

The Seven Churches

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Ephesus.

One short expression, repeated in each of these addresses to the seven churches, brings down the substance of all to each individual believer in the present day: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." One might even be living in a country where there was nobody taking the place of the church of the living God, still that word would come home with a mighty challenge to one's soul.

There is a contrast and a correspondence between the opening and the close of this address to Ephesus. The opening is the starting-point of the bit of ground we have to examine. God set up a certain light for Christ in the world; "seven candlesticks." It was a light God had kindled for Himself, that there might be a reason why the Lord Jesus Christ should have something to do with this earth which has rejected Him. The day of Pentecost set up a certain light, and put responsibility into man's hand; he had to bear light for a Christ walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. You at Ephesus have got the responsibility of letting this light of God's own giving shine out for God.

Is God acting for Himself through Christ in connection with man, it is in connection with that testimony; it is "To him that *overcometh* will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

In Genesis we see a paradise for man; here we have a paradise for God. In man's paradise were certain things, plants, trees, fruits, things in which the heart of man could find refreshment, and a particular tree in the midst of the garden, the tree of life. In the midst of God's garden of delights will be a tree of life too, and that *the* Tree of Life. We cannot doubt who that is. Of that garden God will be able to say, Here *I* have all I desire; here *I* can expatiate. Eden was no place to satisfy me; but here I have everything to *delight* in. I have filled the earth, and there is not a single thing that does not speak to me of what is my own delight. All around is a perfect answer to my heart; poor sinners, saved by grace, filling heaven! It is God's paradise; no hand save His has interfered there.

Now one right well understands, that when one comes home to the garden of God's delight, while it will be very blessed to look around on the saints reflecting glory, yet there will be One who will

stand out conspicuously among all — the blessed Lord Jesus, the Tree of Life in the midst.

But mark what a place man gets in connection with it: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." That tree for man? Yes! Man will be there, and have, as an overcomer, a special token of the grace of God. It is something beyond being a partaker of eternal life. Israel ate of the manna, but not of "the hidden manna." God loved to feed His people, pilgrims in the wilderness; loved in doing it to tie Himself by His own law of the Sabbath: but that display of His love was a passing one — one not needed in the land. But there was a portion not to pass away, a portion treasured up, not for Israel, nor for the priests, it was a record to God! If Israel rejoiced in the manna, God delights in Him who was the manna. Did His delight in Christ cease when Israel needed the manna no longer? No; He loved to have the memorial of it laid up for Himself. Here is manna day by day; I take and feed on it; but how little does my heart enter into the preciousness of it, to what it will do there! There will be to those who overcome the power of tasting God's delight in Christ as the Tree of Life in the midst of the paradise of God. Christ, the One who can give back life to poor sinners, is the ornament in the midst of that garden of delights of God; He adorns it.

Meanwhile, what is the intermediate portion between the two, between the candlesticks and the Tree of Life? It is the very spot on which I now stand, amidst all the difficulties I meet with daily: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." The candlesticks: where are they? Had the word been, Let him that is connected with the candlesticks hear, I must have said, It is not for me for there is nothing I can point to here. But it is, "He that hath an *ear*." I *have* an ear to hear.

Has God become a dead God because man has failed? No! He is the living God, and the God of testimony. If the candlesticks had not failed it would have proved that at last the creature could carry blessing. That is not true. God has tried man over and over again, and man has always failed. But yet God is never wearied out. The churches have all failed; God has not failed. He knew that man would fail; but, while exhaustless in the variety of blessing that is in Him, He does not change because the creature chancres; neither do His thoughts vary.

It is "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." An ear to hear. It is the very lowest qualification. It is not, Can you work? — can you do anything? Israel in the wilderness had no ear, and was overthrown; so will you be also if you have none. God says: Has my word any entrance into your hearts? Have you got blessing from anything I have ever said to you? Here is my challenge to you: "He that hath an ear, let him hear."

"I know thy works." There is such a mixture all around, a little bit of God, and a great bit of evil. The little bit of God first thought of by Christ, the great bit of evil most noticed by us.

We do not like the deep sand of the wilderness. It seems as though the living God had drawn a picture here on purpose that I might see how His eye, which I thought rested only on Christ, comes down to myself; how it weighs up everything, judges all, and puts home responsibility to me. He is marking everything that has the unsavoury taste of the wilderness about it. One reason why people do not like to recognise the ruin of the churches, and the very reason why God allowed it, is because it puts all on the individual saint. I have to pick every step of my way, to try everything, and I do not like that. It puts me under responsibility; it makes it a question between my soul and God and that is what God meant it to be.

"I know thy works." Everything that the renewed nature puts forth as the fruit of faith in Christ, God looks on as works. There are always works of some sort, either God's or Satan's. But besides this we ought also to know what it is to labour for the Lord, not only to bear spontaneous fruit, but to have "*labour and patience*," the consciousness that we are standing against a rapid current. Patience is not

the quietness there may be when there is no difficulty.

"This thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes." We cannot stand in the position God sets us in here without feeling something of the responsibility of hating evil. Is the church the place where evil is to be allowed? What does a man that has an ear hear from God? Is it toleration of evil? Besides, we shall carry about to the end of our lives the law of sin and death in our members; but we shall hate our own self-will, hate the evil within, and have need of patience to bear with the evil around. Separation from evil is one of the first principles of our position before God.

"Thou hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted," sketches the position of a soul when the current is rushing past it, the while it is standing in integrity for God. You may find the evil strong, but you have God and you can endure; you can look for the exodus God will provide. What is the position of the church of the living God now? Everything tottering and shaking. Have you no heart for that which is dear to God? No communion with all the living members of Christ down here? I may have happy intercourse with those who feel with me, and be embarrassed in communion with those who are loving the world and not walking with Christ; but can I give them up? Not care for them? Not mourn over them? I never can get away from them. If it is only a prayer, only a supplication, only a groan, there is always something for me to do for them before God.

"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." How many have had to deplore losing their first love! though it is not true of all. Paul went on, getting strength as he went. But what if your hearts have grown cold? Has that changed the brightness and beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ? Has God turned away from Him? "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works." It is very difficult for us to discern the workings of Satan. One of his ways is to occupy young Christians with doing, and old Christians with their feelings. God's question is neither about doings or feelings, but about *life* — works of *life*; neither work without love, nor love without works. We often lose power by separating the affections of the heart from the fruits that flow from the activity of life. There is no place where life can be given or sustained except in communion with God. If God has presented light, and the heart has trifled with it, that heart will not find joy. It has trifled with what God gave for its joy, and now it is put on walking steadily with God without it; though even then joy may come in at the end of the course.

We cannot tell what the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes was. God has put us where we have Him the living God to judge for us. I have to trust Him to show me what is contrary to His mind. He is a God of judgment. He broke up the hold Satan had on the earth when he led Israel to crucify the Lord Jesus Christ; and then He set up the churches, connecting the whole walk of the individual with Himself as the God of judgment, of government. The God of judgment is the God of eternal blessing. If He says: I do not like that, it does not savour of mercy, it does not savour of heaven — can you say, Oh! that is said as the God of government, not as the Saviour God? He is the God in whom all our springs are, the living God; and He may deliver to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, and "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep."

If man has let slip all that God put into his hand, God has not withdrawn His truth. What was the power of the church then but Jesus Christ in heaven and the Holy Ghost down here? May the Lord bring His own word home to each one of us. He knows how to pour truth, old truth, into the heart; and the truth fills up every void, every crevice of the soul, discovers all that is there; tells of the utter failure of man, but of the utter faithfulness of God.

Smyrna.

We have looked at the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God; let us now turn to what is addressed to Smyrna, the second church.

The scene here is a contrast to that which has just been before us, which is both interesting and instructive. The address to Ephesus, *Beloved*, refers to the virgin state of the church. We find Christ there presented with certain insignia of office, such as the stars and the candlesticks. No one could hold the candlesticks but Christ Himself; no one could trim the lights but the blessed Lord. But in Smyrna I have certain glories in the beginning and the end of the address that show the other side. In contrast also with the position of Ephesus, we have the place in which Smyrna is found — a state of entire prostration. When Christ sees prostration He does not begin with insignia of office, which would damp the heart and crush the spirit. He begins with *Himself*. "I am the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive." I come to you as the One in whom you will find the answer to every trial you are in. Weakness always tends to fear, but I notice the things that you fear. In Smyrna, *Preserved*, things ready to slip, Christ takes up and saves a part. If you are strong in the Lord, you can spring up and soar into heavenly things, and when Christ sees this state He can come and say, Where is your fruit? But when He finds what is weak (and I am sure you and I may say we are weak, the church may be said to be in its dotage), He comes in and says, *Look at Me!* See whether there is not there something to lift you clean up out of your difficulties.

I make a distinction between names and insignia. Badges may pass through a hundred hands, but the monarch never dies. So in Christ there are certain things which will pass away. For instance, He will not always hold the seven stars, and walk amidst the golden candlesticks. But on the other hand He has names which can never pass away. He will never lose the name of Saviour. He will never lose the name of Creator. "The first and the last," in which character He comes to Smyrna, brings out the glory of His Person. It is important for souls in weakness to know that Christ does not expect anything from them. When He found me He tied my feet as a sheep's are tied, and laid me on His shoulder and carried me off, and has cared for me ever since. The moment I think of giving back fruit to Him, if my heart is in a state of weakness, it leads to bondage.

But if I ask, Who saved me out of the world, and has cared for me ever since? I answer, Jesus of Nazareth. Ah, but He is the first and the last! And if there is in Jesus, every time He comes to wipe away a tear, the character of the first and the last, how shall I ever stand before Him? Ah, says He, but I am He which became *dead* and am alive again. Do not you say, My weakness, my weakness; I know more of that than you do; you have not gone down into death. The worst Satan can do to me is only "absent from the body, present with the Lord." When Christ became dead He tasted death for every man. He tasted the wrath of God, one drop of which I can never taste. Death could not hold Him. He could lie there and rise up, carrying the gates of His prison like Samson.

But some in Smyrna are striving to hold on their way with God in spite of difficulties. We cannot, if we know the heart of the Lord Jesus, think that He forgets the state of the world around us. If we care about it, seek to pray intelligently about it, we cannot suppose that *Christ* does not look at it at all. We must know the difficulties of the times we live in, but He would not have us lost in the sense of weakness. The difficulties we are in have not exhausted the springs that are in Him. After all is over, Christ will rise up as fresh to give us blessing as if there had been no sin since Pentecost. There is no wearied eye in Him; it is all freshness, no mixture; there is all the freshness of Christ as the first and the last.

The winding up is: "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." Has it ever struck

you how negatives are used in scripture? No death, not this, not that. There seem two reasons for such expressions: first, the character of the blessing is such that it cannot be presented to our minds; secondly, God is dealing with things as is suited to our wilderness condition.

How little our hearts are made up to suffering! It is often a startle when trial reaches us! What are we called to? "As sheep for the slaughter"? These people were terribly afraid of death. If saints caught in a storm are surprised at it, how little communion they must have with Christ. We ought to have suffering for Christ's sake. If when it comes it produces surprise, it only shows we are not in communion with Him; if we were, we should not complain of tribulation. Even in the sorrow caused by Christians not going on well with us, we cannot say to Christ, who was down here as the Man of sorrows, See, Lord, how I am forsaken! How great my sorrow: *We* cannot be forsaken of God. What is tribulation? Something outside, to complain of which proves we are not in fellowship with Christ. "You shall not be hurt." What are your sorrows? Christ says: what are you afraid of? Look at the glory; turn to the paradise of God, and I will take care of the overcomer.

How blessed for the soul in its weakness when it is laid hold of by the truth, that everything that Satan can do to it on its way home has but one end in view, and that glory! Christ limits the day. Let the enemy do all he can; there is a day beyond in which he can do nothing. God may purposely lead His sheep through a path where they shall discover their weakness, as in the case of Job, for instance.

There was dross hidden beneath the surface; there was a big bit of the world in Job's heart. Satan cannot touch a hair of my head. Shall I then murmur in tribulation, instead of like Jesus saying, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" To Paul was given a thorn in the flesh.

But you answer: That is Satan and I cannot bear to have to do with Satan. Truly there is not a sin which has not sprung from Satan; but I say, though this be from him, I will receive it from *God's* hand. God says, If you lean on anything you will have to learn not only what I am, but what a poor wretched thing you are. Paul could glory in his infirmities. You do not know yourselves if you do not know your infirmities. If you walk to the land's end you will find out if you are a good walker — if you can go up and down hills. So if you have walked ten years with Christ, Christ will have communicated to you in detail what a poor wretched thing He has found you. And suppose it be Satan who teaches you what a poor thing you are, yet may you glory in your infirmities!

"He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." In the paradise of God, where the heart of God will be perfectly unfolded, all the beloved victors feeding there on the tree of life, Christ will have His joy; God will have His joy; and the joy of the Holy Ghost will be thrilling through all!

Christ looks at *all* saints. Does He see a company of pilgrims going forth to meet Him? Do our hearts sympathise with His heart, and that in everything? Does your heart respond to the heart of Christ? If He speaks in heaven, do you respond, sympathise, on earth? — sympathise in His thoughts as to the Father's children? What a comfort in this word: "They shall not be hurt." The wide church of God, Romanist, Protestant, Nonconformist, mixed up with every evil, we find children of God in all. But "he that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." Christ gives it as a comfort to my heart about those whom I love, and whom He loves, in a wrong position; they shall not be hurt. They will not walk with Christ here, but there He will triumph over their inconsistency; they shall not be hurt of the second death.

Christ cares for my future glory. He says, I stand responsible for your soul, before Satan and before God; and do you care nothing for my honour? It comes as an appeal to the generosity of christian love. I put it to you, are you overcomers? Surely it is an appeal to the very kindness of our nature, for love begets love. "Free grace begets free grace" could write even a heathen poet. Can you

say the pit is shut for you, and yet that He has not given you the faith which sets you as an overcomer? It is a practical word. He *has* given faith to overcome. He has given me *life*, and with whom does that connect me? And with what does that life connect itself? Is it its nature to associate with things down here, or with Him from whom it comes? A man may be a Christian like Lot in Sodom. But what a difference between one who has to search out to see whether he has faith to appeal to another, and one who can say, Do not ask me if I have faith; look at my life; I have been walking with God. If you are like Lot in Sodom you must get out as fast as possible. I am a member of Him who has overcome, and what I want is to manifest the liberty I have to be an overcomer also. There is a certain power in an overcomer of leaving things to God, a certain springiness which commends itself to others, a freedom from care. Can you say, I am an overcomer? If you have faith you are one. But I should not like my friend, who knows my life, to ask me if I am. My life should show it. What holds the world should not hold me; the waves that wash over me should only leave me the brighter.

We are weak, and we must know it. If Christ sees us holding up our head about anything we have been, He says, You must learn that you are thoroughly weak in yourself; you will have nothing henceforth from Satan but perplexity. I must for a time prove your mettle, but the day is coming when Satan shall go down and you go up.

There are the two termini: before Satan was, *He* was; He was ever "the first." And when all evil has been purged out, Christ will rise up as "the last." He is your resource. As to the enemy you dread — death, He has taken away the sting of it. The expression of God's wrath He has tasted for you. Because He took that, you shall not be hurt of the second death. But if He dwells in you with joy, it will make you overcomers now. It is the desire of my heart that we may each of us take home the thought, that there is something in Christ that I have to look at more closely — something for *myself*.

Pergamos.

We now turn to the third church. There appears here also a remarkable balance between the character in which Christ presents Himself to the church, and the promise to that church. Here it is perfection of discernment in the Person of Christ, which, as He stands in their midst, shows everything in its true colours. He can read the deep secrets of God, and desires that His people should have a heart to enter into them.

Pergamos, *Elevation*, is in a bad state. The first thing which meets our eye, on getting within the little halo in which this church and Christ are standing, is the sharp sword with two edges proceeding from the mouth of Christ. He will never cease to be the first and the last, but, blessed be God, He will cease to be the One out of whose mouth goes the sharp sword.

God speaks everything by His Son. He is the One who sees everything, not only what is outside, but what is within. There is a very fair outside elevation; there is nothing said as to what is taught; but His eye can see that certain doctrine is *held*, if not *taught*. Christ is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, as we get it in Hebrews 4, and personally He always thinks of God's interests first. You who know anything of the presence of Christ, do you find He will spare for *you*? No, He is all faithfulness for *God*; and that is for your true interests too, but He cares for even a leaf as something precious to God. We find in the Lord Jesus the most perfect discernment; He reads everything to see whether it goes along with and comport.. with the glory of God. But not only personally does Christ think of God's interests, but as Priest He cannot give up God's interests in His people in their connection with things here. Christ cannot say, I will not think of your health, I will only think of your feelings. His eye cares for our souls in that place where God has set Him.

How differently does Christ judge of things to what man does! There may be much apparent devotedness, much study of the word, much running to and fro in service; but He discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart in it all. He never balances something bad by something good, as we do. I am about to do something; well, what is the intent of my heart? The thing may be apparently for God, and yet may be really done for self all the time. And He is near me as the discerner of the thoughts and intents of my heart meanwhile. He has studied me; He has watched me, and that because He has a certain responsibility before God about me individually. Blessed security! He has to guide and to guard His people as One jealous for God.

If God be uppermost in my soul, even if my motives are not unmixed, still His being uppermost proves the purity of my action. Both ought to be there. In Moses we see motives mixed; in Paul not. His motive was pure; his power lay in this, that he had clearly before him God's purpose to glorify Christ. Thus his soul had a certain moral position; his object, God, being before his soul, whatever was in himself came out and was judged.

Christ's eye has been on us today, and what has He found? Has He found anything like Himself? Has He found the answer to God's claim over us? The soul might well sink down under such a question; but, blessed be God, this is not all, He is conducting the sheep of God's pasture home. He does not say, I have taught them such and such things, now I will see how they get on. No, He has taken us up individually for blessing. He would not have us merely know that there is nothing good in us, but He will have us know God's thoughts for us. He had nothing to do with the high-minded at Pergamos. He brings out all that is discovered by His discernment, and proves that it is "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit." If it be true that Christ is the Saviour of the lost, I wish you joy who have so been in His presence as to discover that there is nothing good in you; that You are lost. It is what Christ puts in, not what He brings out, that is the ground of salvation.

"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna." "What is this?" they called it in the wilderness, this constant miracle. The types do not all point to the same glories in Christ. There is a special truth connected with the manna. It brings before us Christ as our food for the wilderness, and it was put into the ark and laid up before the Lord for a memorial. God has a delight of His own. It is Christ's competency to carry His people through the wilderness, and God's positive delight in it. If our thoughts of Christ come short, God's never come short. If He cares for the people of His Father, the Father delights in Him as the One who is their supply the whole wilderness course through. He, "the first and the last," He is the Christ who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Think of it! Let the saints' joy be perfect, let all hindrances be removed, yet what is their joy compared to what God's is? When God gets all His martyrs home, when they get their full joy, yet the joy of God will be greater. Christ says, If I know your heart, I know my Father's also; I know the joy that He has; He has the manna in its vessel of gold. And this delight of God, this provision, is for you as you pass through the wilderness. And when Christ has supplied the needs of all His people, is He exhausted? No, He is ever the same; in Him is the fulness — in Him who is the delight of God. I would not lose the thought that God has a better portion than I have in Christ for a thousand worlds. If God says to a creature, Give me, it soon conies to an end, but in Christ there is no end.

God purposely makes us pass through difficulties, in order that we may learn what we have in Christ. God has Him there in the vessel of gold, in divine glory; and down here I have His power; I may be an overcomer, and the overcomer shall taste of that manna. "I will give him to eat of the hidden manna." It is the hard unbelief of the soul about eternal things that lets it down so about temporal things.

The manna is for the *whole* camp; it is the portion of every overcomer. And then, after this, each overcomer gets something peculiarly for himself; the "white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." It is a secret thing between him and Christ. If I am an overcomer, there may be a secret between me and Christ now.

A word in connection with this stone. There were two ways in which a stone was made use of among the ancients. The first was in the trial of a person; the second in the election of any one to office. The stone spoken of here is for trial, and was large enough for the judgment to be written on it. We find that we are not black-balled; the *white* stone is put in for us by Christ; and that is enough, were my accusers far more bitter than they are. And on this stone there is a new name, a new character. A master gave his slave a new name, indicative of his character. Poor Jacob, the supplanter, who had gone on all his life tripping up other people, gets into God's presence, who thoroughly nips the flesh, and he comes out of it an Israel, because as a man he is crippled. But when we are overcomers it is the power of God coming out in us, not the flesh being crippled.

The white stone with the new name is divinely true of us. What my name may be is a secret between Himself and my soul that no one else may know. If it were Israel I should remember what it was connected with; it would say to me, You have no reason to boast of the way in which you have come here. If it were Job, it would tell me that no one gives such a good character of Job as God Himself does, and that in the point where we should have said he had failed; "Ye have heard of the patience of Job."

The glory is more connected with us as individuals than we have any thought of. A Paul is surrounded by his beloved Thessalonians. Paul, born out of due time, finds the twelve places occupied, but his may be higher. He has not a place in the foundation, but above it perhaps. That name may be connected with God's dealings with you. Do you ever think what name would suit you? What name connects itself with your present walk in the wilderness? It may be profitable to think what name would suit you — that of overcomer? Poor Jacob did not overcome until he got to his wit's end. What overcomes is faith; it is that which makes me part and parcel with the Lord Jesus Christ who has overcome.

Just so far as I walk in the presence and power of the Lord Jesus Christ I am an overcomer. Christ has His eye upon me. He sees me today; He sees me tomorrow; He sees me the third day. He watches to see whether the power with which I am identified gives me power over the world, and if I have in my walk down here done with the world and Satan.

May He lead us on as overcomers here; only a little while, and we shall be with Him and like Him.

Thyatira.

There is connection between the addresses to Pergamos and Thyatira, which are based upon different forms of the same evil. When, as in Pergamos, Christ is found taking care of the interests of God in His people, we find the sharp sword with two edges, which separates, which discerns, which goes into the thoughts and motives of the heart. A person comes to Christ disappointed; he has perhaps failed in service, and he turns to Christ for sympathy. He expects a soft word, but he meets the sword. Christ goes to the bottom of the matter; He sifts it thoroughly; He says I have to act for God; and in this it is not a question of what you are doing, but what the motives are from which you are doing it.

In Thyatira we get a deeper character of evil, so it is no longer the sharp sword even, but it is

"eyes like unto a flame of fire." He lets in the light, and reads everything that is there. Saul the persecutor, exposed to those eyes, shrinks into his own dark heart; but it is all light there to Christ, and then He makes it light to Saul. This too as "the Son of God."

And then "His feet are like fine brass." The feet are connected with service. The feet of the priest were sprinkled with blood. Those of the Son of God are represented as of fine brass. If a thing will not bend, He can break it, can trample it down. If a thing needs help, He can go a whole journey to it in the strength of those feet. It is one of the dearest privileges of the children of God to look around them on all that is contrary to Him, and to humble themselves on account of it; to help others out of it if possible, but to cast no stones.

The low state of this church is marked by the promise to it. To the overcomer "will I give power over the nations: he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father." This promise is what man as man can enter into. When I take my power you shall share it with me. It is a mixed scene of evil in Thyatira, and the Lord comes to shake it. "Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven." It is the end of prophecy that it is important for us to see, not so much the details of it. God puts His stamp on everything here by prophecy.

But there is another promise to Thyatira: "I will give him the morning star." It is the present hope of Christ's heart and ours; it is a hope, not for earth, but for heaven. I wait to see the morning star; directly I see it I shall be caught up to heaven. Christ does not take His place till the night is passed. And it is *His* hope. Oh, He *does* desire it! Have you thought of, and do you long to see, the morning star? He longs to *be* the morning star; I long to *see* it. Who desires it most — you, or I, or Christ? He said when on earth, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" So now does He desire to have His bride, to show Himself as the morning star. Is the desire of His heart pressed on our souls? This is a practical question. At times the wilderness presses upon you; perhaps you may have had thirty years of it, and you are impatient: you are inclined to repine. Think, has not Christ waited? Why should you be impatient? Why not rather, in patient waiting with Christ, seek to be in the fellowship of His sufferings? The overcomer shall share my power with me, and I will give him the morning star he shall not merely look for it, he shall *have* it.

Now, what is overcoming? Many have had the thought awakened as to overcoming. It is the victor who overcomes, but the mind does not take in what victory really is. If I look at Saul, I see a man with a high opinion of the God of his imagination, but wishing to put the true God to death. And then I see Paul come forth as the victor, one in whom is nothing contrary to Christ. The contrast between light and darkness is over. You answer, But can I turn out, self? Surely not; nothing but faith can do it, faith which lays hold of the One who has overcome. The more nature comes out, the more there is for God to put down. You must get Christ in. He is the only overcomer. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." As to detail, if we look at our daily life, is the task less arduous now than it was at the first entrance of blessing to our souls? Not a bit! As to ourselves, it has not changed us; there is the flesh in us to the end.

Another thing that troubles souls is, that they ask the question, Is not joy the mark of an overcomer? *Joy*? The very contrary! If I would be an overcomer, God must so deal with me as to put self out. He lets the soul perhaps have a slip, and it is crushed. It is by humiliation that God leads on step by step; it is not by joy. Is the nipping of evil joy? or of its shoots? God crippled Jacob, but it was no pleasure to him; and He has to nip the root, He has to crush it; it is a horrid thing — this self; it will grow again out of the least little fibre. Daniel fainted, and was sick certain days, when he had

revelations from God. It is not pleasant work to the flesh, the soul being brought into communion with God. It is blessed to know that Christ will change us into the same image from glory to glory; but the process by which it is accomplished is remarkably humbling to the flesh. Nothing but the truth burning in us will carry us on where human energy fails; the only thought that will help us is, Christ must be spoken of, for He is worthy.

We look at acts; God looks at habits. I may perhaps today be walking quietly on under a cross under which I once winced. Christ alone can take the clay, put it on the wheel, and bring it out a vessel to His own praise. He nips the evil, and this is a very solemn thing. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." God is working in you, take care how you walk. If God works in me I may well be confident: but if God works in me I must also be careful.

Sardis.

Two thoughts may help any who have difficulties in reference to overcoming. From the beginning God had left truths in the hand of man upon earth, which pointed to the Lord Jesus; so that, while man failed to hold the truth committed to him, the truth itself could not become null and void, because it pointed to Him. Take Noah for instance. The sword was put into his hand, he failed to hold it; but the promise of wielding power still points to One who shall hold the sword that Noah could not. Then again the law, with equal failure on the part of man. After that, the church set on earth, the candlesticks set up as a witness to a risen and ascended Christ. But where are they? Should we like to connect the name of Christ with the name of Rome? Should we like to connect it with any? But there are beloved children of God in all. Has the church then failed? Surely not. The churches may have failed, but the church, the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, has not. "Men slept;" Satan came in and sowed tares. Man failed, but Christ did not fail.

Now this may help us as to overcoming. Saul was called; perhaps Satan's best servant; yet the Lord Jesus said, Come Saul. Saul comes, and what does the Lord Jesus do with him He puts him in a certain position, one of victory. At Pentecost the Holy Ghost witnesses that Christ is risen. What is the result? Immediately three thousand take their stand in the position of victors. Being one with the Lord Jesus they are counted by God as victors.

Another thing. What is the power to walk in this position? Simon took his stand on it, but with what result? "Thy money perish with thee, thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter." Peter detected him at once. Many have taken the position, but have had no power to hold it; and no power can, save that of the Lord Jesus Christ; it is that alone which gives present victory. You may see neither sun, moon, nor stars for many days, but if your eye is turned to Christ there will be present victory.

The right doctrine is, the Lord Jesus Christ became trustee for me. I am not trustworthy. So the Lord has subscribed His name as trustee for me. If a man has subscribed his name thus, his honour is involved. So Christ in heaven, with a human heart, sympathises with me in all my difficulties down here. I may be buffeted, but I shall sing songs in the night season. Do you speak of your weakness? If you only knew your weakness a little better you would overcome. He may roll you down, He may make you very little, but then He will make you a channel of blessing.

Paul was taken clean off self. He was led through torrents of temptation, but he learned that he could not do without Christ, and in all he was more than conqueror. At the end of the course a great many who had seemed to start fair were still seeking a righteousness of their own; but there was such

an one as poor Paul who knew nothing of himself, and God says, I can own that as a work of my own, and I must put my seal on that one. When we see Paul surrounded by his beloved Thessalonians, shall we hear him say, I have a better righteousness than you? I have been more faithful than you? No, he will be there confessing grace from first to last.

There seems to me in the way God tests the heart and commends Himself, a key which goes into the lock of overcoming; overcoming what I am by bringing in the beauty of what Christ is.

"Thou hast a few names in Sardis which have not defiled their garments." This refers to the cleanness of robes in which Christ invests His people when they first start. The blessed Lord has not left us naked. Christ found us in our sins, but then He did two things for us: first, He purged us by blood, and secondly, He gave us a righteousness by which we draw near to God. There is something marvellous in a robe being given to me; it is a foundation thought for my soul in the presence of God. The question is, Has my guilt been put away? And was God justified in raising Christ? The presence of Christ at the right hand of God, as the federal Head of His people, is the answer to the question whether I am fit to appear before God.

It is important that people should know where they are. If there be a question as to being saved, there must be uncertainty as to walk; there must be a person with robes easily sullied. There are many things I could do as a moral man that I cannot do as a blood-bought saint. He calls us sons, and this name supposes us to go through the world as a washed and justified people. Sardis, as a whole, had not felt this, but some in her had, and these had garments which could be soiled. Lot's garments could not be soiled; Abraham's could. It would have been difficult to soil Lot's robes, he was so like a worldly man, even though he vexed his righteous soul. But there were some in Sardis who had not defiled their garments, and, says the Lord, they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy. At Whitsuntide there is supposed to be a pure white flock of Christ for one week; but there is such a thing as a robe that is white *not* for a *week*.

There was extreme care as to how they walked in the dreadful day of Sardis. The Lord says, I see some who have not defiled their robes; they have been very careful; and such shall walk with me in white. Have you ever sucked the honey out of this promise, as a bee comes down on a flower? I might be in the Greek church, and Christ might say to me there, Cheer up, you shall walk with me in white; you desire to walk carefully; you have a sense of what I have done for you; and this sense is in my mind connected with that scene where you shall walk with me in white.

Christ's eye is upon me. Does He see that there is a sense in my soul of the privileges He has brought me into? He has washed me from my sins in His own blood, has that precious Lord. He has given me such a robe as this. Were He to call me at any moment I should not be ashamed. Does He see in me a kind of nervous fear to keep myself clean? to keep myself separate from evil?

What a thought, when it comes to me individually, is that of my Lord speaking to me of my walking with Him in white! He Himself will be there in purity. In the world there were evil reports of Him; there will be none there who will desire to do it. Does He wish us to think that He will walk there alone? Oh, the wretched incredulity of the heart as to the personality of the Lord Jesus! The same One who was crowned here with thorns, *He* will walk there in white. Has He never given you this promise to lift you as a lever over some difficulty? The world says that you pretend to be one about whom the Lord is occupied; but we can show them nothing as a proof of it but that we know our own weakness; for we are not occupied with covering over, and God would have us uncovered. Faith knows that there is such a thing as a robe, a blood-washed conscience, but it will not always be a question of faith; the day is coming when He will bring forth crowns and white robes. If these promises were rested in, God's

children would not have the vague ideas of heaven they so often have; a happy place, but we do not know much about it. The white robe comes down to our individuality. He will present us faultless before His presence with exceeding joy, and the sweetest part of all will be that we receive it from His own hand. The brighter the robe, the more it shows spots of defilement. *There* there will be nothing that can ever stain. Who will get the praise for not defiling their garments *now*?

And then there is the second promise: "I will not blot his name out of the book of life." There are two books of life. One is the Lamb's book of life; the book of eternal life. The other is what we should call the book, or roll, of the living; just as there is a book of the corps of the city, the census. Thus it is not merely a question of having eternal life, but of being found in the book of the living. What a difference there is among saints! some are looking for Him, others will have to be dragged out of some corner to meet Him when He comes. God may know them, but they have never been known as effective men for Christ here. It is no little thing to be walking with the living and true God, to have this Christ as the Captain of our salvation; it is no little thing to be the channel through which streams of blessing flow. What a contrast there was between Israel passing through the Red Sea, and Israel marching triumphantly on the other side! What a difference there is between trying to keep oneself unspotted, and throwing oneself out as largely as one can into the world, may be even from an idea of duty. Many who have found peace go back into the world. Such have not understood about the book of the living. Would you be found walking with Christ, or would you be startled by His coming? We may be accustomed to hear Him call His people by name. He has intercourse with us as much as we have with Him. How blessed to hear the voice of Christ in communion! How blessed to have our name in the book of the living! He can erase a name from that. Christ says of those who are overcoming, that they need not fear it. When we have our face to God, and our back to the idol, we can count on God.

And then the third promise: "I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels." There is a great want of appropriation in saints. A bee keeps to the same flower until it has sucked out all its sweetness. Our hearts ought to know something of Christ's confessing our names. Is it true that He knows us by name? Is it true that He names us 'before God? Where was Christ when He said, Saul, Saul? Where is He when He is our Advocate? Not down here, but up there. Ah, you know little of Him if you do not know that it is true that He has named you before God. He does it now. When He rose from the grave there were but eleven — but a hundred and twenty of His disciples, but His heart loved them; and when He went up He presented them all before God. He is our High Priest. The twelve stones on the breastplate, with the heaving of the High Priest's breast, showed all the movement of His heart. And if He has confessed our names on the throne of God, He will do it again in another way. He will confess each, not in a mass, but one by one, publicly named for honour there where Christ finds everything according to His own taste. There is a Lot whose name is not in the book; but you, who were specially careful about your robes, I must have you named publicly. We like something vague as to the future, but when Christ deals with us there is nothing vague. I press on you that Christ has given you these promises, and that you will have to answer *individually* as to them, for *churches* owned of God there will be none.

The Holy Ghost always gives growing desires for the present honour of Christ. May each one of us keep our robes unspotted.

Philadelphia.

Immensely comforting in reading this little book are those words, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." However poor we may be as Christians when measured

by the standard of the early saints, so that we may well be ashamed, yet one cannot say truthfully one has not an ear to hear. One *has* an ear to hear; and this makes the constant repetition of it very sweet to me. Now the Lord's eyes are marking those who have an ear, and He has provided in the word promises specially addressed to them.

There are three points that we may notice here. First, the remarkable insignia under which Christ presents Himself to the churches, some of which are *essentially* true of Him, and some *officially* true. The first two mentioned here are essentially true of Him, and were so among men. He was the holy One and the true One. One could not thus describe even an apostle. He did all in the very character of the God of whom He was tending the lights in the midst of the seven candlesticks. He cannot lie, and He is essentially holy.

Then, when He comes to offices, He has the key of David. It is not, as in the first chapter, the keys of hell and of death; there it is the unseen world, but here it is earth; it is the key of David. To Him is attributed all the shutting up and letting out, whether of John in Patmos, or Paul in Rome. If you are shut up in a kind of Pihahiroth you can say, I know the Lord Jesus has shut me up here, and He who has the key can open when He will. Whether the service be tiny or great, you must know that your source is the Lord. The least service that Paul had to do, if he had tried it in his own strength, would have broken his back. While, on the other hand, if it were the care of all the churches, if it were Christ who had opened the door, I can say Christ is with me, and I can go quietly on. When Paul gets into fresh circumstances Christ appears afresh to him.

The second is what is very touching in this epistle. The church of Philadelphia is supposed to represent the state immediately following on Protestantism which failed. Men are now more and more overturned; the state in this church, then, is one of extreme weakness. What a precious thing, then, if the Lord Jesus Christ can say to some in it, I see your heart like a vessel in which My word is hid; "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." It is just a few poor weak ones who have an uncommon relish for God's word.

Thirdly, we find the overcomers. "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." There is the same harmony here, as in all the addresses, between the glory in which Christ presents Himself, the state of the church spoken to, and the promise to that church. Here the church is exceedingly weak, and He comes in with a most precious word. It is most wonderful the extent to which men, Christians, ourselves, you and I, have lost sight of Christ as a living Person in heaven. It is sad how little the thought is in our minds, that the Son of man has a heart full of affections, has likes and dislikes, has antipathies and thoughts. He had while He was on earth, as you would have seen had you followed Him. And though He has left the earth, and is up there in heaven, seated on the Father's throne, has He lost His heart? Surely not! All His sympathies are the same as ever. His affections are the same as ever; and if we have not got the thought that it is so, I think we ought to be ashamed of ourselves.

Am I very weak? Is there a little door open before me? Well, what does the heart of Christ do? If I have not denied His name, there are in His heart streams welling forth which He would have me drink. The temple of my God; the name of my God; the name of the city of my God; my new name; four things most precious to the Lord Jesus. How often we think of what is precious to ourselves, and not of what is precious to Him. Are there not things that are precious to Him? You are not much taught

as a Christian if you do not know that, for one thing, you yourself are precious to His soul. He says: There are these things which those who know me well know how precious they are to me. Now, poor weak one, you who have the little door open before you, my sympathies flow out to you; I want to make these things yours.

"The temple of my God." If speaking of a scene of earthly worship the candlestick gives but little light: but what of the temple spoken of in the end of this book? "The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it"! And poor prodigals brought there to worship God! Is this a thought indifferent to the heart of the Lord Jesus? Ah, no! It is not one spot of the earth; but it is sinners saved by grace gathered round Himself, and God and the Lamb the temple; God and the Lamb all the power of worship.

Do you understand what heavenly worship is? It is the heart finding its joy in its admiration of God's dealings with itself as a poor sinner. God gives His Son! God gives His Spirit. Do you know what that admiration is? Do you know, as the little hymn says, what it is to be "lost in wonder, love and praise"? His heart has a fulness when all poor sinners are gathered round Him which will never be exhausted. "And he shall go no more out." Only a little while and then that morning without clouds; God and the Lamb, and ourselves fixedly there.

Another point comes before us with the thought of the pillar — the object of it; "I will write upon it the name of my God." I shall be there as a witness to God. It is more blessed to be witnesses *to* than witnesses *of*. Each saint will *inside* proclaim the name of God. The poor prodigal proclaimed his father's mercy in the house. When you and I are there, God will be able to say: See, here they all are — the very sheep that I picked up; the very same that I gathered; Stephen, Paul, all are here. None there, save the Lord Jesus, except as poor sinners saved by grace. He will be there as the One who went to the cross in perfect obedience; all others are there as saved by His grace, as washed in His blood. Only one Saviour, but many saved ones. Even now He is not ashamed to call us brethren; even now we know whose we are; then we shall be witnesses of it, and we shall witness to it, in the thought of which, as already said, there is something distinct.

"And I will write upon him the name of my God." A name in scripture always means manifestation. God's name expresses His character. He has made Himself known, not in creation, not in providence, but in redemption. The light is shining all around us, but is it merely that it may stop men's mouths? No, blessed be God! It is that it may bring us into His presence; this is why He has picked us up, all good-for-nothing in ourselves. And He will have us at last all gathered up there, not only as worshippers but as companions, as sons in the Father's house. Then He will say: My tabernacle is in these saints dwelling here.

The city is spoken of as the *new Jerusalem*. Jerusalem, the word means, *will provide peace*; Jehovah-Jireh-Shalom. There is a certain spot of the earth, that I have marked off for myself, where there shall be peace. As to the *new Jerusalem*, it really existed before the old, that is, in God's counsels. You will find that the foundation names of the city give you strings of glory connected with the Lord Jesus Christ. There are the twelve tribes of Israel, names of glory connected with Him; the same in the twelve apostles, who are connected with the heavenly form of government. The church does not form part of the plan of earth, but part of that for the heavenly man.

Now what is your inheritance? Can you say that nothing short of that which comes out from God is your desire? Christ's inheritance is a thing that is given to Him. There are two parts in it; one in heaven, the other on earth. The residence is twofold; it "cometh down out of heaven from my God." The blessed Lord Jesus cares for, prizes, what God has given Him; He cares about the city of His God;

He says to the overcomer: Be of good cheer, you shall be made a pillar in the temple of my God; you shall bear the name of the city of my God.

"And I will write upon him my new name." A few words upon this; but I premise that I especially ask saints to judge what I say as to it. There are some truths, such as those connected with the mercy of God, of which I may say, This will judge you; but there are others as to which one feels responsibility in putting them before others, and of which one says, Judge ye what I say. It is His own new name. The name expresses manifestation. He was Jesus down here: He was the Son from everlasting to everlasting. He was here as the Lamb crucified in weakness; His glory here was that of being the perfect Servant; He had a right to a will, but He would not have one; from the cradle to the cross He was the manifestation, the expression, of the perfect dependent servant. And after He rose from the dead, He tarried on earth some time — forty days; but even then He did not put forth His power; He did not touch earthly glory. He said to His disciples: Patience is what you need; you must tarry at Jerusalem until the promise of the Father comes upon you. And then He ascended up on high. And He is still the manifestation of patience as He was then. His patience puts to shame the impatience of our hearts. We wish to snatch at a blessing. But if we want to be like Christ, we must be waiting in patience; just waiting till He says, Rise up. Is there no other poor sinner to save? What patience the Lord has! And that not merely as to waiting, but towards us. He is never irritable, whatever blunders His poor servants make; He is never impatient. And when the Father says to Him, Rise up, will it be as the crucified One? No, it will be as the anointed One; and then too He will be the Man of joy, as He has been the Man of sorrows. There will be no man's joy like Christ's joy. His song will rise above all ours. He will come forth then as the Prince of *joy and gladness* especially manifested, it will be His new name then. He was known as the *suffering* One; He is now known as the *patient* One; and He shall be known as the *joy* of His people when they meet in the Father's house for ever. You will be there, you who are overcomers, and you will have this new name. It is not that you will be there as an item; it is not that you will be able to say, I miss naught. Those are poor thoughts to have of glory. It is that you will be there as one in a circle, with One in the midst whose eye looks around and rests on you, and you will see that blessed eye full of joy; you will see it turn up to God and the Father, conscious of the joy, of the blessedness, of all that multitude; and you will hear Him say, All these brought nigh to Thee, my Father, by Myself. You will see the welling joy of the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ. Could He see a seat vacant? No, He could not. All must be there to satisfy His heart, He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied. *He* must have the joy is a thought to my soul that is different to all else. Is it only that I want to be there? No; it is that I am *wanted* there. He will communicate to me the glory of His new name; He will make me conscious that the Father is satisfied. See, He will say, the riches of salvation embodied in this, in that poor sinner, saved by grace. If I am one of that crowd, will not my face glisten with joy to see *His* joy? To see His *manifestation* of joy? It will be upon me as He looks upon me when He sings in the midst of the great congregation, and how gladly will our lips take it up! No one ever prayed like Christ, no one will ever sing like Christ.

He puts these things before us that they may be strength for us by the way. You have got my word; you know my heart; then go forth boldly, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. In times of weakness He lets flow His comfort into our souls; makes us know that the spring of entire comfort is in Him. The Lord enable us to take up the thought of the Lord Jesus as presented here to each one who has an ear to hear. He gives large promises; He is a free He desires to communicate all His love.