

JESUS AND THE SEVEN CHURCHES

After the longest, darkest night, morning always breaks again. People who must watch through the lonely hours of night watch for the cheering light of the morning star, herald of a soon-rising sun.

The Thyatira church was the church of the world's dark night. How glad they were for the new note of courage which the early Reformers brought! Many speak of John Wycliffe of England as the "Morning Star" of the Reformation. God found a man whom He could use. He lived in the thirteenth century.

A century later came Huss and Jerome, in Bohemia, boldly lifting the torch of the gospel though they were burned at the stake for their loyalty to Christ.

Then came the church of Sardis, church of the

PROTESTANT REFORMATION 1517-1798

Revelation 3:1. "And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."

Here Jesus, the Head of the church, tells us that He guided the Reformation of the sixteenth century from the holy place of the Heavenly Sanctuary with sending the Holy Spirit in all its perfection to teach the Reformers and strengthen them for the challenge they faced against the dominating church and persecution. It began with "a song of joy" because of the blessings of the Reformation, the new day of gospel light had dawned. In the beginning of its history it was alive and so much alive that it acquired a name which long outlived its spirituality. The Sardis church is "that which remains."

That condition did not continue because the Reformation became popular and the church prosperous. Jesus said, "thou art dead." They had once been a living church or they could not have died. The exhortation of Jesus had its application to them after they had backslidden from God.

The Christian church of the 16th and 17th centuries was a period of Protestant scholasticism. The vibrant generation of the Reformers who awoke the church passed away. Their successors became more and more involved in fervent doctrinal polemics and controversies, gradually degenerating into lifeless formalism and spiritual lethargy.

Toward the end of this period, under the impact of the rising tide of philosophical rationalism and secularism, the saving grace of the gospel and commitment to Christ waned, giving place to rationalism and theological arguments. The church although appearing to be alive, was in reality spiritually lifeless.

The churches hid behind man-made creeds and were satisfied without further light. The Protestant Christians claimed to take the Bible and the Bible only as their rule of faith. But they were content to continue with certain Romanist errors, doctrines which had their origin in paganism long ago. Sunday worship came from the pagan worship of the sun on the first day of the week. The immortality of the soul came from paganism and Greek philosophy. God imputed the guilt of Adam's sin to his posterity and babies necessitating infant baptism. Election of some to be saved and others damned to eternal hell fire. These are just a few of the teachings that caused the flame of God's love to go out in the children of the Reformers.

Revelation 3:2. "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God."

The gospel which Luther, Calvin, Melancthon and other Reformers taught was not the full light from the Word that would prepare a ripened harvest for the second coming of Jesus. It may be sufficient to prepare people to die and come up in the resurrection. They believed that God predestined some to be saved by His grace. If you are one of the elect, then you cannot be denied salvation no matter how you live. Your choice in the matter has been taken away from you by God. If God so manipulates your salvation, then there is no need to worry about good works or obedience to God's commandments. God will worry about all that.

Revelation 3:4. "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy."

There were a few names within this period who sought to move forward in the increasing light. Zinzendorf (1700) in Germany devoted his life to Christian work and gathered the Moravian believers at Herrnhut. They sent missionaries to Turkey, Africa, and America, establishing Bethlehem of Pennsylvania in 1741. He kept the seventh-day Sabbath with many followers.

At this time England's spirituality was at the point of death. John Wesley sought a deeper experience with God, but did not find it in the

Church of England. John and Charles Wesley went to Oxford (1720) and organized a Bible study group which was nicknamed the Methodists.

Wesley came to America to evangelize the Indians (1735) but was largely a failure. Sailing home to England a terrible storm arose on the high seas which caused a great fright among the passengers all except the Moravians aboard. When Wesley saw their calm and inquired why, they attributed to the loving care of the God whom they served. His interest was so piqued by this calm assurance that his future contacts with the Moravians and Zinzendorf had a formative influence on his life's work. It was John Wesley who generally raised the spiritual consciousness of England and America and brought revival. It saved England from the throes of anarchy experienced by France during the Revolution. Wesley caught a glimpse of Christian perfection and desired the experience, but did not know how it was to be achieved.

In England there were men like John Traske, John James, and Francis Bampfield of the Seventh-day Baptists who kept the seventh-day Sabbath. These Baptists were the repository of the Sabbath truth from 1665 into the nineteenth century.

Revelation 3:3. "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee."

It was from the people who had accepted the great revival message that the study of prophecy began in regard to the coming of Christ. For ages little effort had been put forth in regard to study of prophecy, but at the close of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries a new interest in that study began. Among them were Joseph Mede, J. A. Bengel, Sir Isaac Newton. All this turned the minds from the things of this world to the kingdom of God. This prepared the way for the Advent message, for the prophetic Scriptures led them to see the soon coming of Christ.

Revelation 3:5. "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels."

Remember that Jesus is seeking to save us. He is not seeking an excuse to condemn us. He wants us in His kingdom, not out. At this moment, the Holy Spirit is drawing each one to Christ, and imparting to us His heavenly grace so that we may "overcome" if we will cease

resisting Him and yield to His grace. He will draw us all the way. Our real battle is to trust God, to believe that He loves us—sinners, unthankful, impure, mean persons, that we know ourselves to be. “Overcoming” is overcoming doubt that God accepts us individually and personally. “This is the victory that overcomes the world—our faith” (John 5:4).

If you believe Him, you will overcome. No one who appreciates the love of Jesus can possibly continue living in sin. “The love of Christ constrains us” (2 Cor. 5:14).

But God provides white raiment, and He Himself will take away the filthy rags, and clothe us with “change of raiment.” That is, the Lord teaches His people, and Himself provides the clothing necessary. The plan of salvation is one of giving and taking; giving on the part of God, and taking on the part of man. The pride of the heart resents this dependence upon God; but we are pensioners, beggars, miserable, and poor, and naked. The only thing for us to do is to buy the white raiment. This is offered without money and without price.

The prophet rejoiced in the Lord, because God had clothed him with the garments of salvation, and covered him with the robe of righteousness. We are not to put on the robe ourselves. Let us trust God to do that. When the Lord puts it on, it is not as an outward garment merely; but he puts it right through a man, so that he is all righteousness.

Sometimes we hear people talk as though we must ourselves put on a fairly presentable garment before we can ask for the white raiment. But it is the very need and helplessness of the beggar that recommends him to charity.

“I will not blot out his name from the book of life.” In Christ you have been adopted by God into His heavenly family. “According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself (Eph. 1:4, 5). Legally every one’s name has been written in the book of life. Every one has the gift of eternal life in Christ. If they do not resist and throw away the gift they will be saved. If they judge themselves unworthy of salvation by despising this birthright, then they will receive the reward they have chosen for themselves.

“It is only by being overcomers at last that our names can be retained in that book. But all will not overcome. Their names, of course, will be blotted out. And reference is made to some definite

point of time in the future for this work. "I will not," says Christ (in the future), blot out the names of the overcomers, which is also saying, by implication, that at the same time he will blot out the names of those who do not overcome. Is not this the same time mentioned by Peter in Acts 3:19? "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." To say to the overcomer that his name shall not be blotted out of the book of life, is to say also that his sins shall be blotted out of the book wherein they are recorded, to be remembered against him no more forever. Heb.8:12. And this is to be when the times of refreshing come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19).

"I will confess his name." Can you imagine a more thrilling honor than for Jesus Himself to take your name upon His lips, to confess you as His holy child before the Father in heaven and before the millions of loyal angels? In the judgment which is now in session, there will be a time when all the assembled hosts of heaven will look at each of us alone and scrutinize our individual lives.

It is well to think often about that moment soon to come when Jesus will take our names on His lips and say, "Father, this is My child; he trusts Me, and I cannot abandon him! I died for him, and I must have him in My kingdom!" And when Satan whispers to you that you are too great a sinner, that you must give up hope, remind him of what Jesus said of the greatest sinner on earth, "The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" (John 6:37). Claim that promise, and come.

Revelation 3:6. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

The message to the church in Sardis is a strong appeal to all who feel half-hearted and divided in their devotion to God. They may not feel the same enthusiasm which they had when they first received and heard the gospel, and they may find it difficult to continue serving God. Jesus' appeal shows that what happened to the Christians in Sardis can happen to every Christian, regardless of place and time.

A church can have a great name and reputation and brilliant works, and yet be spiritually lifeless and lethargic. The fact that it was faithful to the Lord at some time in the past does not mean that it will remain faithful. The only way to reclaim the wholehearted and original enthusiasm and devotion to Christ is to bear in mind and keep afresh the cross of Christ.

“Repent!” In the life of every Christian who is backsliding from ardent love for Christ, there must be a decisive moment when a firm, radical decision allows for a new beginning.

THE CHURCH OF BROTHERLY LOVE 1798-1844

Revelation 3:7. “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth.”

The word Philadelphia means “brotherly love.” This was the spirit that pervaded the church at the beginning of the “time of the end,” from about 1798-1844 A. D. Throughout the Christian world, the church enjoyed a marvelous awakening. The Bible societies were organized, and the Scriptures published in multiplied editions.

It was in the time of the Philadelphia church that the great work of preaching the gospel of Christ to the nations that knew Him not really began in earnest. William Carey went to India from England in 1793, Adoniram Judson carried the gospel to Burma from America in 1813, Robert Moffat went to Africa to preach in 1817 and David Livingstone in 1840. The Church Missionary Society of the Anglican Church was founded in 1799, the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804, the American Bible Society in 1816. New missions were pioneered around the world. Truly the Philadelphia church had “a little strength, and has kept My word.”

Jesus introduces himself with three great titles. “The holy One” refers to God (Isa. 43:15). “The true One” Jesus is real; he is the true God. “The One who has the key of David.” This symbolizes his full authority. Isaiah 22:22 presents a picture of Eliakim, the faithful chief steward of the king who was given authority over the royal palace and the royal storehouse.

The Son of God is the rightful heir to the throne of David, and is about to take to himself his great power and reign, hence is here represented as having the key of David—key, a figure of power. The throne of David, or of Christ, on which he is to reign, is the capital of his kingdom, the New Jerusalem now above.

Christ receives the kingdom, takes the throne of David, before his second advent. (Dan. 7:13, 14; Ps. 2:8, 9; Rev. 11:15; Matt. 25:10). This union is represented by the marriage of Matt. 25:10, and is called “the marriage of the Lamb,” Rev. 19:7.

Christ is given all authority (Matt. 28:18). He is “faithful as a Son over His [God’s] house” (Heb. 3:6). He presents Himself to the Philadelphians as the One who has received full authority and has access to the heavenly storehouse and the riches of God.

William Miller was born in Massachusetts 1780, and was an officer in the War of 1812. He found little comfort in his Deist beliefs and so studied the Bible and joined the Baptists in 1816. When asked why he believed the Bible is true, he replied that it was proved true by prophecy, and it fulfilled the heart’s longing by the teaching of the coming of Jesus. In 1818 he became convinced that the 2300 day prophecy of Daniel 8 would terminate about 1843. He believed that the return of Jesus would take place at that time.

The world was ignorant of the coming of Jesus so he hoped that someone would preach it. The conviction came to him that he should do it, but he shuddered at the thought. He decided if a request came to preach then he would. The next Sunday the preacher failed his appointment and Miller was asked to speak. He preached on the prophecies of Christ’s coming. He was asked to speak more. Word spread and churches everywhere invited him. The falling stars in 1833 added to the conviction that time was short.

For years Miller went about this work at his own expense until 1838 when Charles Fitch and Josiah Litch united with him. Then Joshua Himes entered the publishing work with them. The *Signs of the Times* became a regular visitor in people’s homes (1840). Meetings were held in Boston and a great interest arose.

There Joseph Bates, a sea captain from Connecticut, attended and began an active roll. As conferences were held Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Christian Connection, etc. held in common the belief in the soon coming of Jesus.

As campmeetings were organized from 1842 onward hundreds heard the message and a great revival occurred. James White, joined them in 1842.

At first none of the Millerites set a time for the Lord’s return except to say it was anticipated between March 1843 and March 1844.

It was the desire of the believers to continue as members of the denominations, but after 1841 opposition arose to the Millerites, and many were disfellowshipped as fanatics.

After the disappointment of March 1844, there was anxiety among the believers. Finally, an explanation came at the Exeter, N.H., campmeeting. One, John Clough, came forward with the Midnight

Cry, and the end of the 2300 years, October 22, 1844. He gave the parable of the ten virgins, when the cry went forth, "Go ye forth to meet Him."

Miller was at first reluctant to set a definite day, but soon all were agreed in this teaching of the Midnight Cry. It was preached with fervor and large numbers were converted and awaited the Lord's return.

Revelation 10 has the picture of an angel standing on the land and sea with a special message that time shall be no longer. The angel was clothed with a cloud, and the angel told the apostle to eat the book from which they got the message and it would be sweet to the mouth, but would make the belly bitter. They were then told that they must prophesy again. The Advent people of 1844 saw that this description fully pictured their experience. The message was sweet when they expected the Lord to come so soon; but when the time passed their experience was most bitter.

Revelation 3:8. "I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name."

"He who opens and no one shuts." What does this mean?

Let us visit the sanctuary that Moses built long ago. There we will see the "door" that the high priest opened, which no one could shut, a type or symbol of the greater "door" that Jesus, our true High Priest in heaven, opens for us.

Moses was told by God to make the sanctuary after the pattern of the heavenly temple (Heb. 8:5). So he built two rooms, one to be the Holy apartment, and the other to be the Most Holy. The first room contained important pieces of furniture that represented Christ's work as Saviour—a lampstand of seven lamps ("I am the light of the world." John 8:12), a table for holy bread ("I am the bread of life." John 6:48), and an altar of incense standing as near as possible to the mercy-seat where God's presence dwelt ("Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." John 14:13). Every day in the year the high priest went freely into this first room.

But there was a veil that barred the way, like a closed door, into the second room. Here was the ark containing God's holy law written on two tables of stone, with the mercy-seat—like the very throne of the infinite God—and angels of gold. No one except the high priest dared

even peep behind the veil, lest he be destroyed in judgment, slain by Him whose presence “is a consuming fire to sin” (Heb. 12:29).

And only once a year on the Day of Atonement did the high priest alone venture to enter the Most Holy apartment, to perform a work of reconciliation for the people of God. This was to them a type of their day of judgment.

It was to this same work of judgment performed in heaven itself that Jesus referred in His words to the Sardis church, “I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels.” This “Day of Atonement” began in heaven at the close of the 2300 years of Daniel 8:14. As our true High Priest, Christ entered the Most Holy apartment in A. D. 1844, and began His closing work of “cleansing the sanctuary,” to make a people ready for His second coming. The “door” into the second phase of His ministry was opened. And no one can open what Christ has closed, nor close what He has opened. But this change is not to be misunderstood as merely one of physical place. There are spiritual realities involved.

The “open door” is a special opportunity to preach the gospel of Christ throughout the world. The Advent people went out to prophesy again after receiving light on the work of Jesus in the sanctuary above which began to be cleansed in 1844. This was the work of Christ instead of His coming to gather His people from the earth at that time.

Revelation 3:9. “Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.”

Brotherly love expresses the position and spirit of those who received the advent message up to the autumn of 1833. As they came out of the sectarian churches, they left party names and party feelings behind, and every heart beat in union as they gave the alarm to the nominal churches and to the world, and pointed to the coming of the Son of man as the consummation of the true believer’s hope. In that movement was deep searching of heart, consecration of all to God, peace, joy in the Holy Spirit, and pure, fervent love for each other, which true believers then enjoyed.

Who are these? No others besides believers are recognized in the New Testament as true Israelites or Jews. These profess the faith, claim to be Adventists; but on account of rejecting the present truth, and backsliding from God, are not in fact what they profess to be. It is

a fact that a large portion of the advent host that stood consecrated in 1844, left their consecration, denied the hand of God which led them out so far from the world: and have stood deadly opposed to the Third Angel's Message and have done all they could to crush those who have taught it, and have sought to obey it. Many of them will help compose the synagogue of Satan. And for all their opposition, revilings and reproaches, they will repent when it will be too late. They will bow at true believers feet. The scale is yet to turn. Near the close of the ministration of Christ in the Most Holy, the latter rain will be poured out, the Message will go with a loud voice, the Holy Ghost will be poured out, the gifts will all be restored, and the remnant will stand forth in power. Then will those who have represented believers in the Third Message as departing from God and his Word, be made to know that God has loved them. They will bow at the feet of those who have stood firm. They will own that God has been with those who have for many years acknowledged all the way the Lord has led them in the past advent movement, and who have stood firm for the Third Message.

They heard the message of the first angel of Revelation 14 proclaiming the gospel and the second coming of Christ. There came a time when the second angel called them out of Babylon. The Advent body came away from the several churches. The fall of Babylon had been proclaimed throughout the land. The spiritual death, and the deep corruption of the churches which constitute Babylon, and the fact that God's people came out of her. Babylon, the nominal church, is fallen. God's people have come out of her. She is now the "synagogue of Satan."

Revelation 3:10. "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."

Those who keep the word of Christ's patience, will be kept from the hour of temptation which is to try all the world. Those who now live in patient, faithful obedience to the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Christ, will be kept in the dreadful deciding hour before us.

From the point of time to which the testimony of this verse applies, it looks both ways: back over the period of the open door, or the patient waiting time in which believers have been tested by the Commandments of God and the Faith of Jesus; also forward through the time of trouble which will try all on the earth. As Christ ceases to offer his blood for sinners, the saints will be sealed, and Christ will

keep them through the time of trouble, or pouring out of the seven last plagues. "I will keep thee"—gracious promise;--Lord, help us to keep the word of thy patience.

Revelation 3:11. "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

Revelation 3:12. "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name."

We cannot suppose that the words "pillar," and "temple," can be understood literally, as applying to the New Jerusalem; but, rather, as figures of the power and strength of believers in the church of God, when they shall have fully overcome. Then, as the wholesale dealer marks upon the box of goods which he wishes to send to the purchaser, the owner's name, and the place of destination, the saints by their faith and works will show to all around, whose they are and where they are going; viz., they are God's property, going up to the New Jerusalem. "I will write upon them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem."

Revelation 3:13. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

Even though God's people have little strength, he graciously sets before them a door of opportunities. The enemy of God and his people can try to shut that door, but Jesus possesses the key to the heavenly storehouse. When he opens a door, nobody is able to shut it. He is in control. God's people, although weak, need to hold what He has given them trusting God and allowing him to work in them and through them. In such a way, no one will be able to take their crown from them.