but that was nothing in the eyes of men, yet with that little strength they held to Christ, and Christ loved them. It is wonderful to think of Christ's love to a feeble few who hold to Him. Oh! to value Christ's love, and to avoid the pretentious spirit of those "which say."

Having noticed the dangers which had to be overcome, for they had not fallen into them, let us look more closely at the characteristics of this company. The Lord does not present Himself to Philadelphia in any ecclesiastical or official character, not as One inspecting the candlesticks and passing His judgment upon their state; nor does He present Himself as having all in His hand for the church, so that the testimony of Christ might be borne if the church availed itself of the resources in Christ; but He presents Himself in the truth of His own person—what He is. It is not an official

character which He bears, He is the Holy One and the True. This is of all importance ; when there is nothing ecclesiastical to which the saints can hold, they can hold to Christ. We may be sure that if any keep His word they will find others who are doing the same, without making any pretension to be anything. If we *said* we were "the Brethren," and as such holding a true system of doctrine, it would be pretentious. No ; Christ is the truth, all truth is in Him ; let us each seek to hold to Him. To hold fast His word and not deny His name may be difficult in the face of ecclesiastical pretension, but it marks the little strength which Philadelphia possessed.

It is an encouragement to see that Christ owns what is real, while He exposes the true character of pretension. An illustration from the book of Judges may serve to bring out the character of this pretension. At the close of the book the Philistines are seen in determined opposition and hostility against Israel. They were a remarkable people ; they were not external enemies, but they dwelt in the land, and they could claim the right of antiquity to the possession of the land, for they had come up out of Egypt before Israel. Hence the possession of the promised inheritance was always in question. When Israel brought the ark into the camp

(1 Sam. iv.) the Philistines said, "Be strong and quit yourselves like men . . . that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews as they have been to you." Goliath challenged the armies of Israel on the same ground, Were the Philistines or Israel to be masters? Do not we see to-day this claim to antiquity—the claim to pre-eminence in the things of God? It was a remarkable danger to Israel, and how did God show that it could be met before the anointed king came in? He met it by Nazariteship; both Samson and Samuel were Nazarites. Samson was not true to his Nazariteship; he discovered the secret of his strength to a Philistine woman, but it was God's way of meeting the Philistine pretension. The Nazarite abrogated his own rights as a man, and took the place of weakness and dependence, that he might be wholly for the Lord. He was separated from earthly joy to that end. The real question lay between the Lord and the Philistines, not between Israel and the Philistines.

How is all the pretension to antiquity which is around us to be met? Not by a like spirit of pretension, but by personal trueness of heart to Christ. We cannot count upon a system of things here, for all has failed, but Christ has not failed. He is the Holy and the True. He has maintained, and does maintain everything for God; and in keeping His word and being true

to His name, we shall surely find companions, as of old they that feared the Lord spake often one to another. They were in the midst of formality, but they had the Lord's approbation. "A book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name."

Sardis did not avail itself of the spiritual direction and order which were with the Lord; Sardis missed it, and the Lord does not so present Himself to Philadelphia. There was no pretension to have a name to live, but holding to Christ's name with a little strength. Are we seeking to be for Him? When the moment comes for Christ's decision, He will own that which has been true to Him, though it may have no place among men but one of weakness, and no name to advance but His. His name sets forth what He is, and His word is the expression to us of His mind, He makes it known to us. It may seem an immense thing for any one to refuse to recognise the claim of systems or creeds, even though they may have been framed and formulated by christian men, and are only attempts to meet the failure by human effort, but we are cast upon the faithfulness of the Lord, and it is everything to have His approval. I would ask the youngest believer here, Do you not value His approval? You may have to say

No ! to many an attempt to be something in the religious system around us, but the test for everything is the confession of Christ's name and hearkening to His word. Everything will be seen in its true character as we bring it into the light of Christ, the Holy and True One ; the youngest believer can test everything by Him ; there are many influences in the world which affect people, but you can test their character in a very simple way ; as you are acquainted with Christ, so you judge of things in relation to Him, He is Holy and True. Do things accord with Him ? He has been here the perfect manifestation of God, and now He is in glory ; glory has been *given* Him (though it was always His due), and that tells us that perfection is in Him. Good men may have said or done many things, but Christ is the test. The spirit of anti-Christ is abroad, but it does not confess Christ, and is thus detected.

Now in order to know Christ we must seek His company, we must cultivate intimacy with Him. Let me ask you in all affection, Do you find your true association with Christ and with those who keep His word and do not deny His name ? We know Himself through being near Him, but we ought to learn His characteristics among His own. One wants to be with those in whom Christ is seen. If a child were sent

into another country he would be coloured in speech and manner by the company he is in, and so with us, we are coloured by the company we keep. If we keep to the company of Christ and those in whom He abides, our speech and character will be affected by it. We shall grow in acquaintance with Him. Depend upon it there is a great deal in association. I see a great tendency to adopt the speech—the current expressions of the world; we need to have our speech seasoned with salt. In learning of Christ we should acquire a tone and wisdom of manner which would prevent our adopting the current expressions of the day.

Are you seeking this association with Christ? In doing so we should be kept from the trial and dread which the break-up of things here brings to many. Men's hearts fail, but Christ abides the Holy One and True.

Then there is the exhortation, "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." What is the crown? I think it is Christ's approval, and association with Him. Association with Christ is the keynote of the promise to the overcomer; "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of *my* God. . . . I will write upon him the name of *my* God, and the name of the city of *my* God . . . which cometh down out of heaven from *my* God, and

I will write upon him *my* new name." Note the word "my"; Christ brings the overcomer into association with Himself. It was said of Aaron that the *crown* of the anointing oil of his God was upon him; the peculiar privilege of nearness to God in the sanctuary for which he was anointed was his crown, and the peculiar privilege of the church is association with Christ. It is blessed to think that that abides whatever the ruin, and we have to hold fast to Christ. We have received the Spirit in order that we might be in the truth of our being in Christ, and of our association with Him who is the Son of God. People consider honour in this world to be a crown to them morally; to us it would be a disgrace. But association with Christ! Is not that a crown? To walk with Him in white! To be a pillar in the temple of *His* God! To be of the city of *His* God! To have *His* new name written upon us! That is our crown. We bear His name here, we are called Christians; Philadelphia had not denied *His name*; but the overcomer is to bear His new name, that which sets forth what He is as the exalted Man, the Head and Centre of *God's* creation.

Do not let any one say that this association with Christ belongs to a class—to advanced Christians. No; it belongs to the church, to Christians as such. Has not the Spirit of

God linked your soul with Christ? Has He not brought to you the knowledge of the Son of God? Do you not know Him as light and salvation and blessing? Do not be content to say, I am a Christian; let it be a Christian *in association with Christ*.

The history of Laodicea is a sad one; it is soon told. It is the last phase of that which was set to give light for Christ here, and stands in contrast to Philadelphia; it is the last state of Protestantism. In Philadelphia we have seen that which Christ owns, and now in Laodicea there is that which is nauseous to Him. "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot"; there is utter *indifference* to Christ. We see the spirit of it around us, if the actual state be not here. There is a looseness of principle as to what is due to Christ everywhere. In days which many of us can remember, the articles of the establishment as held by the evangelicals, and the professions of faith of orthodox dissent, were regarded as a bulwark against Romanism and heterodoxy; but now every bulwark is broken down. People may hold anything and yet be in fellowship with churches and chapels. Unitarianism is rampant, and the glory of the Son of God loosely held, if not denied. In Philadelphia Christ's name was held to; in Laodicea it may be dishonoured, and there is indifference as to it. There are,

thank God, happy exceptions, but it is what Protestantism has come to. Christ is no longer the test of doctrine, but man's mind, and higher criticism is indifferent to Christ. To be neither cold nor hot is to be indifferent. With all this there is boasting. It is not religious pretension, but infidel pretension ; "*thou sayest I am rich.*" Christianity has no doubt benefited man apart from conversion, and this is a matter of boast, while real conversion is unknown. There is no divine righteousness, no spiritual perception, no real purity. The first man is exalted. Christ had to endure the agony of the cross so that God's judgment of the first man might be expressed. The atonement is denied, and Christ is regarded merely as an example for the first man to imitate ; but whether people believe in the atonement or not, there is in Christ's death the witness of God's holy judgment on the man who sinned, and God will not revive that man, though Laodicea seeks to do so.

If there is indifference as to the purity of so-called Christian churches, we may be sure there is indifference privately. The measure of everything for a Christian is Christ. We have to take care that we do not allow in ourselves that which is contrary to His name. But in Laodicea Christ is outside. Think of it ! that the professing church should be in such a state—

a state of self-satisfaction—that Christ is outside of it, and stands at the door and knocks. Christ does not change; He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, and therefore in His own unchanging love He says, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.” He cannot give up His love to the church. It is not really an assembly at all with Christ outside, but till the moment of judgment He says, “Be zealous therefore and repent.” The church in its responsibility has left Christ, but His love lingers over it. Indeed, the Lord does not seem to expect the church to listen, for He addresses individuals in it; if *anyone* will hear His voice, He will come in to him (not now to the assembly) and sup with him, and he with Christ. That one shall enjoy Christ’s company, He will come into that one’s circle, and that one shall enter into Christ’s things and enjoy them with Christ.

It has been said that the promise to the overcomer in Laodicea is simply a place in the kingdom, there is nothing special as there is to Philadelphia. The promise to the overcomer there is the consequence of association with Christ. How could anyone be a pillar to support the temple of God’s glory apart from association with Christ? To be of the holy city and its administration of glory is consequent on association with Christ, and Christ’s new name is written on the

overcomer. How different from Laodicea ! the overcomer there who just at the last hears Christ's voice, gets a place in the kingdom, but that is all.

I would like to impress every heart and conscience with the state of things around us, that we might not be lethargic as to Christ's judgment of the church as that which was set to give light for Him during His absence. May we be those who are waiting for Him, careful lest any take our crown through our not holding to Christ. He is the church's crown, and His fulness is known through association with Him. May we know Him better, that we may better answer to His mind and be for Him down here.

CLOSING REMARKS

The foregoing addresses by no means exhaust the subject matter of the epistles to the seven churches; much more might be said. I take the opportunity of a vacant space allowed me by the printer to make one or two closing remarks.

The association of that which bears the name of God, and should be a witness for Him, with the world in the midst of which it is set to give light, leads to the judgment of God on both. We have an illustration in Sampson. He was a Nazarite, and as such, a representative of the thoughts of God as to Israel that they should be a separate people. As a Nazarite he should have acted *entirely* in the power of the Spirit of Jehovah the God of Israel. He joined affinity with Jehovah's enemies, against whom he was set to act in the power of the Spirit. God's overruling hand was there, but the result reached was that Sampson became captive to the Gentile power, and his cry for deliverance and vengeance on his enemies involved his perishing with them. It is a picture of the history of Israel, and of this state of things the prophets and the Psalms speak. The nation that has departed from Jehovah will

perish with the Gentile power. It will be revived in Christ the Son of David and in the remnant associated with Him.

In the sealed roll of chapter v. there is evidently a new unfolding of God's dealings, differing from those mentioned in the prophets and Psalms. It comes out I have no doubt consequent upon the *church* having as a *public body* allied itself with the Gentile power, and that combination also comes under the judgment of God. Finally, apostate Israel, apostate Christendom (as Babylon) and the apostate Gentile power perish together. It is well to have the sense of where things are tending, and at the same time to seek to be in the true place of the church as set forth in Philadelphia. The overcomer is to bear the character of Christ in the midst of evil. Another has said of this character "A heavenly man in the midst of pretensions to be the people of God, which made nothing of Him, his only part personal faithfulness along with them that clung to Him, the whole weight of human traditional religiousness being against them, else all death around, yet an open door to serve."

If all has failed in the church, there is no failure in the Lord, nor can the purpose of God fail. Christ is the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, and all is established for God in Him. Blessed it is to be in association with Him.