"Blessed is he who reads, and blessed are those who listen to the words of this prophecy and lay to heart what is written in it."

—Revelation 1:3 (Weymouth)

I

The Book of Revelation begins with a pronouncement of a twofold blessing, a blessing upon the reader and a blessing upon the hearer who takes its message to heart. But if there is a blessing for those who take this book seriously, it is one that the modern church has in large measure lost. This is true for the following reasons:

1. The vast majority of professing Christians lose this blessing through neglect. Many of us seldom read any part of the Bible. But even those who read it with constant devotion often leave this particular book severely alone. They treat it as the priest and the Levite treated the man who had fallen among thieves; they pass by on the other side. For this reason, though intended for a book of openings, it is for many about the most tightly closed book in the Sacred Library.

2. Then a second group I fear miss the promised blessing because they misread and misinterpret the book. There are those with whom Revelation is a great favorite. Some of these are highly intelligent and thoughtful Christians, but certain others, I fear, while genuinely sincere, are often rightly accused of dwelling upon the "lunatic fringe" of religion. Since this great book lends itself by its very nature to fanciful interpretation, it has become a happy hunting ground for those seeking to prove almost every variety of vagary. A certain humorist in suggesting fit topics for conversation recommends as one of the best "What a Whale Has for Breakfast". The obvious advantage of such a topic is that the conversationalist can make any assertion about it that suits
him without the slightest danger of being proved at fault. This I fear constitutes for some one of the fascinations of this book.

But in spite of wide-spread neglect, in spite of fanciful interpretation, I am firmly convinced that this book has a message for today. It is especially fitting I think that we study it at this trying hour. The red hell of war is now raging all round the world. No one knows what will be the final outcome of this tragic investment in blood and tears. Because of this fierce tempest that has broken upon us, we especially need something to keep alive and to strengthen our faith. I believe that we can find some needed help in this book. This I say because I am convinced that Revelation is about the most daringly hopeful, the most dauntlessly optimistic book to be found in the New Testament. This is saying a great deal I know, but I believe a faithful study of the book will convince us of its truth.

II

Why is this book so little read and so often misread?

One reason is the peculiar style in which it is written. Revelation belongs to that type of literature known as apocalyptic. This is a type of prophecy that came into being after the Exile. The great prophets spoke their messages in a straightforward fashion. Any intelligent hearer or reader could understand them. But the apocalyptic prophet spoke to the initiated. Had he used plainness of speech, it would have cost him his life. What is more important, it would have cost the lives of his hearers. Therefore, he had to speak in such a fashion that his message could be comprehensible for those for whom it was intended but hidden from those outside. This type of prophet also had a different emphasis. Prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah put their emphasis on man's duty to his God and to his brother. The apocalyptic prophet, preaching in times
of crisis and danger, put his emphasis on what God was to do for man. This Seer of Patmos, speaking to the Christian Church, sought to speak in a fashion that Christians could understand, while his meaning would be veiled from others.

To this end he proclaimed his message by means of visions and symbols. As another has pointed out this is a book of pure poetry. It is a book of songs. To interpret it literally is to miss its meaning. For instance, the numbers used in the book are used in a symbolic rather than a mathematical sense. To the Jews certain numbers had very definite meanings. That is true to some extent with ourselves. We at least have one number that is a symbol. That is thirteen. There are those who do not like to stay in room number thirteen in a hotel. They think it bad luck to sit down at the table with thirteen or to begin any journey on the thirteenth day of the month.

Now the Jews had many such numbers. For instance, three came to symbolize for them the divine. Just how they came to use three with this meaning, we do not know. Possibly they did so through the contemplation of the divinest something they knew—the family. The family was composed of three—the father, the mother, the child. But whatever its background, three came to be a symbol of the divine. Four was also symbolic. To their mind the world was flat with four corners. Four winds blew upon it. Hence, four became the world number. The summing up of earth and heaven is three plus four which equals seven. Hence, seven came to be the number of perfection. It is the number that is most frequently used by this Seer. The evil number in the book is six. The evil of six is that it falls short of seven. This carries out the New Testament idea of sin, which is a missing the mark. Sin is falling short. "We have all sinned," writes Paul, "and come short of the glory of God." Wickedness at its worst was six repeated three times—hence, six hundred sixty-six. In the man represented by six hundred sixty-six, Doctor Jekyll was dead
and Hyde alone was left alive.

To symbolize the imperfect, they divided the perfect by two. Seven divided by two equals three and one-half. That is a number of which the author is fond. It does not mean a falling short as six does. It simply means the incomplete.

The author uses this expression in varied forms. He speaks of a time and times and a half time, by which he means three and one-half. Again he tells of a certain event that lasts forty-two months, which is three and one-half years. Again he uses twelve hundred sixty days, which again is three and one-half years. Here then is a book whose story is told in visions and symbols. It is best understood by those who bring to it a mind saturated by the Old Testament.

One writer asserts that of the four hundred verses two hundred seventy-eight are either quoted from or colored by passages in the Old Testament.

III

What was the purpose of this book?

It was written to hearten the Church of that dark and difficult day. Whatever meaning Revelation has for our time, it certainly had a meaning for the time in which it was written. Indeed this may be asserted of all true prophecy. Every prophet spoke to his own day. His message, therefore, was always timely. Because it was timely, it also as a rule was timeless. Human nature remains unchanged through all the changing years. Even historical situations have a strange way of repeating themselves. We need not be surprised, therefore, when we realize that this message to the church of the first century has something to say to the church of the twentieth century.

This book is thought to have been written during the reign of Domitian, who was Emperor of Rome from 81 to 96 A.D. During his reign emperor worship was becoming compulsory. Everybody was expected to do homage to the statue of Caesar. This was a patriotic procedure that had somewhat the same meaning that
saluting the flag has with us. Rome was very tolerant in matters of religion. If she conquered a foreign nation, the gods of that nation were brought to Rome and a temple was built in their honor. Though Rome was willing to defy the nations, she was not willing to defy their gods. The Roman citizen, therefore, or the Roman subject, might worship any god he pleased provided he included Caesar.

But while Rome was tolerant, Christianity was not. These stubborn Christians refused to burn incense to the statue of the Emperor. Rome looked upon such rebellious conduct as high treason. For this reason she set herself to the task of destroying this treasonable sect. It was, therefore, to nerve these few and scattered Christians to face this persecution that John wrote his book. Compromise was easy. A Christian might offer homage to Caesar and at the same time despise him in his heart, but to the mind of this prophet such compromise would mean disloyalty that might end in utter apostasy. In this hour of terrible crisis, therefore, the Seer of Patmos called the Church to a vigorous faith that would enable its members to be loyal even unto death.

IV

How did he seek to accomplish this purpose? He did so by making certain disclosures.

1. There is the disclosure of the Church. John as Christ's spokesman sends seven different messages to seven churches of Asia. He speaks as one who is intimately acquainted with these seven churches. He has perhaps preached in all of them. He knows their membership. He knows their strength and their weakness. He knows something of their achievements in the face of difficulty. He knows the opposition and persecution they have had to meet. Of course, there were more than seven churches in Asia, but he uses seven in its symbolic sense. In speaking, therefore, to these seven churches he is speaking to
the Church as a whole.

The membership of the Church that he discloses was few among many. It is estimated that less than one-tenth of one percent of the population of the Roman Empire at this time was Christian. This small membership was without compact organization. Its one bond of union was that of loyalty to their common Lord. It was a Church whose membership was not perfect. We need to bear in mind that neither at that day nor at any other has the Church been perfect. But it was a Church that in spite of the fewness of its numbers, in spite of its imperfections, could be symbolized by a lamp-stand, even a golden lamp-stand. It was not light in itself, but because the Risen Christ walked in her midst and held her messengers in His own right hand, it was able to be the light of the world. Thus John discloses the Church with the Risen Christ in the midst.

2. The second disclosure is the foe of the Church. The Church is out to do battle aggressively against evil in all its forms, but evil here becomes concrete. It is incarnate in one great organization—the Roman Empire. This Empire with its capital is given varied names. Rome is called Babylon, the Great Harlot, the Beast. What a fitting name was this latter! The Rome of that day was a beast of prey as has been many another nation since then. And what an enormous Beast it was viewed in its physical proportions! The nation at that day was near the zenith of its power. It embraced practically the whole world that John knew. It extended from Scotland on the north to the Sahara Desert on the south; from the Atlantic Ocean on the west to the Euphrates on the east. It had one hundred million population. The Beast was great in its physical proportions and seemingly unconquerable.

But the opposition that Rome was able to offer through her physical power, great as it was, was less appalling than the opposition growing out of her
moral rottenness. The Rome of that time had passed from the higher standards of other days. She was on a swift toboggan toward utter decay. Marriage had fallen into such disrepute that bachelors had to be fined in order to induce them to marry. The marriage tie had become so exceedingly weak that the home had become little better than a wreck. The work of the world was being done by some sixty millions of slaves. The Roman citizen looked upon work with contempt. He was kept in idleness by a dole system that made it exceedingly easy to rot down. Life was for the most part meaningless save as men and women sought thrills through sexual vice, through betting on who should win the chariot races, or who should slaughter his opponent in the gladiatorial contest. Thus, the Church faced a rotten and rotting society that was vast in its extent and more appallingly vast in its degradation.

3. The third disclosure of the Seer is the conflict between this weak Church on the one hand and Rome on the other. He never seeks to disguise the fact that there is a conflict. This conflict is a fight in which no quarter will be asked or given. He is sure that Rome will either destroy the Church or the Church will destroy Rome. It is to be a fight to the death. In thus facing the fact that the Christian life is a battle, he is in harmony both with Christ and with the saints. "Think not," said Jesus, "I am come to send peace on the earth. I am not come to send peace, but a sword." Of course, the sword of which He speaks was spiritual and not physical. Because the Christian life is a battle, we are to "put on the whole armor of God". We are to "fight the good fight" and thus "lay hold on eternal life". It was Paul's proud boast when he came to the end of the journey that he had "fought in the good fight".

This is an emphasis that the modern church has too nearly lost. We have a tendency to make Christianity too easy. In failing to emphasize the fact that to be a real Christian means a strenuous battle, we have forgotten one of
its supreme appeals. I am aware that there is that in us that makes us long to dodge the difficult. But that is not the biggest fact about us. Carlyle was right when he said: "It is not to taste sweet things, but to do true and noble things, and to vindicate ourselves under God's heaven as God-made men and women, it is that after which every son of Adam dimly longs." We cannot here give any details of the fight, but this Seer emphasizes the fact that the Church and the forces of evil, headed by Rome, are in deadly conflict.

4. The fourth disclosure is that of our Great Ally. "I saw a door open in Heaven." Through this open door, John gets a vision of the Throne and of the God Who sits upon it. Thus he realizes that in spite of all that seems to the contrary, in spite of Roman power and persecution, God still reigns. He sees also that this God Who is upon the Throne is a holy God. The word holy here is not used in the Old Testament sense of separateness. It is used in its ethical sense. God is holy in that He is perfectly pure and sinless. Being thus holy, He is the eternal foe of all evil, of all sin, of all that can in any wise mar and blight and destroy. "He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity." This holy God upon the Throne is the eternal foe of all evil.

Not only is God holy, but He is also omnipotent. He is the Almighty. That is a characteristic of God that I fear does not brace the Church as it braced our fathers. We have a truer conception of His tenderness, but not of His power. We are greatly in need of a new sense of God's almightiness. "Men are like the gods they serve." That being the case, if we have a weak God, we are likely to be weak men. Too many of us wail with the psalmist: "This is my sorrow, that God is not so strong as He used to be." But the God of John's vision is an Almighty God.

The God of John's vision is also a loving and suffering God. The Seer sees in the midst of the Throne a Lamb as if it had been slain. What a word that is! God is not only omnipotent, but "He is One Who is being wounded for
our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities." He is a Lover. He loves us so genuinely that He will spare Himself no pain to destroy evil and to establish His Kingdom in the earth. John, therefore, heartens himself as he seeks to hearten others by reminding them that a holy, almighty, suffering, and sacrificial God is upon the Throne.

5. The final disclosure is that of victory. This of all others is the most amazing to one who sees only the seen. John knows something of the weakness of the Church and of the might of Rome. He himself is feeling the grip of her iron hand even now, for he is a prisoner on the Isle of Patmos. But there is no hint of pity either for himself or for the Church. He sings a few dirges, but they are not for the saints nor even for the martyrs; they are for the mighty who have been foolish enough to take the side of evil. Faced by what seem stark impossibilities, he is absolutely sure of victory. He is aware of the fact that this victory will be progressive, but he never doubts that it will be complete and final. He is sure of victory because he is sure of God.

Because he is thus sure, he faces the future unafraid. While others might sob, he sings. While others might give way to wails of despair, he shouts. Listen to him: "The sovereignty of the world has passed over to our Lord and His Christ." Then near the end of the book he reaches a grand climax. "Hallelujah!" he sings, "For the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth! Let us rejoice and be glad." What a faith for a day like his! What a faith for a day like ours! What courage it gave and still gives to those who share it! We can face any danger unafraid if we are thus sure of God and of final victory.

And, mark you, his faith was more than justified. He believed that his mighty Lord was going to conquer Rome by destroying it. But God did something far better; He conquered by converting it. He displaced the eagle by the Cross.

What has all this to say to us? We are a part of the Church that John disclosed. His conflict is in large measure ours. His omnipotent Christ
"Unto him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood; and he made us to be kings and to be priests unto God."

Revelation 1:5-6

The Seer of Patmos is telling us the marvelous difference that Jesus has made in his own life and in the lives of his fellow-saints. "Here," he says with glad enthusiasm, "is what I owe to Jesus. Here are some of the unspeakably worth-ful gifts that he has put into my hands. Of course, this does not tell the whole story of the countless blessings He has brought to me. No words would be adequate for that. The amazing gifts of my Lord could never be fully put into words. But this at least He has done, He has honored me with His love. He has loosed me from my sins by His death on the cross. He has made me to be a king and a priest unto God." Thus John indicates something of the immensity of his debt to Christ.

What do you owe Him? "What is there in your life," John Arthur Gossip asks in a sermon on this text, "that simply could not be there but for the fact of Christ?"

"If there is nothing," he concludes, "your religion is sheer futility."

One day two Indian students came to interview Dr. E. Stanley Jones. "Tell us how to find Christ," they asked. Stanley Jones reached for his Bible and opened it. But no sooner had he done this than one of the students took it out of his hand and closed it, "Not that," he said. "We do not care to have you read to us. Tell us out of your own experience." "Aye, there's the rub!" That is the test that counts. And Stanley Jones, just as truly as John, was able to speak to them out of his own experience. He had a story to tell of the dealings of Jesus Christ with his own soul. That is everybody's privilege. John claimed his privilege. Therefore, he testifies that Jesus had conferred upon him four matchless gifts. What were these gifts? Just what did he owe to Christ?
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I.

"First," John declares boldly, "I owe to Jesus a new sense of personal worth." John lived in a day in which the individual counted for very little. Kings counted, nations counted, but not the individual, not the ordinary man. In this respect John's day was somewhat like our own. Ours is a day that has tended to dwarf individual. It is not easy for the modern man to maintain that high and holy self-esteem, that bracing sense of personal worth, that is so essential to strong and victorious living. Many foes are at present making war upon our sense of individual worth. These foes are robbing many of their self-respect. They tend to reduce man to a tragically insignificant creature that counts for little or nothing.

A certain Psalmist of the long ago felt himself dwarfed by the vastness of the universe in which he lived. "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" It was hard for this singer to believe in the greatness of the individual as he turned his eyes toward the star-studded heavens. Yet he managed somehow, for he declares triumphantly, "Thou hast made him but little lower than God. And hast crowned him with glory and honor." But the universe of this Psalmist was a mere speck in comparison with the one in which we live. The walls of our universe have been pushed back to the infinite. The very vastness, therefore, of this measureless universe has made it hard for some to believe in the greatness of the individual.

The rise of the totalitarian state has tended to rob man of his sense of individual worth. Where the state is supreme, as in certain despoticisms in Europe, the individual counts for little or nothing. A certain German tells that the individual no longer counts, is no longer wanted. Then man is dwarfed by our industrial and economic order. Too often, he becomes only a "hand" - a mere cog in the machine. Thus he loses his sense of personal worth and dignity. One of the most wholesome signs of our times is the preaching of the social gospel. We are realizing how hard
it is for the individual to be Christian in an un-Christian social order. Yet we sometimes preach this social gospel in such a fashion as to belittle the individual. Finally, there is a widespread loss of faith in God. If our only God is a mere blind force, then man dwindles into a spiritual dwarf and loses all ennobling sense of personal worth.

Jesus gave to John, as He gives to you and me, the high right to respect himself. He enabled him to face life with a holy self-esteem. The newspapers were none too kind in their criticism of Mrs. Simpson, when she married King Edward. Nor were their criticisms without foundation. She had made shipwreck of two marriages already. There could be no positive proof that she was really in love with Edward. Certainly there is little doubt that she would have married him for his position and his wealth had she had no vestige of love for him. Maybe the critics were right. Maybe she really is a cheap woman with a trashy soul. Maybe she is incapable of a truly great love. No doubt, too, she has felt quite keenly the adverse criticisms that she has received in such vast abundance.

But, be this as it may, I am sure, when she was passing through those depressing moments when the clamor of the world made it hard for her to respect herself, when she was tempted to think meanly of herself, she fell back on the biggest and brightest experience of her life. I can imagine that at such times she talked thus to herself:

"The world says I am a bit shoddy and cheap. Perhaps there is some truth in that accusation. I may be as bad as folks think I am, even worse. But this bracing fact remains. In spite of all my shoddiness and littleness, the king of the greatest empire in the world saw enough in me to be glad to give up his crown for me." If she cannot bolster her self-respect with that big fact, then she is far gone indeed. Such a realization ought to make a sense of utter cheapness and worthlessness impossible.

It was somewhat in this fashion that John learned a new and bracing self-respect.

"In spite of all my faults, in spite of all my failures and sins, he tells himself, Jesus Christ has loved me and loves me still. He has loved me well enough to uncrown
Himself for me. He has loved me well enough to die for me." With that bracing realization stirring in his heart, he could never think meanly of himself. He could never any more despise himself nor look upon himself with contempt. Henceforth, he is compelled, in thinking grandly of his Lord, to think grandly of himself, because of the sacrificial love that has been lavished upon him.

Now, we need this realization of the love of Christ to restore to us our lost sense of personal worth. To think meanly of one's self is likely to result in cheap and mean living. To think grandly of one's self is to live grandly. Such a sense of the personal love of Christ for us is a source of unmeasured strength. That accounts in large measure for the amazing strength of the Puritan. His faith that he was the loved and chosen of his Lord made him a man of power. "The meanest of them," says Macaulay, "was a being to whom a mysterious and terrible importance belonged, on whose slightest action the powers of light and darkness looked with anxious interest. It was for him that empires had risen and flourished and decayed. It was for him that the Almighty had proclaimed His will by the pen of the prophet and the harp of the evangelist. It was for him that the sun had been darkened, the graves opened, and that all nature had shuddered at the agony of her expiring God. Thus the Puritan was made up of two distinct beings, the one all self-abasement, penitence, gratitude, passion; the other, calm, inflexible, sagacious. He grovelled in the dust before his Maker, but he set his foot on the neck of his king." Thus he brought England in a few short years from a third-rate power to be the mightiest nation in the world.

This sense of personal worth, growing out of the personal love of God, is in a peculiar sense the gift of Jesus. It is Jesus who discovers to us the worth of the individual. It is Jesus who puts the world in one end of the balance and a human soul in the other and shows us the world flying up as if it were of no more weight than the toy balloon of a child. No wonder that in those despotisms where the individual is repudiated, Christianity is being repudiated also. Any system that belittles
the individual is anti-Christian. According to Jesus, the one something of real worth is human personality. The Ninety-and-nine may be safe within the fold, but that cannot satisfy the Good Shepherd. He must go after that which is lost until He finds it. "He calleth His own sheep by name." Every man's worth is attested by the fact that our Lord loves him with a love that will not let him go. In accepting and experiencing this love of Christ, John, therefore, found himself enriched by a new and bracing self-esteem.

II.

Then John declares, "He gave me a new freedom. I owe this to Him that he has snapped my fetters and broken my chains. He has loosed me from my sins in His own blood." Such language leaves the modern man a bit cold. When Jesus declares that he that commiteth sin is a slave, we are not greatly impressed. When Bunyan pictures Christian as staggering under the weight of a heavy burden till he comes within the sight of the cross where his burden is loosed from his shoulders and tumbles into the mouth of the sepulchre, he seems to some to be speaking a foreign language. We of today are not keenly conscious of the bondage of sin.

Yet, there are certain sins that enslave men before our very eyes. There are those who have become bond-slaves of their past, bond-slaves of habit. It has been well said that it would be easier to find a man who has never sinned at all than to find one who had not committed the same sin twice. When I was in Washington, there was a man from the Southland who was one of the handsomest and ablest men in the Senate. I saw this man go in a few years from a fine upstanding man to become like a creature of some hideous nightmare. He was the bond slave of drink. That slavery was utter and complete. In the toils of his fetters, he died.

But if the assertion that sin brings slavery leaves us a bit cold, there is another type of bondage of which we are more conscious. We know what it is to be the bond slaves of ourselves. There is an old story that tells of a certain Persian King who was going to be away from his palace for a long time. In order that
the young prince, his son, might not miss him too deeply, he gave him a lovely mirror with which to amuse himself. This prince began to look at himself in the mirror. More and more, self became an obsession with him. He became so taken up with himself that he forgot to eat. When the king came home, he found that this son had starved to death, so absorbed was he in himself. The world is literally cluttered up today with those who have died after this fashion. There is no more galling bondage than to be a slave to yourself.

Now, John tells us that there is a way to freedom. The Bible seems to have been written largely to bring us this good news. It is the record of the most thrilling and amazing escapes. One of the most gripping pieces of fiction ever written is "The Count of Monte Cristo." In its early days, it was said to have cured more invalids than all the physicians in France. Possibly the most thrilling part of the story is that of the escape from prison of Edmund Dantes. You remember how his old friend had died, and how Edmund Dantes slipped the body out and carried it to his own cell. He put himself in the place of the dead man and thus had himself tossed over the cliff into the sea. Though Edmund Dantes escaped from prison into a roomy world, he was still a slave. He was a slave to his own hate. He spent his life tracking down, one by one, those who had wronged him. It is awful to be the victim of a hate like that. It is far more awful to be the bond slave of such hate.

How much more thrilling is the story of John Newton. He ran away from home in his early boyhood, you remember, and became a sailor. By and by he engaged in the slave trade. At last he himself became a slave. He was not even a slave to a white man, he was a slave to a negro woman. His condition was about the lowest possible. Yet John Newton found freedom! He not only broke his physical fetters, but through Christ, he broke his spiritual fetters as well. In the after days, he became a good minister of Jesus Christ. But lest he should forget his debt to Christ, he hung over his desk, where he could see it every time he looked up from his work this word:
"Remember that thou wast a bondsman in Egypt, and that the Lord thy God delivered thee." There was no song upon the lips of Edmund Dantes as he hung like a terrible blood-hound upon the track of his victims. His freedom was only partial. But John Newton could sing, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me." Thus, John Newton, along with John of Patmos, testified to the freedom he had found in Christ Jesus.

III.

"Jesus gave me a new character. He crowned me," John declares with a bewildered joy looking out from his eyes. "He made me a king." That means more, of course, than that he brought John to a royal position. He did not do that. One may have the position without the royalty. That has happened countless numbers of times. "Pigmies will be pigmies still, though perched on the Alps." He did something far better for John than to give him a kingly position, He gave him a kingly character. He enabled him to become a partaker of the divine nature. The most kingly man on the earth today is the man that is most Christ-like.

Now, what our Lord did for John, He proposes to do for all of us. One of the most winsome Christians of the last century was Henry Drummond. Mr. Moody declared him to be the most Christ-like man he ever knew. This was also the verdict of George Adam Smith. It was the verdict of many others. Those who knew him best called him "The Prince." There was something kingly about him. So was there about the scheming and slippery Jacob, after that transforming experience by the brook. "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." Sin and selfishness rob us of our crown. Jesus comes to confer royalty - the royalty of Christ-likeness.

Then, of course, being royal in ourselves, He enables us to live royally. As John Arthur Gossip says of this experience, "He conferred upon me a new opulence."
Living royally, He enables us to have dominion, to reign as kings in the here and now. In the power of this kingship, we, as our Lord, overcome the world. We overcome the fear of it. We no longer cringe at its criticisms. We overcome the love of it. We are no longer in bondage to things. What a pity that with this full freedom within reach of our hands, we cling so tenaciously to our chains. I am told, that, a few years ago, a friend of mine spent a day sight-seeing in New York City. When he came back to his hotel at the close of the day, he bowed before God and prayed this prayer, "Lord, I just want to thank you that I haven't seen a single thing that I want." He was living a kingly life. He was experiencing and appropriating the royal opulence that is the birth-right of the children of the King. "I was a slave," said John, "but Jesus set me free and made me a king."

IV.

Finally, "He not only freed me, He gave me a position of highest usefulness. He made me a priest." What is the work of a priest? He has the right of approach to God. He goes into the Divine Presence on his own behalf. But while he dares to approach God for himself, he does not do so for himself alone. He goes to God on behalf of his fellows. Having seen his face, and having heard his voice and having received into his heart and hands God's matchless gifts, he brings them back to men. Thus, he becomes a mediator between God and man. He becomes a channel through which God's gifts of love and grace flow into the hearts of others.

Now this, I take it, is the path to supreme usefulness. There is absolutely no service that one man can render his brother that is equal to that of bringing to that brother a sense of God. And this is a possibility that is within reach of every one who really approaches God for himself. "If any man thirst," said Jesus, "let him come to me and drink. He that believeth on Me as the scripture hath said, out of his inner life shall flow rivers of living water." This high service is rendered only by those men and women who have been made kings and priests under God.
But we are to bear in mind that this high service is not just for ministers and those who bear the name of "priests." It is for everybody. The New Testament everywhere teaches the universal priesthood of believers. Everybody has the right of approach to God for himself. Everybody may accept the invitation of Jesus to come and drink. Everybody, having accepted the invitation of Him who is the Fountain, may have flowing out of his own inner life, rivers of living waters. That is the way to live life at its best. That is also to be in the highest sense helpful to our fellows.

I rejoice to say that it is the custom of this congregation to speak kindly and lovingly of your former pastors. But there is one particular compliment that you pay one of them over and over again. You have different ways of stating it, but it amounts to the same thing. "To see Brother Blank walk into the pulpit," one says, "gives me a sense of God." "He was a blessing to us just by being here," says another. "He somehow broke my heart with longing for Jesus without saying a word." That is the very best that could be said about any man. But why was it true? He was a priest unto God both on your behalf and his own. Having tarried in God's presence, he brought with him into the pulpit a spiritual fragrance born of that friendship.

"He gave me a new sense of personal worth," said John, "He set me free. He changed me from a pauper into a prince. He made me a priest, a bearer of blessing from God to man. And what He did for me, He will do for you." These gifts of measureless worth, and what makes this sermon a gospel is this: He is holding all these priceless treasures out to you at this moment, with both His eager hands. If you will accept them, life will become as abundant and rich for you today, as it was for John in the long ago. God grant that such may be the case. You, too, will then, 'To him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins, and made us kings and priests unto God.'
THE COLD CHURCH

"This I have against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love."

Revelations 2:4

This is a part of a letter addressed to the church at Ephesus. Ephesus was at that time the capital of Ionia. It was a city of artisans and merchants; a city of wealth and power, of luxury and idolatry. It was a city where the goddess Diana was held in peculiar favor. Ephesus owed much of its wealth to the manufacture and sale of images of this goddess. Into this wicked and idolatrous city had come the heralds of the cross. Some of the greatest ministers of the early Church had preached here. There was the eloquent, zealous and imperfectly instructed Apollos. There was John, the beloved Apostle. And above all, there was Paul, the ablest and the hottest heart of them all. He preached here for some three years. It was under his ministry that this church became a mighty spiritual power.

The writer of this letter is a man named John, a Christian prisoner in a penal colony on the isle of Patmos. It is the faith of this prisoner that is the inspirer of the letter, the real spokesman, is Jesus Christ, risen and reigning Lord. He introduces Himself as the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. That means, simply, that Jesus holds the messengers of the churches safely guarded in His own right hand, and walks in the midst of these churches, unifying, guiding, and guarding them, making good His promise that He will build His Church, and that the gates of death shall not prevail against it. Here and throughout all these letters, Jesus presents Himself as one who knows. He qualifies as an expert. That is heartening. If we are sick, we want to consult the best physician possible. Whatever our need, we turn eagerly to the man who has
made himself a master in the field in which our particular need lies. And now that many of us are in sore straits spiritually, how vastly important that we consult this Supreme Expert in the realm of the spiritual! How needful that we hear what the Spirit is saying unto the churches!

I.

When our Lord tells us what He knows about this church at Ephesus, we are fairly amazed at how much of it is altogether commendable.

1. "I know thy works," testifies, "I know the difference that your presence in this city has made. I know the beneficent changes that you have wrought in the heart of the individual, in the home-life, in all human relationships. I know how you have changed despair into hope, sobbings into songs, hate into love. I know under your ministry the wilderness and the solitary place has become glad, and how the desert has rejoiced and blossomed as a rose!" In the Book of Acts we read of a riot in this city that was brought about by those interested in the image-trade. This church, in offering to the people of Ephesus a living Christ, was threatening one of the most lucrative trades of the city. Many were throwing away the images of their pagan goddess, while others were refusing to buy. The evil of idolatry was being swept away, and those whose pocketbooks were being touched thereby were irate, just as men everywhere, under such circumstances. It was the same sort of howl as that which went up a few years ago when the churches put the saloons out of business.

Not only had this church positive tasks to its credit, but it had also served as a preventive. It had been as saving salt in that corrupt city. We cannot judge a church simply by its positive accomplishments. We cannot judge it simply by the purity of its membership and by the higher moral tone of the community in which it works. We have to take into consideration also what it prevents. As members of the Church we are far from perfect, but how much further would we be without its bracing influence. Our community is not what it ought
to be, but how much worse it would be but for the presence of the Church. A young fellow came into my study some time ago and handed me a check, saying simply, "That check was forged. I forged it myself. The only reason I did not cash it this morning is that I attended church last night." This church at Ephesus was accomplishing something, as the Church is today, and Jesus could say, "I know thy works."

2. "I know thy toil." That is, "I know the effort, the sacrifices, the struggles on your part that have been necessary in order for you to accomplish the tasks that you have accomplished." This church at Ephesus has not dreamed its way to great achievements. Its accomplishments have been at the price of strenuous and sacrificial effort. These saints have blessed because they have been willing to bleed. Nothing worthwhile is ever accomplished except at the price of hard work. "I know thy toil." I wonder if Jesus can say that about you and me. Many of us take our church membership all too lightly. It costs us nothing, and is, therefore, worth what it costs, and that only.

One day the Master watched a struggling, despairing crowd that reminded Him of a flock of sheep without a shepherd. But He not only saw these people as they were, He saw the amazing possibilities that were locked in their hearts. And He said, "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest that He would thrust forth laborers into His harvest." That is the need of this hour. We have enough drones. We have enough folks who are at ease in Zion. We have enough who refuse to put themselves to the slightest trouble. What we need is laborers, men and women, of whom Jesus can say, "I know thy toil, and I know the works that are the result of this toil. I know beautiful deeds that are blossoming like flowers all over your city that would be impossible but for you."

3. "I know that thou canst not bear evil men." This church believed in discipline. It refused to fellowship with those who dishonored Christ by open and flagrant sin. There was a time, even in recent years, when open and scandalous sinners were turned out of the Church. I am not at present saying that this was
the best possible way to deal with them. I am sure it was not. But it was one way, and far better, in my opinion, than the indifference with which such conduct is often treated today. One of our most damning weaknesses is that we are so like the world. We who claim to be alive are so like those who have never passed out of death into life.

4. "I know that thou didst try them that call themselves apostles, and they are not, and didst find them false." This church knew what it believed and why. Its membership was not to be swept off its feet by any teacher who came along making the high claim of apostolic authority. They had sat at the feet of some of the great teachers of the Church. They knew the Gospel. They were able to give a reason for the hope that was within them. They had a fine and intelligent faith. They, therefore, rejected those who came teaching that which seemed to them contrary to the truth. That was wise. Too many in our churches today know neither what they believe nor why.

5. Finally, he says, "I know thy patience." This is mentioned more than once. These saints were patient in their work, persistent in their endeavors to serve God. When days were sunny, they could be counted on. When days were cloudy, they could be counted on none the less. When their church was prospering and going from victory to victory, they were there. There are some people whose religion is little more than a pious spasm, a futile effort that ends in nothing. When I was a boy I used to drive a team of mules. There was little to choose between these mules when the road was smooth and the load was easy. But when things got tense, when the wagon bogged down, or the road wound over a rugged hill, then there was a different story. One of these mules would soon become impatient and nervous. Instead of making a steady pull, he would give frantic jerks, and thus often break the single-tree or some part of the harness. But the other could be counted on to pull his best every time the word was given. And I think with respect of that patient worker to this day. He changed many a possible defeat into victory. There is
great hope, therefore, for the church of which Jesus can say, "I know thy patience."

II.

Now it seems that the possession on the part of this church of so many fine qualities leaves nothing to be desired. But Jesus is compelled to make one tragic criticism. What does He find wrong? "This I have against thee," is the answer, "that thou didst leave thy first love." "Yet I have this against you," Weymouth translates it, "that you no longer love me as you did at first." "But I have this against you," Moffatt translates it, "you have given up loving one another as you did at first." Both translations are correct. This church was still active and earnest. It was decent, respectable, and orthodox. Its one fault was that it was failing in its love for Christ and, therefore, for one another. It was losing its glow, its zest, its enthusiasm. It was becoming "faultless, icily regular, splendidly null." It was growing cold. And about the least attractive something in all the world is a cold church.

"This I have against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love." First love is the love of espousal. It is the love of the honeymoon days. Now, sad to say, the honeymoon for many married couples is an exceedingly brief period. It is almost over as quickly as the wedding tour. How soon, for many, the radiance and the romance fade into the dull, drab commonplace. If you have been married for as long as twenty years and do not love each other better than you did in the honeymoon days, then the chances are that you love each other far less. And if you do not love Christ more today than when you first met Him, you are on the way to ceasing to love Him altogether. In spite, therefore, of all that was commendable in this live and active church, Jesus recognized the beginnings of a deadly disease that, if unchecked, was sure to end in tragedy.

III.

What is the tragedy of the cold church?

1. It has no winning power. "Unless you repent," says Jesus, "unless
you recover your first love, I will come and remove the lampstand out of its place. You will lose all power to shine." The most winsome something in all the world is a church that really cares. One day Mr. Moody found a little chap in Philadelphia who was making his way to a church far across the city. "Don't you have to pass a lot of churches on your way over there?" he inquired. "Yes," was the answer. "Then, why do you go to that church when it is so far away?" The answer was very direct and very convincing, "I go to that church because they love a fellow over there." So long as we love, we shall win. So long as we love, tired hearts will gather about us as bees about blooming flowers. But when the flowers wither, the bees will no longer come.

Not only do we lose our power to win with the passing of love, but sooner or later we give over our efforts as well. This church was still working. It was still getting results. But its momentum was born of the love of a by-gone yesterday. Some time ago, while I was out driving, my gasoline gave out. What happened then? My car stopped, of course. But it did not stop the instant that the gasoline was exhausted. It ran for a little while on the momentum that it had gathered before the power was gone. But soon enough it came to an utter standstill. Thus, while this church was still active, it was in the process of becoming inactive.

Then even the works that were being accomplished by this church were very faulty. That is ever the case with those tasks that are not motivated by love. I am not at all sure that the rigid discipline of this church, its loveless zeal for orthodoxy, did not do far more harm than good. It is fine to be possessed of clear and strong convictions. It is fine to contend earnestly for the faith, provided we can do so in the spirit of love. But I know of nothing more un-Christ-like than the tendency some of us have to damn everybody who does not agree with ourselves. Every heresy-hunter is on the way to losing his first love, if he had not already lost it before he began his unedifying task. "Better that error live than that love should die."
"This I have against thee that thou diest leave thy first love." No charge could be more fraught with tragedy than this. What is the lover seeking from his beloved, first of all? Is the supreme longing of the devoted husband for a good housekeeper, for one who can be depended upon to sweep the floors and dust the furniture? Is it his first dream to have a good cook? What is the dearest longing of a wife with regard to her husband - that he have a good job, that he be active and industrious and a good provider? All of these things are needful and worthwhile, but they are not first. Your home may be a palace. It may be furnished with every luxury, but if you as husband and wife no longer care for each other, if love lies a corpse in your hearts, then your home is close upon the gates of hell. When first love goes, therefore, everything goes that can satisfy either God or man.

IV.

Is there any hope for this cold church? There is. It is because of this hope that Jesus Christ sends this letter. He believes that this cold church may become warm and radiant, that it may recover the rapture of its first love. He tells us that for it to pass from spiritual winter to thrilling spring, only three steps are necessary.

1. "Remember whence thou art fallen." To cease to love is always to fall. Jesus comes, therefore, to those who have thus fallen and seeks to turn their thoughts to those glad yesterdays when their hearts were warm. "Remember," He says. How beautifully tender! It is thus that one loving human heart that had been sorely wounded by the carelessness of another might appeal. Here, for instance, is a devoted husband who has been made to realize that there is a widening chasm between him and the woman he loves. For years they have lived joyfully together, but now there is coldness where once there was warmth, indifference where a glowing love once laughed and sang. How naturally would he appeal to her by the memory of those gracious days when each had a place in the heart of the other. "Remember," he would say, "that
golden day when love's morning had its dawn! Remember our springtime joys! Remember our first great sorrow! Remember the sick beds by which we have watched and the coffins beside which we have kneeled! Remember the comfort and courage of our mutual helpfulness!"

And so Jesus appeals to this church, and to you and me. "Remember," he urges, "that great hour when you first met me: Remember those better days when you could sing with a sense of reality, 'Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!' Remember how I have been your comfort in hours of grief! - your companion in hours of loneliness! Remember how I have been your stay in the nightwatches, and your morning and sunrise at the breaking of the day! There was a time when you turned your steps eagerly to God's house; when you could sing zestfully, 'I was glad when they said unto me, let us go up into the house of the Lord.' Remember whence thou art fallen."

2. Repent. We are to remember in order that through remembering we may be led to repentance. When the prodigal was away in the far country, it was the memory of his better days that made it impossible for him to stay where he was. He was haunted by home-voices and home-faces. At last he could endure it no longer. He said, "I will arise and go to my father." And as we thus remember, we too shall return to Christ, and returning, recover our first love.

3. "Do the first works," that is act as you did at the first. This is to be the outcome of their repentance. For as they return to Christ they will love as they did in the old days, and loving they will gladly serve as of old. And it is as they thus repent and do the first works that they become conquerers. For all such, there is life in increasing abundance. These have access to the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God. But it is not only in the paradise of God, it is also in the here and now, its winsome fruits are for every one who is willing to repent and do the first works.

"Thou didst leave thy first love." Is that true of you? Is it true of our Church? If so, we are bringing unspeakable grief to our loving Lord. What, in your
opinion, was the most pathetic chapter in the tempestuous life of Jean Valjean? He was called upon to suffer much, but when did his suffering reach its tragic climax? I am convinced that it was when he was forced to say of Cossette, "Thou didst leave thy first love." Cossette had become his in her tender years. He had been both father and mother, and he had given her his whole heart. But now she has married, and her husband is robbing her, little by little, of her faith in him and of her love for him. Never does she spurn him utterly, you remember. To the end, she remains courteous and considerate after a fashion. But, though she does not openly turn against him, she does become cold. He cannot but recognize the change, and her coldness freezes his heart.

For a while he tries to visit her, as if she loved him still. But he cannot endure the agony of her icy welcomes. Then he begins to go within sight of her home to stand by the hour, looking at it with pathetic wistfulness. At last, as death creeps upon him, he spreads out the little black dress that she wore when she first became his, and fingers it carressingly as a man might finger the tresses of the woman that he had loved and lost. "Oh," he sobs, "she is a bright smile that came and shone over me and went away." What is the matter? His heart-break is that he has to say of the one for whom he cares the most, "Thou didst leave thy first love!" And that is the heart-break of Jesus. And nobody can cure it but ourselves. Therefore, as he comes with this appeal, "Remember how thou art fallen and repent and do the first works," let us respond by giving Him our whole hearts.
"That Rich Church."

Revelations, 2: 9

You will find the text of the morning in the 2d chapter of Revelations and 9th verse. It is not in the verse in itself, this text, but only a little parenthesis of three words, and yet these three words are wonderfully arresting. They fairly tremble under their heavy weight of meaning. Here they are: 'Thou art rich." So Jesus Christ describes the church to which he is writing in the city of Smyrna.

Now, so far as I know this is the only church in the Bible to which the Master pays this compliment. He never speaks of another church as being rich. There was another church that spoke of itself as being rich. The church in Laodicea considered itself rich. I have no doubt it was spoken of throughout the city as the rich church. Everybody considered it rich. Listen to this resolution that was possibly passed by the official board: "We are rich and increased in goods and have need of nothing."

But that was simply what they thought about themselves. That was not according to God's knowledge of them at all. Doubtless they had a magnificent building. They lived in lovely houses. They wore good clothes. They had plenty of servants. They had high social position. They had fat bank accounts. And because they were in possession of all these things they took it into their heads that they were rich.

That was pathetic, wasn't it? Isn't it pitiful to the very point of tragedy when we get in the grip of that species of madness which makes us think that we are rich when we are poor, that we are wise when we are foolish, that we are kings when we are slaves? I talked to a man the other day who was thoroughly confident that he had a destiny before him that had to do with the swaying of the world's greatest nations. But he had no such destiny. The trouble with the poor fellow was that he was about half crazy. He gave himself credit for possessing a treasure that he in no sense possessed.

So this church thought itself rich. "Thou sayest", says Jesus, "and knowest not." What did they say? They said, "We are rich." Jesus replies that"you are only speaking out of the abundance of your blindness. You are saying that you are rich when in reality you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked." And one can not but be startled by the wide gulf that separated what these people thought themselves from what they really were.

But this church at Smyrna is not rich simply in its imagination. It is rich in genuine reality. The One who said so was not a money grubber. He was not one who was blind. He was not one who was trying in any sense to flatter. He was speaking what was the absolute and utter truth about this church. And what He said was this: "Thou art rich."

Now, I will tell you very frankly that I would like to be pastor of a rich church. I do not know of any privilege that would be finer. Not that I have ever cared specially for being pastor of one that was simply rich in things, - the truth of the matter is, I could conceive of few calamities worse than being called to be pastor of a church whose only wealth was material wealth. But to be pastor of a church that was accounted rich in God's sight, - that, I say, would be no mean luxury. And a church may be rich in His sight though it is very poverty stricken in the eyes of the world. It may also be rich in His sight and rich in things at the
same time. Poverty is not in itself a great virtue. The one thing needful is to be in possession of what Jesus Christ counts the true riches.

Why was this church rich? In other words, in what did its wealth consist. It certainly did not consist in its worldly prosperity. The people of Smyrna would never have thought of calling it a rich church. I doubt if its own membership would have so labeled it. And yet He whose eyes are as a flaming fire, He who sees things clearly says that it is rich. In what does its wealth consist? Where are we to look for its assets?

I am ready to admit to you at once that the things which first meet our eyes in connection with this church look dreadfully like liabilities. In the first place, when Jesus tells us what He knows about this church He says that He knows its tribulation and poverty and blasphemy. To take the last of these first, He knows their blasphemy. The word might better be translated "slander". It means, of course, not the slander of which they have been guilty, but the slander of which they have been the objects.

This rich church then has been and is a much slandered church. The Jews whom he calls "the synagogue of Satan", have maligned them. They have lied upon them. They have misrepresented them. They have stolen their good names and have helped to make them poor indeed.

Now a man is not to be congratulated simply because he has been slandered. It is no cause in itself for great happiness to be misrepresented and lied about. And this church had had this misfortune. They had been so misrepresented that their unselfishness had been made to look like selfishness, that their purity had been made to resemble impurity. Their love had been turned in the eyes of men into hate.

As a result of this slander they had been persecuted. The men who might have trusted them regarded them with suspicion. Those who might have helped came to hinder. Those who might have followed fought against them. Those who might have been their friends became their bitterest enemies. They were persecuted. This persecution had taken the direction of the destruction of their property. There had doubtless been among the membership of this church many well-to-do people, but the Jews had aroused persecution against them. Their shops had been looted. Their homes had been sacked. Their goods had been destroyed. This had gone on till they had been reduced to poverty. Jesus says, "I know thy poverty" which means utter beggary. Their property had not only been destroyed, but their prospect of accumulating more property had also been taken from them. Hated and despised and suspected, they had little chance of making a living. They were the last men employed, so that poverty kneaded hunger in an empty bread tray, and they were but little better than utter paupers.

And now our Lord is writing to them. And He does not tell them even now of a better day that is coming. You would have expected Him to do this. Instinctively you listen for Him to tell them that there is a better day ahead. You listen for Him to encourage them by saying that the hardest trials are past and that they are to come upon quieter and more prosperous times. But He does not say this. He says just the opposite. He says, "Though you have been persecuted, yet you are going to be persecuted more bitterly tomorrow. Though you have been sorely tried yesterday, you are going to be tried even more sorely tomorrow. Some of you are going to be cast into prison." And prison was not a Roman mode of punish-
ment. Men were put in prison simply to be held for trial or for execution. And what Jesus is telling them in this sentence is that some of them are going to be cast into prison, and beyond prison is death.

It certainly looks like a gloomy prospect: Slandered and plundered and poverty stricken. And prison doors are swinging wide to them. And beyond the prison door they are to expect to meet the executioner with his axe. Beyond the prison door they may face the cross. Beyond the prison the flail is waiting to be lighted. Beyond the prison the wild beasts are already being starved in preparation for tearing them to pieces.

These then are the people that Christ labels rich. These are the ones that He mentions as earth's plutocrats. They are the holders of the wealth that is real. It seems an amazing thing to say about them. Suppose one of them had said as much to a heathen of that day. Suppose he had said, "Yes, we are slandered and persecuted and poverty stricken. Yes, we are on our way to prison and death has his hand upon the knob of our front door, but we are rich." How that heathen would have laughed. And yet his laughter would not have shown him wise. It would only have been the cackling laughter of a fool.

And though these people look so utterly bereft, they are rich after all. Christ was not mistaken. He did not overstate the case. Look at some of their rich treasures. First, they were unspeakably rich in the possession of their glorious Lord. Notice how He introduces Himself to them. He introduces Himself as "He who was dead but is alive."

So then that Savior knows exactly the experiences through which they themselves are passing. Are they slandered? Have they been maligned and lied about? So was He. Have they been robbed? So has He been robbed. His garments were taken. His seamless robe was a prize for a gambling game. And they did not even leave Him His life.

Their Savior then is one who has passed through all the dark experiences through which they are passing. However profound their agony, He has sounded the deepest depths of it. He knows it all. He understands fully.

And because He knows He is able to sympathize. And what a wonderful benediction is sympathy. How it helps us sometimes to have an arm run through ours and to hear somebody say to us, "Yes, yes, I know. I understand." That is the reason why the most helpful folks in this world are the folks who have had their hearts broken.

Believe me, my friends, no price would be too great to pay just to learn the fine art of sympathy. And we fail in it so often. "Be pitiful," said Ian McLaren, "for every man is having a hard time." And oftentimes we make it harder simply because our ignorance has made us blind and unsympathetic. The rattlesnake is a rather gentlemanly sort of reptile except at one season of the year. Just before he casts his skin he becomes almost blind. Then it is that he is most irritable and strikes at everything that comes his way.

And how often we ourselves strike with the envenomed tongue. How often we say the unkind and cutting word just because we know so little, and knowing so little, have so little sympathy.
"When on the fair fame of friend or foe
The shadows of disgrace shall fall,
Instead of words of blame,
A phrase of "thus and so",
Let something good be said."

These people were rich then in the possession of a Savior who could sympathize. And not only could He sympathize, but He could act up to His sympathy. There are times, you know, when though we sympathize, there is little else that we can do. I saw one whom I dearly loved slip away into the Great Brightness years ago. There was a sweet old body there that loved him better than I, and how I sympathized with her. And yet how very little I could really do for her.

But here is one and He tells these poverty stricken rich people, "I know what you are suffering. I know what you are going to suffer. I know because I have passed through it all. But in passing through it, I have conquered it. I have throttled death and the grave. And because I have passed through it I am able to bring you through, and my message to you today is to make you to know just how little death can do. I want to make you understand just how powerless it is to rob you of any of your real treasure."

So these people were unspeakably rich in the possession of this wonderful Savior. They were rich, in the second place, in His confidence. They were rich in the smile of His approval. You will notice in the Ephesian letter just before this that though Jesus says many very complimentary things about that church, He closes by saying, "But this I have against thee." But He has no such word for this poor rich church. He has no complaint to make of it. He has no fault to find. He has no criticism to offer.

How rich is that church, how rich is that man - that carries in his heart the consciousness of the Divine approval! What unspeakable wealth does he possess who can hear in his heart even now the "well done" of his Lord and Master.

"However the storms may rage about such a soul,
There is always peace within.
However night may be
It is always sunshine for him.

"As the sunlight breaks through the clouds o'erhead
When the storms are past and the winds are fled,
So in our darkness and fear and trial
There is nothing so sweet as my Savior's smile."

These people were rich, in the third place, in the fine grace of service. They were rich in good works. For this is a wealth that is absolutely independent of goods. Yonder is a widow and she makes the greatest contribution of the centuries. And though it is only a fourth of a cent, being rich in love she is rich in service, rich in good works.

And here is a man, a preacher. He has not found the Christian ministry altogether easy. He tells us that he has suffered the loss of all things. He has to make tents for the meager living that he earns. And when he shivers in prison he is not able to send out and buy a new cloak, but
That rich church

must needs write to a distant friend to bring the old threadbare garment that he had left over at Troas. He is a poor man, exceedingly poor. And yet he tells us though poor, he made many rich.

What a sentence that is! And how tremendously true it is! Why this multi-millionaire Paul has been bequeathing rich legacies to men for eighteen centuries. If all these who have been enriched by him were to shout together this morning it would fairly shake the pillars of Heaven. He, as these in Smyrna, was rich in good works. They had learned that blessed secret from Him, who"though He was rich yet for our sakes became poor,"that we through His poverty might be rich.

They were rich, in the fourth place, in their fidelity. "Be thou faithful unto death", said their Lord who could depend on them, "and I will give you a crown of life." The word "faith" means "be convinced." "Continue", says Jesus, "to be convinced of me. Continue to have convictions." The poorest man in the world is the man with no convictions. That man is unspeakably rich who has a conviction, who is firm in the faith that he has hold on a truth that is amply worth dying for.

Because they were rich in a mighty conviction, because they had confidence unshaken in Jesus Christ and in the glory of the salvation that had come to them, - they were rich in character. They were rich in peace. They were rich in joy. They were rich in consecration. They were rich in their spirit of self giving. They were rich in their willingness even to die for Christ's sake.

And is there any finer treasure than this that makes us willing to die rather than prove disloyal to our duty? Is there any truer treasure that that which makes us glad to yield our lives for the blessing and enrichment of others? That is the one bright spot in the heart of the history of war. That is the one thing of beauty in its terrible tale of blood. Here are men who forget themselves and measure their life but as dust in the balance when it comes to doing their duty.

"Where are you going, young fellow, my lad,
On this glittering morning of May?
I am going to joib the colors, Dad,
They are looking for men, they say.

"But you are only a boy, young fellow, my lad,
You are not obliged to go.
I am seventeen and a quarter, Dad,
And ever so strong, you know.

"So you are off to France, young fellow, my lad,
And you are looking so fit and bright.
Terribly sorry to leave you, Dad,
But I feel I am doing right.

"God bless you and keep you, young fellow, my lad,
For you're all my life, you know.
Don't worry, I'll soon come back, dear Dad.
And I'm awfully proud to go."
"Why don't you write, young fellow, my lad? I watch for the post each day. (And I'm awfully sad and I miss you so,) And it's months since you went away.

"I have had a fire in the parlor lit, And I'm keeping it burning bright Till my boy comes home, and here I sit Into the quiet night.

"What is the matter, young fellow, my lad? No letter again today. And why did the postman look so sad, And sigh as he turned away?

"I hear them say that we have gained new ground, But a horrible price we've paid. God grant, my boy, that you are safe and sound, But Oh, I'm afraid, afraid.

"They have told me the truth, young fellow, my lad, And you'll never come back again. (Oh God, the dreams and the dreams I have had, And the hopes I have nursed in vain!)

"So you passed in the night, young fellow, my lad, And you proved in that terrible test Of the bursting shell and the battle hell That my boy was one of the best.

"And you'll live, you'll live, young fellow, my lad, In the gleam of the evening star, In the wood note wild and the laugh of the child, And all sweet things that are.

"And we will never forget you, my wonderful boy, While life is noble and true; For all of beauty and all of joy We owe to our lads like you."

And I would not take one single laurel from the self-forgetful soldier's brow. I could not if I would. I would not if I could. But I would like to drop a rose upon the graves of those nameless sleepers who went out of the gate of ghastly death with no flags flying, with no martial music to theer them. I would like for us to honor afresh the fine high courage of those who went out in sheets of flame with no victory songs save the derision of their tormentors and the howls of the angry mob. These people were rich in that they had a treasure in their dying fingers that was so precious that they laughed outright in the thought of dying for it.

And I am afraid that you and I are not as rich in this respect as we ought to be. If your neighbor is saved by the salvation with which you are saved will he be very much enriched? Suppose I could bring my whole congregation up to the level of the preacher this morning, have I brought them boundless treasure? Have you anything for which you would gladly lay down your life? Have you convictions that are worth suffering for? Have you convictions that make you count scorn and derision
as small things? Have you convictions that are strong enough to make you stand faithful and unafraid even when nobody applauds and when no flowers are thrown in your path? We need today to grip more mightily and to be more mightily gripped by the soul saving convictions that made our fathers the heroes that they were.

And then these people were rich in their future prospects. They were rich in the treasures that God was keeping for them in eternity. One of these treasures seems a rather strange one to us. It was the treasure of the privilege of escaping the second death. These Christians were going to die even as the heathen of Smyrna were going to die. But the final outcome was not to be the same. Beyond the Christian's death was life. And beyond the death of the heathen was that mysterious and awful agony that is called the second death.

I do not claim to know just what it means. God grant that I may never know. It is one of those meaningful words by which God in His mercy seeks to impress upon our drowsy hearts again and again the awful fact that there is a different destiny for the righteous and for the wicked. It is a privilege that He mentions along with the very finest and highest, this of being allowed to escape the horror of the second death.

The other rich prospect of these persecuted saints is this, that by and by they are going to receive a crown of life. Death is going to rob some people in Smyrna, but those who are rich in faith, who are rich in Christlike character, - death will not rob them. It can not. Instead it is going to crown them. By its dark passage these saints are coming into the kingly life of Heaven.

They are going to receive a crown of life. This, I say, is a crown of royalty. It is not only a crown of royalty, - it is a crown, as one has pointed out, of royalty victorious. It is a crown of royalty victorious and enriched with the spoils of its victory. These spoils are the treasures of character that through grace these men and women have won in their patient endurance of suffering.

Therefore I do not wonder that Christ calls this persecuted and impoverished church a rich church. Rich, indeed it is. Rich in their possession of their risen and victorious Lord. Rich in His approval. Rich in their faith in Him. Rich in the Christlike character that has been born of this faith and fellowship.

And now I wonder just how we stand on the bank books of Heaven. I wonder as God looks at us this morning as a congregation, as individuals, whether He counts us rich or poor. The wealth of this world is beyond the reach of most of us. Possibly not one of us will ever be rich as the world counts riches. We do not need to be. Personally I do not want to be.

But thank God, in the treasure that outlasts the ages we can every one be unspeakably and eternally rich. It may prove impossible for us to ever accumulate much in the banks of this world, but we can all lay up for ourselves treasures in Heaven where "moth and dust doth not corrupt and where thieves do not break through and steal." Though we are never rich in the eyes of men, let us make it the supreme desire and purpose of our lives that we may be rich toward God. There is a story
of how a man of great wealth passed one day and saw a poor old man sitting by a spring and he softened a crust of bread under the spout of the spring and ate it with his toothless gums.

And there was a touch of contempt in the rich man's look, and he half blamed the old man that he had not laid up something for a rainy day, little thinking of the meagerness of the salary of an itinerant preacher and forgetting also that the one hope of the old man had been the treasure that abides. So the rich man passed on to his palatial home that stood in a lovely grove.

That night the story says he dreamed a terrible dream. He thought an angel stood before him and raised his mighty right hand and said, "Tomorrow morning at half past three o'clock the richest man in Bartow County shall die." And the rich man viewed himself as the county's richest man, so he was shaken with terror. But in spite of himself he dropped to sleep again, and again there came the vision.

He then rose and seated himself in the armed chair before the clock and he watched the hands go around, but in spite of himself he dropped to sleep, and again the same vision and the same warning. And now he is awake once more and it is almost three o'clock, and he is watching the hands with staring eyes. Three o'clock. Five minutes past three. Ten minutes. Fifteen. Twenty. The great beads of perspiration stand out upon his forehead. Twenty-five. He is gasping for breath. Thirty.

And still he lives. Four o'clock - and still he lives. And by and by the sun rises.

About nine o'clock he is out on the lawn. A servant passes with a spade in his hand. He questions him. "I am going to help dig a grave," he says. "Who died," said the rich man. "That old preacher that we saw at the spring yesterday. He died this morning at half past three o'clock." And then the rich man knew that he who possessed the real treasure was not the man who held his wealth in his hand, but the man who held his wealth in his heart. "Thou art rich." God grant that that entry may be made opposite your name upon the records of Heaven.
"This I have against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love." - Revelation 2: 4

This is a part of a letter addressed to the church at Ephesus. Ephesus was at that time the capital of Ionia. It was a city of artisans and merchants; a city of wealth and power, of luxury and idolatry. It was a city where the goddess Diana was held in peculiar favor. Ephesus owed much of its wealth to the manufacture and sale of images of this goddess. Into this wicked and idolatrous city had come the heralds of the cross. Some of the greatest ministers of the early Church had preached here. There was the eloquent, zealous, and imperfectly instructed Apollos. There was John, the beloved Apostle. And above all, there was Paul, the ablest and the hottest heart of them all. He preached here for some three years. It was under his ministry that this church became a mighty spiritual power.

The writer of this letter is a man named John, a Christian prisoner in a penal colony on the Isle of Patmos. But the inspirer of the Letter, and the real spokesman is Jesus Christ, our risen and reigning Lord. He introduces Himself as the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. That means, simply, that Jesus holds the messengers of the churches safely guarded in His own right hand; and walks in the midst of them, unifying, guiding, guarding, making good His promise that He will build His Church, and that the gates of death shall not prevail against it. Here and throughout all these letters, Jesus presents Himself as one who knows. He qualifies as an expert. That is heartening. If we are sick, we want to consult the best physician possible. Whatever our need, we turn eagerly to the man who has made himself a master in the field in which our particular need lies. And now that many of us are in sore straits spiritually, how vastly important that we consult this Supreme Expert in the realm of the spiritual! How needful that we hear what the Spirit is saying unto the churches!
When our Lord tells us what He knows about this church at Ephesus, we are fairly amazed at how much of it is altogether commendable.

1. "I know thy works," that is, "I know the difference that your presence in this city has made. I know the beneficent changes that you have wrought in this city, the heart of the individual, in the home-life, in all human relationships. I know how you have changed despair into hope, sobs into songs, hate into love. I know how, under your ministry, "the wilderness and the solitary place have become glad, and how the desert has rejoiced and blossomed as a rose." In the Book of Acts we read of a riot in this city that was brought about by those interested in the image-trade. This church, in offering to the people of Ephesus a living Christ, was threatening one of the most lucrative trades of the city. Many were throwing away the images of their pagan goddess, while others were refusing to buy. The evil of idolatry was being swept away, and those whose pocketbooks were being touched thereby were indignant, just as men ever are, under such circumstances. It was the same sort of howl as that which went up a few years ago when the churches put the saloons out of business.

Not only had this church positive tasks to its credit, but it had also served as a preventive. It had been as saving salt in that corrupt city. We cannot judge a church simply by its positive accomplishments. We cannot judge it simply by the purity of its membership and by the higher moral tone of the community in which it works. We have to take into consideration also what it prevents. As members of the Church we are far from perfect, but how much further would we be without its bracing influence. Our community is not what it ought to be, but how much worse it would be but for the presence of the Church. A young fellow came into my study some time ago and handed me a check, with a simple statement, "That check was forged. I forged it myself. The only reason I did not cash it this morning is that I attended church last night." This church at Ephesus was accomplishing something, as the Church is today, and Jesus could say, "I know thy works."
2. "I know thy toil." That is, "I know the effort, the sacrifices, the struggles that have been necessary in order to accomplish the tasks that you have accomplished." This church at Ephesus has not dreamed its way to great achievements. Its accomplishments have been at the price of strenuous and sacrificial effort. These saints have blessed because they have been willing to bleed. Nothing worthwhile is ever accomplished except at the price of hard work. "I know thy toil." I wonder if Jesus can say that about you and me. Many of us take our church membership all too lightly. It costs us nothing, and is, therefore, worth what it costs, and that only.

One day the Master watched a struggling, despairing crowd that reminded Him of a flock of sheep without a shepherd. But He not only saw these people as they were, He saw the amazing possibilities that were locked in their hearts. And He said, "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest that He would thrust forth laborers into His harvest." That is the need of this hour. We have enough drones. We have enough folks who are at ease in Zion. We have enough who refuse to put themselves to the slightest trouble. What we need is laborers, men and women, of whom Jesus can say, "I know the works that are the result of this toil. I know beautiful deeds that are blossoming like flowers all over your city that would be impossible but for you."

3. "I know that thou canst not bear evil men." This church believed in discipline. It refused to fellowship with those who dishonored Christ by open and flagrant sin. There was a time, even in recent years, when open and scandalous sinners were turned out of the Church. I am not at present saying that this was the best possible way to deal with them. I am sure it was not. But it was one way, and far better, in my opinion, than the indifference with which such conduct is often treated today. One of our most damning weaknesses is that we are so like those who have never passed out of death into life.

4. "I know that thou didst try them that call themselves apostles, and they are not, and didst find them false." This church knew what it believed and why. Its mem-
bership was not to be swept off its feet by any teacher who came along making the high claim of apostolic authority. They had sat at the feet of some of the great teachers of the Church. They knew the Gospel. They were able to give a reason for the hope that was within them. They had a fine and intelligent orthodoxy. They, therefore, rejected those who came teaching that which seemed contrary to the faith delivered unto the saints. Too many in our churches today know neither what they believe nor why.

5. Finally, he says, "I know thy patience." This is mentioned more than once. These saints were patient in their work, persistent in their endeavors to serve God. When days were sunny, they could be counted on. When days were cloudy, they could be counted on none the less. When their church was prospering and going from victory to victory, they were there. When it was in sore straits and seemed on the point of utter defeat, they were also there. There are some people whose religion is little more than a pious spasm, a few futile efforts that end in nothing. When I was a boy I used to drive a team of mules. There was little to choose between these mules when the road was smooth and the load was easy. But when things got tense, when the wagon bogged down, or the road wound over a rugged hill, then there was a different story. One of these mules would soon become impatient and nervous. Instead of making a steady pull, he would give frantic jerks, and thus often break the single-tree or some part of the harness. But the other could be counted on to pull his best every time the word was given. And I think with respect of that patient worker to this day. He changed many a possible defeat into victory. There is great hope, therefore, for the church of which Jesus can say, "I know thy patience."

II.

Now it seems that the possession on the part of this church of so many fine qualities leaves nothing to be desired. But Jesus is compelled to make one tragic criticism. What does He find wrong? "This I have against thee," is the answer, "that thou didst leave thy first love." "Yet I have this against you," Weymouth translates it, "that you
no longer love me as you did at first." "But I have this against you," Moffatt translates it, "you have given up loving one another as you did at first." Both translations are correct. This church was still active and earnest. It was decent, respectable, and orthodox. Its one fault was that it was failing in its love for Christ and, therefore, for one another. It was losing its glow, its zest, its enthusiasm. It was becoming "faulty faultless, icily regular, splendidly null." It was growing cold. And about the least attractive something in all the world is a cold church.

"This I have against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love." First love is the love of espousal. It is the love of the honeymoon days. Now, sad to say, the honeymoon for many married couples is an exceedingly brief period. It is almost over as quickly as the wedding tour. How soon, for many, the radiance and the romance fade into the dull, drab commonplace. If you have been married for as long as twenty years and do not love each other better than you did in the honeymoon days, then the chances are that you love each other far less. And if you do not love Christ more today than when you first met Him, you are on the way to ceasing to love Him altogether. In spite, therefore, of all that was commendable in this live and active church, Jesus recognized the beginnings of a deadly disease that, if unchecked, was sure to end in tragedy.

III.

What is the tragedy of the cold church?

1. It has no winning power. "Unless you repent," says Jesus, "unless you recover your first love, I will come and remove the lampstand out of its place. You will lose all power to shine." The most winsome something in all the world is a church that really cares. One day Mr. Moody found a little chap in Philadelphia who was making his way to a church far across the city. "Don't you have to pass a lot of churches on your way over there?" he inquired. "Yes," was the answer. "Then, why do you go to that church when it is so far away?" The answer was very direct and very convincing, "I go to that church
because they love a fellow over there." So long as we love, we shall win. So long as we love, tired hearts will gather about us as bees about blooming flowers. But when the flowers wither, the bees will no longer come.

Not only do we lose our power to win with the passing of love, but sooner or later we give over our efforts as well. This church was still working. It was still getting results. But its momentum was born of the love of a by-gone yesterday. Some time ago, while I was out driving, my gasoline gave out. What happened then? My car stopped, of course. But it did not stop the instant that the gasoline was exhausted. It ran for a little while on the momentum that it had gathered before the power was gone. But soon enough it came to an utter standstill. Thus, while this church was still active, it was in the process of becoming inactive.

Then even the works that were being accomplished by this church were very faulty. That is ever the case with those tasks that are not motivated by love. I am not at all sure that the rigid discipline of this church, its loveless zeal for orthodoxy, did not do far more harm than good. It is fine to be possessed of clear and strong convictions. It is fine to contend earnestly for the faith, provided we can do so in the spirit of love. But I know of nothing more un-Christ-like than the tendency some of us have to damn everybody who does not agree with ourselves. Every heresy-hunter is on the way to losing his first love if he had not already lost it before he began his unedifying task. "Better that error live than that love should die."

"This I have against thee that thou didst leave thy first love." No charge could be more fraught with tragedy than this. What is the lover seeking from his beloved, first of all? Is the supreme longing of the devoted husband for a good housekeeper, for one who can be depended upon to sweep the floors and dust the furniture? Is it his first dream to have a good cook? What is the dearest longing of a wife with regard to her husband - that he have a good job, that he be active and industrious and a good provider? All of these things are needful and worthwhile, but they are not first. Your home may
be a palace. It may be furnished with every luxury, but if you as husband and wife no longer care for each other, if love lies a corpse in your hearts, then your home is close upon the gates of hell. When first love goes, therefore, everything goes that can satisfy either God or man.

IV.

Is there any hope for this cold church? There is. It is because of this hope that Jesus Christ sends this letter. He believes that this cold church may become warm and radiant, that it may recover the rapture of its first love. He tells us that for it to pass from spiritual winter to thrilling spring, only three steps are necessary.

1. "Remember whence thou art fallen." To cease to love is always to fall. Jesus comes, therefore, to these who have thus fallen and seeks to turn their thoughts to those glad yesterdays when their hearts were warm. "Remember," He says. How beautifully tender!

It is thus that one loving human heart that had been sorely wounded by the carelessness of another might appeal. Here, for instance, is a devoted husband who has been made to realize that there is a widening chasm between him and the woman he loves. For years they have lived joyfully together, but now there is coldness where once there was warmth, indifference where a glowing love once laughed and sang. How naturally would he appeal to her by the memory of those gracious days when each had a place in the heart of the other.

"Remember," he would say, "that golden day when love's morning had its dawn! Remember our springtime joys! Remember our first great sorrow! Remember the sick beds by which we have watched and the coffins beside which we have kneeled! Remember the comfort and courage of our mutual helpfulness!"

And so Jesus appeals to this church, and to you and me. "Remember," he urges, "that great hour when you first met me! Remember those better days when you could sing with a sense of reality, 'Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!' Remember how I have been your comfort in hours of grief! - your companion in hours of loneliness! Remember how I have been your stay in the nightwatch, and your morning and sunrise at the breaking of the
There was a time when you turned your steps eagerly to God's house; when you could sing zestfully, 'I was glad when they said unto me, let us go up into the house of the Lord.' Remember whence thou art fallen.

2. Repent. We are to remember in order that through remembering we may be led to repentance. When the prodigal was away in the far country, it was the memory of his better days that made it impossible for him to stay where he was. He was haunted by home-voices and home-faces. At last he could endure it no longer. He said, "I will arise and go to my father." And as we thus remember, we too shall return to Christ, and returning, recover our first love.

3. "Do the first works," that is act as you did at the first. This is to be the outcome of their repentance. For as they return to Christ they will love as they did in the old days, and loving they will gladly serve as of old. And it is as they thus repent and do the first works that they become conquerers. For all such, there is life in increasing abundance. There have access to the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God. But it is not only in the paradise of God, it is also in the here and now, its winsome fruits are for every one who is willing to repent and do the first works.

"Thou didst leave thy first love." Is that true of you? Is it true of our Church? If so, we are bringing unspeakable grief to our loving Lord. What, in your opinion, was the most pathetic chapter in the tempestuous life of Jean Valjean? He was called upon to suffer much, but when did his suffering reach its tragic climax? I am convinced that it was when Cosette, to whom he had been both father and mother, and to whom he had given his whole heart, has married, and has allowed her husband to rob her in large measure of her faith in him and of her love for him. She does not spurn him utterly, you see, but over time, she remains courteous and considerate after a fashion. She does not openly turn against him, but she only becomes cold. But he cannot but recognize the change, and her coldness freezes his heart.

For a while he tries to visit her, as if she loved him still. But he cannot endure
the agony of her joy welcomes. Then he begins to go within sight of her home to stand by
the hour, looking at it with pathetic wistfulness. At last, as death creeps upon him, he
spreads out the little black dress that she wore when she first became his, and fingers it
carelessly as a man might finger the tresses of the woman that he had loved and lost.
"Oh," he sobres, "she is a bright smile that came and shone over me and went away." What
is the matter? His heart-break is that he has to say of the one for whom he cares the most,
"Thou didst leave thy first love!" And that is the heart-break of Jesus. And nobody can
sure it but ourselves. Therefore, as he comes with this appeal, "Remember how thou art
fallen and repent and do the first works," let us respond by giving Him our whole hearts.
"But thou art rich." 

So spoke Jesus of the church at Smyrna. It is a unique compliment. It is one that he paid to no other church. It is true there was another church that spoke of itself as being rich, but Christ did not so regard it. While the church at Laodiceas was boasting of its wealth, while it was pridefully dwelling on the prosperity of its membership and magnificence of its program, Jesus was pitying its dire poverty. 

Listen how widely His knowledge of them differs from their opinion of themselves. "Thou sayest, I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing." So spoke this seemingly rich church of Laodiceas of themselves. To be a member of that church was in the mind of its membership, and possibly of the people of the city, a business opportunity. To belong to it was like belonging to a great and wealthy social club. All its bills were paid. There was no claim against it. Its membership declared with prideful swagger that they had need of nothing.

Yet through the eyes of Jesus they were not rich at all. They had nothing whatever of which to boast. "Thou sayest, I am rich and increased in goods and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked." "That is, says Jesus, you are not to be congratulated. You are to be pitied. You are not the happy, dreamy congregation in the world. You are really naked. You are not truly rich. You are desperately poor. Your gold is only fairy gold. Your wealth is only born of delusions and dreams.

A certain French poet, years ago, lost his wealth and had to move into a miserable attic. The meager furnishings of his room were the very poorest. In the stress of it all the poet lost his reason. He began to fancy himself enjoying great prosperity. He secured some gaudy yellow paint and daubed it over his broken and rickety furniture, and that furniture became his greatest pride. When visitors would come he would point it out to them very boastfully and tell them that it was solid gold. And the miserably poor he fancied himself gorgeously rich.

A few weeks ago I was invited by a physician, who was superintendent of one of our state hospitals for the insane, to attend a clinic. Among those brought in was a splendid young fellow who came with a fine air of material well being. The superintendent questioned him about himself. And he began to tell us what an important man he was. Among his employers was Henry Ford. John D. Rockefeller had been on his payroll until recently, but he had been unfortunate enough to make a false entry in the books and had been turned off. He declared that he owned all the national banks in the United States and half the post offices. An eminently rich man, fabulously rich. Yet if you tipped him a dime he would gladly accept it, giving as his reason that he did not want to hurt your feelings.

"But the wealth that was possessed by this church at Smyrna was not imaginary. It was genuine. Nor was it a wealth that was merely a mere hope of the future. It was a present possession. Jesus does not say that this
I. Then it was a poverty stricken church. Nor does He say that it once was rich. What He says is "Thou art rich." At that present moment they were in possession of wealth unspeakable. At that present moment they were clasping treasure untold. In the then and there they were gripping riches worth more than all the worlds in swinging space.

I.

This church was rich in spite of its liabilities. And Jesus faces the fact at once that it has liabilities. Everything is not well with this church. There were many things wrong.

1. It was a splendid church. "I know", says Jesus, "thy blasphemy." The word here translated "blasphemy" really means slander. This church was being maligned. It was being criticised. Its reputation was being destroyed. Its good name was being torn into shreds. Its enemies were saying harsh and hard things about it that had no foundation in truth, but those that heard them were believing them, so that the church had lost its good reputation.

Now slander is not an easy thing to endure. The harm wrought by the peddler of slander is great beyond our power to estimate. "A good name in man or woman, dear My Lord, is the immediate jewel of their souls. Who steals my purse steals trash. 'Tis mine. 'Tis His, and has been slave to thousands. But he that filcheth from me my good name, taketh that which not enriches him, but makes me poor indeed."

2. This church was being persecuted. On account of the slander of the Jews, those who might have helped were only hindering. Those who might have been their friends had become their enemies. Those who might have helped them to build a strong and growing church in Smyrna are doing their best to make their great work impossible. And this persecution had been more than verbal. There had been merchants among the membership of this church that had had their stores looted and their business destroyed. There had been home owners that had been rendered homeless. There had been employees who had lost their employment. These people had suffered not only in the loss of reputation, but in the loss of property as well.

3. It was a poverty stricken church. This persecution had been so universal that the membership of the church had been reduced to utter want. The word here translated "poverty" really means beggary. Thus this rich church was the poorest of the poor. This rich church could not have raised enough money to pay the most economical of preachers. It could not have raised enough money to buy a half dozen hymn books. It was a church in want. It was a church face to face with absolute starvation.

4. Then it was a church on the way to yet greater suffering. Some of its members were soon to die the death of martyrs. Jesus does not promise them a better day. He rather says "Fear none of these things that thou art about to suffer. The devil shall cast some of you into prison. Now prison is not a Roman mode of punishment. People were only put in prison to be held for trial or for execution. And what Jesus is saying here is-
"I know that the prison door is ahead of some of you, and beyond that prison door is the cross, or the arena or the stake. You are standing now face to face and eye to eye with certain death.

So you see this church had its liabilities. Slander, persecution, poverty, death - these are not assets in themselves. It is true that God can bless them to the spiritual enrichment of those who have to endure them. It is true that He can transform either of these forbidding calamities into spiritual capital. Yet in themselves they are not wealth. They are the opposite. In themselves they are not desirable. They are things from which every mortal man shrinks naturally and rightly. But in spite of all these tragic liabilities, Jesus calls this church rich.

II.

What are its resources and of what does its wealth consist?

1. This church is rich in the approval of her risen Lord. The people of Smyrna do not approve of this church. Their faces are against it. They do not smile upon it, they frown upon it. This was no doubt a grief to the church. But while its membership found it impossible to please the world, they found it altogether possible to please Christ. If the world refused its approval, they could endure it because they had the approval of Him who loved them and gave Himself for them.

Now the "well done" of Jesus ringing into your soul is true wealth however many voices may clamor against you. If He smiles upon you, your load is radiantly light. However dark may be all other faces in the world, however dark may be all other faces in the world after the sunlight breaks through the clouds overhead when the storm has passed and the winds are dead, so in the hours of darkness and fear and trial there is nothing so sweet as my Saviour's smile."

One of the sweetest sentences in all the Bible is that that tells of Enoch's fellowship with God. "And Enoch walked with God for three hundred years, and was not, for God took him." And when we ask for the secret of this long fellowship and this beautiful translation we find this to be the answer. Before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. And that is to be your aim and mine. To live in the light of His smile, to dwell within the circle of His will, that is to have wealth untold. That is to be free from a sense of guilt. That is to have peace. That is to be able to sing "There is now no condemnation, for the law of the spirit of life in Christ has made me free."

2. This church was rich in the possession of a Saviour that could enter fully into sympathy with them in all their sorrows. Were they being slandered? So had He been slandered. His steps had been dogged by the
most slanderous set of human hounds that ever besmirched a good man's name. Were they being persecuted? So had He been persecuted. Were they reduced to poverty? So had He known poverty. He had not where to lay His head. Were they going out to ghastly death? So had He died. He introduces Himself as the one who was dead and is alive again. All that they suffer, He knows. With every pang of their hearts, He is able to enter into full sympathy.

What a great privilege it is to have a friend, when sorry comes, who can enter into sympathy with us! Here is a mother who has lost her child. A kindly woman comes in from across the street and talks very beautifully to her. But somehow her consolation does not reach her heart. She has never passed through a like sorrow. A little later another comes who has little to say, but she puts her arms round her friend and simply says "Yes, yes, I understand." I have some toys at which nobody plays and somehow as she talks the fountains of the great deep are opened up and comfort comes through a bond of sympathy. (The story of Booth Tucker)

Thank God we have a Saviour that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmity. He was tempted in all points as we are. When nobody else can understand you, He can understand you. When nobody else can sympathize, He can sympathize. He knows your disappointment, your heart-hunger, your secret grief. He knew the grief that is hidden away in the heart. Happy is the church and happy is the individual who, when heartache comes, are in possession of a Saviour who is able to enter into full sympathy with all their losses and pains, their laughter and tears. Such a soul may sing in the face of all circumstances:

"Let the world despise and leave me
They have left my Saviour, too;
Human hearts and looks deceive me;
Thou art not, like man, untrue
And, while thou shalt smile upon me,
God of wisdom, love and might,
Foes may hate, and friends may shun me;
Show thy face, and all is bright."

3. They were rich in the possession of great faith. These people had such faith in Jesus that they had been glad to be slandered for Him, to be robbed for His sake, to be poor for love of Him. They were in possession of faith so rich and true that they were even willing to die for Him. "Be thou faithful" said Jesus. That is "Be thou convinced. Cling to your convictions of me and of my trustworthiness. You have had convictions that have made you glad to suffer. Continue to cling to those convictions.

Now is there any treasure greater than to have such a real sense of Christ that you are willing to suffer the loss of all things for His sake. Popularity is a desirable something. Money is also desirable. We do not naturally want to be poor. Life is extremely desirable. We naturally shrink from death. But what unspeakable treasure is this that makes these people glad to give up these things that the world holds dear rather than to give up Jesus.

And, last of all, these people were rich in their loyalty. They
had a faith in Jesus that made them faithful. They so trusted in Him that they were trustworthy. He could not count on their enemies to be just and fair, but He could count on them to be true to Himself regardless of the persecution that they received at the hands of the world. They were rich in the matchless grace of loyalty. Jesus had strengthened them and had so transformed them that they were not only able to die, but they were willing and glad to die out of loyalty to the Christ who had won their heart's love. (The dog and the gold.)

III

Now I wonder how fares it with ourselves this morning. Suppose Christ were to speak out about our church as He did about this church in the long ago. I wonder what He would say. Suppose he were to speak out about you as an individual. What are you worth? I am not asking how much real estate you own, but how much have you got laid up where moth or rust does not corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal? What have you this morning that death cannot take away from you?

"Thou art rich." Can Christ say that about you and about me? As He looks upon us this morning, does He call us rich in the wealth that satisfies and in the wealth that abides? Are you rich in His approval? Are you rich in the possession of a Saviour that can sympathize? Are you rich in faith? Are you rich in deathless hopes that outlasts the world?

There are some who cannot answer this question as you would like to answer it. You are here this morning with the realization of your deep poverty. If that is true, thank God for that, because that is the first step toward becoming a multimillionaire. It would be needless for me to say that all of you might one day be rich in the coin of this world. You will live poor and die poor. But in the wealth that abides, every one of you may be unspeakably rich for time and for eternity. Christ is here offering that privilege even now. "The he were rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might become rich." You may go home today a prince or a pauper, a plutocrat or a beggar. The choice is up to you.

(The richest man in Bartow County)
THE CHURCH AT THE DEVIL'S CAPITOL

Revelation 2:13

"I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is."

I.

This church has a peculiar location. This peculiarity does not grow out of the fact that it is located in the city of Pergamos, though Pergamos was one of the conspicuous cities of Asia Minor.

1. It was distinguished for its culture. Of all the cities of which Christ wrote, this city was perhaps the leader intellectually. It had the largest library in the world with the exception of the one at Alexandria, Egypt. This library boasted of more than two hundred thousand volumes. This city was a maker of books. The word "parchment" derives its name from the name of this distinguished city.

2. Pergamos was a great religious center. It was a city of temples. It boasted of a temple to Apollo, and another to Athena and another to Asclepius. Its patron saint was Asclepius, the god of medicine. He was worshipped in the guise of a serpent. This cultured city gave hospitality to all these gods, and was at once very religious and very rotten.

2. But the real distinguishing mark of the city was that it was the seat of the Devil's capitol. This information we do not obtain from the citizens of the city, but from the lips of Jesus Himself. Jesus had much to say of this personal agency of evil called Satan. He did not mention him once, but over and over again. He never shut His eyes to the fact of his existence. He claimed to have waged battle with him. He warns His followers against him over and over again. But, sad to say, many of his followers have today forgotten these warnings altogether.

Now the fact that the Devil had his capitol here indicates certain truths about this evil personality. First, he is not God-like in his attributes. He does not know all things, as God does. He does not possess all power, as God does. He is not able to be everywhere at the same time, as God is. He has to have a basis of operation from which he works through lesser agencies of evil.

For some reason known to himself and to God, he had chosen to set his capitol in the city of Pergamos. It may be that this was his capitol before any Christian church was ever established here. But I am inclined to believe that such was not the case. I have a fancy, and like to cling to it, that it was the aggressive work of this live and spiritual church that threw such a fright into the Devil that he felt it necessary to move his basis of operation here and give this church his special and personal attention. So many lives were being enriched, so many homes were being transformed, so much was the world and unclean atmosphere being purified that Satan became afraid that he would lose the whole city unless he put forth his utmost effort to prevent it.
I do not suppose this church ever realized it, but it was greatly honored by being thus opposed. It was greatly honored by being stationed at this position of hardship and responsibility. There are some churches and many individuals in the church that do not arouse any opposition on the part of the enemy at all. The Devil never wastes any ammunition on those who are already dead. He is alert and alive against those who are out to conquer.

It is said one day a man was passing by a magnificent city church during the 11 o'clock service. He looked up and seated upon one of its lovely marble steps was a very diminutive demon who was nodding and gave every indication of being greatly bored. "What is going on inside?" asked the man. "Nothing much," said the demon. "The preacher is preaching to some shambled pews and a few listless people." The stranger did not go in. Neither he nor the demon thought it worth while.

He passed on into the open country, and toward night fall he came to a farm house. To his surprise he saw demons running toward that house from every direction. Every road was blocked with them, and they were making their way across the field. The roof of the house was already covered, and every door and window was full, and there was the utmost excitement, not to say consternation. "What in the world is the matter?" asked the stranger, as one of the demons hurried by him. "This old farmer is about to engage in family prayer, and it looks like he is going to escape us and carry every child with him."

But it may be that Pergamos had been the capitol of Satan for many years. It is possible that Jesus established a church there and sent a pastor there of Undoubted spiritual worth and fervor just for that reason. If so, that preacher and congregation were to be greatly congratulated. They were in a position of high honor. They were chosen for a most difficult and trying task. Any sort of soldier is good enough to drill, but it takes one of real worth to hold the station where he must constantly meet death eye to eye.

I had a rebuke one day from a fine old presiding elder. There was a certain appointment in the Conference that everybody dreaded. During the whole conference session one preacher would say to another, "I pity the man that goes there." When the appointments were read, it fell to my lot. The cup was found in Benjamin's sack. I spoke to this old presiding elder friend about it, and I could see he was disappointed. And, calling me by my first name, he said: "I want you to know that it is a great compliment to be sent to a place like that. The bishop and the cabinet knew it was a hard place, that is why we sent you." Now, frankly, I was not fishing for that sort of compliment. But I went to it and found a great blessing in doing the work.

Possibly you find yourself today in a very difficult situation. Maybe your home life is not what it ought to be. It may be you are married to a growling and grouchy heathen. It may be that your work carries you constantly into a companionship that is not only unchristian, but is anti-Christian. Instead of whining about it, instead of constantly complaining of the difficulties, try congratulating yourself that God trusts you enough to honor you with the place that is hard to hold. If your Sunday School class gives you trouble, that is the reason that you are needed.
there. If folks were just what they ought to be, then there would be no place for us. But because things are wrong and hard, that is our chance. "I will tarry here," said a great hero of the faith, "because a great door and effectual is open unto me, and there are many adversaries."

II.

How did the Devil indicate his presence?

1. Let us face the fact that he began operations at once. The Church may go on a strike now and then, its membership may take a vacation, but you may count on it, the Devil is always on the job. He does not succeed at his undertakings always, but he is always active, he is always working. If we had the enthusiasm and the earnestness for doing good that he does for doing evil, we would take the city of Memphis. When you get lazy this summer, and decide to quit, just remember this: that there is no day too hot for the Devil to be earnestly and aggressively at work at his task of opposing all that is good and promoting all that is evil.

2. He made a frontal attack. He set at once to arouse opposition against this church. He began to persecute it. His persecution went so far as to actually result in the death of one man. One Christian, who is named in the text, Antipas, died a martyr. It is probable that Antipas was not this man's name. "Anti" means against, and "pas" means everything. This man was one who stood in stubborn opposition to everything for which the Devil stood, and he died a martyr.

But the Devil soon learned the futility of this open attack. He soon saw that he was not getting anywhere. The Church was not made weaker but stronger. It was not filled with fear, it was made more bold. It did not become more worldly, but less so. Jesus can write of the membership of this church proudly: "Thou holdest fast my name and hast not denied my faith." In the midst of this opposition the members of this church stood true and had grown only the stronger.

This is almost always the case. Days of persecution are as a rule days of purity. I am firmly convinced that it would be a blessing to the Church rather than a curse if today she had more open opposition. If more had to face shame and possible dishonor and persecution in order to come into the Church, it would have a great sifting power. Then it would have a great enriching power because God's grace is always sufficient. And when He puts us in a trying situation, it means that He greatly manifests His power to save and keep us in that situation.

3. Having failed in an open attack, the Devil changes His tactics. His next method was far more dangerous. It met with some degree of success then. It is meeting with great success today. He tried a flank move. He effected a compromise.

His success in this is seen from the words of Jesus. "I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling block before the
children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication." That is, while the church membership in large measure were sound and clean and pure, they were having fellowship with some who held the doctrine of Balaam, and because of that doctrine, were so compromising with the world as to eat meat offered to idols and to commit fornication.

Now, what is this doctrine of Balaam? Some of you will possibly remember Balaam's story. He was a man of great power and influence. It was thought that whoever he cursed was cursed, and whoever he blessed was blessed. When the Israelites, therefore, were camping on the borders of Balaam's kingdom, he sent a committee to Balaam to hire him to curse them for him. Balaam prayed over the matter, and then refused to go.

Later there came a large committee to see him, with the offer of a larger reward. Again Balaam took the matter before God in prayer. This time he was not seeking to know the will of God, but seeking to do as he pleased without displeaseing God. God, therefore, committed him to go. Not that Balaam had obtained an answer to his prayer, he had only succeeded in blinding himself. As he went, he went with the angel of the Lord standing as an adversary against him.

Arrived at his destination, he blessed Israel instead of cursing them. And Balaam sent him away in anger. But these two met again. And Balaam told Balac that he could not curse Israel, but he could make them curse themselves. How did he do it? I told them that they were blessed. That regardless of what they did, they were God's chosen people. Therefore, they could eat meat offered to idols, and could commit adultery if they so desired. Since they belonged to God, God would keep them in spite of their wickedness and under all circumstances. That was the doctrine of Balaam, and it was belief in that doctrine that was threatening to utterly destroy this pure and faithful church.

Now this method of attack is still in vogue. Jesus met it when he was here. "If thou be the son of God", said Satan upon the pinnacle of the temple, "cast thyself down: for it is written, he shall give his angels charge concerning thee; and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." This was a temptation to presume on God.

Now God is able to keep us under all circumstances and conditions so long as we are willing to be kept. He is able to keep us so long as we are willing to walk within the circle of His will. But He gives us no promise of help when we deliberately take ourselves out of His hands. When we put our heads into the lion's mouth, He does not promise that He will not let the lion bite down upon it. When we violate His laws, He does not promise that He will keep those laws from operating.

One of the most ruinous and weakening forms of sin today is just this: There are those who believe having united with the Church they can do anything they please to do and still be Christians. Or there are those
who feel that having once become Christians they can leave off their Bible reading and leave off their prayer life and leave off their church attendance and leave off their Christian work, and still remain Christians. Such a course is rank presumption. Such a course most end in inevitable defeat and failure.

III.

Now what does Christ have to say to this church who through its presumption is daring to compromise with the world?

1. He calls on them to repent. That is reasonable. That is simple. That is something anybody can understand. That is something anybody can do. If you are here this morning, conscious of wrong, conscious of sin committed or good undone, all God asks at your hands is that you repent of it. That is, if your sin is some form of wrong doing, quit it. If your sin is the habit of neglecting duty, take up that duty and do it at once. Repent. Then to those who repent He makes these rich and definite promises: "To him that overcometh, will I give you to eat of the manna. And I will give him a white stone with a new name written thereon that no man knoweth save he that receiveth."

(1) He promises them hidden manna. Mamma was the bread that came down from heaven that the Israelites ate in the wilderness. But Christ tells us in John's Gospel that that was not the true bread from heaven; that He Himself was the true bread. That is, whoever repents, whoever ceases to presume on God, will find themselves daily strengthened and sustained and empowered by Jesus Christ Himself, who is the bread of life.

(2) Those so repenting are to receive a white stone with a new name written thereon. Now commentaters are not at all agreed as to just what this white stone means. In fact it has a variety of meanings, all of which I think tend to reveal to us something of the richness of this promise.

(a) It is a token of pardon. In the olden days when a man was being tried those who voted for execution used black and those who voted for pardon used white. It is a practice that has come down in some form even to the present time. This white stone, then, stands for pardon. Whoever repents will receive the white stone of the consciousness of sins forgiven. They will feel their burden rolled away. They will be able to sing "There is therefore now no condemnation."

(b) Then a white stone was sometimes given in token of citizenship in the city. So it might mean here after we repent we cease to be aliens and foreigners and become fellow citizens with the saints in the household of the Father. We can say with Paul "Our citizenship is in heaven." We become kinfolks with every child of God. Our kinship ceases to be one of the flesh and becomes one of the spirit. (But was ashamed of his king)
This stone was a symbol of friendship. Two friends separated
would break a stone and write their names upon the broken pieces and
give a half to each one. This piece of stone was treasured. It was
handed down from father to son, and if in after generations one met the
other and the two fragments of the stone fit into each other, they were
then bound together by the strongest ties of hospitality and
friendship. And this white stone signifies the abiding friendship between
the repentant soul and Jesus Christ. "Henceforth I call you no more ser-
vants, for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth, but I have called
you friends."

Finally, this white stone shows the symbol of victory. It
was given to the conquering soldier after the battle. And to the man that
repents and refuses to make any compromise with evil, God promises to give
victory. He promises to save such unto the uttermost. He declares that
He is able to make them conquerers and more than conquerers through Him that
loved them.

There is no place where the Christian life is altogether easy.
Wherever it is lived it means the denial of self and the bearing of the
cross. And there is never the easiest way. But if there is no place that
is altogether easy, it is equally true there is no place where the Christ-
ian life is impossible. To deny this is to give the lie to the whole
 teachings of the word of God.

Now and then a man tells me that he cannot be a Christian while
he is in his present business. He is a traveling man or he is a railroad
man, or he is in the real estate business. Therefore, the circumstances
are such that a vital Christian life is impossible. I do not hesitate to
say that this is absolutely untrue. There is no legitimate work in the
world where God cannot keep you, and the very difficulty of your situation
constitutes the greatest opportunity. Remember this, Jesus Christ is not
simply sufficient when you are at prayer meeting. He is not simply suffi-
cient when the sea of life is smooth and every road is jewelled with joy.
He is sufficient when the whole crowd is against you. He is sufficient
when the atmosphere is poisoned with worldliness. He is sufficient when
the sea is no longer smooth and when it is whipped with the storm and
when death seems to be laughing amidst the torn shreds of the rigging of
your ship. If you will repent, if you will give yourself wholly to Him,
He will give you here and now the white stone of victory and your conquest
shall last throughout eternity.

— James—

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Pergamos was another one of the cities of Asia Minor. It was an exceedingly important city. It did not, however, owe its importance to its commerce as did Ephesus and Smyrna. It was rather a center of culture and of religion. Here was the largest library in the world, except the one in Alexandria in Egypt. There were two hundred thousand volumes on the shelves of this library. These books were mainly made in Pergamos. We get the word parchment from the name of this city.

But if Pergamos was noted for its culture, it was even more noted as a center of religion. It was a city of temples. Here was a temple to Athena, Cynthia, Zeus, Apollo and Aesculapius. Of all these the last named was probably the most popular. His emblem was a serpent. These people then were very religious. But their religion was of such a nature as to make them only the more sensual and lustful.

No doubt the people of Pergamos took great pride in their city. But our Lord did not look upon it with approval. He regarded it as the most dangerously wicked and corrupt city in Asia. It had this unique and inevitable distinction. It was the seat of the throne of Satan. In other cities he had his representatives, but in this city he had his capital.

For this reason Pergamos was a situation of peculiar peril and difficulty. The Churchsituated in the devil's own capital is not likely to have an easy time. This Church was doing business where life was hard. There are some places, you know, where it is harder to live right than in others. There is no place where genuine Christian life is altogether easy. To be a Christian is to say no to self, and to take up the Cross daily and follow Jesus. This is never without difficulty. We never deny these selfish and wicked selves of ours without a battle. If you are hunting a bargain counter religion you need never come to Jesus.

But while there is no place where the religious life is altogether easy, there are some places where it is exceedingly difficult. Pergamos was such a place. The difficulties of these saints in Pergamos were greatly increased because they were in the midst of most deadly opposition. Not only was this opposition bitter, but it was powerful. The people opposing the Church here were people of culture and of wealth and of high social standing. They were a vast majority pitted against a small and insignificant minority.

There are those today who find the task of being a Christian is set with peculiar difficulties. Maybe you are a young man away from home. Being a Christian in a boarding house where you have to stand almost alone is not easy. Maybe you are a young girl of high ideals. Yet your life has thrown you amidst a circle that is indifferent and worldly and sometimes positively wicked. It is far harder for you to be a Christian now than it was when you were back in your quiet country home.

When Daniel came to his test in Babylon he met it. He played the man in a trying situation. I am perfectly confident that Daniel had been a pious and conscientious lad before he ever came to Babylon. But it was far more difficult for him to stand alone in Babylon amidst the gilded sin of that mighty city than it was for him to be loyal to his conscience in the pious city of Jerusalem.
Then there are hindrances to religious life that, while not so aggressive as open opposition, are no less deadly. You remember how Bunyan's Pilgrim met Apollyon in the Valley of Humiliation. It was a trying and dangerous conflict that he had with this terrible enemy. But I doubt if the good Pilgrim was in as great peril in the midst of this battle as he was when he reached the Enchanted Ground. In the Enchanted Ground the atmosphere was heavy. It made one drowsy. He desired above all else to sleep. He was sorely tempted to give up his high quest and take his ease.

And there are many today whose circumstances make a religious life difficult because those circumstances are seemingly so favorable. Some months ago I was holding a meeting in a lovely Southern city. I was driven out through one of the most beautiful suburbs that is to be found anywhere. I knew many of the people who lived there. Most of them belonged to some church. And yet I found it in my heart to be a bit sorry for them. They would like to be religious, many of them, but they were wealthy and they were mired up in a thousand social engagements, overwhelmed by those numberless, nameless duties that wealth and social position seem to make necessary. For this reason a life of vital godliness was next to impossible.

When I was a boy my father used to keep a good many hives of bees. I used to help rob these bees in the spring. I stood one day and watched a bee get drowned in his own honey. I doubt not that there were hungry bees standing about who envied him, thinking that such a death might be sweet, but that bee was just as dead strangled by honey as if he had been overwhelmed by a whole sea of gall. And it is terribly hard for some folks to be Christians because they are so well circumstanced.

So this Church at Pergamos had a place of great difficulty. For that very reason it had a place of great honor. These Christians who made up that Church must have been a chosen body. What an honor it was to be selected of the risen Christ to storm this strong citadel of sin. Our Lord wants these persecuted Christians to realize that. He seems to be saying to them: "When I wanted good soldiers of the cross who should bear the dangers of the devil's own capital, I selected you."

Am I talking to one of God's saints this morning who is having a hard time? Are you tempted to say at times, "Nobody knows just what I have to contend with?" Yes, God knows all about it. He said to this Church, "I know where thou dwellest." Christ has not forgotten you. You may think the world has. You may feel lost in this big Church, but our risen Lord knows your street, He knows your number, He knows where you live. He knows all your conflicts, your difficulties, your struggles. In fact, He has put you in this present difficulty. He needs somebody in just your place who will show forth the riches of His grace by being true to Him.

More than once since I have been a Methodist preacher I have had appointments that I never would have chosen for myself. But there was one that was unwelcome above all others. I felt when I was sent there that certainly the worst possible had happened. After the appointments were read I talked to a good old presiding elder about it who was my friend. And I told him the terrible situation to which I had been sent, how that the Church was torn to shreds and that there seemed no prospect of doing anything at all.

He listened to me patiently and he did not deny a single thing that I had said. In fact he agreed with me. He said, "Yes, the Church there is
torn into shreds." And then calling me by my first name, he said, "It is a great compliment to be sent to a place like that." I suppose he was right, but just between ourselves, I wasn't fishing for a compliment just at that time and of that nature.

But if you find yourself this morning in a place where the currents are strong against you, if you find yourself making a very small minority, suppose you refuse to pity yourself. Suppose you bite your tongue when you feel disposed to whine. Suppose you stifle your own groans and then in the silence you might hear the voice of the Lord speaking to you, saying, "I know where thou dwellest. I know it is a hard and trying place. That is the reason I put you there." Should that happen I am sure your sorrow would be changed into joy.

Because this Church was in a place of great difficulty it was also in a place of great opportunity. There was opportunity there to render great service. There was, above all else, the opportunity there of being greatly blessed. God's grace is always sufficient for us. There is absolutely no place that God puts us that He can not keep us. I know we put ourselves into places at times where He does not promise to keep us. But there is no place in the path of duty where He is not sufficient to keep.

I was reading a very beautiful letter the other day. It was written by an old preacher who spent a great deal of his time in jail. At the time of the writing of this letter he was in jail in the most corrupt city on the earth. But when he closed the letter various saints of the city sent greetings to those to whom the preacher was writing. Among those who sent greetings was a little group known as the "saints of Caesar's household."

Now think of these ancient saints for a moment. In the first place they were slaves. In the second place they were slaves in Rome. In the third place they were slaves in the palace of Caesar. The most unlikely situation in the wide world. But here they were like a spring bubbling up in the desert, like flowers springing out of the snow. "The saints of Caesar's household." God was keeping them alive amidst the fiend of death. If your father sends you away to a certain very select finishing school he will not expect to keep you there on a mere pittance. He will say, "Everything is costly there." He will expect therefore to send you a small fortune in order to keep you there at all. And when your heavenly Father puts you in a hard situation He will expect to send you abundant supplies of grace. He knows that otherwise you will fail. Therefore, to be in great difficulties is to be greatly helped and greatly enriched.

These people had found it so. Jesus said, "Thou hast kept my name and my faith." They had kept faith because they themselves had been mightily kept. He appeals to their past as proof of the sufficiency of His grace. Some of you who are listening to me at this moment could take this sermon out of my mouth and preach it better than I. You realize that you are here this morning as a monument of the divine grace. You know how this grace has been proportion to your difficulties all the way through. I heard a saintly woman praise the Lord aloud some years ago in the darkest trial of her life. She was able to praise because the darker grew her night, the more conscious did she become of the Master's presence.

Then the letter closes with this promise, "To him that overcometh I will give to eat of the hidden manna and I will give him a white stone with
The church at the devil's capital

a new name, etc. " This is to be the reward of overcoming. It looks for its perfect fulfillment to the future. But it is also a means of overcoming. The blessings here mentioned are blessings that must begin in the here and now, or we can never stand true in any place of difficulty.

First, if we are to overcome we must have a new name now. Here and now we must become partakers of the divine nature. For this new name means nothing more nor less than a new character. When Jacob came from his night of wrestling with the sunrise in his face and the sunrise in his heart he had a new name. Jacob the supplanter had been crucified. Israel the prince had come to live in the place.

Then if we are to win over our difficulties we must have the right kind of food. Here it is. "Hidden manna." That is the bread from heaven, the very bread of life. "My body," said Jesus, "is bread indeed and my blood is drink indeed," and as we gather round this table this morning we are to look beyond these symbols and feed our souls on Christ Himself.

There is absolutely no situation too hard if we draw our sustenance from this unfailing supply. I was reading recently of a prospector who lost his way and was more than forty-eight hours without water. "Toward nightfall," he said, "my faithful dog walked at my heels; tongue hanging from his mouth, eyes bloodshot. He was panting for breath. I sat down to rest myself for a while to make one more effort before giving up the search. While resting I dropped asleep. When I awoke a little later my dog was standing before me. He was no longer panting, but was resting in perfect peace and contentment. And I knew that that dog had discovered a spring, that I did not know. I watched him. A little later he took out through the woods, and I followed. And a few rods away I came upon a gurgling, singing spring."

And our witness seems very much like this of the old prospector. I have seen folk famished and thirst-parched and panic-stricken. But here and there was one among them full of strength and peace and power. Why the difference? He had discovered the hidden spring that flows out from the Throne. He had learned to feed on the heavenly manna. May the Lord teach us that gracious lesson and no place will be too hard and no burden will be too heavy to bear.

It may be that Satan moved his headquarters to Pergamos on account of the presence of this Church. I like to think so.

I take the divide also marked by a big city church where an army was housing a house where they were at praying.
"I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is."
---Revelation 2:13

This is a part of the letter to Pergamum. This city, unlike most of the other seven cities to which John wrote, was not famous for its commerce. It was rather a religious center. It had altars and temples to many gods. There was an altar to Jupiter, Apollo, Asculapius. The latter, the god of medicine, was the patron of the city. Had Paul visited Pergamum as he did Athens, he might have among its many altars and temples what he said on Mars Hill: “I perceive that you are very religious.”

Not only was Pergamum like Athens in that it was a religious center, but it was also akin to this famous city in point of culture. Pergamum was a center of learning. It had one of the greatest libraries of antiquity. Upon the shelves of this library were more than two hundred thousand books or rolls. The word "parchment" itself is thought to have been derived from the name of this city.

This church, then, was established in a city that was very religious and very cultured. But as famous as was this city for its culture, it seemed to have been equally famous for its wickedness and for its moral rottenness. Education is a great blessing, provided it goes hand in hand with ennobling religion. But unless education is kept Christian, it becomes oftener more of a menace than a minister. Here is a fact that makes the Christian college so vastly important. Education itself is not enough. History has demonstrated over and over again that a community may be well-educated, well-housed, and well-fed, and well-rotted all at the same time. This was true of much of Pergamum.
In his letter to the church of Pergamom, our Lord through his apostle begins with a commendation. That was uniformly his custom whenever possible. There were two of these churches with which he had no fault to find. There were also two about which he said nothing good. The letters to the other three are a mingling of commendation and condemnation, of praise and rebuke, and of exhortation. With sound psychology he begins whenever possible with a word of praise. His commendation here is three-fold.

1. "Thou hast not denied my faith." This might mean, "You have been loyal to your faith in me." But I think it means rather, "You have been loyal to the faith that I possessed." "My faith" is used as "my yoke" is in that passage where Jesus says, "Take my yoke." He means, "Take the yoke that I bear." So he is commending these saints that have been loyal to the faith that had braced him as he walked his difficult road. What was that faith? It was faith in a fatherly God who intended that all men should be brothers. It was a faith that the people of this world were made for God's Kingdom, and that they could really live on no other basis. It was in that faith and for that faith that he died.

2. "Thou holdest fast my name." That means, "In the midst of difficulty you have been loyal to me personally. You have shared my faith. You have walked my way until you have come in some measure to share my nature. During these tempestuous days and in the face of an unfriendly environment, you have held fast my name."

"This you have done, not because your situation was easy, but in spite of the fact that it was very hard. I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is. You live where the devil has his throne. You live in the capital city of the infernal empire." In other cities Satan had his emissaries, but this city is his capital. Here he reigned in person. Of all the cities to which he wrote, this was evidently the most dangerously difficult.

When, I wonder, did Satan move his capital to this city? Perhaps it had been one of his great centers for many years. If such is the case, then those heroic saints
that came to establish the church here did so not because the situation was easy, but because it bristled with difficulties. Our Lord often seemed to meet the challenge of the enemy in places where there seemed no hope of victory. When he went down to the pool at Bethesda, he picked out the most hopeless case among those desperate people and tested his power to heal upon him.

Years ago a young minister named Titus found himself in a most unpromising situation. He was undertaking to do missionary work on the island of Crete. He was faced to face with what seemed like stark impossibilities. Therefore, he made up his mind to quit the place as soon as possible. He was only waiting to hear from his old friend and teacher Paul, to whom he had sent a letter. In this letter he had informed Paul what g\textit{\textbullet}mess he was in and told him of his purpose to leave just as soon as he heard from him.

How did Paul answer? He did not deny that the young minister was in a difficult place. In fact, he agreed with all he said about his difficulties. He seems to indicate that they were even greater than Titus knew. He said, "A Cretian poet has declared that his fellow citizens were all liars and lazy gluttons." "That, he said, "is the reason that you are there. You are to carry on in Crete, not because your work is easy, but because the need is so great."

When I was quite a young minister, I was transferred into the Central Texas Conference with the promise of a lovely city church. When it came time for the Bishop to read the appointments, I went in with the other ministers to see where they were going. I already had my appointment—as I thought! But I was read out, not to my lovely city church, but to a place that was almost a complete wreck. The former pastor had fallen on evil days and had had to quit the ministry and the church. For a little while I was broken-hearted. In fact, I felt that I was utterly ruined. A minister, old enough for my father, seeing how desperate I was, took me aside and spoke this word of encouragement: "It is a great honor to be sent to a place like that. It seems so utterly impossible." I was not thrilled
by what my friend said at the time, but I learned the truth of his utterance by going and by having one of the richest years of my ministry.

These are difficult days for the forces of righteousness. The youth of our day might find much to bewail if they were given to cowardice. How easy it would be for them to cry with Hamlet, "The world is out of joint. O cursed spite! that I was ever born to set it right!" But Hamlet, weakened by that kind of faith, had nothing better to offer than a suicide's exit. How much braver and truer to say, "God has matched me against this difficult hour. I have come to the Kingdom for such a time as this. I am here because God needs my kind of man or my kind of woman in this place of difficulty." Yes, Pergamom might have been the devil's capital for a long time, and the saints were carrying on here because the need was so great.

There is however another possibility. I rather like to think that this was the case. This church at Pergamom had been pressing the battle so bravely that the powers of evil have become afraid. Seeing that these courageous saints were about to turn their part of the world upside down, Satan had to bestir himself. He had hurried to this city to take personal charge because these heroic saints were carrying on in such a victorious fashion. It is always a good day when the church meets opposition. Throughout the centuries her days of greatest victory have always been the days of greatest conflict.

This, I think, is what our Lord had in mind when he said that rather strange word, "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you." Jesus is not urging upon us to care nothing for the good opinion of our fellows. We all like the approval of our friends. If we do not, there is something wrong with us. Everybody would like to be popular. Other things being equal, the power I have to help you is measured by your friendship for me. Yet popularity must not come first. Loyalty to Christ is first. Such loyalty means that the possessor of it will meet opposition. If bootleggers and prohibitionists, if honest and dishonest, if selfish and unselfish, if brotherly and unbrotherly all speak well of you, the chances
are that you are too faultily faultless to be of any real value.

The membership of this church was made up of more rugged people. So staunchly had they stood that they were being persecuted. One of their number had already paid for his devotion with his life. The name given him is interesting. The author calls him, "My faithful witness, Antipas." This in all probability was not his real name. It was doubtless a nickname given him by his enemies. It is, as you see, composed of two Greek words, "anti and "pas"—anti, against, and pas, everybody. This rugged man could not be bent. He would not compromise. His enemies said that he was against everything and everybody. Thus they described this rugged son of battle.

II

Having thus commended the church as having kept his faith and having been loyal to his name even in a city that was so wicked as to be designated as Satan's capital, he passes on to offer his criticism.

What is that criticism? He accuses this church of a certain heresy. They hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. What this doctrine is we do not know. It is mentioned along with the doctrine of Balaam, so that it is thought that they mean practically the same thing. Therefore, we do not know what the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes is, but we do know Balaam's doctrine. Suppose we glance at it afresh. His story is found in the book of Numbers. Here are the outstanding facts about it:

Balaam was a religious man whose vast ability had made him famous in that ancient world. He was thought to possess magic powers. Those who knew him believed that he was able to pronounce a curse or a blessing on an individual or a nation. How he acquired such a reputation we do not know. In all probability he had done so by being keen enough to know that one on a wrong road would reach a wrong goal while one on a right road would reach a right goal. When he saw one headed in such a way as to bring a curse on himself, he foretold that curse and it came to pass.
Now it was to this man who was thought to possess such magic powers that King Balac sent for help. The Israelites had come up and encamped upon the borders. They were so many that he felt unable to encounter them in battle. Therefore, he sent a delegation to this great prophet and asked him to put a curse upon them. But Balaam, being a religious man, decided to inquire the will of God before going. He went alone to pray and God forbade him to go. Thus the delegation returned to the king without the prophet.

After this delegation had gone, I have an idea that Balaam thought rather wistfully of how much he had missed by not being allowed to go. Maybe he had made a mistake. The King could have done a lot for him. When, therefore, a larger delegation made up of more prominent men came from Balac, a few days later, Balaam was not sorry to see him. "Let nothing hinder you from coming," said the spokesman, "for the king will promote you to very great honor."

Now what did the prophet do? Instead of saying, "I told you that I cannot come. It is contrary to the will of God"—he went to pray over the matter again. The first time he was praying to know the will of God. He got a clear answer. This time he was seeking to please himself without displeasing God. He prayed until he became morally confused. As a result of his wishful thinking, he persuaded himself that God had told him to go. Then follows the story of the journey. It is a very human story. The prophet went into a rage over the mulish conduct of his donkey. The donkey is represented as speaking to him. There is nothing hard to believe about this. I have had messages from mules many times myself. But all this rage of the prophet and the whacking of the helpless donkey over the head with his staff is but an expression of the inner rage of a man who is at odds with his own conscience. The Angel of the Lord stood as an adversary against him. But while opposing him, he tells him to go on. It is a strange story, but it is just another way of saying, "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light; but if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness."
Arrived at the headquarters of Balac, he tells the king frankly that he is going to speak what God tells him to speak at all costs. To that one conviction he remained true. In the worst of men there is, generally speaking, one little citadel that he refuses to surrender to the powers of evil. But while Balaam pledged himself to speak the truth as God gave him to see the truth, he did his best to keep from seeing it. He kept the rule and smashed a principle. Thus, he went home without his reward.

But this is not the end of the story. Balaam's disappointment was too hard for him to bear. Therefore, he came to Balac again and said, "While I can't curse Israel, I can tell you how to make them curse themselves. Just remind them that they are the chosen people. Remind them that I tried to curse them again and again but God said he would bless them. Impress upon them that He will continue to bless them whether they obey or disobey Him. Tell them that God's promises are unconditional." This doctrine was preached and thousands were destroyed. What then was the doctrine of Balaam? It is a doctrine that leads us to presume on God. It assumes that, having found His favor, we can continue in it regardless of our conduct. This, of course, is not true. If the best man in the world undertakes to live without eating, He will die. He must obey the laws of Nature. If the greatest saint living undertakes to raise a crop of corn without planting the seed, he will fail however tirelessly he cultivates the soil. Even so, to live in the Kingdom of God we must obey the laws of the Kingdom. That is just plain common sense. To claim to be a Christian and to refuse the Bread of Life and the Water of Life, to claim to be a Christian and to go our own way is not to trust God—it is to presume on Him.

III

What is the call of God to these?

1. He calls them to repent. They are to repent by putting away this false doctrine. They are to realize that just as we can only use electricity as we obey the laws of electricity, so we can only be kept by the power of God so long as we
in obedience put ourselves into God's hands.

2. To those thus repenting, He said, "I will give a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." As to just what this white stone is, no man can say with accuracy. Possibly it refers to a custom that has lived in some organizations to this day of a vote of approval. If one asking to be received into an organization is rejected, he is blackballed. The man who repents is accepted into the Living Church, and a new name, which means a new nature, is imparted.

3. To those repenting is promised the hidden manna. This hidden manna is none other than Christ himself. It is that Bread of Life by which the soul lives. The manna is hidden in that it is unseen. We are to maintain this new name and new nature by being constantly related to our Lord as the branch is related to the vine.

"I know where thou dwellest," Jesus said to this church. He is saying that to you and me. If the situation is hard, it only means that His grace will be the greater. This is the case because always He said, "My grace is sufficient for thee." No wonder one of the greatest saints that I have ever known was accustomed to thank God for every hard place! It was in such difficult situations, when his own strength failed, that he found in a peculiar way the undergirding of the Everlasting Arms.
"I know thy works: that thou hast a name that thou livest, and thy art dead." —Revelations 3:1.

At the time of the writing of this letter, Sardis was an old and well-known city. It had long been famous for its commerce and wealth. Here Croesus had reigned, Croesus with whom the plutocrats of twenty-five centuries have been compared. Sardis was also famed for its strategic position. It was built upon an elevation that was defended on three sides by sheer cliffs. On the fourth, it was approached by an isthmus so narrow that a handful of men might have defended it against many thousands. It was, therefore, considered impregnable. In spite of its impregnable, however, it had been captured more than once. But always it had fallen through sheer carelessness, through over-confidence, through allowing its very strength to become its weakness.

This letter to the pastor of the church at Sardis and through him to his congregation is very different from any we have yet studied. Here Jesus speaks with a new note of sternness. When he wrote to the church at Smyrna, he had no word of criticism to utter. There was no word of condemnation. He could look upon that rich poor church with genuine approval. When he wrote to the churches at Ephesus, Pergamum and Thyatira, he began each letter with words of warmest praise. There was much in all these churches that he could commend. Having pointed out the good, he then proceeded to indicate the things to which he objected. There was, therefore, a mingling of praise and of blame. But to the church at Sardis he has no good word to say. There is nothing but condemnation. It is true that there were a few in the church who had remained loyal. But in the church as
a whole, even His eyes of infinite love could find nothing to commend.

I.

But in spite of this fact, this church enjoyed a most excellent reputation. It was exceedingly well-known and well regarded, and that was good as far as it went. "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches." Of course that is true only on the supposition that this good name stands for a good character. Had you inquired for this church of one of the citizens of Sardis, you would not have inquired in vain. Anyone could have directed you. Everybody knew it, and everybody thought well of it. And this was the case, not only in the city in which it was located, but also in the neighboring cities as well. There was perhaps no other church in all Asia Minor that had so good a reputation.

Now the fact that this church was so well and so favorably known indicates that it was honored and appreciated and respected by its own membership. The folks who belonged to this church thought well of it. That is good. Very few churches suffer from being held in too high esteem by those who belong to them. One of the most common tragedies of our day is the low estimate in which the average church-member holds his church. And of course, whenever a church is held in contempt by its own members, it is held in contempt by the community in which it is located. Whenever it is despised by those who belong to it, it will certainly be despised by those who do not.

Why was this church so honored? It was credited with possessing the finest of all possible commodities—life. It was known throughout the city and far and wide, as the live church. What an enviable reputation! Had I been spending a Sunday in Sardis, I should certainly have gone there. Life is fas-
There is no doubt that throngs of eager folks came to this church. Though, sad to say, many of them came only once. This was the case because the conviction was forced on them that this church did not live up to its reputation. There was a growing number, no doubt, who suspected what Jesus knew for a certainty, that instead of being a church to be envied, it was a church to be pitied because of the pathetic plight into which it had fallen.

II.

Why was the plight of this church so tragic? It was not because it was ringed about by enemies. That was true of the church at Smyrna. All about it there were hostile forces that were inflicting bitter persecution. Yet Jesus congratulates that congregation upon its wealth. But the church at Sardis had no enemies! There was not a man in the city that would throw a stone at this church. Nor was it tormented by internal heresies. There were churches that had heresies that were gnawing at their vitals like some deadly disease. Ephesus and Pergamum and Thyatira all had their heretics. But no such evil vexed the church at Sardis. It was utterly free from foes both within and without.

What then was the matter? Just this, the very worst that could possibly be the matter — the church was dead. "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead." "Thou art dead." Surely that is the supreme calamity. That is the very climax of tragedy. As long as there is life, there is hope. As long as there is life everything, in a measure, is possible.
Milton had no eyes, but he had life. And therefore he wrote a poem that the world will never let die. Bunyan was robbed of his liberty. For twelve years he was shut behind prison bars. But he had life. And having life, he dreamed an immortal dream that will be helping struggling souls toward the Celestial City as long as there is a hunger in the human heart for God.

But of death there is no good word to say. It is a hideous something. All that makes it endurable is that Jesus Christ has plucked its sting. Apart from Him, it is the most ghastly of terrors. It is the supreme ugliness.

I remember a song that I heard at a funeral when I was a boy that I am glad that nobody ever sings any more. It is so utterly false:

Ah, lovely appearance of death, What sight upon earth is so fair? Not all the gay pageants that breathe, Can with the dead body compare.

With solemn delight I survey The corpse when the spirit is fled, In love with the beautiful clay, And longing to lie in its stead.

How absurd! How utterly abnormal! I have never had any such longing. I have seen "At Rest" upon the casket. And though I have been quite tired a few times, I have never been quite that tired. When Jesus said, therefore, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead," He was saying the very worst that could possibly be said.

III.

How did this church come to die? Of course, in so far as it was dead, it had died through the death of its individual members. Live people make a live church. Dead people make a dead church. I have a friend in the ministry who is given at times to doing eccentric things. It is said that he told a certain congregation of which he had recently become pastor that
their church was dead, and that he proposed to preach its funeral on the following Sunday. At the appointed hour he had a casket placed in front of the pulpit, and proceeded to deliver the funeral sermon. At the close, he said: "Now, some of you may not agree with me that this church is dead. That you may be convinced, I am going to ask you to view the remains. I want you to pass by the casket, one by one, and see what is dead." Now he had had a mirror placed in the bottom of this casket. It is evident, therefore, what each one saw as he came to view the deceased. I do not believe this ever happened, but I am sure that such would have been a fitting procedure for the church at Sardis.

But how did these individual members come to die? It was surely not of deliberate purpose. There was no definite and open break with Jesus Christ. Ludwig calls attention to the fact that Bismarck, at a certain particular date ceased to pray. At a certain given time, he left off all religious observances. That sometimes happens, though not often. But it was not the case here. This congregation had not met and passed a resolution saying: "Whereas we have found that we have been following cunningly devised fables, and whereas we have found that the promises of Jesus Christ are not to be taken at their face-value; Be it resolved that from this hour, we renounce all allegiance to Him and to His Church."

Neither did this church die through neglect. Of course neglect is deadly. It is probable that more people are dying through sheer idleness and indifference today than from any other cause. But this church was still active. It was still doing sufficient work to maintain its reputation as a live church. It is true that none of its works were complete in the sight of
God. Their undertakings were like flowers that wither before they come to full bloom. They were like fruit that shrivels because the branch upon which it grows has been torn from the parent tree. But though no works were perfected before God, though it was serving through the momentum of a dead yesterday, it was still active.

Then this church did not die because it was planted in a moral desert where spiritual life was impossible. This is evidenced by the fact that there were those in that very church who were beautifully alive. There were those whose leaves had not withered, but who were green through the vitality and freshness of an everlasting springtime. "Thou hast a few names in Sardis which have not defiled their garments." They were a heroic remnant. They were the few among the many; the unspotted among the spotted and sin-soiled, the living among the dead.

And lest I should forget to say so later, let me remind you that Jesus in His exhortation does not urge this little handful of living saints to come out from among the multitudinous dead. A woman came to me some time ago who told of a deeper religious experience into which she had just entered. She then proceeded to ask for her letter that she might join a little group of like-minded souls who were more congenial to her. I raise no question as to her sincerity. I think she was genuinely in earnest. I raise no question as to the reality of her experience. But I do question the use she was making of this deeper spiritual life that she claimed she had come to possess. In fact I feel quite sure that she was making a mistake. If your church is dead, that is all the greater reason that you should be true and loyal to it, if you have life. To withdraw and seek for an easier place smacks of sanctified
selfishness, however fine the motives you may claim for such conduct.

What then, I repeat, proved the death of this church? Once it had really possessed the life for which it now had only the reputation. Its good name was once deserved. But it became content with itself. It undertook to live upon its reputation. This congregation had erected a beautiful building on the corner of Self-satisfied and Complacent Streets, and then, perfectly pleased with itself, had gone quietly to sleep. It was taken captive as had been the city in which it was located, through a too great self-confidence. Thus, with the voice of congratulation ringing in its ears; thus, while patting itself on the back, it came down to ghastly death. And most tragic of all, it died without being aware of its own death. To be dead is bad enough, but to be dead and not know it, is worse still.

But that is a calamity that takes place all-too often. What happened to this church may happen to you and me. Samson lost God without at first being aware of his tragic loss. When danger threatened, he rose up with his old confidence saying, "I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself." There had been a time when his every effort ended in victory. To shake himself was to bring his foe to disastrous defeat. But it was not so this time. To his utter amazement, he found himself as weak as any other man. Expecting victory, he went down in defeat. "He wist not that the Lord had departed from him." We may love Jesus today, and yet lose Him tomorrow. Not only so, but we may lose Him without at first being aware of it. Mary did it. "Supposing Him to have been in the company, she went a days journey." How far have you traveled on a supposition?

IV.

But what has Jesus to say to this dead church? Death means the end of all hope for us. Is that also true of Him? Thank God it is not! Do you remember when that solicitous
father was fairly tugging at Jesus in an effort to hurry Him to the bedside of his little girl. She was so very sick, so very close upon the gates of death. Soon it would be too late. But in spite of all his frantic urging, Jesus was too slow. Here are some messengers that have just come from his home. What news do they bring? They speak out with brutal frankness, "Thy daughter is dead. Why trouble the Master any further?" Why indeed! Death puts a period to everything. That is the case with us. But not with Jesus. He turns eagerly and confidently to this broken-hearted father with this bracing word, "Be not afraid, only believe." And the father held to his faith with the result that he soon had his child, all a-thrill with life, in his arms again.

And He is equally hopeful in regard to this dead church. His introduction is intended to show his complete adequacy to its need. "These things saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars." The seven Spirits of God, that means the Spirit of God in all His manifold perfections. Jesus claims to be the giver of the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of Life. Jesus holds also the seven stars, the pastors of the churches, the membership of the churches. That is, in one hand He holds the Holy Spirit, the Life-giver. In the other, He holds this church, He holds you and me. He is longing to bring our emptiness into contact with His fulness. He is yearning to enable every one of us to say with John, "Of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace."

That this may be the case, He calls on these dead to repent. They are to repent by remembering what they have received and heard. They are to think back to those great days when the life that is now only a name was a reality. They are to repent by arousing themselves from their guilty sleep. They are to
turn from their benumbing self-confidence. They are to come back to Him with the realization that there is none other name under Heaven given among men whereby they must be saved.

To those who thus repent is given a two-fold promise:

1. "They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy." How rich is this promise! They shall walk. To walk means - work. To the paralized man Jesus said "rise, take up thy bed and walk. Do not have to be carried. Do not be a parasite, an idler. Go to work - walk." To walk also means to make progress. They shall go forward; they shall get somewhere; they shall achieve. Not only so, but they shall go forward with me. They shall have my constant companionship. They shall do this not because of any favoritism, but because they are worthy. Fellowship with Christ depends upon right character. Walking with Him in white requires a white heart. God has no white garments for a spoiled soul that persists in its sin.

2. "I will in no wise blot his name out of the Book of Life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before His angels." "I will in no wise blot his name out of the Book of Life." There is implied in these solemn words that a name once written in the Book of Life is not necessarily written there forever. Through our sin, through our self-confident sleep, we may cause it to be blotted out. Where your name stood only yesterday, there may be only a blank this morning. But be assured that no such tragedy will happen to those who repent. Instead, their names shall remain, and remaining they shall be confessed before the Father and before His angels.

This is in harmony with what we read in the Gospels. Jesus gives a pathetic picture of certain bewildered and disappointed souls who will try to call themselves to His remembrance. "Lord, did we not prophesy in Thy name and in Thy
name cast out demons, and in Thy name do many wonderful works?"
And Jesus will have to answer with unspeakable pain, "I never knew you." How eager He is to confess these needy souls, but He cannot for the simple reason that they have not the character that makes such confession possible.

But this will not be the case with all. Here is one who wakes in that miracle country a bit confused. He is not at all sure that he belongs where he is. There must be some mistake. Then Jesus hurries to meet him with eyes that sparkle with enthusiastic welcome. "I know you," he declares, "I know this man," he confesses with joy and pride before the hosts of Heaven. "He is a friend of mine. He has shown me many a kindness. Once I was sick and he came to see me. I was in prison and he didn't forget me, but shared my shame with me. I was hungry and he fed me. I was naked and he clothed me. He has been my loyal friend." What a welcome! What a recognition! And it is for every faithful soul. If we only permit Him, He will be our friend in the here and now, and He will be our friend throughout eternity. Here, then, is boundless hope, even for the dead. Therefore, remember and hold fast, and repent!
THE DEAD CHURCH

"Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead... Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments;" Revelation 3:1 and 4

Sardis was a city famous for its commerce and wealth. Here Croesus had reigned. It was the Croesus with whom the plutocrates of all the subsequent centuries had compared. To be rich as Croesus is to be rich as the one time king of Sardis.

Not only was Sardis famous for its wealth, but also for its location. From a military standpoint it was considered impregnable. It was shielded on three sides by cliffs. It was bordered on the fourth side by a narrow isthmus, so narrow that few men could defend it from a thousand. But in spite of this fact, it was often captured. It never fell because of weakness, but because of carelessness and overconfidence of its defendants. Its complacency had opened the door to the enemy.

- I -

What kind of church was this at Ephesus? The fact that impresses us most was its excellent reputation. It had a reputation of being a live church. How appealing that is. There is nothing so winsome as life. A live church at once is the most magnetic and useful something that I know in the world. How intimate must have been its contact with the living Christ to have become known in that pagan city as the live church. I assume that the fact that it had this reputation is that fact that it once had something for which it was famous.

For this reason had I been spending this Sunday in Sardis, I would certainly have made my way to this church. But having attended, I would have been disappointed. Perhaps I could not have
told just what was lacking, but certainly I would not have the uplift of a live church. The tragedy of this church was that it did not live up to its reputation. The second fact about this church is that in spite of its reputation for life, the church in reality was dead. By this, the author does not mean that every single member had died. He does mean that the overwhelming majority had lost their grip of life. "Thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead."

Death is the supreme ugliness. All that keeps physical death from being a gaily horror is that Christ has plucked death's sting. In itself it is an ugly monster. I remember a song I heard as a boy that I am glad we do not sing any more. It is so morbid. "Ah, lovely appearance of death, what sight upon earth is so fair."

What utterly morbid hokum. Death is ugly—any death. Spiritual death is ugliest of all.

It is life that is beautiful. It is life that has possibilities. If one is dead, nothing is possible but disintergration. But for life, anything in a measure is possible. Milton did not have any eyes, but he had life; so he wrote poetry that lives forever. Bunyan was robbed of his freedom, but he had life. So he will be guiding pilgrims from the city of destruction to Mt. Zion forever. Beethoven did not have any ears, but he had life so he wrote music that will live forever. In losing its life then, this church had lost its charm and its usefulness.

2. How did it come by its death? Suppose we hold an autopsy and see how this once alive church lost its glow and came to be numbered among the dead. When it was alive, it owed its life to the live members that belonged to it and carried on its work. When it died, it owed its death to those members who were dead themselves and who
because of death had ceased to function or had become half-hearted.

How then had these individual members come to die? They had not died because of the harshness of their situation. Some of these other churches were torn by bitter heresies. They were fighting earnestly to keep their faith pure. Others were reviled about by enemies. They were having a hard fight with poverty, a hard fight with persecution. Some of them had had to pay for their faith with their lives, but no so of these one times saints of Sardis. They had no foes either within or without.

Years ago I talked with an old gentleman who claimed perfection. He declared that he had not even had a temptation within two years. Yet he met an old friend with whom he had had a slight difference and refused to speak to him. The situation with him seemed to be that the devil did not see any sense in wasting anymore ammunition on him. If I shot two birds and one was dead and the other about to escape, I would not spend anytime with the dead bird.

As we read between the lines, it would seem that this church died for the same reason that Sardis allowed itself to be captured. It became complacent. When ever an individual or a church becomes as good as he wants to become, the devil is pleased with him too. This is a constant danger that threatens our strongest denominations. We make up our mind that we have arrived. To take up residence on easy street, is to find ourselves inevitably on rotten row.

But there is a brighter side to this picture. While this church has so nearly lost its touch with the living Christ as to be pronounced dead, while the vast majority of its members are dead, there are yet a few who will remain radianty alive. That is at once heartening and thrilling. In this unwholesome environment, in this city where less than one-tenth/percent belonged to the church,
and where the overwhelming majority of those who do belong are dead, there are some that are still alive. How many are there of these brave and heroic souls? There number is not given. The writer says that there are few. This brings us face to face with certain facts that we must bear in mind today. First, the vitally Christian are always the few, never the many. The Christian movement has always been a minority movement. We are thankful that it is not such a small minority as it once was. But it began as an almost insignificant minority. It has been a minority in every age and even in many individual churches. Those who are vitally alive to God are the few rather than the many. It is the few who can say, "I know whom it is the few who are. Keep denominating.

If, therefore, you find yourself in a minority group, do not let that discourage you. There is a certain advertisement that says, "Twenty million people cannot be wrong." Well, my answer to that is that they can. We have a great fondness for standing with the majority. I have known people to cast their ballots, not because they believed in a certain candidate, and the things for which he stood, but because they believed he was going to win. If the crowd is with you, you better look well to your guide post, because the chances are that you are headed in the wrong direction. It is the few always rather than the many who possess spiritual vitality.

2. A second arresting fact is that while we must look to the few rather than to the many for spiritual vitality, these few are always to be found. As the centuries have come and gone, our world has faced some black and discouraging situations. There have been times when it looked as if goodness would be vanished from the earth. But that tragedy has never taken place. In the old Genesis story society
became so thoroughly rotten that it was hurrying down the steep decline that resulted in the flood. But there was one man, Noah, by name, through whom God could make a new start.

This faith in the chosen few was central in the life of Isaiah. As you read his book, he speaks again and again of the remnant. When I was a boy, my mother used to make a good many of the garments that I wore. She never used quite all of the cloth. There were always some remnants. When we have turkey, there are remnants that torment us with turkey hash. This faith in a remnant was an obsession with Isaiah. He gave his life to its proclamation. It is a faith.

With him it was a faith that had its harsher side. The fact that there was to be a remnant meant that the nation as a whole was to be destroyed. Isaiah was sure of this. He was the first of the great prophets to emphasize the greatness of God. He emphasized the fact that this whole universe is founded on righteousness. The nation that sinned as well as the individual was doomed to death. His nation had refused to cooperate with God, therefore, there was nothing for him but to be destroyed.

But as sure as he was of the destruction of the many, he was equally sure of the salvation of a few. Just as the Holy God must be against a man who goes in the wrong direction, even so, He must be on the side of and give His power to the man that goes in the right direction. The vast majority of the nation was facing wrong, but there were some whose faces were turned toward God. These Isaiah called the remnant.

So sure was he of this and so desperately earnest was he of the claiming of the truth, that he named his firstborn son Sheal-Jashub. The meaning of the word is a remnant shall be left. When he met a
friend on the street, I can hear him present his son who is a small boy. "This is Shea-Jashub."

"Is that a family name?" asked the friend.

"No, I named him that to remind him, to remind all my friends that a remnant shall be left. When I hear this child cry in the night, my first thought is 'a remnant shall be left.'"

Thus he tells us that he made his own family omens. He made them preachers of the gospel of the remnant.

This faith of Isaiah's was tested many times. The test came to its climax during the days of Hezekiah. There were two great nations at that time, Assyria in the north, and Egypt in the south. Hezekiah had cast in his lot with Egypt. The Egyptians met in a disastrous defeat. This left Jerusalem completely at the mercy of the enemy.

Look at the picture. A great conquering army is now only thirty-five miles away. They can see the smoke of the burning villages. Refugees are flocking into the city. Jerusalem's time has come. In bitter sarcasm the enemy has offered them 2000 horses if they can put riders upon them. It is a bitter way of saying, "You haven't 2,000 fighters in your city." Then comes the taunting letter, "Do not let Jehovah deceive you in making you think that He can deliver you from the enemy." If ever his cause seemed utterly lost, this one did. In the face of this bleak tragedy Hezekiah appeals to the Lord. The great prophet demonstrates his own declaration. He heartens the king by telling him not to be afraid. He tells him that the enemy shall not shoot an arrow in the city. "I will put my bit in his mouth and my ring in his nose and turn him about." The prophet is yet sure that God is not going to let him down, that a remnant shall be left. So what? Do you remember Byron's poem?
"The Assyrian dame down like the wolf on the fold,  
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;  
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,  
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee."

Thousands of the enemy died of some kind of pestilence that night and the remainder had to flee from the country that seemed to have a curse.

When the Christian movement was born, a grim period in the form of a cross was put to the whole enterprise. Nobody dreamed that any movement could outlive such a tragedy. Yet it lived on. Years later Rome unsheathed her sword against it. Christians were burned at the stake. They were fed to the wild beasts. One emperor erected a triumphal arch to show that the last Christian had been swept off the earth. Yet the extermination was not quite complete. A few still lived. And through these few nameless souls God moved on toward the conquest of the world. Again and again the church has seemed to die, but it has always come to a resurrection. Jesus spoke of four soils. There was the wayside soil, where no seed could take root. There was a rocky ground and stony ground, but there was some good ground that brought fourth one hundred sixty and thirty fold. These are with you in the darkest times.

What chances would the church have under Hitler? No chance at all. Everything possible was done to destroy it. Yet there were a few who would not defile their garments. Albert Einstein declared that he did not have much respect for the church. When Hitler came to power, he looked to the universities to withstand him, but they crumbled. He looked to the newspapers, and publications, but they also crumbled. There was only one group who stood up, and that was a group in the church. When Paul wrote from Rome, he sent greetings from the slaves in Caesar's household. Here was the most
If the militant minority is important in every cause, it is doubly important in every religion. We need more Christians in America. But deeper than that need is this for a better type of Christian. Look at that little handful of folks going into the temple to hold a prayer meeting. They are not impressive in quantity. Had the Jerusalem Gazette written them up, it would not have spoken of the vast throng, yet there was this one hundred and twenty, baptised by the Holy Spirit, that remade the world. Ours is a difficult day. There are some so obsessed by problems that they are all but paralyzed. We have a great deal of problem preaching and problem discussion, but the hope of the world is in folks that refuse to remain a part of the problem, but merely discuss it, and becoming themselves a part of the answer. There are, broadly speaking, two kinds of people in every community and in every church, those who are a part of the remedy, and those who are a part of the disease.
In conclusion, a minister told recently of a young fellow who came to see him to tell him what a mess the world was in. The minister replied, "Yes, you are right, but you do not know one-
thousandth part of it." Then he told him of ten million people in India who are stone blind, thirty million who are partly so. Then he added, "I know a Navy physician who has thrown himself in to help it. Instead of wailing about how awful things are, instead of telling how hard it is, he is becoming an answer."

Had I sat down by the Prodigal Son, he could have told me an ugly story. He could have said, "I am half starved among the hogs, but it is no fault of mine. I would never have left home, but for that brother of mine who has ice water in his veins. Then my old Dad is too soft. If he had been the kind of father he ought to be, he would not have given me all my goods. Then I had friends as long as I had my money; but when I lost my money, I lost my friends.

This is a mess of a world. Therefore, I am going to sit here among the hogs until I starve." No, he refused to do that. As long as he sat there, he was a part of the disease. As soon as he turned his face home, he became a part of the vineyard.

A few years ago I went to a church that was torn to shreds by internal strife. But there were a few names even there that did not defile their garments. While I was talking with one who was a real saint, another member came and listened for a while then he broke in with this helpful word, "You cannot do anything with that church. The devil has taken it over." Then this old saint looked at him almost with pity and said, "No, George, not quite. He might have your pew, I never see you in it, but he hasn't mine yet. I occupy it every service."

They both belonged to the same church. One was the problem, the other was the answer. Which are you?
"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:
These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and no man shutteth; and shutteth and no man openeth; 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. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the 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. 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. He that hath an ear let him hear what the spirit saith unto the churches."

There must have been a time of rejoicing among the congregation in Philadelphia upon the receipt of this letter. Along with the letter to Smyrna, it has no word of condemnation. On the contrary, it is rich and full in commendation. This does not mean that the church is absolutely perfect, but it does mean that it was the type of church upon which Jesus could smile. It was the type of church upon which He could look with deep joy and approval.

I.

His commendation is summed up in this verse: "I place before you an open door and no man can shut it." The implication here is that Jesus is still Lord and leader of His Church. He is still present opening up doors of opportunity and making good the promise that He made long ago. "I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

But while Jesus holds the keys and while He opens doors of opportunity for His people, He cannot compel them to enter those doors. It is true He said: "I have placed before you an open door and no man can shut it." That is, no power can rob the Church of its usefulness except that Church itself. The same is true in your case and mine. I am the only man that can defeat the purpose of God in my life. You are the only one that can defeat the purpose of God in your life. You may slam the door in your own face, but no one else can. That was just the trouble with the children of Israel when they first came out of Egypt. Through Moses
the Lord led them to the very door of the land of their dreams. He then told them "The land is before you. Go up and possess it." But instead of doing so, they appointed a committee. This committee reported back that the proposition was not practical. Thus they refused to possess their possessions. Thus they slammed the door of their highest possibilities shut in their own face.

It is tragedies like this that is the constant heartache of our Lord. Many a local church has failed to win not because it could not, but because it would not! How many an individual has gone down in defeat and failure not because they were unable to attain, not because the hand of an unkind fate shut the door in their faces, but because they refused to enter the door that God had opened. Our Lord is opening doors before our feet every day - doors of opportunity for service in the Sunday School, for service in the prayer meeting, for service in our social relations, for service in the secret place of prayer. Some of us are entering, but some of us are shutting ourselves out from these high possibilities. But such was not the case with this conquering church over which our Lord rejoices in this letter.

II.

What was the secret of its victory? How was it able to enter this wide open door? The Lord gives two reasons.

I. "Thou hast little strength." That is the same as saying that this church entered through its weakness. A rather strange statement at first. "You have been able to enter this door of opportunity" our Lord seems to say, "not because of your strength, not because of your culture, not because of your popularity, but because of your weakness." You have faced this open door with such a profound humility that what would have been impossible has become possible.

But while this may seem a strange reason, when we come to understand it, it is not strange in the least. It is only this sense of weakness that makes our receiving the divine strength a possibility. "Then am I strong", we hear one of the greatest of God's saints shouting. To what does that "then" look? When is it that this man reaches his highest strength? When is it that he becomes in the truest sense a moral giant? When is it that his hands become possessed of the force of a Samson and his shoulders of the lifting power of a Hercules? Here is the answer: "When I am weak, then am I strong."

When we read that God has chosen the weak things to confound the mighty, this is not a record of a bit of arbitrary conduct on His part. God does not work except through those who have a sense of weakness simply because He cannot. It is only the man who has a sense of need that seeks help. It is only the man who realizes the emptiness of his own larder that hastens out to knock upon the door of his friend to tell him that a guest has come and he has nothing to set before him.

Do you know how long the preacher would be without the spirit of God in His ministry? Do you know how long he will continue to do his work in the energy of the flesh? Do you know how long the Sunday School teacher
The Conquering Church - 3.

will go to his task unassisted by the Divine Spirit? Do you know how long you will face the daily responsibilities of your home without the help of God? You will do so and I will do so just so long as we feel that we are able to get on without God. Not till a sense of need puts its two heavy hands on our shoulders and presses us to our knees in the presence of our Lord will it be possible for Him to help us.

The first weapon that this church had for the winning of her victory was a profound sense of weakness. Surely that asset ought to belong to everyone of us! Surely we have tried enough in our own strength and failed enough as we have tried, to remember that it is "Not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord." Let our gifts be what they may so long as we are without the spirit of God in our lives, our movements will be the movements of a galvanized corpse, our fighting will be only the pathetic effort of a shorne Samson who goes out to shake himself as at other times before not knowing that the Lord has departed from him.

2. The second reason that our Lord gives for the conquest of this Church is this: "You have kept my word and have not denied my name." That is, this church has been loyal to the doctrine and loyal to the person of Jesus Christ.

(1) This church has been doctrinally sound. It has been beautifully orthodox. It had not spent its time smashing up all the idols it found in Philadelphia. It had devoted itself to the proclamation of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

(2) They had been loyal to Jesus personally. They did not simply believe His message. They lived it. They did not proclaim Him simply as their Saviour. They accepted Him as their Lord. When He bade them preach the gospel to every creature, they laid themselves out for the task. When He bade them love their enemies, they actually did it. When He told them that the servant should be as his Lord, that as He had laid down His life for them, they ought to lay down their lives for the brethren, they stood ready for this daily dying.

That is, these people took their religion seriously. They took the business of helping to establish the Kingdom of God in the world as their supreme business. They were not mere parlor soldiers. They were not afraid of hardship; they were not afraid of sacrifice; they did not balk at the Cross. They did not fail, as so many fail today, through moral flabbiness and killing softness.

When I think how little church membership costs the average one of us today, it makes me afraid. When I think how little we are doing here in proportion to what we might do, I wonder at the patience of Jesus. With forty percent doing all the attending, with twenty-five percent doing all the giving and ten percent doing all the working, it is a matter of amazement that the Kingdom goes forward as well as it does. I do not hesitate to say that is no hindrance today that is comparable with that of the failure of the membership of the Church to live their own gospel. If Christ could say of us what he said of these in Philadelphia, our influence would be felt literally round the world.
III

Then he tells of the future possibilities of this church. He speaks of the yet greater days that are ahead if they only continue to be faithful.

1. Since they are keeping His word, He promises to keep them. "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience I also will keep thee." This does not mean exemption from battle and from conflict. It does not mean that they will never be called to pass through the fiery furnace. But it does mean that He will keep them in spite of all battle. It means that even the they are called to pass through the furnace, He will be with them, and bring them out without the smell of fire upon their garments.

And how heartening it is to know that our Lord is able to do just this, if we are only faithful to Him. If we only continue in the path of obedience, no power is able to pluck us out of His hands. Of course He cannot keep us in our indifference and in our sin. But if we will do our duty as God gives us to see our duty, then in youth and in age, in times when the sea is calm and in times of storm, He will surely keep us. For it is true that "He is able to keep us from falling and present us faultless before the throne with exceeding joy."

2. He promises to the membership of this church a continuous growth in Christ-likeness. "I will write upon it the name of my God and the name of the city of my God." In another place He says His name shall be in their foreheads. Now the name of God stands for the character of God. Among the Jews a child was not named, as a rule, until they knew something of his character. So when He tells us that His name shall be in our foreheads, He means that we shall be Christ-like in character.

Of course this looks for its final and great realization to life's other side. But it is something that must begin in the here and now. If it does not, it can never be realized anywhere. It is possible amidst the every day conflicts and worries and struggles of this life to be Christ-like. Such was the attainment of James and John in a few short years. "They took knowledge of them", the story says, "that they had been with Jesus." And, thank God, that has been true for countless thousands since that far off day. For those who walk in the path of obedience there will surely come a growing likeness to Christ that we shall wake in as full likeness on the other side.

3. He promises these continued usefulness. "I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God." Now this is not a "pillow". I suppose that some of us wish that we had more pillows in the temple. But of course this is entirely unnecessary for many. You can sleep quite well enough without any pillow. But what Jesus here promises is every man who overcomes and every man who continues faithful is that he shall be a pillar in the temple of God.

What is a pillar for?

(1) It is that that helps to support the temple. And this simply means that God can make every human soul useful who is willing to be
used. How fine that is. What a tragedy it would be to be condemned to utter uselessness. "The shock of uselessness," says Hasler, is the greatest that can come to human organism." But everyone may help somewhere. Everyone may have a hand at lifting the load. Everyone may contribute somewhat to healing the world's open sore.

Now, there are two classes of church members - those who lift and those who lean; those who are pillars and those who are caterpillars. A while before I left Washington, a woman called me up to tell me how little she cared for the church, and how much less than nothing it had meant to her. And I asked her what contribution she had made, and her contribution had been just in proportion to her receiving. Doing nothing, standing in the midst of a thousand needy tasks and utterly refusing to stretch forth her hand to help. No wonder she had received nothing.

(2) A pillar is not only strong to uphold, but it is a "steadfast something." "I will make him a pillar" says Jesus, "and he shall go no more out." He shall be constant in his place of duty. A pillar that supported a house one Sunday and let it fall down on Wednesday evening at prayer meeting, or let it fall down on Sunday night, is not the kind of pillar that the Lord is speaking of. A pillar that starts down in Mississippi or Arkansas, but refuses to hold up now in Memphis is not the type of pillar that our Lord is talking about. If you are to be among the overcomers, you have got to be fixed in the path of duty. You must be steadfast, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

(3) A pillar is an ornament. These people of Philadelphia lived in an atmosphere of Greek architecture. They passed buildings every day that were supported by Corinthian columns and Doric columns of finest marble. Those columns were not only things of usefulness, but they were things of beauty. And the type of Christian that Christ indicates is not only to be strong and steadfast, but winsome also. How marvelously attractive was Jesus! How many people who had aching bodies and aching hearts pressed about Him! How sunny faced little children ran into His arms! He was so attractive. And He is willing and able to impart some of that winsomeness to ourselves. He is able to grant that the beauty of the Lord our God shall rest upon us as the sunshine rests upon the hills.

So attractive were these Christians in Philadelphia that even their bitterest enemies were unable to resist the spell that through the Spirit of Christ was cast over them. "I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan to come and worship at thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee." These people were not driven to accept the love of God for these saints by physical force. They were not won by heated arguments. They were won by the compelling and magnetic power of their spiritual loveliness. That is, the Lord made them increasingly useful here, and he will make them increasingly useful through all eternity.

(4) He promises to those who continue faithful a crown. "Hold fast that thy hast. Let no man take thy crown." This of course does not mean a visible crown. It is equal to saying: "Continue in your loyalty lest by being led into paths of sin and disobedience you break your fellowship with Jesus Christ you lose your soul and make it impossible for God to give you the reward that awaits those who overcome."
I do not know all that is included in this crown. I think it sums up for us all the joys of heaven. Certainly a part of it is going to be the meeting of those who have been won to Christ through our own efforts. "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?" That is, Paul tells us, that his crown is going to be the saints who have been won to God through himself. May God grant that such a crown may be yours and mine.

(Pearl McGwan.)
"The Dead Church."

Revelations, 3: 1.

You will find the text of the morning in Revelations, 3d chapter and 1st verse: "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." I call your attention especially to the last word: "I know that thou art dead." That is a startling statement indeed. Who is the corpse? On whose pulseless wrist did the infinite Physician have His fingers when He said this word? Into whose pallid face is He gazing? Whose are the glazed eyes that are looking out at Him. Who is the dead?

The answer is amazing. The dead here is not some purely human institution. It is not some heathen organization. It is not some unfortunate individual born under benighted skies in some darkened country where the sound of the Gospel was never heard and where the voice of the prophet never sounded. When Jesus said "Thou art dead" He was talking to a church. He was talking to a company of men and women who were called Christians. He was talking to people who had heard the message of salvation and who had responded to it and who had separated themselves from the wicked life of Sardis and had formed themselves into a Christian society.

But the best He can say for this church is just this: "Thou art dead." Once it had been alive with the very life of God. Once it had been illuminated with the light that flashes from beyond the cliff tops of glory, but now the life—and the light had gone and death abides as king supreme.

Why did Christ declare this church dead? He did not do so because it had become utterly disorganized. Had you walked down the streets of Sardis past this church you would not have found it an abandoned and dismantled building. You would not have found the weeds growing in its front walk. You would not have found its windows out and its doors torn from their hinges. You would have found it in good repair. You would have found its pews fairly well filled. You would have found its organizations intact. When He called it dead He did not mean that it had ceased to exist as a church altogether.

"Thou art dead." And by this He means that it had no life. There was physical life. There was no divine life. They had lost their life because they had lost the Lord of Life. "He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son hath not life." These people had lost their vital grip of Jesus Christ. They had lost their vision of His face and losing Him, they had lost life. He came that we might have life and have it in abundance, but apart from Him we are but withered and dead branches and there is no life in us at all.

That was what was the matter with the Young Ruler. He had many fine qualities. He was cultured, enthusiastic and courageous. He was heart hungry and clean and religious. He was winsome with the fine winsomeness of unspotted youth. Jesus beholding him, loved him. And yet He said to him, "One thing thou lackest." And the thing he lacked was life, that life that comes in vital faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He had not been born again. He had not passed out of death into life.

And so Jesus in writing to this church that had lost her Lord,
The dead church

says plainly the saddest thing He could possibly say, and that is this: "Thou art dead." It was not a persecuted church. It was not hated and scorned and plundered as was the rich and impoverished church of Smyrna. A calamity infinitely worse than persecution had befallen it. It had become dead. Its membership had lost their joyous and vital communion with God.

And to be dead is the worst calamity possible. That is indeed the supreme tragedy. As long as there is life everything in a measure is possible, but as long as there is only death nothing is possible but disintegration and rottenness. Here is a multi-millionaire. He lives in a lovely palace overlooking the sea and the great mountains stand in the background. A more beautiful spot is not to be found in the wide world. But he died last night, this money king, and this morning he lies by the east window.

And at a certain hour the radiant morning came singing o'er the sea. It shot its arrows at the ocean's waves and so wounded them that they bled streams of crimson and gold. It became an artist and painted the snow capped mountain peaks till they shimmered with the splendor of a million priceless jewels. In the rapture of it the flowers lifted up radiant and rare faces. And the mocking bird from his choir loft amidst the honey suckle spilled out a mad medley of music.

But did the dead man open his eyes to see or turn his ear to listen? He did not. And when the woman that loved him best came in and bent over him and kissed him and rained hot tears upon his face, and when the little girl that was his treasure pulled slyly at the bed cover, - he never changed his expression by so much as an eye lash. Because beauty and music, ocean waves pounding out their thunder upon the rocks and the mountains climbing above the clouds, and love itself - all these are lost and wasted upon the dead.

And there are no achievements for us if we are dead. Men can get along with almost nothing else if they only have life. Bunyan had no liberty, but he dreamed a dream that will live as long as literature lasts. Milton had no eyes but it did not keep him from spilling an immortal poem out of his heart. Beethoven had no ears but he listened with his soul and left music for other ears that will live forever. I read of a man recently who had no hands and yet a marvelous picture was left behind him. He painted it with his foot. If you have life everything, I say, is in a measure possible, but without life nothing is possible. And these people had no life because they had no Christ.

So you see that lying right upon the surface of this text is the solemn fact that it is possible even for a church to die. Don't misunderstand. It is not possible to kill a church. They tried to kill the church at Smyrna, but they did not succeed. Every effort was made to kill the little church at Jerusalem at the very beginning, but they only scattered it. Rome organized the forces of her mighty empire for the extermination of Christianity, but she utterly failed. No force without the church can ever kill it.

But while that is true, it is possible for a church to die. It is possible for a church to unbar her own doors and let sin in. It is possible for a church to shut Jesus Christ out and have Him say, as He did say at the door of one church, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock."
But no church is ever killed or ever defeated or ever loses its grip except through the failure of its own membership. If your church ever dies it will be because those who compose its membership have died and not because of anything that might happen outside its membership.

This church died. That means of course that the individuals who composed it died. And it seems very clear to me that the Bible teaches it as possible for a man to be alive in God today and dead tomorrow, that it is possible for a man to know Christ today and not to know Him tomorrow. That is the reason we are warned again and again to hold fast. That is the reason our Lord says, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." That is the reason Paul declares that he "kept under his body and brought it into subjection, lest by any means after he had preached to others, he himself should be a castaway."

That is the reason, I am sure, that the Bible does not withhold from us the tragic story of some who though they once lived, lost their life and went out into the bitter black night of death. Judas, the apostle, ended his career in the potter's field. Demas, the companion of Paul - Demas who was a fellow soldier of the mightiest saint that ever preached, turned his back on him and upon his Lord. And that is possible for you and for me and for every Christian. Otherwise Peter would never have written this sentence, "If after they had escaped the corruption that is in the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, they are again entangled and overcome, the last state of that man is worse than the first. For it has happened unto him according to the true proverb, the dog has turned to his vomit again and the sow that was washed to her wallow in the mire."

Not only is it possible for a church to die and for an individual to die, but it possible for them to die without at first being conscious of the fact. It is possible for you to lose your Lord and lose your life and be for the time wholly unconscious of your terrible loss. One time there was a man named Samson. He judged Israel twenty years. At the end of that time he decided, as many of you have, to take a vacation. So he quit his job and went for a pleasure trip into Gaza.

You will notice that in Gaza he never identified himself with any church. He identified himself with the world. He lived as if God had never spoken to him. He lived largely as if he were not a Nazarite, as if he had no peculiar relationship to his Lord.

Quite naturally he fell in love in Gaza. And that evil love began to feel for the secret of his power. And he began with fool-hardy carlessness to toy with that blessed secret. He told his temptress that if she would bind him with seven green withes he would become powerless. That was not true. A little later he said, "If you will weave my hair into the loom I will be powerless." That too was false, but it was coming a little closer. At last the whole secret is out and his hair which was a symbol of his consecration to God, is clipped.

But here is the amazing part. "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson." He has heard that cry before. He rouges himself, splendid animal that he is, and says, "I will go out and shake myself as at other times before." That is all that has been necessary to win victories in other days, just to shake himself. And so he goes in perfect confidence that he will win, but he does not win. He is not as he was before. Though he doesn't know it, there is a difference in the man of today and yesterday
as wide as the difference between life and death. He went full of courage, for "he wist not that the Lord was departed from him." He had lost his life though at the time he was unconscious of it.

Do you remember the story of how when Mary and Joseph went up with Jesus into the temple when He was twelve they lost Him? Now, Mary loved Jesus with passionate devotion and yet she lost Him by living upon a supposition. Suppose you had said, "Mary, where is Jesus?" She would have answered, "He's back there in the company somewhere." "What makes you think so?" "Oh this is a religious company and we have been up to the temple. We have been engaged in worship, so I am sure He is along." "She, supposing Him to have been in the company, went a day's journey."

So Mary lived for one day upon a supposition. But she did not live longer than that. At night fall she said, "I will make sure." And then she found that Jesus was not there. I wonder how long you have lived on the supposition. I wonder how long since you have been content because of your circumstances or because of the crowd in which you move, just to suppose that Jesus was in the company. You had better be sure. There is no greater madness than living upon a supposition, especially when God wants to make us sure. Believe me heart, if there is one thing upon which you can not afford to be uncertain it is about your relation to Christ. Remember that it is possible for you as a Christian to die spiritually and to die without at first even being conscious of your terrible loss.

How did this church come to die? It did not do so purposely. It did not do so all at once. Death had crept on it stealthily from out the dark. It had died little by little. Do not think for a moment that one day they had had a meeting of the official board and had decided to disband. Do not think that it had reached the conclusion that there was nothing in religion after all and that there was no use to waste any more time and money on the matter. They did not die of a deliberate purpose.

Neither did they die because they quit the church. They still attended, many of them. They still carried on much of its work. They still kept alive its activities. They did this to such an extent that it had a reputation for life. It was even known on the streets of Sardis as "the live church." Jesus says of it distinctly, "Thou hast a name that thou livest." These dead Christians then had not quit and turned their back upon the church altogether.

In that they were at least ahead of some of us, I am talking to men and women at this moment who have absolutely quit. You came to Washington six months or a year or ten years ago and you said, "I don't know how long I will be here". And you left your membership down home. You don't help the church down there because you are not there. You don't help it up here because you don't belong here. You don't help anywhere because you are dead. It is possible to be dead and even keep up certain outward activities, but it is utterly impossible to live and to deliberately disregard the vows that you have taken and spurn the duties that you are solemnly obligated to perform. No, these people had not quit. True, they were destined to quit soon. That is why our Lord says, "Strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die." Men will go on for a while with religious performances when their hearts have lost their song and when there is no longer any real spiritual life. But as a rule they will not keep it up long. An engine will run for a little while after
The dead church

The fire has died in the fire box, but it won't run for long. And so even these outward works were ready to die because the motive that had set them in motion had ceased to exist.

How had they died? The context seems to indicate that they died through sheer carelessness, self sufficiency. They had failed to watch. They had become content with a form of godliness without the power. They seemed to feel that because they had the reputation of having a live church that that was all that was necessary. They lost their passion, their devotion. They quit growing spiritually. They quit winning others. Becoming content with the superficial, they attained only the superficial.

What a calamity it is when a Christian gets the idea that they have attained simply because they have been converted and have joined the church. That is only the enlistment. The battles are yet to be fought and the long roadway stretches over the hills to the sunset. To be content with only that is to doom yourself to death.

And yet I have seen that happen again and again. I recall a woman who once belonged to my church, whose husband was unsaved. As long as he was unconverted her zeal scarce knew any bounds. At last he was saved. She then seemed to think that she had arrived. She became content with things as they were. She rested and backslid and her husband is in the grip of sin today.

I knew a preacher some years ago, a saintly man. Slightly impaired in health, his friends for love of him gave him a fairly lucrative position. He became content, then easy going, then careless and he died drunk. These people died little by little through the careless neglect of their own spiritual life. And just so surely as you persistently neglect your relationship to the church, just so surely as you leave off your personal fellowship to God through Bible study and prayer - so surely you will die.

But even for the dead God has a remedy. Even for this church He has hope. So He introduces Himself as the one who has the seven Spirits of God. That is, this Christ has in his possession the Holy Spirit in all the perfection of His activities. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Life. And so Jesus introduces Himself to this dead church as one who has power to make them alive.

And that He can do and will do on one condition, and that is that they repent. If they will only repent glorious and abounding life is yet possible for them even though they are now dead. So He comes to them with this tender plea upon His lips: "Remember how thou hast heard and received."

He takes them in memory back to the old days. He leads them into the fellowships of yesterday. He tells them to think how different was their relationship in the past, how warm their love once was, how vital their joy, how enthusiastic their service.

I wonder if I am not telling the experience of some of you. You are still members of the church. You are still holding on to your profession after a fashion, but you have got into the dark. You have lost your joy. You have lost your certainty. You have lost your vision of the face of Christ and you are living here in Washington as Lot lived in
Sodom, vexed in your soul, disappointed, discouraged, dispirited. And sometimes you think with longing unspeakable of other days of how you kneeled in company with some who are in Heaven today to prayer that was real and rose from your knees to a fellowship that was vital and sweet.

"Remember", says Jesus to you and to them, "and repent." And by repentance He means simply this, to turn away from the sin that has robbed them and come back to Himself. When Mary found that her Lord was not in the company she did the wise thing. She went at once back to where she had left Him, and there she found Him because Love always waits to forgive and to forget. If you today will go back you too will find Him. He is not angry. He is only grieved and disappointed.

I wonder if I am not talking to some who are willing to go back. Maybe you have simply neglected your duty. Maybe you have simply forgotten that you promised one day that you would walk in God's will all the days of your life. If you have forgotten, let this be the day that you remember. Have the courage to go back. Have the courage to start again. Have the faith to believe that Christ is waiting for you where you left Him. Let the goodness of God lead you to repentance. He has been good to you - hasn't He? He has spared your life. He has given you the best possible chance to know Him. He has rained blessings upon you. He has baptized your life with rich bapisms of human love. He has been gentle and tender and patient and loving through the years. Let His goodness speak to your heart today, the goodness of His providences and the goodness of His love shown through the cross. Let these speak. And maybe they will break your heart and you will come sorry that you ever grieved Him and glad of the privilege of making Him joyful in your return.

"Repent" - that is the word. And it is the word of tenderness and the word of love. I know woe and disappointment lie behind you if you refuse, but let us think today of the goodness of Him. I remember once when I was a boy that I was sent to the village twelve miles across the mountains. I was to buy a number of small things. Among the rest it was desired that I should bring some ice. It was summertime and ice was very rare and Mother was sick.

I got on a reckless mule and galloped away. At the village I made my purchases and was preparing to return when I thought of the ice. I decided that it would be impossible for me to bring it. Possibly I was right. So I came home without it. I stepped into the room and stood by Mother's bedside. Her fever was high, and mistaking me for my brother, she said, "Has my baby got back with the ice yet?" And the words smote me to the heart, not because I was afraid of what Mother would do or any unkind thing she might say, but I knew had she been in my place and I had been in hers she would at least have tried, and I had not even tried. And I did like poor old Peter when he saw the love look of His Lord, I went out and wept bitterly.

Heart, God has been good to you. Let this be the day when you remember and when you repent, that He might not have to write about you this tragic sentence: "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."
Jezebel's Church
Revelation 2:18-29

You remember that we said that the church at Pergamos was in particular and especial peril because Pergamos was Satan's own capital. The power of darkness was present in person to antagonize and to make difficult the work of this church. I am persuaded, however, that the church at Thyatira was in a position of peril almost, if not quite, equal to that of the church at Pergamos. If the devil was not present in this church at Thyatira he had a representative that was certainly a force to be reckoned with.

The one who represented the devil in the Thyatira church is called Jezebel. I do not think that was her real name. I think she is called that because she is so closely related in character to that infamous woman of the Old Testament. It was Jezebel who was the Queen of Ahab who poisoned and polluted the life of a whole nation.

This woman Jezebel was a teacher in the church at Thyatira. I take it that she was one of its members. As such she was in a position to be a menace of peculiar deadliness. Satan on the outside of the church is bad enough, but when he gets on the inside through some prominent member of the church it is a calamity indeed. There is absolutely no estimating the harm that is being done in many of our churches today by certain unworthy men and women in positions of prominence. There is scarcely a church that escapes. Go where you will you will very likely find some woman or man whose biggest contribution to the church is to cripple its unfluence, sow discord among its members and to lessen its power. Such a member was this prominent woman called Jezebel.

In writing this church Jesus assumes a tone of stern authority beyond that used in any other letter. "These things saith the Son of God whose eyes are as flaming fire and whose feet are as burnished brass." He comes clothed in the power of his divinity. He had eyes clear and keen to see into the inner part of the individual and of the church. His feet are strong to walk over all opposition and tread down all the power of the enemy. He comes with the knowledge of a judge and with power to execute judgment.

Having thus introduced himself he proceeds to point out all that is commendable in the life of this church. You will notice throughout these letters that wherever there is anything to be commended His eye is quick to see that something. He does not have an eye simply for our faults. He searches with even greater care for our virtues.

Now this church has many fine qualities. He says, "I know thy faith." In spite of the presence of Jezebel a large part of this church had kept the faith. They had not gone away after strange doctrines. They had not lost their vital grip of God. A church ceases to be a church when it loses its faith. Without faith there is no fellowship with Christ. Without faith there is no real service. If faith is dead there is nothing to commend us to the divine pleasure. For without faith it is impossible to please God and "he that cometh to God must believe that He is and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

Not only was this church a church of faith. It was also a church who was still in possession of her first love. This holy fire had not gone out as in the case of the church at Ephesus. Its membership still had the love of God shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost. They were still
people who genuinely loved their Lord and who were possessed of love one for another.

Thus this church had faith and love. And having faith and love, these mighty fountains gave birth to sweet and pure streams. Having these trees of faith and love growing in their garden we are not surprised to find that they were expressing themselves in terms of blessed fruit. Where there is faith and love there will always be corresponding action.

It is so in this case. He says, "I know thy ministry." These people believed in their own Gospel. They were perfectly confident that it was indeed the power of God unto salvation. Therefore their faith gave expression in service. Real faith always does. The faith that does not serve, the faith that does not minister, is only a sham and a farce and a fraud.

The same is true of love. Love does not have to be forced into service. You never have to conscript love. Love is eager. It seeks for an opportunity. It is spontaneous, irrepressible. You might as well try to dam back the Niagara Falls as to repress love. Love will serve if it is invited. If it is not invited it will serve any way. So these people with faith and love in their hearts were people also of busy hands. They were people who were serving.

Next, the Master says, "I know thy steadfastness." What a fine virtue that is. How refreshing to meet people here and there who are staunch, who are not easily swept off their feet. You remember there was a man during the Civil War who won the name of Stonewall, he was so staunch, so dauntless, so immovable, so unafraid. Now, that is the type of character that we need today. And that is just the type that Jesus Christ has power to make. "He should be like a tree planted." That means fixedness. You cannot make a tree get out of your way by simply "booing" at it. It is firm. It is immovable. It laughs at the storm. And there are men and women who are just like that, by the grace of God.

Of the greatest character in the Old Testament we read this: "He endured." What did he endure? He endured being misunderstood. He endured criticism. He endured opposition. He endured sacrifice. He endured endless self-giving. He endured years and years of patient waiting. How did he manage to do it? Hear the remainder of the sentence. "He endured as seeing Him who is invisible." He was made strong by the might of his faith.

Of another Old Testament Character we read that "he toiled seven years, but they seemed but as seven days." What made the time so short? How was Jacob able to keep on undiscouraged through all these toilsome months? "They seemed as but seven days for the love that he had to her." Love made him staunch. It made him steadfast. "The hireling fleeth because he is a hireling, But the shepherd, for love's sake, stands by." Judson could wait seven years in Burma for his first convert because he had faith and because he had love.

Then Jesus says finally, "I know that thy works are more than they were at the first." "You are working harder for me now," He says, "than you ever did." These were not only faithful and loving Christians, but they were growing Christians. They were doing more today than they were doing yesterday. They were giving more this year than they were giving
last year. They were praying more and loving more than at any other time in their lives. They were showing more of the fruits of grace in their lives than in any yesterday of the past.

I wonder if our Lord could say that about us if He were to come into this house this moment. Are you growing? Are you doing more and more with the passing years? Are you loving better? Is your faith growing stronger? "I know that you are doing more today than you used to do." There are scores of us about whom He could not say that. You are doing far less. You used to work in the Sunday school. You used to be active in the Prayer Meeting. Today you do nothing.

Now, it is the privilege of every Christian to be a growing Christian. It is the positive duty of every Christian to be a growing Christian. What a pitiful thing it is to see a man prosper in business and yet never learn to give any more than he gave in the first year of his membership in the church! God makes growth a fine and joyous possibility. And it is a blessed thing for Him to be able to say that you are doing more, that you are rendering a larger service today than ever before. But if He can not say that about you and me remember then that the opposite is true. There is no remaining the same. We either go forward or backward. We either go up or down. We either grow or we decline and lose our spiritual health altogether.

So you see there was much, very much, in this church to be commended. But there is one complaint that our Lord had to make against her. This is the complaint: "You tolerate the woman Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess." Just who this woman was, I repeat, we do not know. But we do know this about her, that she posed as a prophetess. She claimed to speak from God. She claimed to be a voice of revelation to the people to whom she talked. She had a new revelation. She passed even beyond the apostles and the prophets and Christ Himself.

Just what her doctrine was we are not told. It was spoken of by herself and her followers as "the deep things." It is a catchy name. People are always interested in the deep things. We are fascinated by those teachers who muddy the water and say things that we can not quite understand. Deep things smack of great learning. They have the savor of the profound. They flatter our intellectual vanity. This woman was a deep teacher, a female preacher who preached on the deep things.

But while we are not told just what those deep things were we are told this much. We are made to understand the effect of her teaching. By her new revelation, by her fresh discovery of truth, by her exposition of the deep things she did not make her hearers better. She made them worse. She wooed them away from the simplicity that is in Christ. She made them more worldly and less Christlike. She had skill to put to sleep their watchfulness against wrong doing. She took the fine edge off their sensitiveness to sin. She softened their antagonism against evil.

So it is evident that her presence in this church was a real peril. She spoke as one inspired. She so spoke as to appeal to the pride of the intellect. She so spoke as to lessen the antagonism of her hearers against sin. Under the influence of her teaching sin was minimized. It came to be a little thing, a mere trifle. And it is simply impossible in this connection for me to keep from thinking of another prophetess in a later day who also minimizes sin, who even says there is no sin. Truly, the devil in
all his cunning does not get out very many new inventions.

Now it is to this church listening to a teacher who dopes the consciences of her hearers that Jesus comes with His words of solemn warning. He declares that judgment is soon to come upon this false teacher. He also declares that He is about to slay her children, that is those who follow her, with death. But to those who have not followed her teachings He has this very pertinent word of warning.

"To you who have not known this teacher", He says, "I cast no other burden. Only that which thou hast hold fast till I come." What does He mean? He means this: "I am not giving you, through this woman, Jezebel, or through any one else, a new revelation of truth. You already are in possession of the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. Do not seek for a new revelation. Do not listen to the man who has had a new vision. All that is required of you is to be loyal to what you already have till I come." And, my brethren, I frankly have no confidence and no patience with the man who comes with a declaration of truth that is not sanctioned by the word of God. I believe that in this Book is absolutely every bit of truth that we need for the saving of ourselves as individuals and as a church and as a nation. I believe that loyalty to the Word of God as found in the Bible will absolutely meet the needs and solve the problems of this day and of every day. There is absolutely no possible need for a new revelation. There is no possible need for a new Gospel. What we need is to live up to the one that we have. We need to hold fast to the truth that He has already given us till He comes. Doing that we will be safe for time and for eternity.

It is to those who hold fast, not some new doctrine, but this doctrine that comes through the word of inspiration, that this promise is given: "I will give him authority over nations and he shall rule them with a rod of iron. I will give him the morning star." These words were a bit perplexing at first. For God to put a rod of iron into the hands of His saints and allow them to break down their enemies as a potter breaks a vessel, sounds a bit antagonistic to the spirit of Christianity.

But here, as so often, the letter kills but the spirit makes alive. The Master simply means that to those who overcome, that to those who, in spite of their own sinfulness and in spite of all foes within and without, succeed in clinging to Him and in becoming like Him, that to these He will give a power. That He will give to these a power like that that was exercised by Himself.

What was the secret of the power of Jesus Christ? The people who heard Him preach were astonished and said that He spoke with authority. Again they said, "Never man spake like this man." When He cleansed the temple they asked by what authority. What was His authority? What was the secret of His power? Answer: It was the power of a perfect life. It was the power of a character without defilement, without flaw, without any tinge of selfishness, the power of a perfect love.

And people are broken before such power today. In fact, there is no power that is half so compelling as the power of genuine Christlikeness. That is what made the woman of shame who had heaped every insult possible upon the city missionary who was seeking to win her, at last break down and say, "Your goodness has broken my heart." Men can resist all else. They can laugh at our arguments. They can criticize our organisation. They can
smile and scorn at our preaching. But they are broken in the presence of a holy and Christlike personality.

That is what won Paul. Paul was by when Stephen was stoned. He saw the face of this young man, fine in spite of its ugly bruises, in spite of the blood that trickled down over it. He heard the cry of his forgiving love, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Paul could never get away from that. I think it was through that open door that Jesus Christ walked into this man's heart. Stephen took this sceptre, this iron rod of a holy life and broke the proud man's heart as a potter's vessel is broken and shattered.

I have told you, I think, of that simple and saintly man, Bud Robinson. He called one day upon a very cultured and intellectual infidel. The man knew that the preacher was ignorant and so he sought to overpower him with the weight of his learning. And the preacher listened in all meekness and made no claim to any knowledge that he did not possess. But when the infidel had finished showing the preacher his books, then Bud said, "Now that I have seen your books, I have a little book here that I would like to read to you."

Then Bud tells the story. He said, "I began to read. And I looked up and I thought I saw a tear in his eye. I read on and then we prayed," And Bud prayed after this fashion, "Lord, this is the smartest man I ever seen. He knows everything, it seems like. That is, he knows everything except you. He don't know anything about you, Lord, and that is what breaks my heart, because you are the best friend I ever had." And the proud man tumbled down on his knees and surrendered to God. What was the matter? His heart was broken with the mighty power of a Christ-filled personality.

This is the power, my brethren, that belongs to every one of us. There are many gifts and graces that we can not possess. We will never all preach well or teach well or sing well or even look well. But we can all carry about with us day by day that mightiest of all graces, that sceptre of divinest and most compelling power, the sceptre of a genuinely holy life. "I will give him power over nations." This power begins here and it climbs on toward perfection throughout eternity. May the Lord help us to be faithful, not to some new truth, but to the truth revealed in Christ Jesus, and we will be a blessing here and a blessing through all eternity.

1. Pentecost- Peter broke bones to please
2. Finney- broke audience--are on this face
KEEPING OUR ZEST

"I know thy works that thou art lukewarm and neither hot nor cold. I would that thou were either cold or hot."

Revelation 3:15

I.

This letter comes out of an age of tears and blood such as the one through which we are passing. The Church was at death grip with the Roman Empire. This empire of force was unspeakably strong and ruthless. The Church seemed weak and helpless. It was the few among the many. Yet, this writer possessed of a mighty faith somehow believes that right was going to win. He believed that God was going to intervene on behalf of the Church and that Rome would be destroyed. The issue was even greater than his faith. Rome was not destroyed it was Christianized.

In looking forward toward the conquest of the Church he was sure that while the victory was to be of God it could not be won except through the cooperation of the Church. If the Church was to be of use in this day of tragic crisis it must be a fully dedicated church, it must be a consecrated church, it must be a church wholly given to God. That is, it must be a church that is the very opposite in character and attitude to this of Laodicea.

What was wrong with this church?

It was not accused of open antagonism toward God. The membership of this church was not fighting the faith that it had once accepted. It had not gone
over to the side of the world and the flesh and the devil. No more had it settled down into a colorless neutrality. True it was facing in that direction. If it keeps on going the way that it is going it will arrive at that distressing goal, but it has not arrived yet. Its services are still well attended, its bills are still paid, As far as the outer eye can see it was a live and active church.

What then was wrong? It was lukewarm, half-hearted, tepid. The individual members had lost their earnestness, their glow, their enthusiasm. They had lost their zest for living. They were no longer living thrillingly, daringly, expectantly. They had settled down into an ugly and paralyzing dullness. For when zest is gone dullness and boredom always come to take its place.

Now this lack of zest strikes me as being characteristic of much of our life today. This is true not only of many outside the Church, but with many within as well. We are not openly wicked, we have many fine qualities, but most of us are not distinguished for our enthusiasm and our zest for the things of religion. We find our church life very tame, very commonplace, at times genuinely boring. How many there are today for whom life has lost its tang, who are fed up, who are saying it with yawns rather than with flowers. This is true not simply of the old and tried, but it is often equally true of those in life's green spring.

II.

How do we get that way? There are a good many roads to boredom. There are a good many of us who are yawning today out of sheer weariness have come to our pathetic plight by different roads.

1. How had these churchmen of the long ago lost their zest? It was born of their conviction that they had arrived. They were no longer crusaders,
they had already won. Listen to what they thought of themselves:— "Thou sayest I am rich and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing." There you have the picture drawn to the life. As they looked at themselves individually and as a group, they had no fault to find. There was no need of a greater missionary passion, there was no need of a greater zeal for growth in grace. There was no need for anything. They were as sure of themselves as the Pharasee who thanked God that he was not as other men.

Now there may be a sense of satisfaction in the feeling that we have arrived, but it strikes a death-blow to our zest. When I was a boy we used to debate some very important questions in our school at Flatwoods. One of them that was always of vital interest was "Resolved that there is more happiness in pursuit than there is in possession." I am still convinced that the affirmative has it. Pursuit at its best implies some bit of possession. The very fact that we hunger and thirst after righteousness shows that we are already in some measure in possession of righteousness. The man who has won a fortune usually found far more thrill in the pursuit of it than in the possession of it today. That is true of many marriages. You remember how the wife in Salas Marner said, "Nothing is so good as we thought it was going to be, not even our marriage you know."

There is a hackneyed old story that tells that after Alexander had conquered the world he wept because there were no more worlds to conquer. There is profound philosophy in that word. He had ample cause to weep. Why? Because he had conceived what he thought was the highest. He was standing on the pinnacle, the only step he could take was a downward step. Life no longer had anything up its sleeve for him. For instance, zest was gone. A man of great wealth said sometime ago that he watched a snail climb to the top of a stick, hesitate on top for a moment and then climb painfully down. "That," he said, "is a picture of myself." This ancient churchman was self-satisfied,
and for that very reason life had lost its tang. And though they had won satisfaction they had lost something far more priceless. When we come to a place like that,

"The lamp of our youth will soon burn out,
But we will subsist on the smell of it,
Whatever we do we will fold our hands
And suck our gums and think well of it;
Yes, we shall be perfectly pleased with ourselves,
And that is the perfectest hell of it."

2. A second reason that leads many to lose all zest for living is the failure to find a satisfying faith in the meaning and purpose of life. It is not easy today to believe that there is a living God who has a great purpose for his world. It is not always easy to believe that there is a heavenly Father that loves us and plans our lives. No life can be other than thrilling to the one who is able to look into God's face and say, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world." But many today have lost that high faith. And losing that, life has lost its zest. Here is one saying that too many feel today--

"Life is but a tale told by an idiot,
Full of sound and fury signifying nothing."

Gripped with that despair no wonder we do not care to live any longer. His natural reaction is, "Out, out, brief candle."

3. Then there are those who have lost their zest for living because they are tired and discouraged. Once they set out on a great quest; once they believed that they themselves could be Christ-like and could help to build a Christ-like world. But something has happened to put out their sight. They have barked their shins upon grim oppositions till today they are utterly discouraged. "For the wettest of all wet blankets," said Morley, "give me the
"Keeping Our Zest"

man that is most enthusiastic in his youth." This is not always the case, thank God! But even then, it is the case too often.

Here for instance is one of the stalwart souls of the New Testament. One day with a fiery courage he faced Jezebel and Ahab and made them face their sin. For years he was the dominant force for righteousness in the nation. But one day, after what seemed great victory, he had to face the fact that it was in part a miserable defeat. He fled for his life into the wilderness and poured out this despairing prayer,—"They have slain thy prophets and torn down thy altars, and I only I am left, and they seek my life to take it away." And the zest was so gone out of him that he did not care to live any more. What was the matter? He had lost hope and lost heart.

III.

What is the tragedy of this half-heartedness that leads to a loss of zest? Suppose for us life has lost its tang—what of it?

1. To lose our zest is to lose our joy. No bored, yawning individual is ever really happy however perfect may be his surroundings. In fact, boredom may become a torture. The dullness and the monotony of life have driven multitudes to suicide. I was reading sometime ago of a brilliant, young, Princeton student who had graduated with honor. But who ended by blowing his brains out because he was so dead tired of being bored. You remember Kipling's poem, "Boots," where he pictures a Tommy madened by having to watch the monotony of marching feet. When half heartedness kills our zest for life it also kills our joy.

2. Then a loss of zest leads finally to a loss of usefulness.

This is true in the first place because it is only the wholehearted that are really charming. The bored and the fed-up make little appeal. How would you like to hear an artist play who was dead bored by his own music? How would
you like to see a game of football by two teams that had no zest for the game? How would you like to hear a minister who hated preaching, and had no slightest interest in his own sermon? How would you like a friend who was so half-hearted in his friendship as to be utterly without zest? I do not know whether Addison deserved the rebuke given to him by Alexander Pope, but I know as long as literature lives he will bleed from that black wound.

"Were there one whose fire true genius
kindled and fair fame inspires
Blessed in each talent, and each art to please,
Born to converse, and write, and live at ease,
Should such a one too fond to rule alone
Bear like the Turk no rival to his throne,
View him with scornful yet jealous eyes,
And hate for arts that cause himself to rise,
Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike,
Just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike,
A like reserved to blame as to commend,
A temerarious foe and a suspicious friend."

For sheer ugliness we cannot beat that. But there is a charm in zest, in wholeheartedness. A house on fire will draw a crowd any day. But the most appealing something in all the world is a soul on fire. John the Baptist was rugged, and his message in many respects was harsh and hard. But he helped the cities round about and filled the wilderness with excited thousands because of the hot fire that burned within him.

Then when we lose our zest we lose our driving power. A really earnest man is the most dynamic something in all the world. When an earnest man gets
on his knees the angels open the windows. How did the infant Church change that hard pagan world? It swept across the continents under the impulse of a mighty earnestness. They had a zest for living that shook the multitudes out of their dull despair. You can only account for the mighty deeds they did in terms of their fiery zeal.

This was not only the case with the early Church, but it has been the case with every man and woman since that day who has mightily moved his fellows. There is no accounting for a man like Hitler except in terms of a fiery passion. It is a hellish passion it is true, but he has had to burn mightily to fire his people with the enthusiasm with which he has fired them. Had he put this same passion into the cause of building a better world he would have been one of the great helpers of mankind.

In the early days of his ministry Wesley was just an ordinary preacher with very ordinary success. He accomplished something through his efforts. But almost nothing in comparison with what he accomplished after his experience in Aldersgate. Something happened to him there that gave him a new zest for living and serving. "He felt his heart strangely warmed." The next day with that hot heart pounding in his bosom he mounted his horse and road literally through the countries. As he did so, the icicles melted from the eaves of the houses, the grass became green, the winter stripped hearts stood up in the great consciousness that God had come. And civilization moved out of winter into spring because of this one fiery man. But to lose our zest is to lose our usefulness.

3. Finally, to lose our zest is not only to fail in Christ-likeness, it is to be the very opposite of him whom we call Lord and Master. Jesus was a man desperately in earnest. He was a man who lived zestfully, abundantly. When folks wanted to know about life they came to him. One day a rich young ruler ran down to kneel at his feet with this question pounding in his heart
and breathing from his lips, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Here was a man who was living to the fullest. Here is the hottest heart, the most zestful soul that ever walked our world. To be like Him is to share somewhat in his passion. To refuse to do so is to miss Him. A half-hearted saint cannot walk with a wholehearted Christ.

What Jesus was in this respect he expects you and me to be. "Ye are the salt of the earth," he declares. Salt is an antiseptic. It is a great preventive. But above all else it gives a tang to the feast of life. It is vital religion that keeps life from growing stale. Without it, sooner or later the anchor drags. Sooner or later all of us become tired and bored and dull. When we lose our zest then we lose our Christ-likeness. We make it impossible for him to walk with us.

IV.

How should we avoid this tragedy? Or, if we have already lost our zest how shall we recover it? I am going to offer three simple suggestions.

1. Hold fast the faith that such recovery is a possibility, regardless of your temperament, regardless of your circumstance, regardless of what life may do to you, your May need never fall into the Egyptian yellow leaf. The anchor for you need never drag. You need never to say that the wine of life is gone. Instead you may say even to the end of the journey, but the Governor of the feast said in the long ago, "Thou hast kept the good wine until now." I have seen youth utterly spent and bored, but I have seen men and women past four score living zestfully with the light of an eternal youth making radiant their faces and shining from their expectant eyes. Every man may live zestfully if he will.

2. If you are to live zestfully you must be one of the world’s workers. No idler can keep from being bored. Not only must you be one of the world’s
workers, but you must work unselfishly. You must work for others. There are multitudes today who find no zest in life in spite of the fact they have every physical comfort. They have plenty to live on, but they do not have enough to live for. They are introverts. They are self-centered. They are forever asking, "where do I come in?" Hence for them life has lost its tang.

If I am speaking to such a man this morning, let me tell you that there is a way out. You remember in that story, "The Man that Played God," there was a great musician, who lost his hearing. He had lived for his music. Now that he could no longer enjoy that music he became unspeakably bitter. He so lost his zest for living that he made an attempt at suicide. But he learned lip reading. One day while looking through his glasses he heard a prayer prayed by a young man down in Central Park. He answered that prayer. It brought him such a joy that he began to throw himself under the burdens of those who passed his window. Soon his heart had recovered its song. Soon he was living again the wholehearted song.

3. Finally, and above all, and including all, let God into your life. Listen to the words of our Lord,—"Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man will open the door I will come in." He is the only one that can enable us to live life to the full. Apart from him every man will fail. In his fellowship the least of us can find life thrilling with high adventure. That is what Paul meant when he said,—"Be not drunk with wine wherein is riot. But be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Why do people get drunk? What is the meaning of the night spots of our city and of our world? Why do so many fray their nerves and burn themselves out in varied forms of dissipation? It is not that they are trying to wreck themselves. It is not that they are trying to do injury to society. They are trying to find a thrill. They want something that will pack a punch, give them a kick. In other words, what they want is a bit of zest. But sad to say
they do not find it that way. If you seek to find this zest, as so many do, through outward stimuli, you are going to miss it. It is an inside job. "If you want life to thrill," said Paul, "be filled of the Spirit."

This is not theory, this is experience. What was the charge brought against the saints on the day of Pentecost? That they were drunk. They were so glad, they were so thrillingly alive that those who saw them thought they were intoxicated. In his fellowship we find the joy of becoming our best. We find the joy of doing our best. This author tells us that even the least of us may be a doorway through which Christ enters into the Church, if any man will open the door. Our Lord always gets into every situation through some individual. The most deadly menace that Hitler has given to the world has been his parachute troops. You can be one of God's parachute troops if you will. In order to do that you have simply to open the door. The Christ that you need, the Christ that is infinitely eager to enter your life is that near to you at this moment. Will you let him in?
"Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth."

Revelation 3:16

I.

Here an emotion is ascribed to our Lord that so far as I can find is not ascribed again in the Bible. There are times when Jesus is represented as being angry. Some are rather horrified at the thought of anger on the part of Jesus. Bob Ingersol once said, "that he could not worship a God that got angry." I confess that I could not worship any other. I think a God that looked with the same eyes upon the pure and impure, the just and unjust, the kind and the cruel, could neither win nor hold our respect. A God to be lovable must be moral. He must love the right and seek to make it dominant. He must hate the wrong and seek to destroy it.

But most of our anger is not like that of Jesus. When we get angry it is usually because some one has interfered with some of our selfish interests. Somebody has done us a wrong, or has failed to give us the consideration to which we felt entitled. We can often look on the most flagrant injustice inflicted upon others without indignation. But when we ourselves are wronged we grow hot and indignant. The anger of Jesus was just the opposite of this. When he was wronged he kept his temper. "When he was reviled, He reviled not again." But when He saw weakness trodden down by strength; when He saw right
pressed to the wall by might, then "His soul leaped to its feet fire-eyed
and defiant," and He blazed with honest anger.

One day, for instance, He went into the synagogue and saw there a man
with a withered hand. This withered hand hampered its possessor. It kept
him from playing the game of life as he might have played it. Therefore,
the Master sought to cure him. "Is it right to heal on the Sabbath?" He
asked. But the Pharisees were more concerned about their selfish interests and
petty rituals than they were about giving this man a chance. Therefore, they
answered never a word. Then Mark tells us that Jesus looked round about on
them with anger. It was an anger that scorched, and burned, and blistered.
One who was present wrote of it fifty years later in tones that awe the heart
when he speaks of the wrath of the Lamb. But the emotion here described is
not that of anger.

Then there were times when Jesus was grieved. While He walked among us
He knew the tragedy of heartache. There were times when His face was wet by
tears. "He beheld the city and wept over it, and said O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,
how oft would I have gathered thy children together as a hen doth gather her
brood, but you would not. Now behold your house is left unto you desolate."
The heart of Jesus was broken by the sins of his people, as it is broken still
by your sin and mine. But the cry of Jesus here is not one of grief.

Then there were times when the Master was greatly pleased. One day cer­
tain petitioners came to him telling him of a Roman officer whose servant was
sick. "He has requested that you heal this servant," they said. Then they
continued, "he is worthy that you should do him this favor, because he loves
our nation and has built us a synagogue." When Jesus granted their request
and set out on his errand this Roman official came to meet him. "Don't bother
to come," he told the Master. "I am not worthy to have you enter my house,
neither thought I myself worthy to come to Thee. But speak the word only and my servant shall be healed." This delighted Jesus beyond words. "I have not found so great faith," He declared joyfully, "no, not in Israel."

On another occasion an offering was being taken. There was a widow that came and cast in all her living. That thrilled Jesus beyond words. We have it in our power to grieve him still. We also have it in our power to please Him. He is that much like ourselves, He can be pleased or grieved. But the emotion that was stirred in him by this church was not one merely of grief or of pleasure. What then was this emotion? It was one of disgust. Jesus is saying of this church, "You disgust me to the point of nausea. You so disgust me that you make me sick. I am about to spew thee out of my mouth."

II.

What was wrong with this church?

It was not that it had broken with the faith, and had turned to fight against the Master whom they had once followed. It was not that they had become aggressive in sin. In fact, Jesus never got disgusted with folks who sinned, even in the most horrible fashion. Peter once vowed that he would go with Him to prison and to death. But when the test came he swore that he had never met him. But a little later the Master looked upon Peter, not with disgust, but with pity and love. One day a bunch of hard and cruel men dragged a young woman into his presence. Of her past we know little. She might have been tenderly reared. She might have once been beautiful. But now her beauty is soiled, having been fingered by too many hands. She has the misfortune to belong to that class that in all centuries has been the most despised. She was an outcast woman. Moses, they declared says "we ought to stone her, but what sayest thou?" And what did he say? He did not scorn her. He believed
in her. He said, "Go and sin no more."

What was it then that aroused the disgust of the Master? It was still quite decent and respectable. But its respectability had no zest and no glow. The church was lukewarm. That was its crime. The members of this church were neither hot nor cold. They were neither aggressively good nor aggressively bad. They were half-hearted, limp, flaccid, they were straddlers, they were sitters on the fence. They were merely savorless salt, good for nothing but to be thrown away.

Now this writer indicates that a lukewarm attitude toward God is about the worst possible. In fact he makes a declaration that I would hardly have dared to make. "I would that thou wert either cold or hot." We can understand how our Lord is eager for us to be whole-hearted in our devotion. We can understand how He longs for us to give ourselves to Him with abandon. He is eager for us to be out-spoken, aggressive Christians. But he said, "If you are not going to be out-and-out for me, then be out-and-out against me." Because any attitude is better than an attitude of half-hearted and lukewarm friendliness.

III.

This sounds a rather shocking thing to say. Why is lukewarmness so horrible and ugly in the sight of our Lord? Why does He seem to hate this half-hearted attitude more than all others.

1. He hates lukewarmness because it is ugly in itself. Earnestness is beautiful, but half-heartedness does not appeal to any of us. We do not like it on the athletic field. If we go to witness a game we desire that the players be in earnest. If we see, or take part, in any sort of contest, if the players are flabby, half-hearted, indifferent, we lose our interest. A football game where the players did not care seriously whether they won or lost
would certainly not be worth seeing.

Lukewarmness does not make for beauty in friendships. How would you like one who stood by when skies were clear, and when the sea of life was smooth, and "every moment jeweled with a joy," but who was conspicuous by his absence when the storm was on, and "when sorrow sat sobbing like a ghost in every chamber of the heart?" Joseph Addison was a brilliant writer. I do not know whether he deserved the cutting rebuke addressed to him by Pope or not. But I do know that his reputation will always bleed from the ugly wound that Pope inflicted by his cutting satire:

"Were there one whose fires,
True genius kindles, and fair fame inspires;
Skilled in each talent and each art to please,
Born to converse and write and live at ease;
Bear like the Turk no brother was his throne,
View him with jealousy, Yet with scornful eyes;
And hate for arts that caused himself to rise,
Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,
And without sneering teach the rest to sneer;
Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike,
Just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike;
A temerarious foe and a suspicious friend."

Perhaps Addison did not deserve this. I do not believe that he did. But what worse could be said about any man than this? "A temerarious foe, and a suspicious friend." Jesus hates lukewarmness just as we do because it is ugly and hurtful in itself.

2. Then Jesus looks upon lukewarmness as about the worst possible attitude because it is a deadly foe of all moral progress. How had this church
come to be lukewarm? This sorry attitude was born of a conviction on the part of the church that it had already won. This church had a great opinion of itself. Listen to what it thinks of itself:-"Thou sayest I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." There was no need for the deepening of its spiritual life. There was no need for a greater passion for the spread of the Gospel to the needy of their city and of their world. There was no need for a closer walk with God on the part of the individual members. They had arrived. They were satisfied with themselves.

Of course, such an attitude strikes the death-nell to progress. If you know as much as you desire to know, you are not likely to learn any more. If you are as high up the hill as you care to be, there will be no more climbing for you. If you are as close to your Lord as you desire to be, you will certainly not press closer. If you are as useful as you desire to be, you will not grow more useful. I used to teach school, the most difficult pupil was not the one who was dull. The most difficult always was the chap who was born educated.

We can readily realize the deadliness of this attitude for the man who is outside the church. The lukewarm man, the man whose lukewarmness is born of his self-sufficiency will never begin the Christian life. He feels no need. The first step in conversion is the realization that you are going in the wrong direction. The man who does not realize that is not likely to turn. If you have no sense of sickness you are not likely to consult a physician. If you feel no need of God you are certainly not likely to seek Him.

Not only is a sense of need that drives us to moral earnestness necessary for the beginning of a Christian life, but it is also necessary for its continuance. The moment that we fancy that we have arrived, that moment we not only cease to grow, but we begin to die. That is the reason that Jesus pronounces a blessing on the hungry and upon the thirsty. When one is genuinely hungry he is not lukewarm on the matter of food. When one is genuinely thirsty he is not lukewarm about water. A soldier back from the battle front said,-
"I lay in a shell hole for hours. I got so thirsty that I would have given my right arm for one drink of water. I got so thirsty I would have given my life for one drink of water. But these lukewarm saints were neither hungry nor thirsty. Therefore, they were making no progress.

3. Then Jesus hates lukewarmness because it is a foe, not only of progress, but of all real usefulness. All effective Christians have been earnest Christians. Such people are fascinating. We love to watch earnest men play any game. We love to have a whole-hearted man for our friend. Jonathan as he uncrowns himself for David casts a spell over our hearts to this day. Damon and Pythius, putting themselves each at the disposal of the other, have won the admiration of the world. As the half-hearted friend is repellent, the whole-hearted is beautiful and winsome beyond words. Here for instance, is a woman who loves a man. He has fallen into disgrace. But she does not pass him by as do his lukewarm friends, she presses all the closer:

"Come rest in this bosom my own stricken dear;
Though the herd has fled from thee, thy home is still here;
Here is still a sky that no cloud can overcast,
And a heart and a hand all thine own till the last."

"O what was love made for if 'tis not the same
Through joy and through torment, through guilt and through shame;
I know not, I ask not, if guilts in thine heart,
I know that I love thee whatever thou art."

"Thou hast called me thy angel in moments of bliss,
Thine angel I'll be midst the horrors of this;
Through the furnace not shrinking thy steps I'll pursue,
And shield thee and save thee, or perish there too."
Just as we love friends like this, so does our Lord. It is through such friends that he wins his way into the world. The men who have builded the Kingdom of God, in so far as it has been builded, have been hot-hearted men and women. I wonder if a limp, flaccid, half-hearted saint ever won an individual to Christ through all the years. Jesus is out to win the world. But he knows He can win the world only through men and women who are in earnest. Therefore, He loves a high and holy enthusiasm with an intense love. Therefore, he hates lukewarmness with a deadly hate.

4. Finally, Jesus hates lukewarmness because it is not only unchristian, it is anti-christian. Half-heartedness is the exact opposite, the very antithesis of vital Christianity. In fact, it is impossible really to believe the truths of the gospel and be lukewarm about them. The man who tells you that he believes the teaching of this New Testament, and yet is limp, and lukewarm, and listless, is either mistaken, or is playing the hypocrite. The heart of Jesus was the hottest that ever beat in a human bosom. For this reason it is impossible for a half-hearted saint to walk with a whole-hearted Christ. In fact, these go in the opposite direction.

Few men, of equal ability, have done more to help heal our sick world than did William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army. You know what it was that went far to making him the man that he became? One day he stopped in the City of London to listen to a soap-box orator. This orator was an atheist. As Booth listened, this is what he heard. "If I believed what Christians pretend to believe I would never cease night nor day telling people about it. I would give myself wholly to it." And as Booth stood there he said, "I really believe it. Therefore, I will do just that." And from that scene he went out to remake the lives of countless thousands.

IV.
Is there any hope for this lukewarm church? Is there any hope for the half-hearted and indifferent among ourselves? There is. The divine disgust here pictured was born of an infinite and tender love. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." Jesus was knocking at the door of this church, as He is knocking at the door of our hearts. Because He is eager to save us from the sin of ugliness, the sin of arrested development, the sin of uselessness, the sin of being so little like Christ.

What is needed to change our indifference into a beautiful enthusiasm? Answer: Christ is needed. And how shall we have Him? We have only to open the door. "Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man will hear my voice and open the door I will come in and sup with him, and he with me." Our needs are many and great. But all these needs are met in Him. If we let this hot-hearted Christ into our lives, we shall go forth with that winsome earnestness that wins others. We shall go forth with a high enthusiasm that brings a power before which stark impossibilities take to their heals. All the worthwhile tasks of the world have been done by the men and women who dared to get in earnest.

Somebody said that it couldn't be done,
But he with a chuckle replied,
That maybe it couldn't, but he would be one
Who wouldn't say so till he'd tried.

So he buckled right in with a bit of a grin,
On his face. If he worried, he hid it;
He started to sing as he tackled the thing
That couldn't be done and he did it.

Someone scoffed; "O you'll never do that;
At least no one ever has done it;"
But he took off his coat and he took off his hat,
And the first thing we knew he'd begun it.

With a lift to his chin, and a bit of a grin,
Without any doubting or quiddit;
He started to sing as he tackled the thing
That couldn't be done, and he did it.

There are thousands to tell you that it cannot be done;
There are thousands to prophecy failure,
There are thousands to point out to you one by one
The dangers that wait to assail you.

But just buckle in with a bit of a grin,
Just take off your coat and go to it;
Just start in to sing as you tackle the thing
That cannot be done, and you'll do it.
THE HOUND OF HEAVEN

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and sup with him and he with me."

—Revelation 3:20

I

I have called my subject the "Hound of Heaven." Of course you know this is not original. It comes from the heart and brain of that brilliant poet, Francis Thompson. Thompson was the son of a physician. It was his father's desire that he should follow in his steps, but Francis rebelled, went to London, sank into direst poverty, and became a derelict. One day the editor of a leading magazine in London received the torn, sodden manuscript that bore the marks of genius. Later the author of this manuscript came fearfully into his office. His bare feet looked out from wornout shoes. He wore a ragged coat with no shirt underneath it. He seemed an utter wreck, but he was remade by the power of God. And this took place not because of the persistent seeking of Francis Thompson, but because Jesus Christ, the Hound of Heaven, pursued him with a love that would not let him go.

Now, it is hard to find a better statement of this pursuing love of our Lord than in this text: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." This declaration emphasizes certain facts about Jesus and about ourselves that we are very slow to believe.

1. It is an assertion that Jesus is constantly seeking to gain an entrance into our lives. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." And this is in harmony with the teaching of Scripture as a whole. On the first pages of the
Book we are told how man lost God. But when he lost him he
did not set himself to the task of finding Him. He did not
go up and down the aisles of Eden crying, "Oh, my Lord, where
art Thou?" But it was God that had to come in quest of man.
And even when He came calling: "Adam, where art Thou?", Adam,
instead of running into His arms, went and hid himself as
man has been prone to do throughout all the years.

We are accustomed to emphasize our search after
God rather than His search after us. But the Prophet was
speaking the true word when as God's spokesman he cried:
"I was found of him that sought me not ... I was ready to
hear him who asked not after me. I cried, 'here am I' to those
who did not seek me." When the coin was lost, it was the
owner that sought for it till she found it. When the sheep
went astray, it was not the sheep that found the shepherd, but
it was the shepherd that left the ninety and nine and went
after that which he had lost until he found it. Though
none of the ransomed ever knew how deep were the waters crossed,
nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through ere
He found His sheep that was lost.

Now, this pursuing Savior is on your track and mine.
And what ought to startle and arrest us is this: Having
pursued us through all the years He is at this moment close
upon us. Even now He is at the door. "Behold, I stand at
the door." Have you ever looked for a desired guest? When
at last you heard the welcome footfall upon the steps, and
your heart beat quicker, and you hurried to open the door
saying: "At last he's come!" So near is Jesus tonight.
He is closer than the one that sits beside you. He is closer
than the one upon which you rest. He is closer than breathing.
and nearer than hands and feet. He is at the very door of your heart.

But this is not the first moment that he has been there. "Behold, I stand at the door." He was there yesterday, though you refused to let Him in. This speaks of His infinite patience. If you were to come to my home and find the door shut in your face even once you would not likely come back. And Jesus has found the door shut in His face countless times, but as yet He refuses to be discouraged. He still stands at the door and knocks. Still He persists in His loving effort to get into your life.

And you will notice that this is something that is taking place in the here and now. Notice the text. It does not read, "Behold, I stood at the door and knocked." Of course that is the case. He stood at your heart's door yesterday. He has stood there through all the changing years. The day that you were born He was there. Before your mother's lips gave you your first kiss, He was there. And, thank God, this is not simply a fact of yesterday. It is a fact of today. It is a present experience to you, and you, and you. Right now Jesus is saying to every one of us; "Behold, I am at this moment standing at the door; at this moment I am seeking admission into your life."

2. This declaration of Jesus' tells us something about ourselves that we find it a bit hard to believe. The fact that Jesus has to knock at your door and at mine - what does that mean? It can mean only this - that we have shut the door of our hearts in His face. He did not knock on a door that was not shut. When the Bible says, "My spirit shall
not always strive with man." The fact that His spirit does strive is proof positive of our resistance. There could be no strife where God and men were in agreement. And there would be no knocking but for the fact that the door to your heart is shut.

The reason you have shut the door is because you do not desire to have Christ enter. But you say: "That is not the case with me. I have sought Him. I have invited Him. I have done my very best to induce Him to enter into my busy life, and yet I have not gotten anywhere. He has refused to come." But in so saying, you are mistaken. Christ enters in where He is wanted. He never fails to do so. But He must be wanted above all else. There are many who desire Him, but they want Him to share with others. The Rich-Young-Ruler yearned for Him, but he yearned to keep his own money more. Felix was deeply stirred, but not deeply enough to give up the woman that was not his wife. To open the door to Jesus is to shut the door to our sin and to our selfishness.

But why does not Jesus come in even if the door is shut? He does not because He cannot. He has left us free. He will not poach upon the sacred precincts of personalities. You have seen, doubtless, the picture of the "Knocking Christ" by Holman Hunt. Jesus is represented as standing at the fast-closed door of a house, standing in the midst of an unkept garden. It is said that when Mr. Hunt invited a friend to see this picture that the friend said to him: "Mr. Hunt, you have left something out. The door has no knob on it. There is no latch." "I have not," was the firm answer, "the only knob to the door of the heart is on the inside." And that is true. Sin can
only get into your life through your own consent. God Himself can get in in any other way. All our Lord can do is to stand at the door and knock, and the weakest soul in the world can keep the Almighty Christ out of his life forever if he wants to.

II.

If Jesus knocks at the door of our hearts, how does He do it? In an infinite variety of ways. He uses every device which His loving ingenuity can invent to induce you and me to let Him into our lives. Let us mention just a few of these.

1. **He knocks through the voice of His Word.** The Bible is a much neglected Book in our day. The ignorance of the average professing Christian of the Bible would be positively laughable if it were not so tragic. Yet it seems that every one would read this Book if for no other reason than because it is the best piece of literature that is printed in one single volume. But the supreme appeal of the Bible is that it is a Book of the heart. It is God’s message to the human soul. If we read it with open mind, it will make us wise about a great many things. But it will certainly make us wise through salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus. It is a convicting Book. It is the hammer that breaks the rock in pieces. It is a regenerating Book. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God that liveth and abideth forever," Christ has entered into millions of lives through the knocking of His Word.

2. **Then, Christ knocks at our doors through the appealing winsomeness of those who are Christ-like.** I know that there are religious people who are not winsome. I know
some who are earnestly religious, but they are horribly religious at the same time. We feel that if to be a Christian is to be like them we want none of it. But that is not the whole story, thank God. There are those upon whom the beauty of the Lord our God rests as the sunshine rests upon the hills. When we think of them we wonder yearningly if Christ can do for us what He has done for them. Speaking out of my own experience I think one of the greatest appeals that God has made to my heart has been through the Christlikeness of certain rare and radiant souls that it has been my privilege to know.

3. Then, our Lord knocks through our helplessness, there are possibly those who have always felt adequate in the presence of life's demands. But I am persuaded that these are very few. Any man, I think, who has ever set himself with serious effort to the task of right living has been made aware of his own weakness and helplessness. How many of us have resolved to have done with certain sinful practices, only to be defeated and enslaved by them again and again. We have resolved to be less critical. We have resolved to be more clean in our thoughts. We have resolved to break away from some enslaving habit, only to fail.

Then, we have not only found ourselves doing the things that we hate, but, fumbled the task that we longed to accomplish. In our better moments we have had visions of the larger men and women that God made it possible for us to be. We have set out to achieve those high possibilities, and have met little more than defeat. Paul had the same experience. The very thing, he tells us, that he vowed he wouldn't do, he found himself doing—and the heights that he determined to scale, he never won. At last he became desperate, so desperate
that he cried, "Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?" And then he flung himself into Christ's arms, and God entered into his life, through his sense of helplessness.

4. Then, God knocks at the door of our hearts through the needs of others. This is a needy world in which you and I live. There is much of sin, much of suffering, much of injustice, much of cruelty and tears. There is not one of us, I think, but would like to make this world a little better. Some of those in need of help are very close to us. Some of them we love with passionate devotion. They are our very own, our husbands, our wives, our children. But we have nothing upon which to draw, and the keenness of their need is so deep. But God tells us, "My grace is sufficient for thee. It is not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, sayeth the Lord." And we are driven to let Christ into our lives because we realize this is our one big chance to help others.

5. Finally, God calls us through His providences, through our joys and through our sorrows, through our laughter, and through our tears. God is doing His infinite best to get into your heart and mine. If you have just buried a loved one, God did not take your ladder out of your arms in order to punish you. He did not take him in order to save you. He never willingly afflicts sons of men. But if you will permit him, He will use your sorrow as a means of getting into your life. There are millions who have lived to thank God, even for their broken hearts, because their very pain and desperate need drove them to open the door to Jesus. But whether I have described your case or not, remember that by every ingenuity that infinite love can invent, Christ is trying to get into your life.
III.

Then, notice the promise to those who admit Him,

"If any man will open the door, I will come unto him and sup with him and he with me."

1. Jesus will enter into any life that will permit Him. This is not a promise for the few; it is for everybody. "If any man will open the door." When Jesus was here, He was ready to become the guest of any man that would ask Him. One day He went down to Jericho. There was much excitement about His coming. I am sure they must have had a large and distinguished reception committee. But He went home with a little despised tax collector. And the decent and respectable people of the city fairly gnashed their teeth in disappointed rage as they said: "He has gone to be the guest of a man that is a sinner!" He is like that still. He is ready to be the guest of any man.

Now, in becoming your guest, He also becomes your host. As you sup together, that means you become friends. If you are His guest, He is also yours. That is, you give Him what you have - your sins, your cowardice, your failure, your hopes, your dreams, yourself. You give Him your very all.

In return, He gives you His all - His pardon, His peace, His power, His love. If He becomes your guest, He says: "Son, I am art ever with you; .. that I have is thine."

And how is this unspeakable blessing to become yours?

He does not depend upon the strength of your will. He does not depend upon your emotions. He does not depend upon your goodness.

I went to pay a pastoral call some time ago where I could stay only a few minutes. But the one upon whom I called consumed all the time getting ready. He did not hurry away, for we had to leave the time getting ready. We do not have to do that. You
remember that old story of the laddie that was kidnapped in England years ago. They could not collect the ransom on him, and they made him into a chimney-sweep. One day, through ignorance, they sent him to sweep the chimneys of his own palatial home. When he had finished, he came down into the lovely sitting room, instead of into the basement. He looked up and saw a magnificently gowned woman, and was terribly frightened. She recognized, underneath the soot and grime and ashes, the boy that she had lost. Then, what did she do? She did not call a servant and say: "Wash this boy and then his mother will kiss him." She took him to her heart just as she was.

Your part, then, is to open the door. You do not have to persuade Jesus to come into your life. Open the door, and He will come in as naturally and as quickly as the light enters when you lift the blinds in the morning. He will come in as readily as water rushes into the hull of a ship when an opening is made in its side. Your one task is to open the door. That, you can do. That, you must do, or else shut it in His face. If I knock at your door after this service, you must do one of two things - you must either let me in, or shut me out. And, if Jesus knocks at the door of your heart, you must do one of two things - you must either let Him in, or shut Him out.

A good many years ago, two young men landed their yacht at Inverness, Scotland, and set out on a walking tour. They got lost, and after midnight knocked at the door of a Scottish farm house. The family was in bed, and flatly refused to be disturbed, though the two young men persisted for some time in their knocking. At last they were compelled to
go to another farm house, a mile or more away, where they were graciously received. One of the young men that knocked at the door of that farm house, is now king of England, and the other was his brother. What must have been the humiliation and embarrassment of those ungracious folks when they found that they had shut the door in the face of their future king! But, they were ignorant of the one who was knocking. You know! If you refuse, you shut your door, not in the face of a king, but in the face of the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. Therefore, will you respond to His gracious appeal and win his infinitely worthwhile promise. Hear it again: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and sup with him, and he with me."
The Rich Church

Revelation 2:8-11

Fifty miles to the north of the city of Ephesus there stood and still stands the city of Smyrna. Smyrna is a very ancient city. It was rebuilt by Alexander the Great. In the first century at the time of the writing of this letter it was a thriving commercial center.

Now, while the merchant was plying his trade, the missionary of the cross was no less zealous. Who it was that founded the church at Smyrna we do not know. But the good news had been brought to this sinful and needy city. Here, as at Ephesus, it had proven itself the power of God unto salvation. Smyrna still stands. It is today a city of more than a hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants. It is a Mohammedan city. But it is still so strongly tinted by Christianity that it is known as "Infidel Smyrna."

This Church at Smyrna occupies a unique place among the Churches to which the Master wrote. It has one outstanding characteristic. It is conspicuous for its wealth. Christ says of it, "Thou art rich." Of no other Church does He say this. Of course there was some bit of wealth in the other Churches, but there was so much in this Church at Smyrna that it earned for itself the title of "The Rich Church."

I said just now that this was the only Church that the Master called rich. There is another Church that called itself rich. If we had met the pastor of First Church in Laodicea and asked him of what Church he was pastor, he would have said, "Why, I am pastor of the rich Church over here at Laodicea." You know we preachers are not all averse to being pastors of rich Churches. A preacher acquaintance of mine said the other evening to a worldly friend who attended his Church, "You ought to have been here in the morning. Our best people don't come out at night. We have a whole row of millionaires in the morning." And this pastor was flattering himself on his good fortune in being pastor of a rich Church.

A man told me the other day of another Church. And when he dilated on its wonderful qualities, he said, "It has thirteen millionaires on its official board." Good for that. A preacher is to be congratulated on being pastor of a rich Church provided it is rich in something else besides things. He is to be congratulated on having men of wealth in his congregation provided those men have something more than money. A rich man can be a tremendous asset if he is the right sort of rich man. But if he is not he can be a terrible liability.

I have in mind a Church in a certain Southern city that has been greatly hindered by having in its membership and on its official board a man who boasted of little else besides money. He has an abundance of that. And so much did he trust in money that he seemed to think that a substitute for right living. And some of the preachers by their flattery helped to confirm him in his wickedness. But he had a change of pastors not many months ago and that preacher instead of preaching at him from the pulpit, preached to him in his own office. The next Sunday that man of wealth came to the altar. He got down on his knees and stayed there till the Lord blessed him. And I am told that the whole atmosphere of that Church has been changed. Yes, a rich man and a rich Church - these are great assets provided they are not rich in goods only.

Did you ever have the pleasure of attending a rich Church? If you
have not let us give ourselves the pleasure this morning of attending this Church in Smyrna. Let us slip in and seat ourselves among the plutocrats of that ancient city. Certainly we will not have to be elbowed by a lot of common folks. We won't have to be offended, we feel confident, by clothing that is threadbare and hate three seasons out of style.

But when we reach this Church in Smyrna we are shockingly disappointed. The building is so insignificant that it is not worth commenting on. We stand at first in dumb wonder as to why the Master has called this Church rich at all. We are perplexed to know in what its wealth consists. Certainly it is not rich in those things that meet the eye.

Listen to this catalog of its possessions: "I know thy persecution, and thy poverty and thy blasphemy." These three possessions certainly must be rated as liabilities rather than assets. First, "I know thy blasphemy." Slander is a better translation of the word. "I know how you are being slandered." This Church at Smyrna is being vilified, lied about, slandered. The Jews in their fanatical hatred against it were telling all kinds of lies upon its individuals and its membership.

It is not easy to be slandered and keep sweet. There are few things harder to bear than hurtful and unjust criticism. And there are also very few things that are more despicable and more cruel. One of the names for the devil is "The Traducer", the slandered. And we never show ourselves more possessed of his spirit than when we are engaged in breaking and blasting the reputation of our brother.

This was a slandered Church. I do not know what particular lie or lies were told upon it. You remember when Rome was burned they laid the terrible conflagration upon the Christians. This lead to the cry of "The Christians to the lions;" It is possible that some misfortune that had come to Smyrna was unjustly laid upon this Church.

But whatever form the slander took we know what was the result of it. These Christians became the objects of bitter hate and the suspicion of the populace. They also became the objects of cruel persecution. They were robbed. Their shops were plundered. Their homes were destroyed. They were reduced, by this persecution, to direst poverty. Not only did they lose their goods, but in many cases they lost their capacity for earning a living. They were discriminated against so that they could not get work. Thus they were reduced to beggary.

And it is a bit surprising that when Jesus writes to them He does not promise that there is a better day ahead. When He has told them that He knows their slander and persecution and poverty we are prepared to hear Him say, "But the worst is past and I am now preparing to make bare my arm in your defense." But He does not say so. He rather tells them that though persecution was bitter on yesterday, it is going to be still more bitter tomorrow. "Fear none of these things", He says, "that you are about to suffer. The devil is going to cast some of you into prison." Now, prison was not a mode of punishment. A prison was a place to keep a criminal till he could be executed. So our Lord is here telling them that though they have been made to suffer in the past, they are going to suffer even more in the future, that they are soon going to enter into prison and that prison is only a dark tunnel that shall lead to death at the end. Lions are already being starved that would tear some of them limb from limb. Faggots were already being gathered that would send them to meet God in a lying and cheating flame.
The Rich Church

Doesn't it seem strange then that Christ calls this persecuted and poverty stricken Church that is facing yet bitterer persecution and direr poverty - isn't it strange, I say, that He calls this Church rich? And yet so He does. In what then does its wealth consist? What are these surpassing values that it holds that causes the Son of God to declare it to be a rich Church?

First, this Church is rich in the sympathetic fellowship of Jesus. "I know", He says, "thy poverty, persecution and slander." This means far more than the fact that Christ simply has knowledge of the trial through which this Church is passing. He means, "I know the experience. You are being slandered. I know what it is to be slandered and reviled. You are being persecuted as a result of the slander. I know what persecution means. You are reduced to poverty. I know the pinch of poverty. 'Though I was rich, yet for your sakes I became poor.' I have been poorer than the birds of the air and the foxes of the mountain. 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.' You are facing death. I know what that means. I know what it is to pass through death. Everything that you are suffering, I have suffered before you. Therefore I am able fully to enter into sympathy with you."

It is a great and blessed privilege to have somebody sympathize with us. There is healing in sympathy. You may deny it, but if you do it is because you have forgotten. I saw a little fellow fall down and hurt himself the other day. And he came in crying as if his heart would break. To whom did he go? He went to his mother. And she took him upon her lap and said, "Yes, yes. Mother knows." And she kissed him. And the kiss was a kiss of sympathy. And the tears were dried and the wound was healed.

Second, this Church was rich in the consciousness of the divine approval. The city in which they lived did not approve them. They did not stand high in the social scale. The world gave them no crowns. The great and fortunate and popular did not smile upon them. But all this was compensated for by the light of the divine countenance. They had the consciousness that He approved, and there is no finer joy than that. There is no richer treasure than that.

"As the sunlight breaks through the clouds o'er head,
When the storm is past and the winds have sped,
So in hours of darkness, fear and trial
There is nothing so sweet as the Savior's smile."

The turmoil about these persecuted Christians was great. But there was fine music that changed all the discord into harmony. That music was the "Well done" of the Master. The world is stoning them and maligning them, covering them with lies, but they went quietly upon their way. As they went they sang

"Let the world despise and leave me,
They have left my Saviour, too;
Human hearts and looks deceive me;
Thou art not, like man, untrue;
And, while thou shalt smile upon me,
God of wisdom, love and might,"
The third possession that this Church had among its treasures was that of faith. "Be thou faithful," said the Master. That is, "Continue to cling to your faith." The word for faithful is better translated conviction. "Continue to be convinced even though it costs you your life." Some of these had already been so convinced of the divine faithfulness that they had died in the power of that faith.

It is not an easy thing to die. Men will not deliberately die for money, as well as they love it. One of the worst old misers I have ever known lived close to our home in Tennessee. He loved money better than anything else in the world. But when one night a man put a pistol in his face and asked for his money he gave it up.

But here were some people who had a treasure that was so unspeakably priceless that they laughed out loud in the presence of death. One of their number, for instance, was Polycarp. He was their pastor. A Roman soldier who was to have him executed was a bit sorry for him. "Have pity on your old age", he said. "Utter one reproach against Christ and I will set you free." And the old man of the white hair and the whiter heart answered: "Better than six years have I served Him and He has never done me anything but good. Therefore, how could I reproach Him?" And he was faithful unto death.

A man possessed of a treasure of this high value is to be congratulated. You remember that wealthy maker of pottery who won the friendship of the King of France. This old pottery maker was a Protestant and the Catholics of that day thirsted for his life. He was thrown into prison. The king came to him one day and told him that he must turn Catholic or the pressure was so great upon him that he would be forced to surrender him to his enemies. "Forced", said the old prisoner with fine scorn. "Sire, you have said that you were sorry for me. I am far more sorry for you. You speak of being forced to do wrong. No man can force me to lie to God as you are asking me to do." And the old man died a martyr to his faith. But they didn't force from him his treasure.

In the fourth place, these people were rich in service. They were rich in their usefulness. They suffered, some of them died a martyr's death, but they did not die in vain. Even to this day the Christians of Smyrna make an annual pilgrimage to the grave of their ancient pastor who was possessed of a treasure so rich that he went to the stake for it.

There was an old man in the early days of Christianity who found the ministry a bit hard. Money was not at all plentiful with him. He sat
shivering in his prison cell one day and when he reached for his old familiar threadbare coat it was not there. He did not then call a servant and send for another one. He was not able. He rather took up his pen and said, "Dear Timothy: When you come please go by Troas and bring my old coat. And come, if you possibly can, before winter." A very poor man was Paul and yet he tells us he made many rich. In fact, I suppose Paul set up more multi-millionaires in business than any other man who ever lived.

Last of all, these people were rich in their deathless hopes. "He that overcometh", Jesus says, "shall not be hurt of the second death." These inhabitants of Smyrna were going to die after a while. They have all died long since and they have gone from death to death. These persecuted Christians were going from death to life. "I will give you," He said, "a crown of life."

Death, He is telling them, is not a blind alley. It is a thoroughfare. It is not a terminus. It is a highway into God's house. "I know that this is true," said Jesus, for I have tested it out. 'I am the living one who died. And behold, I am alive forever more." Therefore, death is only the gateway into a larger life. Out yonder one of your numbers has been lead to death. The fagots have been piled about him and lighted and now a few gray ashes, the blackened chain, the charred post is all that remains. And yet that is not all. The one who died there is alive forever more." And so these people are rich in their deathless hopes.

And now I wonder what is our rating. Suppose we had the privilege this morning of looking over some spiritual Bradstreet and Dunn in the city of God. I wonder what entry we would find opposite the name of our Church. I wonder what entry we would find opposite our names as individuals. The wealth of this world is forever beyond the reach of most of us. But it is possible for every one of us to be rich in the wealth that abides, rich in the consciousness of God's approval, rich in convictions that are more priceless than life, rich in deathless hopes that outlast the world. May the Lord help us to claim for ourselves this wealth that is wealth indeed.
The Church that Made Good
Revelation 3:6-13

Had you been in the little congregation in Philadelphia when this letter was read I feel confident that you would never have forgotten the scene. There was such a joy, such a fullness of holy delight as one seldom sees in this world. I can see the faces of the different members of the congregation. They are not people of any great wealth or learning. They are people who have suffered. They are people whose Christianity has cost them something. But there they sit with faces strangely alight and the tears of pure joy flow unheeded down their cheeks. And the preacher - he will scarcely be happier when he receives his crown. And I can hear him saying under his breath, out of a full heart, "Bless the Lord, oh my soul and all that is within me, bless His holy name."

The reason that I know this was an occasion of wonderful joy is that it could not have been otherwise. This letter is so full of gracious commendation. And of course they know that the commendation is deserved. He who wrote it is not some fulsome flatterer. It came from the hand of Him who is holy and true, "who has the key of David, who opens and no man can shut, and shuts and no man can open."

What is the commendation? The heart of it, I think, is this: "I have placed before you an open door and no man can shut it." Of course there is implied here that these people had entered the door that their Lord had opened for them. Christ introduces Himself, you know, as one who opens and no man can shut. He is constantly opening doors before His Church. These doors lead today into every nation under heaven.

He opens doors for the local church. He has opened for us here at Mount Vernon Place a door that leads into possibilities wonderful and large and beautiful. He opens doors for us individually. Never a new sunrise but that a new and wonderful door is opened in front of your feet, a door that if you will enter, it will bring you into a place roomy and rich in service.

This is a universal fact. He does not open the same doors before all of us. If you enter the door that God opens for you you may go into the mission field and you may not. If you enter the door that He is opening for you this morning you may become a minister, you may be privileged to preach. That would be wonderful. I declare to you that I never cease to be amazed that He opened that door for me. As I look at my own past I cannot but be joyously amazed at the doors that God has opened for me. God may not open the door of the Christian ministry for you, but this I know, He will open some door that will lead you into a wonderful place of service.

But while God opens a door for the Church and the individual in the Church, while God is putting before every single man and woman of us a door of usefulness and blessedness, let us bear in mind that He will never force us to enter that door. These people had entered the door that God had opened for them, but they had not been herded together and driven to it. They had not been forced. The truth of the matter is, man is not a creature that can be forced. You can drive an ox into his stall, but not even God Himself can drive a man. These people had entered this door, not because they were driven. They had entered through their own initiative. They had entered because they wanted to enter.
The church that made good

But how was it that they were able to enter this door? I can well imagine that it was a very exacting business. I am quite sure that it was no holiday task. It will not be any holiday performance for you to enter the door that God opens for you. How was it that when Jesus looked down upon the work that He had called them to do, upon some particular mission that He had called them to fulfill, that He was able to say to them, "You have accomplished your task, you have entered the door that I opened for you"? He could not say that about all of us. We are conscious of having failed and failed many times. Many a door has been shut in our faces. They have been shut, not because God became angry and impatient with us. They were pushed shut, not by the hand of the world or the hand of our enemies. They were pushed shut by our own hand.

Why, I say, did these people enter? They were able to enter, first of all, because of their faithfulness to the Word and to the person of Jesus Christ. "You have kept my word", says Jesus, "and have not denied my name." That means that these people had been loyal to the doctrine of Jesus Christ. They had faithfully preached His word. They had been faithful to the doctrine of His person. And while I know it is possible to be very orthodox and very dead, yet it is well to bear in mind this fact, that the people today and the people who throughout all the centuries have entered God's wide open doorways, have been people who have been loyal to the Word of God.

When I was a student at college I was not above giving some hospitality to very broad views on the Bible. And one of the influences that swung me back to orthodoxy was this: I watched men of great ability and also of genuine beauty of character. I saw these men engaged in the work of the Lord. But sometimes they would take a text and spend the first few minutes casting a doubt over the authority of that text. The result of it was that they failed to win their hearers. There was no stirring among the dry bones. There was not mustering of an army of God in the dreary valley of death.

On the other hand I have seen men very defective, men unacquainted with the schools, men strangers even to the laws of grammar. I have seen these men declare the truth of God emphatically and with authority. And as they preached, account for it as you may, the skin of the Ethiopian was changed, and the spots of the leopard disappeared, and the dead lived and the blind received his sight. So that I say with absolute conviction that the Church or the individual that is to enter the wide open gateway that God places before him must enter in loyalty to the Word of God.

Then a second reason for these people being able to enter was this, they had a little strength. It is equal to saying they entered because they were weak. It seems like a strange reason. Had Jesus written to them and said, "You have entered the door that I opened. I knew you would because you are so strong, you are so gifted, you are so altogether capable", we would not be surprised at that. But He says just the opposite; "You have entered the door that I opened for you because you were so weak."

Yet we should not be surprised at this reason. The only reason we are surprised is because we forget the very plain word of God where He declared that He has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty, and the foolish things to confound the wise, and the things that are not to bring to naught the things that are.
Here is a man giving his experience and he says, "Then I am strong." "Then" - I wonder when that is. When is it that the strength of this man is as the strength of an army? When is it that this one can chase a thousand and two can put ten thousand to flight? "Then am I strong." When is it that the pigmy becomes a giant? When is it that the man of weakness gathers into his sinewy hands the strength of a Samson and into his shoulders the lifting power of a Hercules?

He gives the answer: "When I am weak, then am I strong. It is when I feel most fully my insufficiency that I find the sufficiency that is in God. It is when I realize my utter weakness that I open my heart for the incoming of His power." And what is true of Paul is true of every one else. So long as you feel yourself capable of saving yourself, so long as you feel equal to the task of entering your open door in your own strength, just so long will your entrance be an utter impossibility. "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength."

That is what Jesus meant when He told the story of the guest that came at midnight. The host, having received the guest, looked into his pantry and found absolutely nothing. And so he went to the house of his friend and knocked. And the reason for his knocking was this: "A friend of mine in his journey has come to me and I have absolutely nothing to set before him. I am absolutely destitute. My need is no ordinary need." That is the reason he persisted in his knocking till his prayer was answered. And you and I will never reach our best till we get to the end of ourselves. Not till the burden of a great need puts its hands upon our shoulders and pushes us in utter insufficiency to the foot of the cross will we really be able to enter the door that God has opened for us.

That was a wonderfully wide open gate that the apostles entered at Pentecost. Beyond that door three thousand souls greeted them eagerly. Beyond that door was a waiting world. But they did not enter in their own strength. Jesus had said to them, "Tarry yet, till you be endued with power from on high." Having waited in weakness the power of God came upon them. And in His strength they enter to become conquerors and more than conquerors through Him that loved them and gave Himself for them.

Then Jesus utters a word of warning to the people who have already begun to conquer. He knows that the victory is not yet fully won. He knows that He has only lead them through this first door to prepare them for a larger. One great reward for service well done is the capacity for doing a larger. So to this Church that is lighted with the light of His smile, this Church that has made good in its trying and difficult field, He sends this word of warning; "Hold fast that thou hast. Let no man take thy crown." If you and I fail at the work to which God has called us it does not mean that the work of God in the world is going to ultimately fail. Of course it means our own personal failure. But if we refused to lay hold on the crown that He has prepared for us, some other will do the work that we might have done and win the crown that we might have won. Moses was one of the great men of all history. He was crowned at the end of the day, but he did not receive the original crown that Jesus intended for him. He fell short somewhat and his crown went to another.

This is a word that is needed in our own Church. There is a marvelous work for you to do here. There is a glorious service for you to render. It is a service that is intended to bless locally. It is intended to make all America a little bit richer spiritually. It is intended to raise the moral temperature in some bit around the world. And through my lips the
The church that made good

Lord is saying to us today, "Hold fast that thou hast. Continue to be faithful to the Word and to the name of Jesus. Continue in your weakness to claim His power. Let no other Church have to be raised up to render the service that God is calling on you to render. Let no man take thy crown."

And then He tells them of the rich reward that is waiting for them. What is to be the result of their continued faithfulness? What is to be the outcome of their holding fast? First, if they keep hold on God, God has promised to keep hold on them. "I will keep thee," He said, "from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world." Don't expect God to keep you if in madness you cast yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple. But as long as we remain faithful to Him, no power will be able to pluck us out of His hand. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for you who are kept by the power of God."

Not only does He promise to keep those who hold fast, but He promises to use them. It is a wonderful privilege that God gives to us human beings. He gives us the privilege of being a blessing. He says to the overcomer, "I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God." Of course that refers to the great future, but it begins to be true in the here and now. "I will make him a pillar" not a pillow. Some of you would like to have a few more of these in the temple possibly. And others do not need them. You can sleep well enough without them.

"I will make him a pillar." A pillar is made to support something. A pillar in the sanctuary is that something that holds the sanctuary up. And you know the Lord purposed from the beginning to build His Church out of folks. He dumped the weight of it upon the shoulders of eleven men centuries ago and said, "The gates of hell shall not prevail." "I will make thee a pillar. You shall be strong; strong to bear; strong to lift; strong to uphold."

Now, wouldn't you like to be that type of saint? There are so many of us who are not. We don't hold anything up. We have to be held up. We are not going to support the Church or support anybody. We have to be supported. A sister called me up the other day to inform me how peevied she was because nobody came to see her. She made it very emphatic that she did not need any help. She made it equally emphatic also that she did not give any. But what the Church meant to her was not a place to stand upon her feet and help lift at the load. She wasn't thinking of being a pillar. She rather had the idea that a Church member was a caterpillar. Instead of walking and carrying the load, she wanted to crawl and be carried.

"I will make you a pillar." I like that. There are some folks that have to lean all their lives. The Church is made up of those who lift and those who lean. Believe me, I want to be among the lifters. It costs a little more sweat, but it is far more satisfactory. It is expensive at times, but it is very blessed. "I will make him a pillar." Down in Texas in a certain Church whose membership had fought among themselves almost to their utter undoing there lived an old saint named Brother Hancock. Many folks had given the Church up for lost. It was commonly said among them that the Devil had it. But old Brother Hancock answered, "No. At least he hasn't my place yet. I occupy a pew in it every Sunday and the Devil is
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crowded out there. "And the old brother stood "a pillar in the temple of God." Thank God for him and for the pillars everywhere. They are highly honored. They are the folks that keep the Church from falling into ruins.

Then a pillar is not only something that upholds. It is also an ornament. These columns that stand out in front of this Church - they might carry the weight that they do carry quite as well and be of concrete. But they are not only things of strength. They are things of beauty. They are ornaments. So God proposes not only to make us strong. He also proposes to make us winsome. He intended that the beauty of the Lord our God should rest upon us as the sunshine rests upon the hills. He promises to make us strong and also charming.

Now, I suppose you will agree with me that the Church has lost quite a good deal by not being more attractive. We need to be stronger, everyone of us. We also need to be more winsome. There ought to be a lovely spontaneity about our character. A holy charm ought to be breathed out from our personalities as naturally as from a lovely flower. We ought to charm as naturally as the sun gives its light. "I will make you strong and I will make you attractive, beautiful with a beauty that holds."

And the outcome of all this strength is to be, not the glorification of ourselves, but the winning of others to our Lord. He said to these people that He would even cause their enemies, those who belonged to the synagogue of Satan, - that He would cause them to come and worship at their feet. This does not mean that these people were to be made by any physical force to bow at the feet of God's saints. It means that they are to be lead there by the sublime magnetism of their God-conquered personalities,

How is it that the Church has won its enemies and the enemies of its Lord through the years. I do not know that it has ever made much headway by mere fighting. I cannot recall folks who have been won to Jesus Christ by heated arguments. I think I could count all the converts that I have ever heard of on one finger who have been made through debating. People can resist your argument I do not care how logical it is. But they cannot resist a life made beautiful by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Paul said to the Galatians, "Ye glorify Christ in me." That is, that there is so much of beauty and strength in this great man that they were made, not to worship him, but to worship Christ that made him what he was.

And, my brethren, this is the way to conquer. There is no other way. Over in Japan a few years ago a young man was engaged to teach in one of the Japanese schools. He was employed on this specific condition. They knew he was a Christian, but he was not to mention Christ in the course of his teaching. He rigidly adhered to his agreement. And yet, unknown to himself, forty of the young men who were under him met secretly and pledged themselves to give up idolatry and to become Christians. And twenty-five of these have since then entered the Kiiolo Christian College. What was the secret? Through fidelity to God, God had made him a pillar in His holy temple.
"The Dead Church"

Revelation 3:1

"Do you know of any church that is so worth while for me to attend today?" "Indeed I do," is the reply. There is a church at the corner of Self-satisfied and Complacency Streets. You ought to go there. If you are going to spend a Sunday in the city of Sardis. That's a live proposition, that church. And its pastor is indeed a live wire."

So men talked about this famous church in the city of Sardis. Mark you, this church had a reputation. It was known far and wide. And that reputation, I must confess, was one that is to be desired. It was a reputation for life. And you are aware of the fact that nothing is so much to be desired as life. And a reputation for life is entirely good provided you have the commodity for which you are famous.

I think it altogether splendid for a church to be known. I believe it is the duty of the church to make itself known as widely as possible. I think every church, so far as lies within its power, ought to haunt the city where it does business with the fact of its presence. It ought to force people to know that it is there. I believe in advertising.

This church was well advertised. It had a great reputation. But the startling part about it is the wide contrast between what men thought of this church and what God thought of it. It is amazing to see how destitute it was of that very something on which it prided itself. In my early ministry I was sent to a town called Blooming Grove. It is a rather lovely name. But when I got there I not only found no blooming going on, but there was not even any grove to bloom. It was only a few houses sowed broadcast on the face of the desert.

Now, here is a letter written by the Son of God to this church that called itself The Live Church. Listen to what it said: "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." I know your reputation. I know you pride yourself on your activities. I know the praise you give your pastor for his drawing power. But I know, also, that in spite of all these activities and all this outward show and all this good name and all this fair reputation, that in reality you are dead."

And remember that this is not the declaration of a cynic. It is not the criticism of some disgruntled member of the church who has been put out of office. It is not the comment of an envious outsider. It is the sure word of Him who knows. The one who puts His finger upon the pulseless wrist of this church and pronounces it dead is none other than the infinite Physician, the eternal Christ of God.

And, my brethren, it is something to startle us, it is something to send us to our knees, it is something to make us examine ourselves in the light of the Word of God. This fact that this very church that was congratulating itself and being congratulated on having an abundance of life in reality had no life at all. "Thou art dead." That is what the Master said of it. I wonder what He would say if He spoke out about our church. I wonder what He would say if He told the truth about you as He knows it to be. What would He say if He told the truth about me? How do we stand when seen through the microscope of Calvary?

"Thou art dead." That means, of course, not physical death. It means that death that is infinitely worse than physical. It means that death that comes from separation from God. It means the withering of the
branch that has been cut off from the living vine. It means death in trespasses and in sin. And this was the state of a company of individuals who called themselves a church. This was the condition of a group of men and women who had declared their allegiance to the Son of God, who had been born again and who had a reputation among themselves and among their friends for being thoroughly alive.

What killed this church? They did not deliberately commit suicide. Do not think for a moment that this church met as a congregation or that its official board came together and passed a resolution that read something like this: "Whereas we have discovered that Jesus Christ is not what He claims to be and cannot do what He claims to do; Therefore, Be it resolved that we disband." No, this church had reached no such conclusion. They had no intention of disbanding their church.

The church did not die because they neglected it or ceased to attend it. There are churches that do die for this reason. Any neglected church will die. Put your church in the second place in your life, all of you, and you will kill it. There is many a dead church today that has been murdered in exactly that way. There are those who belong to the church but whose presence in the church help it toward the graveyard instead of toward the goal of abundance of life.

But if you had gone to this dead church you would not have found weeds growing in the walk that led to its doors. I have seen that happen, but it was not so in this case. You would not have found a dilapidated building with the windows broken and the doors torn from their hinges and the pews empty. No, this church was well kept up. Its buildings were intact. Its organizations were complete. Its finances were in good condition. Its services were well attended. It was still doing many things. It did not die, therefore, because it quit.

Neither was it killed by persecution. It is rather startling to notice that this is the only church that we have met so far that seemingly has no difficulties. The church at Ephesus had to contend with heretics. The church at Smyrna was bitterly persecuted. The church at Pergamos had to contend with the very devil himself. The church at Thyatira had the devil's strong lieutenant, the woman Jezebel. All these churches were being tempted, tried, opposed, fought, but this church at Sardis hasn't one single bit of opposition. The devil had no thought of putting his capital here. He was not needed. Even Jezebel was not needed. They were so dead that he simply left them to themselves.

Yet, this church without any serious problems and without any bitter persecutions, this is the one church that we have met so far about which our Lord has not one single good thing to say. He commended a few that were in the church, but to the church as a whole He has nothing but words of sharp rebuke. For the church at Smyrna He had nothing but commendation. For other churches He had much of commendation and some of condemnation. But for this one He has nothing but condemnation alone. Here they were, praised of men, unmolested of the devil, condemned of the Lord. It does seem that the passage is strictly true that says, "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you." The church or the preacher that has no least bit of opposition, no single bit of criticism is likely to be on the road to death instead of on the road to life.

Neither did these people die because the inner life of the church was at such a low ebb that life for them was impossible. We know this from the
fact that Jesus Christ says "there are a few even in Sardis that have not defiled their garments." Let us thank the Lord for these few, a little tiny handful, the contemptible minority among the big majority, the pure among the impure, the living among the dead. Yet God's grace proved sufficient for them. And he said to them, "They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy."

It is hard to stay alive in a dead church. When the people about you are dead and the preacher is dead, life is not easy. But it is possible. "For God is able to make all grace abound unto you, that always having all sufficiency for all things you may abound unto every good work." These few people found it so and you and I may find it so if we will.

Why then had this church died? This letter makes it plain that though they had not died through idleness or through deliberate sin they had died through dire neglect of what was inward and spiritual. People had praised them. They had become themselves a society for mutual congratulation. They had become satisfied with the praises of men. They had become contented with the superficial. Thus they had grown indifferent about supreme values. They had grown careless. They had forgotten both their highest possibilities and their deepest dangers. First, they had forgotten that though they were alive once they might die. They had forgotten the warning that says, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Many a man who once had life is spiritually dead today. It is possible for one who has escaped the corruption of this world to become entangled. It is possible for the one that is spiritually alive to become spiritually dead. The Bible is full of examples of this fact.

Not only is it possible for those who once knew the Lord to lose Him and thereby lose life, it is possible for them to do so without at first being conscious of it. For these people were not conscious of it. The same is true of Samson. You remember his trip to Gaza. He toyed with the secret of his power. He became untrue to his vows of consecration. But when his enemies came upon him he was not afraid. He had been victorious many times. He counted on victory this time. He said, "I will go out as at other times before and shake myself. But he wist not that the Lord had departed from him." He was weak. He was powerless with the powerlessness of the unspiritual. But it says he did not know it.

Do you remember when Mary and Joseph took Jesus up to the temple when he was twelve, how the lad tarried behind and Joseph and his mother knew not of it? But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey. They loved Jesus. They loved him tenderly. And yet they lost him. They lost him in the temple and they lost him without at first being conscious of their loss.

Now this question: Have you lost Him? I know you are a member of the church. You may be an office bearer in the church. You may be a preacher of the Gospel. But have you lost your Lord? Are you living on mere supposition? Are you living on a mere hope so? Or can you say with gladsome conviction, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day?"

It is a terrible thing for a church to die. Death is the colossal calamity. Death makes everything that is worth while impossible. It is life that brings to us everything that is of worth. Is there anything more charming than a church that is alive with the life of God? Is there anything more repellent than a dead church?
Death is always ugly. I do not see how we could endure that horrible ghastliness in those we love but for the fact that we are able to look upon it as a gateway into a larger life. But death in itself is terrible. It is hideous. I know we used to sing,

"Ah, the lovely appearance of death!
What sight upon earth is so fair?
Not all the gay pageants that breathe
Can with the dead body compare."

But it false, absolutely false, morbidly and insanely false. It is life that is beautiful. Death is hideous.

What is the secret of the spell that Christ casts over men? Wherein was the matchless magnetism of Him? He was attractive for many reasons but not the least part of the secret was this, He was so thoroughly alive. Everybody felt the truth of this fact, that he had an abundance of life. That is the reason the young ruler came to Him. He was asking how he might get hold on life. That is the reason Peter would not leave Him though the crowd deserted Him. He said, "Thou hast the sayings of life." If you want to be charming lay hold on the rich boon of life.

Death is tragic, in the second place, because there is no emotion in it, no responsiveness, no capacity for laughter and love and joy. Life laughs. Whenever I find a congregation that won't laugh I know I have a congregation of the dead. Life responds. Life thrills. Life glows and sings and enjoys. But not so the dead. I may be a poet and I may lie at the east window of the lovely palace overlooking the sea. And the mountains may lower up toward the stars in the background. But if I am dead there will be no thrill in me. The morning may come, singing glees, the sea and the mountain tops may blaze like the heaped up mass of a million crowns, the mocking birds may spill out a medley of music from their choir loft of green, but will the sight stir me or will the music awaken me? And if the woman I love best comes in and kisses my lips and spills a thousand April showers of tears upon my face, would I respond? Not so much as by the movement of an eyelash. God could have no joy in this church. It could not respond to His love. It was dead.

Death is tragic, last of all, because it can render no service. What can the dead do to bless the world? If a man has life he may do almost anything; Milton had no eyes, but he sung a song that will live forever because he had life. Beethoven had no ears, but he wrote music that will live forever because he had life. But the dead can do nothing but disintegrate. They can only rot themselves and help others to do the same. Oh, the calamity of all calamities is to be dead. And Jesus said to this church, "Thou art dead."

But here is a blessed fact: Christ does not look upon death as final and irremediable. He believes that there is a cure even for death. When our loved ones are dead, physically dead, we know there is no remedy. But Christ is able to say with authority and power, "Awake, thou that sleepest and arise from the dead." And so He introduces Himself to this church as the one that "hath the seven spirits." And so He introduces Himself that He may be known as the One who is able to give life.

That is the secret of His writing this stern letter to this church. That was the reason for His rebuke. He was not seeking to make their lot the harder. He was not seeking to impoverish them more and more. All He was trying to do was to give them the supreme gift, the gift of life. He
is coming that they might have life and have it in abundance.

That is why He is coming to me and you today. He does not come to steal or to kill or to destroy. He does not come that you may work less than you have worked. He does not ask this church to give up any of its activities. He asks them to put a new spirit of life into their activities. There was no harm in the things they had been doing. But they were useless because there was no power in them, no life behind them. Their activities were the motions of a galvanized corpse.

Here is a rose on a woman's hat. What is the matter with the rose? It is not poisonous. It is not harming any one. What is the matter with the rose? There is something lacking about it. It has never mined in the rich loam of the garden for the priceless gold of life. It has never drunk from the mystic chalice of the dew. It has never been christened by the gentle baptism of the rain. It has never held its cheek up to be touched into glorified color by the sun's magic brush. It does not exhale that which is the soul of the flower — perfume. The trouble with the artificial rose is that it is dead. That was the trouble with this church. And Jesus is coming to give life.

And how were they to get life? They were to get life by repenting. They were to repent of their complacency, repent of their self-sufficiency, repent of their satisfaction in the praises of men, in the mere reputation for life. "Remember," He said, "how thou hast heard and learned. Remember the old days. Remember the glad moment when you first saw the light. Remember the time when I was a reality in your life and come back and you will find, as countless others have found, that love always wins, forgiven is forgetful in its grateful tears and joy is unconfined among the smiles of those who have been won.

As the representative of my Lord I offer to you today this supreme commodity for time and for eternity. I offer it to all alike whether in the church or out of it. I offer you life. Do you not want it? Do you not yearn for it? Do you not say -

"Tis life whereof my nerves are scant.
'Tis life, not death, for which I pant.
More life and fuller that I want."

If that is your cry I know a sure way for you to win. It is an old and familiar way, but it is absolutely certain of victory. Come to Jesus Christ. Put your fingers in your ears as did Bunyan's Pilgrim and hush the voice of pride, hush the voice of cowardice. Flee to Him crying, "Life, life, eternal life", and He will not disappoint you.