

"Hold fast that which thou hast."

Rev. 3: 11.

W. Kelly.

There is a striking coincidence in the facts of the word of God with the ways of God at this present moment. I daresay many have been struck with, and unable to account for, the circumstance — and I remember when it exercised my own mind many years ago — that God should have given such a setting forth of His grace in the twenty-first of Numbers, when the children of Israel were nearing the end of their journey. I think that we should have more readily thought of it at the beginning. But God is always wise. We may be exercised; He may bring in apparently a difficulty; but a difficulty overcome by faith, in the mind of God, a difficulty that has long been uncertain, when once apprehended, what a gain it is, not merely to our own souls, but for others, as leading into fresh confidence in God and His word!

And truly the word of God is a mighty thing, not merely for us but for *Him* at this moment, a moment when Christendom is abandoning it, and when its leaders, blindly, I am sure, and not knowing what they do, are doing what they can to undermine it. His grace has caused that word to shine out in fresh power. For I speak not only of the beauty of the word, but of its *authority*; and this has a most weighty place. By it God Himself puts and keeps us in subjection to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I would first ask, beloved brethren, whether we have not felt that which answers to it, that God has given the living power not merely of much in His word that we had not known, but also of fundamental truth that we knew imperfectly?

Has He not given us back again the gospel, and *that which is the fruit of receiving it*? Not that He has poured out the Holy Ghost again, as some have wrongly asked at His hand, but most assuredly He has given us back the truth of it again. I do not speak now of individuals. It has been very properly said, that when we are speaking of that which is the mind of the Lord, we must distinguish between that which is for His own glory and for the church at the present stage of it, and His special guidance and working in individual souls. It would hinder a little misunderstanding of thoughts very precious in themselves, but very capable of being misused.

It is the mind of the Lord at the present time to be forming and fashioning the church as the bride of Christ. It is His mind that we should be awaiting Him from heaven. But it would be a very grave mistake to substitute that which is His will for the individual, for that which is His mind for the church His body. It is the truth for us all — what the church should never have forgotten. But this does not in the least degree interfere with the particular work of the Spirit of God by each individual believer.

Therefore, whether in the fishing or the feeding [which we have had brought before us], servants have each their place — they in no wise supersede each other. When the heart is filled with Christ, the heart recovered to Himself personally, Himself as an Object before us, and Himself in His moral discerning power — for this is one of the most remarkable features of the way He reveals Himself to the church in Philadelphia — are the fishers to be less simple, earnest or devoted? Is the feeding to be relaxed? The very opposite! There is a heavenly impulse given to it. There is also a freedom from excitement, a solidity and a separateness of character. Not a single want that is not met in the fulness of Christ. The love of Christ constrains.

Knowledge puffeth up, love buildeth up. You cannot separate love rightly from the truth. This personal revelation of the Lord Jesus at the present moment — this use of truth, not as putting

something between us and the Lord, but putting away all that separates — is what we must all have found not only our deepest joy, but our best security.

Let me recall this word as a very solemn one. Do you think any are in such danger as the men of Philadelphia? I do not find that such a sifting goes on elsewhere. But I do not believe that Philadelphia is gone. I believe that *Laodicea is come*, but that Philadelphia is not gone, and will never go until the Lord Jesus comes; and that what He has set forth as a testimony, by revelation of His person, will never be rendered void. I do not believe that Philadelphia will go, but that the souls that fall short of attachment to Christ there revealing Himself, will go, and that grace will bring others to fill up more worthily their place. Assuredly the grace of God which began will keep those that have been there and go on with Christ.

But further, it may be well to observe that the most painful elements in the forming of Laodicea may well have had their place in Philadelphia, when faith failed and flesh gave place to Satan. But if they were in Philadelphia (or separation to Christ), they never were of it. They were such as never appreciated the testimony of Christ; for my heart fully goes along with our beloved brother in the thought of the Lord having a present mind.

I believe that, while something more has come in, we must not allow that which we have to slip from us, as it would if we were to get under the clouding depression that Philadelphia has so failed that there is no longer now anything of that character. I am saying this as a word of supplement. I believe this is on His mind, that those who are accounted of Philadelphia — surely not a mere question as to position but morally — do specially need His grace; for Satan uses all his arts to deceive and injure them. Where the heart is with Him, there He is all to the heart. But you have not Christ thus unless the Lord has led you back into understanding of what His church is to Himself. The most remarkable features of the appeal to Philadelphia suppose a knowledge of the truth and of grace found nowhere else. There must therefore be a very striking commentary within that Epistle. It is simply true. "Behold, I come quickly."

But we find that the Lord warns. "*Hold fast that which thou hast*, that none take thy crown." Do we not know, beloved friends, that never were men more liable to be carried away by feelings, and to be caught with novel teaching? People outside do not believe it; they think if you know one, you know all! We know a very different thing, and that as grace began the thing, so grace alone sustains and completes it. If any people are liable to be moved, we are. The very fact of being alone with Christ, away from the various means of occupying (I might say, of *entertaining*) the saints of God — for what else could I call the excitement of gathering thousands, with the attraction of music, etc. — makes us seem ungenial and ungracious in these days of exposure to the efforts of Satan in ways most trying and delusive. Let us cleave to the evident truth of the Lord. It is a caution given to Philadelphia more than to any other — "*Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.*" It is hard for love to look unamiable; but Christ should be beyond all to us, and His love is alone true.

There are other reasons. This I would add: If you look back over what the Lord has been doing, you find that when souls do slip away, it is rarely into Sardis, still more rarely into Thyatira, but Laodicea is the common direction into which those who fall from Philadelphia gravitate; and there you have that which is most painful, nay, repulsive, to the Lord Jesus. Self-complacency of knowledge abounds, but Christ is outside the door. It is not lapsing from first love, it is far worse than that. It is *indifference to Himself*, with total lack of spiritual discernment. What state is farther from the mind of God?

Philadelphia, I believe, according to marks that, to my mind, are incontrovertible and sure, will

be found when Christ comes. I believe that as Sardis does not supersede Thyatira, the state abides, but, through the infinite mercy of God, I see in Philadelphia the saints enter there as a *question of Christ*. It is not merely a true thing here or there known, but the truth bound up with *Christ is* apprehended, and there only presented morally and in love. Now, this is in no way boastful. There is no man that is led by the Spirit and enters into the mind of the Lord as regards the church but is ready not only to live for it, but to die for it; but Christ is nearer still, not merely this particular service or that rendered; though God has been recovering the cream of the gospel, and putting it in quite another fulness. Who does not know the controversy as to the righteousness of God? The heart of each of us owes much to the recovery of that truth at the end.

Another thing it is well to bear in mind, for it is important for God's glory as for the saints. Christ leaves room for all liberty and variety; for "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." We must not set one thing up against another. Evangelising is a special power, and the Lord calls upon us, as we are enabled, to spread the gospel, and not to teach only. We may be called to correct and be corrected, but our place, I am persuaded, is one of freedom and responsibility in individual service. So the apostle, in exhorting Timothy as to the last days, bids him do "the work of an evangelist." Nor can any who are not evangelists duly enter into the feelings or appreciate the mode of that work.

"I have a few names even in Sardis"; and suppose any of these came; suppose they misunderstand those who do not happen to be in their own circle, and apt to be fault-finding if not captious, would it not be humbling for those who are blessed to be offended by their remarks? If the Lord has borne much from us in many ways, and yet has shown the fulness of His grace, brought out in the greatness of His love, we too are called to answer to His mind. And what is it? There are many saints that pine for a better knowledge of His truth, and desire to enjoy the presence of the Lord who is very dear to them. We know that whatever He may give to some in His abounding grace, the true way to enjoy His presence is according to His word, to be where saints gather to His name. There His Spirit works freely.

He says to the angel of Philadelphia, "Thou hast kept my word, and not denied my name." I should feel it was making His word of none effect if we allowed that there was the same enjoyment of the presence of the Lord where His name was not the centre, and His word not maintained. He has brought out His truth in such activity that those who would follow Him fully now are called into the place of Philadelphia, to know Him who is holy, Him who is true, to hold fast His word and not deny His name. Other things have come in. The most evil departure with good and bad together leads us in it. We would never forget that is what grows until Christ comes. We may let go that which we have! May we hold it fast! May it be true of us, "that no man take thy crown"!

The trials will be fierce and fresh. There are constant dangers and constant difficulties. Only one object keeps, as well as awakens, while in this world, and that is Christ. But there must be self-judgment, weighing truth and judging self solemnly, in order to communion. So only can we have Christ's power, in our weakness, resting on us. Who or what will make more complete shipwreck than the attempt to take up such truth as this in a mental way? Persons that seemed Philadelphians when they started, where are they now?

Yet I have no such thought as that Philadelphia will end before Christ comes, though individuals may come or vanish. It is precisely this which is so serious. We are on a ground where nothing can sustain us but the Christ who led us there. The word without the Spirit of God always ends in intellectualism, Sandemanianism, or rationalism; as the Spirit without Christ goes into fanaticism for a while, and fleshly form in the end.

What avails to offer the brightest visions possible of the church? Better have Christ with self-judgment. The grace towards the end of the journey teaches us how He recovers. The Lord at the beginning, and before the beginning of the church, gave us these very words: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst"! Did He not contemplate our need at the end? Faith in them and Him thus really forms Philadelphia. I do not believe that we shall be ever driven to isolation, though desire after union will never keep us together — nothing but the power of His name. There may be a thinning of numbers instead of that increase which some complain of. All but Christ will fail, no flesh shall glory in His presence.

There is another word, and a weighty one — "The Spirit and the bride." The Holy Ghost has had His active presence and power confessed. It is a great thing *to the Lord Jesus* that the *One sent down from heaven to glorify Him be owned*, and this too in our proper nearness to Christ.

It is not that He does not bless where this is not so. But there is an immense difference between those that are merely blest by preaching and prayer, and those that own the Spirit's presence and action in the assembly also. For my part I see in verse 10 an intimation that there will be the expression of it going on until the end. Saints will be together, and not breaking up into mere units — "the Spirit and the bride say, Come." I do not say that all that ought to have it, *have* really the intelligence of the place. But there are those who do cleave to Christ thus by the grace of God, who prize it above all things here, and that because it *is* the grace of Christ.

"The Spirit and the bride say, Come." It is the due answer to the voice of the Lord Jesus who is coming. It is His word that gives the ground to faith. Such His grace will keep; keeping together, too, those who have kept the word of His patience. Where He is, He not only produces liberty, but sense of unity. It would be a most painful thing, and disheartening to our faith, for those for whom the Lord had interposed — separating them to His name — if they must think that all that is found henceforth would be merely Laodicea. Let none think so. Sardis will go on to the end, and Thyatira. But it is solemn enough and searching truth for us, and for others, I repeat, that while Philadelphia is not gone, *Laodicea has come!*

If the worldly-minded slip into Laodicea, God is working to bring out of it also, and into Philadelphia, just as those who become more simply set for Christ must do. May our Lord, beloved brethren, both warn our souls, and at the same time encourage our hearts, for His name's sake! Amen.

W. K.