

Lecture 8 — The Candlestick and the Bride.

Rev. 1: 10-20, Rev. 22: 16-21.

from 'The Church: What is it?'

Ten lectures on the church of the New Testament seen to be established, endowed, united and free.

W. T. P. Wolston, M.D., 1905.

It is a remarkable thing that the testimony of the Spirit of God regarding the Church, as the Candlestick and the Bride, is found only in the book of Revelation. The reason is pretty simple. The Revelation is the book that gives us the issue of all things; it is emphatically the book of the throne, and the book of judgment. It gives you the final issue of all things, and eventuates in the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ over this hitherto sin-stained, but then cleansed and reconciled earth for a thousand years, which merges, after a little space, into the eternal day — the day of God.

What we have been looking at lately, in regard to the Church, is connected with the Spirit's day, and every saint of God should know and bear in mind that we are living in the Spirit's day, the day when the Holy Ghost is here to look after the interests of Christ; consequently obedience to Him is of the last importance. On the other hand, the book of Revelation unfolds with great clearness and detail — more than we find anywhere else — what the day of Christ will be, the millennial day (Rev. 20); and also instructs us as to the day of God — that is eternity, when all things are of God, and God will be all in all (Rev. 21: 1-8).

Let us now look a little at the chapter I have read, It presents the Lord Jesus in a totally new character, at least in the New Testament. The One John sees in this remarkable vision, is very unlike the blessed Jesus he had known in His earthly pathway, and of whom he had written so beautifully in his gospel — very unlike the One on whose bosom he laid his head, the night before He died for His Church. It is the same blessed Person, but He presents Himself in a very different character. He is seen here in the aspect of a judge — which gives its character to all the book; it is Christ taking up all things, and judging according to God. He is God, the first and the last, the Alpha and Omega (ver. 8).

John was "in the Spirit on the Lord's day," an exile in Patmos, when he had the vision he here records. On the day when Christians meet, the apostle, though all alone, and removed far from his brethren, enjoyed a special power of the Holy Ghost, and is thus an anointed vessel for Christ through whom to communicate His thoughts to the Assemblies in Asia. It is important to bear in mind that Asia, i.e., the two little provinces of Asia Minor then so-called, had already

turned away from Paul's ministry. He had said in writing to Timothy, "All they which are in Asia be turned away from me" (2 Tim. 1: 15). They had turned away from the testimony that was peculiarly Paul's — the Pauline doctrine of the heavenly character of the Assembly — that which I have been seeking to unfold to you during these past few weeks. Asia where he had laboured most, Ephesus included, had given it up. How early had declension set in. Yes, and now John was chosen of God to unfold the deeper defection that would yet transpire as seen in the Candlestick, and the consequent judgment of the Church and the world, and then bring out what God will yet effect, as seen in the Bride. Doubtless when the Emperor of Rome banished John to Patmos, he thought he was doing his own will. No; he was but carrying out the purposes of God. God wanted John to be alone, and in a spiritual state, to get His mind; and you and I also have to be "in the Spirit on the Lord's day" — that is the principle — if we are going to get God's truth in a day of evil, like the one we are in now.

The servant is prepared. He hears the voice of the Son of man, turns round and sees the responsible vessel of God's light on the earth — the seven golden candlesticks — and the Son of man in their midst. The Son of man and the Ancient of days are the same. The one Daniel described as the Ancient of days (Dan. 7) is, as our chapter itself shows, the Lord Jesus Christ, only now become Man. The character in which He presents Himself, and is found among these seven golden candlesticks, is that of discriminating in an intensely solemn way. The Assemblies are first seen as seven distinct light-bearers; it was their position of witness for God in the world: yet the number seven suggests that there is more than this to be found in them. Observe, they are of gold — that is their proper character, divine righteousness — as set of God on the earth. Because of the dimness or utter lack of true light, God may take them away, but originally His hand set them up.

"And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength" (vers. 12-16). This is priestly discrimination. It was not like the Lord in service, in John 13: 4, where He "laid aside his garments." Here, with garments down to the foot, He is the One who has to observe, to see, to discriminate the real condition, and to pronounce judgment thereon. It reminds one of the leper brought to the priest in Old Testament days (see Lev. 13, 14). A state of things savouring of leprosy was under His eye, and He meets it judicially. His garment is down to His feet, and about His loins is the girdle of righteousness; eyes of fire of piercing divine holiness; His feet are as of one who had been Himself exposed to the searching test and found perfect in His path, hence the One fitted to judge the path of what professed to be His. His voice suggests majestic and irresistible power.

"And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead" (ver. 17). John was deeply impressed with what was before His eye; he felt the intense solemnity of the Lord presenting Himself to the Church in such an aspect, and we ought to be divinely affected by this scripture, because what comes before us is intensely solemn. "And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear

not; I am the first and the last. I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of death and of Hades" (vers. 17, 18). He is in resurrection; all power is at His disposal, and that is a great thing to get hold of All power is in the hands of the risen Man who is at God's right hand today triumphant over all the power of Satan, and He who is Head of the Church, viewed as His body, is here seen as the judge of that which, on earth, is His responsible vessel of testimony.

He bids John write "the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be after these" (ver. 19). This verse gives us the threefold division of the book of Revelation — the all-important key to it. "The things which thou hast seen," we get in Revelation 1 — the vision of Christ personally. "The things which are," are brought before us in Revelation 2 and 3. The main features of the history of the professing Church of God, as long as it is here to be addressed, are presented under the figure of seven candlesticks. The whole epoch, from the Lord's departure until the Church is no longer here, is presented in these seven candlesticks; they are "the things which are," and they range from the day in which John wrote, to the moment of the taking up of the saints at the Lord's coming. The whole Assembly is really in view. The then state of the various Assemblies addressed serves the Lord to set forth prophetically the various states the Assembly would pass through and that should be found in it, till the Lord should come. The third and greater part of the book, "the things which shall be after these," opens at Revelation 4. Nothing in it can take place till the Church's history here has closed, and she is no longer on earth to be addressed. Further, "the things which shall be after these" comprehend all that which you have given you from chapter 4 to the end of the book i.e., God's dealings with the world to the end of time, with a wonderful glance into eternity.

Then the Lord says: "The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches; and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches" (ver. 20). He explains the symbols. Seven is the symbolic number of completeness in Scripture; perfection in that sense — spiritual completeness. Not that there was perfection morally, but seven gives the whole number. There were seven local Assemblies, and in them the Lord gives us a panoramic view of what would take place during His absence, until the moment of the Rapture. Doubtless when the Lord takes away the candlestick, with every mark of detestation as to the state it has fallen into, as in Laodicea, Satan will take up what is left of the profession, then become his fitting tool for the development of that frightful church-world system afterwards portrayed in Babylon and its judgment. What was, once espoused to Christ as a chaste virgin, according to the Church's true character — when all who are His are taken out of it — will come under the most awful judgment recorded in the book, as the great whore that sitteth upon many waters (Rev. 17, 18).

These seven Churches we have already glanced at (see Lecture 4). We saw that Ephesus indicated the time directly after the apostolic day, when heart declension from Christ began in the Church, as Paul had foretold. Smyrna answers to the times of persecution in which there was a brightening up of the saints. Pergamos refers to the time when the Church slipped into worldly ease, to dwell where Satan had his throne, when the Roman empire under Constantine became Christian. Thyatira was the outcome of this unfaithful alliance, the descent of the Church into the dark ages when it ruled the world, and is characterised as the depths of Satan. But, looking at that epistle, it is interesting to note that here for the first time the thought of the coming of the Lord is

introduced, "But that which ye have already hold fast till I come" (Rev. 2: 25), and I have no doubt that the reason is this: there is no other outlook for faith, no further hope of the restoration of the ecclesiastical state. Thyatira goes on to the end. Ephesus became Smyrna; Smyrna became Pergamos; Pergamos became Thyatira — they are consecutive states, and Thyatira goes right on to the end, to the Lord's second coming (see Rev. 2: 25-28). But the states indicated by Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, when they arise, go on also to the end. The first four were consecutive; the fourth and the last three are all collateral states, existing to the end together concurrently. Thus is God's panoramic view of what the Church would be during the absence of Christ presented to us.

In all these phases of the Assembly's existence the point to remember is that the object of her being left on earth was to be a light-bearer in the world. God had set the Assembly to be the true witness of what He has manifested in Jesus. She is to manifest what Jesus is. now that He has gone on high. If she be a false witness she will be removed. The candlestick is a vessel that receives the light, and has to bear the light. It is the Church, as the responsible vessel of testimony for Christ, which, during His absence (which constitutes the night), is responsible to give light to the world. If the Assembly cease to give light she will be removed, as Israel was, though, in the long-suffering of God, the judgment announced on the first defection of heart from Christ in Ephesus (Rev. 2: 5), is only finally executed in Laodicea.

Now why do we not read about the Church as the candlestick till we come to Revelation? Who had been God's responsible witness? Israel. Who had the temple, the oracles, the ark, everything? Israel. While Jerusalem existed, the temple was there, and outwardly to the world the candlestick was at Jerusalem. The Ethiopian eunuch travelled a thousand miles to go up to what he regarded as God's candlestick, but he found no light. The Church had become the light-bearer, but God does not address her as the candlestick till this moment, which we are considering in Revelation 1 - 3.

God does not address His new witness under this title (the candlestick) till the old is completely set aside. For a long time Judaism and Christianity went on side by side in Jerusalem, and there was a great deal of vacillation on the part of the Hebrew Christians. They were to be found in the synagogue today and in the Christian company tomorrow; and that went on till the apostle Paul was writing to the Hebrews, and then came the emphatic injunction, "Let us go forth, therefore, unto him without the camp bearing his reproach" (Heb. 13: 13). The camp was the place where God's name was dishonoured and out of which every faithful saint, that wanted the company of the Lord, must go. The Christian was called on to break with the old thing that God had given up.

God was very patient with His people. Judaism as a system, was really dead — it died with Christ; it was nailed to the cross (see Col. 2: 13, 14); but the undertaker had not arrived to bury the body. The destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans took place about A.D. 70. The city was besieged, and though the Roman general gave imperative instructions to save the Temple, a torch was thrown in by a drunken soldier, and it was burnt to the ground. The Lord's words regarding its individual stones were literally fulfilled (see Matt. 24: 1, 2). The old candlestick was destroyed and everything scattered; and not till then is the Church addressed as the candlestick. Rome was the scavenger to whom God, as it were, said, Go and sweep that old, corrupt, polluted,

and defunct system away. Then the old candlestick being gone, the Church is addressed in the way in which we see it in these chapters.

Then what was going on in the meantime? The Church was really the light of the world, but the world looked at Christians as being a sect of the Jews. Perhaps it had a brighter and happier place then, when in lowly grace and moral resemblance to Christ it lived like Him, and only for Him and His interests, than it had after it got the sense of its importance as a light-bearer; because the moment that idea gets into people's minds we know what takes place. She got the sense of her own importance and dignity, and declension set in. Then the Lord addresses her in the way in which these two chapters speak. How deeply the Church has failed you and I know, and the Lord tells us distinctly here what the final result will be, He will spue out of His mouth that which has so failed. If you remember that the Church — the candlestick — is looked at as His light-bearer, and has utterly failed to justify her existence as such, you will have no difficulty when you come to the point where it is seen to be spued out of His mouth as something nauseous. When things come to be as they are depicted in Laodicea He must be done with it.

I said just now that we have four collateral or concurrent Churches — Thyatira, Sardis, Pergamos, and Laodicea. Thyatira is Rome, which goes on yet, and will till the Lord comes, gaining enormous ground in the interval — by leaps and bounds in this land. But other phases of things develop themselves before the end. Sardis, I have no doubt, is Protestantism — the Reformation; and thank God for it, and for the men who were used of Him to come out in defence of the Scriptures, and to rescue and give to the people the Word of God. It is not that the Lord here judges His own blessed work, but the result of it in man's hand.

The way in which the Lord presents Himself to each of these Churches is noticeable. The character which Christ takes exactly meets the condition of the Church to which He is speaking. To Sardis, which begins a new phase of the Assembly's history concurrently with Thyatira, He comes with the solemn and needed reminder (see Rev. 1: 16 and Rev. 2: 1) that all that mighty work that had brought out afresh the gospel, long lost in Christendom, if it had shaken kingdoms to their base, was of Him. It was He that had the seven spirits of God in the complete manifestation of spiritual power; it was He that had "the seven stars." All constituted authority in the Church was under the direction of Christ to begin with. To the angel of the Church of Ephesus He had presented Himself as "he that *holdeth* the seven stars in his right hand." But an innovation had occurred in the action of the responsible vessel. The heads of the Reformed countries were constituted heads of the Church in those countries, as a defence against the Papacy, and thus Christ's place was disowned. But "he that hath the seven stars" will still remind the Church that however man may dispute His title, it is still His; and all subordinate authority can only be rightly exercised under Him during the night of His absence. Sardis, then, delineates Protestantism and its ecclesiastical organisations. The head of the State appoints to the highest offices in the Church; or, even apart from nationalism, man's will is rampant, and the Church will choose this man or that as its minister. The change from Christ *holding* the stars in His right hand, to "he that *hath*," is sorrowfully significant of Christ's estimate of what had now come about in Sardis for the first time — this new and unheard-of departure from His order. The working of man's will and unbelief are responsible for it.

"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" (Rev. 3: 1). It was not the open corruption of Thyatira, and had superior pretensions. There was no Jezebel, but a state of moral death existed. The works were not perfect before God according to the revived truths. Spiritual energy was lacking. It is not enough to be a Protestant. It is of no use for you and me to be iconoclasts, who tear down what is wrong. Nothing comes of that kind of thing. Exposing and condemning what is wrong is of small value. Get the truth, buy it, sell it not, be it. Get it, and keep it, seek to be formed by it, and exhibit it. The Christian is called to that, the iconoclast misses the mind of God. But there are ever-smouldering embers of life in Protestantism that may be fanned into a flame, as in times of revival, here and there: hence He says, "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God" (ver. 2).

In the next verse we get the coming of the Lord introduced. "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" (ver. 3). But how is this? He will come as a thief in the night to the world, *i.e.*, without the slightest warning, "For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape" (1 Thess. 5: 3). Why warn Sardis of the world's aspect of His coming? Because it is the world. If it courted it in Pergamos, and ruled it in Thyatira, the world now rules the Church in Sardis, by the Church's consent, and world and Church are identical. Some day Christendom will be greatly surprised when it wakes up to find the Holy Ghost gone, the Church gone, every saint and servant of God gone; and what is left? A good deal; there is no doubt about that. Many that may still bear the name of Christ, but they are really the world, the world-Church, and get the judgment of the world.

The address to Philadelphia is very lovely, and the characters the Lord takes there equally important to notice. "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" (Rev. 3: 7). Here we have what He is in His personal character, what He is intrinsically — the holy and the true — rather than what belongs to Him officially. The key of David is His — He has all power to introduce the kingdom, but he uses the key of power to open a present door before the time of the kingdom, and indicates who it is that will occupy it. "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" (ver. 8). "I know thy works" — it is quite enough that He knows them. Mary of Bethany's action at the supper was for Him, if even true disciples could characterise it as waste. The truly devoted heart, like Mary, will be quite content that the Lord only knows its works. "Thou hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name" (ver. 8). It does not sound much to say, but it is blessed commendation. If there ever was a day when the Word of the Lord was being given up, it is the day we live in. There are many in high ecclesiastical places who have given up the Word of God entirely, or are fast undermining its authority over the soul. They tell us the Pentateuch is not what it purports to be. Isaiah was a rhapsodist, and Daniel a novel for the entertainment of the Jewish mind, while the four Gospels are inconsistent, and Paul's writings to be severely sifted. We get all that today, and, alas, Christians in hosts sanction it.

A Philadelphian is a person who holds on firmly and quietly to what God has given. "Thou hast a little strength, and hast *kept my word*, and hast *not denied my name*" (ver. 8). The two important things are His word, and His name. Now, is His name enough for you — the revelation of all that He is; and this in face of every effort to defame and dishonour Him? Such are the characteristics of these before whom Christ opens a door that none can shut. I should like to be a Philadelphian — the one He can commend. It is not knowing Assembly truth, and the like, but it is the knowledge of Christ personally and devotedness to Him — faithfulness to His word. If you are giving up His word in any measure, and are gathered to anything but His name you are not a Philadelphian. He is a person who has the sense of what will suit the Lord, and no matter who gives in, or who gives up the truth, he says, I am not going to. You then get the sense of His love and patience until He comes. "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. Behold, I come quickly: *hold that fast* which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (vers. 10, 11). The Lord's coming is here the hope of the heart. Then He will crown the faithful. Till then we must hold fast what He has given. That is a great principle — hold fast the truth of God. If you have it, be tenacious of it, because we live in a day of evil when every attempt will be made to move you from it, and from Him who is it.

Look now at the reward to the overcomer. "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God" — very likely he would not be regarded as a pillar anywhere else; for he is outside all that is regarded as ecclesiastical. He will be a pillar in heaven. As for recognition on earth he does not want it. Jesus says, I will make him "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" (ver. 12). For the man that is faithful to Christ in a day of declension and departure, there is a beautiful and blessed reward by-and-by.

Philadelphia consists, then, of moral suitability to Christ rather than what is ecclesiastical, though one answering to it will not leave out Christ's word as to the Church, any more than as to the individual. If you are to follow "righteousness, faith, charity, peace," it is "with those that call on the name of the Lord out of a pure heart." You will be sure to find others doing the same. You make for Christ, and then you will find yourself in the company of others that "call on the Lord out of a pure heart." That is Philadelphianism. That is a path open to us today. It may seem but little, but in a day of universal declension, coupled with much ecclesiastical pretension, on the one hand, and rationalistic reasonings of man's mind, swamping multitudes on the other, it is everything to keep the word of Him that is holy and true and not to deny His name. God grant that you and I may have a Philadelphian heart. I covet it above all things for myself and for you too.

"And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God" (Rev. 3: 14). Observe the characters the Lord takes here — "the faithful and true witness." The Church has been a false witness; she has been unfaithful and untrue; she is not that which He set her to be, and is to be displaced. But He who is the Amen of all that God had ever promised stands, and the creation that has Him for its beginning stands, whatever the ruin of the Church, not as Adam, who fell and dragged down all in his ruin. The last state of profession in the Assembly is characterised by

lukewarmness. To Christ that is nauseous. He will spue it out of His mouth. There was want of heart, the worst of all evils.

"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth" (vers. 15, 16). The Lord cannot abide lukewarmness. What Laodicea had not got was heart for Christ, and the great thing for you and me to have is heart for Christ, affection for Christ. That is what He prizes above everything — affection for Himself That was lacking, hence the peremptory threat of spueing out of His mouth. That is the final rejection of the Assembly on earth as the candlestick or responsible vessel of the testimony of Christ.

When will that be? At the moment of His coming for all that is real in it. Laodicea is what the Church has become today, evidenced by lack of affection, coupled with immense pretension. It is the professing Assembly boasting of resources in itself "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" — that is self-complacency, and self-congratulation without having Christ as the riches of the soul by faith. What deeper poverty could there be? Hence the next word: "And knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" — that is how He regards what professes to be His Church in this scene, and records His judgment of its pretended acquisitions according to the scientific infidelity of the last days. "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire" — that is divine righteousness; it had not got that. How few know today what it is to be before God in all the blessed acceptance of Christ, and know that He is their righteousness, and that they are "made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5: 21). He counsels all such to buy gold, "and white raiment, that thou mayst be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear." That is practical righteousness, that in which we shall shortly find the Bride arrays herself Further He says, "And anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see" (ver. 18). People often say, I do not see all this about Laodicea. Do you not? Then you have not got eye-salve. You cannot buy that down here; no servant of God can give it to you. You must go to the Lord. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent" (ver. 19).

The end however is this — the Church has not repented, the outward testimony has absolutely failed, and when the Lord comes by-and-by she is utterly rejected. Her testimony was not only dim and dull, but practically null and void, and therefore He spues her out of His mouth. But till then He says, "Behold I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me "(ver. 20). He is outside, but ready to bless any who hear His voice.

Do not misunderstand this passage; it is not the question of a true Christian being lost, because every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, however feeble and young, born of the Spirit, washed in the blood of Christ, and sealed by the Spirit, is an integral part of the body of Christ, and therefore, that individual must be with Christ in glory, or He would not be content. If I had lost my little finger my body would not be perfect. Even so the body of Christ would not be complete if one member were missing. He will have His body by-and-by perfect. But the nominal profession of Christ is going to be rejected. The mere professor has missed eternal blessing — what God has offered, and he must come in for the judgment that will fall upon lifeless Christendom.

There is no mention of the Lord's coming here, but Laodicea goes on till then. The rapture is before the apostasy spoken of in 2 Thessalonians 2, and Laodicea, given up by Christ and adopted by Satan, will doubtless be involved in that, so, as I have said, to be judged as Babylon.

When the vessel of testimony is removed, Christ will come out as God's faithful witness, and He will put everything right. And now we turn to a much more blessed subject, that is the Bride — the Church looked at as the Bride of Christ.

In Revelation 19 we read of the marriage of the Lamb, and heaven then goes into an ecstasy of joy. That is clearly after the rapture of the saints, when the Lord takes out of this scene all that belong to Him. What we read of in 1 Thessalonians 4 has taken place. The Lord has come into the air, and we are caught up to meet Him, and pass in to be with Him for ever; and I have no doubt by the time we reach what Revelation 19: 6-9 gives we shall have passed before the judgment seat of Christ, and every saint have received his reward for the pathway down here. That is what is alluded to there. "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: *for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints*" (vers. 7, 8). That is to say, we are all cutting out and now making on earth the garments we are going to wear by-and-by at the bridal feast. What we have been for Christ on earth will come out in that day; and that makes the holy and devoted life of a Christian a very serious and a very blessed thing.

We get, then, the marriage feast in chapter 19. The Bride is composed of all the Church of God, every saint, from the day of Pentecost to the last one brought in before the rapture of the saints. Those who are "called to the marriage supper of the Lamb" are saints of other dispensations. Being guests they cannot be the Bride, but, like John the Baptist, "rejoice greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice" (John 3: 29). The Bride is more fully spoken of in Revelation 21, which, in its opening section, presents the Assembly in her double relationship to Christ as His Bride, and to God as His tabernacle and dwelling-place — the home of the brightest manifestation of His glory for ever — the unchanging state that marks eternity, the day of God. "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, *prepared as a bride adorned for her husband*" (ver. 2). You have in verses 1-8 got past the millennial day, and have got into eternity; and John sees coming down from heaven the holy city, the new Jerusalem. She is appalled as the Bride, which Paul shows us to be but another aspect of the Body of Christ, bringing out its place in His affections, as the truth of His body did not suffice for Him to do (Eph. 5: 28-32). "He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as Christ the church, for we are members of his body," etc. She is "adorned for her husband." It is not here a question of display. We shall find a wonderful description of her as she will be displayed in the glory of the kingdom from Revelation 21: 9 to 22: 5. Here, in the eternal state, it is what she is for her Husband alone — for no other eye but His. But, mark, it is as a Bride. The marriage of the Lamb has been celebrated in heavenly glory more than a thousand years before, yet in the unchanging freshness of the affection of Christ she comes out of heaven as a Bride, now for the first time indeed so characterised, and that for eternity.

We have seen that the Church is wholly heavenly by her calling. Here, in her eternal relationship to Christ, she comes down out of heaven. Not otherwise is it as to the truth of the Church's relationship to God as His temple or tabernacle. In the eternal day, when God takes up His dwelling-place in a new heaven and a new earth, the centre of the manifestation of His presence and glory will be the Assembly. In the day of God the tabernacle of God — the Assembly — is with men. We have known His presence here, as once "the Word became flesh and tabernacled (literally, John 1: 14) among us." But that was but temporarily, for the world rose up to refuse His presence. Redemption accomplished, in His rejection, as one of the first precious fruits of it, the habitation of God was formed, in which, as we have seen, He took up His dwelling by the Spirit — "in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." Here the Assembly comes out in its full purposed character, as grown to "a holy temple in the Lord," in which God will dwell with the redeemed for ever; yet true to His own blessed thought in coming down in Christ, and manifested here, He gives it the eternal name of Tabernacle. The Assembly has thus its own distinctive place and relationship for ever, the only distinction left amongst the redeemed; because it was not the fruit of sin, as the division of the world into nations, and Jew and Gentile, but of God's eternal counsels.

Lower down in the chapter we get more detail about the Bride. In verse 8 we reach the conclusion of all things relating to eternity — the eternal bliss of the blessed (vers. 1-7), and the eternal misery of the unsaved (ver. 8). But from verse 9 the Spirit of God takes you right back into a time state of things. For not only He knows how deeply important it is to the Bride to see all that she learned of herself, according to the truth of the Church's calling, carried out to its full result in heavenly glory, but, having shown the result of the false alliance of the Church with the kingdoms of the world, when they were *not* Christ's, in this remarkable appendix to the book we are allowed to see her true relationship with them when they have "become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ" (Rev. 11: 15), and she will be displayed in His glory to the millennial earth.

You find frequently in Scripture a very distinct, incisive statement containing the germ of some great subject which is elaborated afterwards in a most particular way. You get this illustrated in the opening verse of Revelation 17, where, by one of the same set of angels that had the seven vials, in each case, which prepares us for the connection and contrast, the seer is addressed in the same way as in Revelation 21. There it is, "Come *hither*, *I will show thee* the bride, the Lamb's wife" (ver. 9). In chapter 17, for a different object, the same words are used, "Come *hither*; *I will show unto thee* the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters." Had there been any allusion to Babylon and her fall before this? Yes, in Revelation 14: "And there followed another angel, saying, *Babylon is fallen, is fallen*, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" (Rev. 14: 8). That is all that is said, and the subject changes. It is but one of the events that have to be brought on the prophetic stage of the last days in that chapter. You have the prophetic announcement that the false church system of the world, Babylon, where every principle of the flesh has obtained and is now headed up in full development, and the Holy Ghost is unknown, is fallen. Then in chapters 17 and 18 you are invited to see how the fall takes place. You have the Spirit of God giving two chapters descriptive of how the whole system of the world, fostered by a false church fully identified with it, comes under the judgment of God in the moment just before the Lord Jesus comes out in manifest glory to execute the last stroke of judgment in person. Babylon's judgment

is really carried out by the confederated men of the earth — the beast and the ten kingdoms of the revived Latin Empire (see Rev. 17: 15-18). But it is not till then that we have the espousals of the Lamb's wife in heavenly glory (Rev. 19: 7-9). Yet in chapters 4 and 5 the Church's place, with all that are Christ's at His coming, had been seen around the throne and the Lamb, as slain, in the midst of it. Do we not see the perfect wisdom of God in the seeming delay? The true bridal relation of the Church to Christ is only declared when that which had falsely assumed her place is set aside by the most appalling scene of judgment in the book (Rev. 17, 18).

Now let us pass on to Revelation 21, and have a look at the Bride of Christ, perfectly answering to His own heart and displayed in His glory. "And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain" (it was a wilderness when Babylon was in question, Rev. 17: 3) "and showed me the holy city Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal" (vers. 10, 11). She is not called "new" here, because she is seen in her own proper heavenly character, coming down out of heaven. In Romans 3 we get, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (ver. 23). In Romans 5 we are able to "rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (ver. 2). But here the Bride has the glory of God, "having the glory of God" (ver. 11). It is the Assembly looked at in this remarkable character. As suited to the kingdom, the Church is looked at under the figure of a city, with which she is identified in the eternal state by verse 2.

Who have access to it? They which are written in the Lamb's book of life (ver. 27).

Who are the stones in that city? I see a good many here today — all the redeemed have the privilege of it, though all are not the body-politic itself, the special place of the Church. I do not very often ask people to look at themselves — I generally tell them to look away to Jesus; but you may get a good look at yourself here, and see what you are going to be like when with Christ in glory, for ever and ever. The city has the glory of God — the very nature of God, for "her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal" (ver. 11). In Scripture the jasper stone is expressive of the glory of God (see Rev. 4: 3), which the creature can see, for He has a glory which no man can approach to. Everything that does not suit God is then outside, and it ought to be so now. But, alas! how its wall of true separation from all unsuited to its nature and calling has been broken down in ruin by our failure. Here that is fully seen, for it had "a wall great and high," and its separation will be absolute from all that does not answer to the glory of God, even as the building of the wall was of jasper (ver. 18), the symbol of that glory as seen in chapter 4: 3.

"The city had a wall great and high And the building of the wall was of jasper the first foundation was of jasper" (vers. 12, 18, 19). The glory of God is the foundation and protection, as well as the light and beauty of the heavenly city, for the Church is glorified with Christ in the glory of God, All is "clear as crystal," and the wall implies separation. And as the city is seen to be holy then, so should they, who will comprise it, be now — God's Assembly is where Christ and the Holy Ghost are, and none are supposed to be inside except those who are the Lord's. It is the normal character of the Assembly to be holy, clean, separate, and suited to God. It will be such then — it *ought* to be so now.

You must not, however, suppose because Babylon is called a city, and the Bride, the Assembly, is here viewed as a city, that there will be a real city in either case. No, it is a figurative way of expressing that which God will bring out by-and-by in full display. It is what the Church is going to be with Christ in the millennial day, as suited to Him. Its nature is divine righteousness and holiness — gold transparent as glass. That which by the Spirit and Word of God is wrought in men here below, is the nature of the whole place. Man in the person of Jesus is going to reign over the new earth, and His Bride will be in association with Him then, for if we suffer now we shall also reign with Him then.

Now just look at John 17 once more, to which the scene we are considering necessarily carries the mind, as it portrays the moment when the Lord's prayer will be answered. You must not suppose that the Lord prayed only for the apostles. He says, "Neither pray I for these alone, *but for them also which shall believe on me through their word*" (ver. 20). There is one feature that is always found in every one of God's family — they all believe on Him; and it is through the apostolic word we have believed. Do you believe? If so, you are of the family, and you are included in His prayer, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may *believe* that thou has sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one" (vers. 21, 22). How did John see the holy Jerusalem, the Church, come down? "Having the glory of God." The glory which the Father has given Him as Son of man, He shares with His co-heirs, so that His desire is fulfilled in that glorious day, to the very words which He uttered: "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that *the world may know* that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (ver. 23).

In the millennial day, when the Church will be seen in the same glory as Christ, the world will believe how God has loved those whom He has given to Jesus. Today they do not. They have missed the moment when they might have believed in Him, for they have not seen the Church walking in unity — to our shame be it owned — and have said, "Look at these Church wars and divisions; Christianity is all nonsense." They have made the worldliness and the inconsistencies of Christians an excuse for not believing, and think they have a solid basis for their unbelief. If the Church had maintained its divine unity, and walked in oneness together and in separation from the world, the latter might have believed its testimony to it, whereas now it thinks it has very good ground, not only to scoff at the Church for its worldliness, but reason also for its own unbelief in Scripture and in Christ. Should not this deeply affect us all? Surely, for our Lord is deeply dishonoured, and immortal souls around us are actually stumbling over us into hell and its eternal judgment. Angels might weep at the sight. Do we ever shed a tear on this account? In the millennial day the world will *know*, when it is too late to believe, that we are one in Him, and that the Father loves us as He loves His Son. I do not think that every one in God's family knows it now. There would be great joy if they did, to think of being as dear to the Father as Christ was. Yet He has made full provision for our entering into it (see John 17: 26). Do you know it? The world will assuredly, when it sees the Assembly, as the Bride of Christ, come down out of heaven to illuminate this scene, as surely it will, for "the nations shall walk in the light of it" (Rev. 21: 24). Then they will say, After all the Christians were right."

But in His prayer our Lord also said Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou

lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (John 17: 24). That goes beyond the glory in which we shall be displayed, and carries us into the most intimate circle of the Father's house: which is not to be found in Revelation. The first part of Revelation 21 (vers. 1-7) gives us the Church looked at in her eternal character as the Bride — what she is to Christ Himself — and, ver. 9 to Rev. 22: 5, as she will be in view of the world by-and-by. The world is most certainly going to learn what the love of the Father for His own is, and the moment indicated for that knowledge is, "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Col. 3: 4). Wondrous privilege! We are going to be the sharers of the glory of that blessed Man. What a destiny! Would you not like to share it?

The main testimony of the book is now over, and you have come to the appendix, as it were, with its special design of bringing out the Church's relationship with the kingdom, the details of the glory in which she will be displayed, bringing out so blessedly for our hearts what her true nature and calling is. But before the book closes, there is, as at the opening of it, a special address of Christ to the Church into whose hands it is put (Rev. 22: 16-21).

I commenced these lectures by quoting the Scripture which declares that "Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers" (Rom. 15: 8). That thought appears again in the last chapter of Revelation where the Lord's final words to the Church are heard: "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" (Rev. 22: 16). He says, I will make good every promise to Israel — Himself the ground and accomplishment of them — but not that only, "I am the bright and morning star." We read of the morning star before this in Revelation. To the overcomer in Thyatira the Lord said, "I will give him the morning star." That forms no part of prophecy. It is the Lord's coming, and he who has the morning star will share in the millennial blessing that follows. The morning star is Christ personally — the heavenly Bridegroom — now known in glory by the watching Christian, while the world is buried in slumber. It is interesting to see that the Old Testament closes with the rising of the "Sun of righteousness," and the New Testament with "the morning star." Every one knows that the morning star is always seen in the heavens just before the sun gets up. Thus Revelation 22: 16 has its fulfilment before Malachi 4: 2. The latter is Christ coming in glory into the world as the King; the former is the Bridegroom presenting Himself as the One coming for His Bride.

The moment He so presents Himself, touching on her own special portion, look at the effect on the Bride. "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (ver. 17). The Holy Ghost, spite of all the ill-treatment He has received, is still on earth and yet dwelling in the Assembly, and produces these bridal affections suited to the way the Lord Jesus presents Himself. She is to be associated in His kingdom, and longs that He should get His rights in the spot of His rejection, where He died for her, and she has so long waited for Him. The nuptial day is deeply desired, and in active love she now bids Him come. It is the proper hope of the Church, what the Bride longs for to satisfy the affections He has Himself awakened in her heart. Nay, is it not for this that He has presented Himself, that He may receive from her the expression of a love beyond all else dear to Him? For the Spirit indwelling is the power of the

consciousness of her relationship before it is declared in glory, and of the affections suited to the relationship.

It is not here His coming back to earth to get His rights in the scene where He has been rejected. There would be no place, in such a connection, for the activities of her heart going out from Christ, the central and absorbing object, to any interests He has in the scene while she waits for Him. His coming for the Bride precedes His coming with us for the kingdom. If you have read the book of Revelation you will see how everything is coming under His sway — all things in heaven and earth are subjected to Him, every enemy put under His feet. But at the very close, in answer to His special presentation of Himself to the Church, the Holy Ghost gives the cry, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come." It is the proper hope of the Assembly flowing from its relation to Christ as His Bride. Then there are those who have heard His voice, and have life indeed, but are not yet resting on His finished work, so as to have peace, and the Spirit to dwell within them, and so be of the Bride. She wants them to be able to join in the cry that bids Him come — "And let him that heareth say, Come." There are also those who have never yet come to Christ or found anything to satisfy them in an empty world. She has still a testimony for them. It is the word first heard on His lips when here, "Come"; and also the old precious "whosoever" that takes in every one that heeds. "Let him that is athirst, come. And whosoever will let him take of the water of life freely" (ver. 17).

There is the Assembly, till the Lord comes back, carrying out and proclaiming the gospel to the very world which has refused and slain her beloved Lord. This is according to His heart, that still lingers here to the uttermost in long-suffering grace over guilty man. Her first object is Himself as she cries out, "Lord, come," and while she waits she turns east, west, north, and south, and says to the weary sin-burdened souls, "Let him that is athirst come"; and yet wider still, in the activity of Christ's love in her she cries, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely"; i.e., come to Christ. That really is the business of the Bride, the Assembly, when she is not found in worship before the Lord. What a blessed being is the Church, whether you view her as the worshipper of the living God or the witness of His grace to men dead in their sins. She is occupied only with Christ's interests in His absence.

Her voice is heard yet once more in Scripture. On her ear falls the Bridegroom's voice, as He says, "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly." He adds just the word she longed for, though it was not for her to dictate to Him — "quickly." She replies, "Amen, come, Lord Jesus." Scripture closes with the Bride of Christ letting out a deep-toned, hearty Amen, as He assures her He is coming quickly. She delightfully acquiesces in His intention. What a moment of joy it will be when we shall see His blessed face and be ever with Him. "Amen, come, Lord Jesus," should be the language of our souls day by day. God wake up our hearts to so blessed a response.