

The State of the Church and the Word of Christ

THE MESSAGE FOR
TODAY



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PREFACE

(WHICH PLEASE READ)

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MANY who read these lines are aware of the double aspect in which the addresses to the seven Churches (Rev. ii. iii.) may be viewed. The seven Churches existed in the apostle John's day and the state described had some relation to the actual condition of each at that time. But these same addresses possess a much wider significance. In this respect, that each Church, and its condition, represents a distinct period, or some special phase in the history of the Church as a whole, down to the close. The first three Churches cover something like the first four centuries, bringing us to the rise and development of the Papacy, as seen in Thyatira. This covers perhaps a thousand years. Then in Sardis we have the era of the Reformation; in Philadelphia a later revival; while when we come to Laodicea we reach the last phase.

This fact, that we have a complete history of the Church to the end told beforehand, adds a wonderful character to these addresses, and gives them a significance they would not otherwise possess. Who but God could do this? It is indeed wonderful that the development of all that we see today should have been foretold.

But this method on God's part need not surprise us; for the same thing happened with regard to Israel's history. Why should He not follow a similar plan with regard to the Church? Again and again in Isaiah's prophecy God appeals to the fact that "He declares the end from the beginning." "Before they spring forth," He says, "I tell you of them." This bore witness to the fact that He was the true God. Our Lord says very much the same thing. In His last discourse to His disciples He declares: "Now I tell you before it come, that when it is come to pass, you may believe that I am" (John xiii. 19). God Himself therefore is speaking in these addresses. And what is more, He is speaking to us; telling us what He thinks of the condition of the Church at the present time; and what is perhaps still more solemn, our own condition. In the address to Laodicea we have a direct message to ourselves.

What has not, perhaps, been clearly recognised is that the full meaning—that is in all its bearings—of the address to any particular Church could not be understood until the special period represented had arrived. Thus the address to Thyatira could not have been fully understood by Ephesus and Smyrna. That is in its entirety. The words, "He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches" reveal that the message had a present application. But this did not exhaust its meaning.

This is the reason why the message to Laodicea has never been fully grasped. But the time has arrived when its full implication may be seen. This is of all importance; for it contains a special message for the present moment. As we seek to make clear in what follows Sardis and Philadelphia are no longer distinct entities, but have become merged in Laodicea. The movement one hundred years ago which had the characteristics of Philadelphia has lost them, and the Laodicean phase has supervened, marked by lukewarmness and self-satisfaction.

The late W. Dorman of Stafford saw clearly enough before his death that Philadelphia had passed away, and he publicly proclaimed his "conviction" and issued a call to *repent*. This summons to repentance on the part of Christ in His message to Laodicea is further proof of what we have suggested, that Laodicea represents a lapsed condition—her glory had departed. But no recovery is suggested in the sense of any return to Philadelphia. And yet the richest offers are made if there is repentance. The one that hears Christ's voice and opens the door may obtain not only the choicest blessings but what is more to be desired than all else, the most intimate enjoyment of His company: "I will come into him and will sup with him and he with Me."

The following pages have been written specially to call attention to the supreme opportunity of the hour: namely, all that Christ is willing to be to the one who hears His voice. And the priceless character of this—unsurpassed even in the early days of the Church—will be understood by those who, on the one hand, realise how empty is the boastfulness and pretension of Laodicea, and on the other, what is involved in having the company of Christ, which He grants now to the individual who loves Him.

"For there are times when a good man would do anything for the sake of peace; but he usually comes to see that he was wrong there—weak, disloyal to himself. He comes to see that in wishing to patch up a peace he was consulting only his own ease and not the interests of the truth. We are often truer to ourselves, truer to GOD and to our commission, when we are hot and indignant than when we are accommodating and tolerant."

THE STATE OF THE CHURCH AND THE WORD OF CHRIST

The Message for Today

REV. II. - III.; XVII. - XVIII.; XXII. 16

THE two addresses to Thyatira and Laodicea deal (broadly speaking) with all that is most conspicuous in Christendom today, and are of special importance to each individual Christian; though the majority who will read these lines are principally concerned with the second. But a few words may be said as to the first, in order to a proper understanding of the scope and significance of the seven addresses found in Rev. ii. and iii.

Thyatira is identical with Babylon, referred to in Rev. xvii. Certain features are prominent in both.

Babylon goes back a long way in the history of the world. It is mentioned in the tenth chapter of Genesis under the name Babel, which means confusion. Nimrod was its founder, and we are told it was "the beginning of his kingdom." He was the son of Ham, upon whom the curse of Noah came, and both Nineveh and Babylon, which stand out as the greatest cities of the ancient world, are connected with his descendants.

Genesis xi. goes on to tell us it was in relation to this very city the confusion of tongues occurred—therefore the name Babel. God confounded their language and scattered them abroad. He then proceeds to call out Abraham, and to disclose His purpose, that in him should all the families of the earth be blessed. Thus Babel—man's work, the exultation of himself which only ends in confusion, and God's purposes are brought into contrast.

So it has ever been, so it is still. On the one hand, we have the work God is doing, and divine principles are in view; on the other, the great systems of the world which end only in confusion. Nebuchadnezzar may for a time seem to fill the earth with his glory; he was the head of gold,

the beginning of Gentile rule, and the times of the Gentiles, but the feet of the image were part of iron and part of clay—a mixture. The rule of man will end in confusion. Babylon continues to the end, though it may appear under different forms. It represents the development of a system.

In Rev. xvii. our attention is fixed upon a woman arrayed in purple and scarlet and riding a scarlet colored beast. Scarlet speaks of human glory. A woman frequently represents a false religious system (see Zech. v. 7-11; Rev. ii. 20-23). It is so here. It is the woman bears the name Babylon. Upon her forehead appears written: "Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth." She represents a universal religious system, as indicated by the words in verse 15: "The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues."

Few who have any spiritual insight and knowledge of history, can doubt what is intended, or what answers to the description here given, or what the woman represents. We are faced today with a vast religious system—a mixture of paganism, Judaism and Christianity, a solemn fact calling for our earnest consideration. Her end is determined.

So far Babylon. Let us now turn our attention to another aspect of things with which we are confronted today. First a word as to

Sardis

It has been said that the last four Churches in Rev. ii. and iii. go on to the end. This is true in a sense. But they do not continue as entirely separate entities. Many have thought they do, but we think without justification. The last three cannot be clearly distinguished one from the other today. Sardis, which represented the Protestant era, no longer exists as a distinct entity. There are multitudes of professing Christians today who refuse the name of Protestant, yet they are not part of the Church of Rome. It is possible at the present time to enter two Churches, one nominally Protestant and the other Roman Catholic, yet, as far as ceremonies go any difference between the two is scarcely distinguishable.

Then take the matter of doctrine. Consider the recent declaration on the part of the commission which for a number of years has been considering the subject of doctrine as relating to the Church of England; and one is appalled to think how little their conclusions are in harmony with the doctrines of the Reformers. So that with a large number of clergy calling themselves Anglo Catholics, on the one hand; and Christian ministers of every denomination who are little better than semi-infidel, on the other, what has become of Protestantism?

Philadelphia

What about Philadelphia? A revival took place more than a hundred years ago which bore the characteristics of Philadelphia, but where is this movement today? Instead of brotherly love, and keeping Christ's word and not denying His Name, what do we see? Not one company "endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit" but half a dozen or more parties and sections each refusing the other. We see brethren in Christ whose interests are practically confined to the particular circle with which they are connected. How can this be consistent with the truth of the one Body of Christ, or with His interests—keeping His Word and not denying His Name, or how can it possibly be considered as an exhibition of brotherly love? When we talk of Philadelphia do not let us forget the meaning of the word—love of the brethren.

The characteristics of Philadelphia are no longer seen. And that this causes so little humiliation and sorrow makes it only too evident that a Laodicean state has supervened.

When we consider what happened little more than a hundred years ago, and of the manifest power of God in connection with that movement, and the place that Christ filled, how can we regard what has since happened in a careless spirit, or even with dry eyes? Hearts were drawn to Christ in the power of the Spirit of God, and therefore to one another, as members of His body; and His interests became paramount. There was separation from all that was not suitable to His Name, and not in accordance with

His Word, and the strongest bond of attachment was formed between those who were led to take an outside place. But today all is changed, and the simple explanation is that Christ has not the place in our hearts He once possessed, or such a condition of things as now prevails would not be tolerated. This is a painful and humiliating confession, but who dare say it is not true?

The Philadelphian spirit has ceased to exist, and the consequence of this is that zeal for party is more conspicuous than devotedness to Christ. And so the uppermost question has become: "Is so and so with US; is he in *our* fellowship"? Not, "Does he belong to Christ? is he walking in communion with Him"? Party spirit governs both our thoughts and actions more than we are aware. If a person is outside our party, he is to a very large extent outside our interests.

All this is too patent to be denied. It is seen in a dozen different ways. Interest is mainly confined to our own particular circle of fellowship. Each party has its separate halls in which to meet; its own book depots and magazines; and its exclusive preachers and teachers. The interests of each party is centred in its own activities, at home and abroad. Even printed ministry not infrequently must bear a recognised label or it is passed by. With the utmost charity how can this be regarded as Philadelphia? Philadelphia *as it once existed* has vanished, and Laodicea has taken its place.

As we have already suggested, this charge serious as it is—overwhelmingly serious—is proved by the general *unconcern* and *indifference* as to the state of things described. Instead of repentance, we even try to reconcile ourselves to it as inevitable, and make the best of it. Indeed, very often our actions, if not our words, declare: "We are rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing," for our very party position supposes evil in others, and that we are right and others wrong. We no longer look at things in their relation to Christ, but to ourselves.

The call to Repentance

The call to Laodicea is to repent. The words are: "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten, be zealous therefore and repent." Repent of her satisfaction with herself, and indifference to Christ, and lukewarmness. The emphasis Christ lays upon lukewarmness suggests that she had once been in a better state, and leaves us in little doubt there is an intimate connection between Philadelphia and Laodicea. Laodicea is Philadelphia cooled down. That today in certain quarters there remains considerable adherence to the letter of Scripture is true. But observance of the *letter*, whether in doctrine or practise, is not enough. In fact it may become a positive snare. It may produce the very complacency seen in Laodicea. It is to this very state the Lord addresses Himself. How important then becomes our Lord's words in connection with the last phase of the Church on earth. This is the message for today—the message we need to take home to ourselves.

The entire history of the Church can now be classified thus; Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamos, which cover the first four centuries, became merged in Thyatira—that is Babylon.* Sardis and Philadelphia are now merged in Laodicea. So that, as we have said, broadly speaking, these two—Babylon and Laodicea—represent what is conspicuous today.

Thank God, although Laodicea represents the general condition, we are not obliged to remain in a Laodicean state. But it is of all importance to notice that when it is a question of recovery it becomes an individual matter, and the individual is addressed. It is of vital moment that this fact should be grasped. No recovery is intimated as far as Laodicea itself is concerned. The word collectively is: "I am about to spue thee out of my mouth." The word is to the individual: "If any man hear my voice."

*The fact that small companies may have existed apart from this does not affect the general principle. In the address to Thyatira a remnant is spoken of. This was the divine path for that time.

Alliances, amalgamation, the union of parties, are nothing better than confederacies. The vital point today is individual communion with Christ. Nothing can take the place of this. If we wish to know what God thinks of confederacies we can learn from the eighth chapter of Isaiah.

There is much in that chapter which is of deepest interest and importance today, and perfectly relevant to the times in which we live and the state of things in the Church.* On the one hand, there are human methods and associations; and on the other hand God's centre and gathering point—Christ. The waters of Shiloah are referred to, which were refused; and the name Immanuel. And then the one thing needful is mentioned:

“Sanctify the Lord of hosts Himself: and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread.
And He shall be for a sanctuary.”

Surely this is the very word for us today and will be found just as true as ever. And then the truth of these other words will be realised:

“Behold I and the children whom the Lord hath given Me.”

What can we want more?

Now throughout the addresses to the Churches everything is looked at in relation to Christ. Nothing is right unless He is given His true place. He Himself is the alone judge of what suits Him and what pleases Him. Moreover the reward to the overcomer has to do with the part he will have with Christ.

The Last Address

This feature becomes specially conspicuous when we come to the last address. He is the AMEN: the last word

*There has recently been issued a document which is to be the basis for discussing the re-union of the Church of England and the various denominations.

to us from God—the *verily* in whom every purpose will be made good. The confirmation of all.

“The faithful and true witness.”

All through these addresses He is bearing witness to the state of the churches, and to the remedy.

“*The beginning of the creation of God.*” In contrast with the first creation and the first man. That new scene which God has formed for Himself, where all gives Him pleasure. The second man, His beloved Son raised from the dead, is the beginning of it. This is the one who addresses you.

Fancy being *lukewarm* in regard to that ONE. Yet such is the description given of the last phase of the Church on earth. Yes lukewarm in regard to “*Him*.” Look at that “*I*”! “*I am rich.*” *I* in place of HIM. Actually speaking of themselves and what they are and what they have in the presence of the “*Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the Creation of God.*” Nothing is easier than to put “*I*” in place of Christ. And this not by putting our affairs in place of His, but in connection with His affairs.

NEED OF NOTHING. There is the tragedy. So happy, so content, so self-satisfied! Yes, and Christ outside. “*Rich and increased with goods,*” lacking the gold and white raiment and eyesalve, which alone are worth anything, which alone could commend them to Christ, and which He alone can give! “*Wretched and miserable, and poor and blind and naked.*” And not even conscious of it! The more Laodicean we are the less we *are* conscious of it, until His voice is heard.

What is the remedy? Where can deliverance be found from such a state? The answer is—“*Buy of Me.*” Only as we find Him: only as we discover our need; and receive the gold, white raiment and eyesalve—*only as we discover Christ* can we find deliverance.

Do you say you found Him years ago, when you came to Him as a poor, lost sinner. That may be. But this is to discover your need of Him as a saint. To discover what

He *did* for you, and to discover what He is, and what He waits to be to you, are two very different things. Thousands have made the first discovery who have not made the second. And what is more; will not take the trouble to make it. They are willing to accept what their Saviour did long ago; but they do not feel their need of anything more. What He wishes to be to them at the present moment seems to be no concern of theirs. And so they are not rich, as He wants them to be rich; and they are not clothed as He would like to see them clothed; and they do not *see*.

BEHOLD, I STAND AT THE DOOR!

The attitude of Christ here is of deep importance, and it is fatal to mistake its significance. He is OUTSIDE.

All that comes under the head of Babylon and Laodicea represents Christianity as a whole today; as Christ views it: that is, the Church as it fills the public gaze, and occupies the attention of men and Christians* And it is a momentous fact that Christ is here seen OUTSIDE. Not outside a sinner's heart, as often represented, but outside a Church, and seeking admittance to the heart of any individual that hears the knock, and obeys the voice, and opens the door.

And here we are face to face with a crisis of the utmost consequence. The supreme question of the hour, for every believer on earth at the present moment, faces each one here. It is a question between Christ and each individual soul. Unless you know, as a matter of actual experience, what it means for Christ Himself to enter in and sup with you, then He is outside, as far as you are concerned, and He is knocking; and He is rejected until admitted. What are you going to do? It is for each individual to decide—"If any man."

*It is not a question here of what certain individuals may be.

What response will there be from you? You may pay no attention; you may disregard the voice, and that will be your present and eternal loss, even though you may not lose heaven. Or do you say, how may I have this great experience: Christ supping with me and I with Him? The answer is very simple. Do you desire it? Do you want his company? Just as the two at Emmaus had only to ask for His company to obtain it, so with ourselves. In that case He waited to see whether He was wanted—"He *made as though* He would have gone further." "But," we read, "they *constrained* Him, saying, 'Abide with us'." And the response was immediate: "He went in to tarry with them."

The same is true today. He acts in the same way still. "If a man love Me," He says, "I will come to him." And more, there is another presence pledged: "My Father will love him and WE will come unto him, and make our abode with him." But whether the Father will grant us His presence or not depends upon how much we think of Christ. If we leave Him standing outside we shall not be conscious of the Father's love and the Father's presence within.

What could surpass the joy of those two in their home at Emmaus when the Lord Jesus supped with them! Their hearts had "burned within them while He talked with them by the way," but He had still remained a "stranger." Now they "knew Him." And so unbounded was their joy at His presence, that when He vanished, they "rose up the same hour," and leaving home and comforts, went out into the night to retrace their steps to Jerusalem, that they might join the others and tell them of the Lord. Yet they might have allowed Him to pass on, and missed this experience altogether.

We may derive great blessing and profit from this event, if we understand it; and as a result come to realise the truest and sweetest fellowship possible today. Much of the fellowship that was enjoyed in the early days is denied to Christ's followers now, owing to the condition of the

Church. In some directions through spiritual poverty and want of intelligence; and in others, fellowship is actually refused. But though our brethren may refuse us, the Lord will not. He will come in, though they stay outside or seek to keep us outside; and if there are two hearts anywhere that have known His company—if the Lord of Glory has supped with these two—their fellowship one with the other will be of the most blessed character, far exceeding in reality and depth, what is often called “being in fellowship,”—if He has supped with them they also will sup with one another.

Do not let us rob ourselves or deprive one another of the joy that is thus brought within our reach; and (it is not too much to add) do not let us rob the Lord of what it means to Him to come in and sup with us and we with Him.

Thus, while they may have known in the early days much that we can never know, there never was a time when the opportunity for individual communion with Christ was greater. He offers Himself—and nothing less than Himself—to everyone who is willing to accept the offer. The offers made to anyone in Laodicea who would hear His voice are equal to; even if they do not transcend: anything that was known in the palmiest days in the history of the Church. And because they are made to Laodicea they are made to us. He is saying to each one in Laodicea today, “I counsel thee to buy of Me.” And He makes the richest offers—gold and white raiment and eyesalve. And then, in addition, His own company and the closest communion. And to crown all, if we overcome—that is, rise above the state of lukewarmness and make everything of Him—He promises that such shall sit with Him in His throne; “even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father in His throne.” The highest honour ever granted to Him, He will grant to us.

Christ offers Himself to us

Thus we see that while on the one hand we have Babylon and Laodicea—the one characterised by outward

show and all that appeals to the senses, and the other by self satisfaction and lack of zeal for Christ—we are not left simply to the choice between these two. If we love Christ, and if nothing less than Christ will satisfy us, He offers HIMSELF to us. And He will come, not to some gaudy temple; nor simply to a company gathered together in whatever way, but to the individual heart—to the one who hears His voice and opens the door. To the solitary soul His presence will be granted. And the soul that knows that, will know there is nothing else that can equal it.

What a challenge! To Laodicea it is as if Christ said: To you who have nothing, though you think you have so much, I offer everything, but you will only find it as you find it in ME. He does not ask for greater service—or indeed for anything, except one thing—“buy of ME”; open the door to ME. “I stand at the door and knock.”

What response shall we make? One characteristic feature of the Revelation is the various ways in which our Lord Jesus Christ is presented; and that, whenever this takes place, there is a response.

In Chap. i. 5, He is presented as “the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the Kings of the earth.” And the response is:—

“Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, etc. To Him be glory and dominion, for ever and ever. Amen.”

Later, John sees Him. “And when I saw Him,” says the apostle, “I fell at His feet as dead.”

In Chap. v., when the Lamb in the midst of the throne takes the book, there is a response from the living creatures and the elders, and finally from the many angels round about the throne, “ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands”; and they ascribe with united voice worthiness to the Lamb that was slain.

There is on every occasion a response. It is not otherwise when we come to the last chapter. How does the book close? Someone once asked two remarkable

questions about the Bible. First, how was it to begin? How would man have begun it? With what words should *such* a book open? And next, how should it close? When all is said that needed to be said; about God himself; about man; and God's purposes concerning, and His dealings with man; how should such a history and such a revelation close? What should be the final word? And if the Bible is judged simply from this standpoint, how great it is seen to be, for how better, or in what more majestic strain could it begin than it does begin? "In the beginning God."

And what sweeter note could be sounded than is heard at the end? The Name, sweeter than all others, lingers in our ears at the close—that of JESUS.

"I, Jesus, have sent Mine Angel to testify unto you, these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David and the bright and Morning Star."

We begin with God; we end with Jesus. And when the Name of Jesus is mentioned—when He is presented—there is a response. "And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come." Where better, or how better, could God's Message close? It is by no mere chance, surely, that this is placed last, though it may not have been written last. The Scriptures testify of Him. "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." And it is to Him as the Root and the Offspring of David that all prophecy converges. It will find its fulfilment when His throne at Jerusalem becomes the centre of administration for the whole earth.

But this does not exhaust His glory. There is the heavenly as well as the earthly; and there is one in closer relationship to Him than Israel. That company—the Church—which at the beginning had said:—

"Unto Him that loves us,"

is the same that in unison with the Spirit says, "Come." It is the Bride. "The Spirit and the Bride say Come." But there is also the individual. "And let him that heareth, say 'Come.'"

May we not well ask ourselves, how do we stand in regard to this? Do these two words, "I JESUS," mean so much to us: do they enclose for us all that is sweetest and best, that we can only say—yea we *must* say, "Come"?

Here is the test for every true heart today. Not merely do I conform to the letter of Scripture; nor do I meet in this way or that, or with this party or that; but with the affections and longing proper to the Bride, do I say "Come?" Mark, this is no mere sentimental emotion, but the Spirit Himself inspires the affection and awakens the cry.

And then, next, and most important of all, in some respects, and as leading to the other, do I know what His private coming means before, and in view of, His public coming? He presents Himself in Rev. iii., 20, as standing at the door and knocking; and says, "if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come into him and will sup with him, and he with Me." What response do we make to this? Have we heard His voice?; and can we truly say, I know what it means, in all reality, for Him to sup with me? Apart from this experience the public meeting in His Name to partake of the Lord's Supper will become a very formal affair.

But if we do know what it is now for Him to come to us privately and to sup with us, we shall long all the more for that public coming, when all the promises to Israel will be fulfilled, but first and foremost, we shall know all that we are to Him as His Bride in the Father's House above for ever.

"For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose Name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." (Isa. lvii., 15)

"I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with Me." (Rev., iii., 20).