

THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE DIVINE REVELATIONS AND THEIR APPLICATIONS

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MESSAGE TWO: THE COMPLETION OF THE DIVINE REVELATIONS: FROM CHRIST TO THE LOCAL CHURCHES (2)

In this series of messages we wish to see how the revelations given to Peter, Paul, and John advanced from one to the other, and how they affected the brothers who received them. The Lord and His church was first unveiled to Peter, and then to Paul. Finally, unto John came the treasures Peter and Paul had received. What was revealed unto John, however, was yet something further.

PETER'S INITIAL REVELATION: JESUS AS THE CHRIST IS BUILDING HIS CHURCH

The initial revelation that Peter received is still something very rich. He saw that Jesus was the Christ, the Anointed One to carry out God's economy. He also saw that the church, or assembly (as he knew the word), would be something the Lord Himself would build. He surely saw that the Lord being the Anointed One to carry out God's economy was related to His being the One who would build His church. Therefore, Peter saw that to carry out God's economy, Christ must build His church. In fact, God's economy is totally focused upon Christ and His work of producing the church.

PAUL'S FURTHER REVELATION: CHRIST AND THE CHURCH - ONE HEAVENLY ENTITY EXPRESSED ON EARTH

As to Christ and the church, however, Paul saw something more. He saw that Christ and His church were inseparable, that they were one entity. The Christians Paul persecuted were on the

earth, but he discovered that they were joined in one with the heavenly Christ. Therefore Paul saw, firstly, that the heavenly Christ in resurrection was one with the Christians he was touching on earth. Secondly, he saw that to follow the Christ in resurrection meant to be daily identified with the suffering Jesus.

Seeing that Christ Today is Still Jesus for Us to Experience

When we begin to follow after this Christ, the one we experience in our daily life is the suffering Jesus. Christ in His glory attracts us, but as we follow Him, we take the way that the one known as Jesus took. Since He was misunderstood, we will be misunderstood. Since He was mocked, we will be mocked. Since He was diligent and denied Himself for the Father's sake, we should also be diligent and deny ourselves for His sake. This was the heavenly Christ's response to Paul's question, "Who are You, Lord?" - "I am Jesus, whom you persecute" (Acts 9:5).

Paul then had a second question: "What do You want me to do?" (Acts 22:10). Those who are young and bold respond to the Lord's calling in this way. They like to tell the Lord, "Lord, I am now Yours. Tell me what You want me to do! Raise up churches? Preach to the crowds? Go to the sea or to the mountain? Just tell me, and I will do it!" Well, this is much better than treating the Lord as someone who must always do things for us! (However, you should not be afraid to ask the Lord for things, for when He answers your prayers, you can at least tell others you have a living God! But Paul skipped this "stage".) The Lord's response to this question was, "Go into the city. There someone will come to you and tell you what to do."

PAUL'S EXPERIENCE AFTER SEEING THE HEAVENLY VISION: LOSING SIGHT OF EVERYTHING ELSE

At this time, after beholding the Lord's glory, Paul could not see anything, although his eyes were opened. Wasn't this our case

after we first saw the Lord? Before we met the Lord, our eyes were always fixed on things such as entertainment, money, cars, jobs, and so on. After we saw the Lord, however, we became “blind”. This “blindness” is the mark of a saved one. After seeing Christ, we declare that our life is for nothing but Him! Everything else disappears. Our only desire is to gain Him; we no longer focus on other things.

Praying to Lay Hold of the Vision

Then Paul went into the city, and there we are told he fasted and prayed for three days. I believe this really stirred the Lord. How many believers, after they receive the Lord, pray like this? After we are saved, the Lord often allows Satan to tempt us away, to see where we are. Will we pray? Something attractive will come. Will we keep ourselves fixed on Christ alone? If we were to judge according to the prayer meetings among the churches, we have not done that well, for they are typically not well-attended. Many read the Bible; many fellowship with other believers; many function in the meetings, but do many pray? We should realize how serious this is. No vision can be substantiated without prayer. If you do not pray, what you have seen will not become yours.

THE CONTINUATION OF HIS VISION: SEEING CHRIST ON EARTH - FINDING HIS SIGHT IN THE PRACTICAL CHURCH LIFE

During those three days of fasting and praying, Paul surely began to see so much concerning the Lord and concerning God’s economy. Due to Paul’s prayer, the Lord was moved to contact Ananias and to tell him, “Go to him. Look...he is praying!” (vv. 9-11). Paul was still in a state of blindness. While he was still praying, Ananias came to him, and Paul heard another voice and had another “vision.” Remember, the first voice He heard and the first vision he had was of Someone heavenly. Surely that Someone had a marvelous voice. And surely that was a heavenly light. But now the voice he heard was perhaps a little gravelly,

certainly something of the earth and not the heavens. This voice told him, “Brother Saul, the One you met on the road sent me here so that you might receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” This brother’s word to Paul was the continuation of the Lord’s speaking.

What Paul saw on the road to Damascus was the heavenly Christ, but what he saw immediately following this was a brother in the local church. The heavenly Christ descended to become the earthly Ananias beside him. His first vision was from the heavens, his next vision was from the earth. As Ananias spoke to him, the scales fell from off his eyes. What he saw after seeing his heavenly vision was a brother.

Surely there seems to be a great difference between these two “visions,” does there not? On the one hand, Christ was so heavenly, while the brother who came to Paul seemed to be completely of the earth. This is our common thought, but we must see that in reality, the saints and Christ are joined as one! Perhaps Paul did not fall to the ground at Ananias’ words as he at the Lord’s speaking, but this brother was a members of that very Christ who appeared to him. To Christ, His members are Him. If you say, “I do not like this brother.” Christ will say, “That member is Me! You cannot say that you do not love one of My members, and yet say that you love Me! My hand is Me, My eye is Me, every one of My members if a part of Me!”

Paul acquired a marvelous revelation. He saw that the heavenly, resurrected Christ was one with His members on the earth as His one Body. He also saw that the local church was the place where this heavenly calling was practically realized. The heavenly Christ gave him the vision, but it was in the practical church life that he found his eyesight.

**JOHN'S CULMINATING REVELATION:
LOCAL CHURCHES UNDER THE CARE OF
THE SON OF MAN**

In John's revelation, the churches come first, followed by Christ! To Peter, Christ was unveiled first, and then the church. In Paul's revelation, Christ and the church were seen as one entity, with the local churches being the practical outworking of the heavenly vision of the Body of Christ. (The churches in Paul's revelation are the substantiation of this heavenly vision. Without the local churches, there is no practical expression of this Body on earth.)

John First Saw Seven Golden Lampstands

In John's revelation, however, as found in the first chapter of his book of Revelation, the first thing he saw was seven golden lampstands (Rev. 1:12-13), which represent seven churches (1:20). Seven in the Bible is the number of completion in this age, so this indicates that these lampstands represent all the local churches, wherever they may be.

According to this it can also be seen that the churches are not independent from each other. Rather, they are all interrelated. This is marvelous. In John's revelation, the local churches become so crucial. In the initial revelation, given to Peter, the revelation of Christ came first, and then the revelation that He would build His church (Matt. 16:16-18). Here, with John, what is first unveiled when he turns to see the voice that speaks to him are the churches as seven golden lampstands. In the beginning, Peter saw Christ and the church. In John's revelation, we see the local churches first, and then Christ.

We may think that our church is small and insignificant. No. Every local church is a golden lampstand on this earth. It does not matter how many are meeting together in your locality, and it does not matter what their condition is spiritually. As long as some are standing on the ground of oneness in their locality, that church is a golden, shining lampstand. Each church is equally precious in the sight of the Lord.

Let us come directly to the verses. Revelation 1:10-11 says, “I was in spirit on the Lord’s Day and heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, saying, What you see write in a scroll and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamos and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.” For some reason the Lord does not even say, “the church in Ephesus,” and so on, but rather only says “Ephesus”. It would seem as if, to the Lord, the church was expressed through each city!

John Then Saw One Like the Son of Man, Walking in the Midst of the Lampstands

The verses continue, “And in the midst of the lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment reaching to the feet, and girded about the breasts with a golden girdle. And His head and hair were as white as white wool, as snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire; and His feet like shining bronze, as having been fired in a furnace; and His voice was like the sound of many waters” (1:12-15).

As the Son of Man, Jesus Comes to Us in His Tested and Divine Humanity

Jesus is revealed here as walking in the midst of the churches. He comes to us firstly as the Son of Man. This points to how He suffered for us and how He now covers us in His humanity. He has been through all the trials, yet He was found to be without fault. This is the One who is now caring for those who are in the churches. He knows what it means to be a human being. He is not coming to chastise us for our failures. The garment He is clothed with is a priestly one, and His golden girdle is girded around His breast rather than His waist. This indicates His work for God on our behalf is something out of His love, and not merely a function of some kind of responsibility.

We should expect that the church life will be a messy “work in progress” until the Lord returns. As this is going on, the Lord walks among us clothed in a white garment and girt about the breast with a golden girdle. He says, “I am your righteousness. Come to Me. Hide in Me. Rely on Me. Take Me. Take My blood. I am your covering.” We are the objects of the Lord’s loving care, particularly as we struggle to stand as the church in our locality.

***The Whiteness of His Head and His Hair
Conveying His Eternal Nature***

The Lord’s head and hair are also seen to be white as white wool, and as snow. Wool is of the animal realm, and snow is of the physical realm. “Whiteness” indicates the Lord’s unchangeableness. He is the self-existing, ever-existing one. He also created all things with His economy in view. He is unchanging. We often feel that things change, but with Him, nothing has changed. We like to remember the “good old days.” To His feeling, however, it is the same. Whether you say something is so blessed, or whether you say something is so poor, the Lord is the same; He does not change. From your point of view, it seems your situation and your condition changes. The Lord, however, never changes. He is the eternal God carrying out His eternal purpose for His eternal glory.

We may feel that the atmosphere in the church life has changed, or that the practice of the church life has changed, or that we are now up or down. But the Lord who began the work will complete it; He is not swayed. We change, and even fail, but the Lord never changes what He has determined to do with us. We look at the church and think things are a mess; the Lord says that it matters not what we feel, for He is the one who is building the church.

***His Eyes being Like a Flame of Fire
Conveying His Work of Judging and Testing***

He is also seen as having eyes that are like a flame of fire (Rev. 1:14b). Fire in the Bible burns what is judged by God. But it can also be said that fire tests to see what is of God and what is not. With his burning eyes, the Lord searches out what cannot be burned, as well as what can be. After this burning, all the negative things are gone, and all the positive things stand out.

Every one of us is loaded with problems. But we should also realize that every one of us also has something divine that has been wrought into us. We all are possessors of the divine nature. We all have had some divine growth. We also have been divinely gifted. It depends upon which angle you look at it from. One person may see the good, another may see the bad. But the Lord searches with His burning eyes, seeing neither good nor bad, but rather searching out what is divine. In His working He neither uplifts the person or disgraces the person; what He seeks to do is to produce what is precious in that person. He is for what is of Himself in that person. He is for whatever is heavenly in that person. His burning eyes search out to manifest whatever is healthy and burn away whatever is not.

Thus the Lord says, “I am Your righteousness, I love You so much, and I will never change. I will produce in You whatever is of Me, and deal with whatever is not.” But there is something more. Not only is He clothed with a white garment, not only is He girded about with a golden girdle at the breast, not only are His head and hair white like white wool and like snow, and not only are his eyes like a flame of fire - His feet are also seen to be like shining bronze that has been fired in the furnace, and His voice is heard to be like the sound of many waters (v. 15).

***His Feet Being Like Shining Bronze Conveying
His Ability to Carry Us Through the Judging and Testing***

The Lord's feet being bronze indicates that He has been fully tested under God's judgment through every trial. Bronze in the Bible symbolizes judgment. He is fully tested. When we discuss judgment, we might have the feeling that it is something that is going to be rather hard on us. Our thought might be that in this matter, the Lord will come to us to deal with us as a judge or as a policeman. The thought of being burned in judgment is rather scary. But in reality, the Lord's dealing with us is very different from this, for He is the one who has Himself first experienced the fire. Everything that is not of God will be burned away, that is true. But the Lord is with you to bring you through this experience. He is full of understanding and sympathy, and He is able to strengthen us to pass through the experience of judgment. When the Lord confronts things in us that need to be judged, He says, "This needs to be judged, but I am with You. Let Me carry you through this process." The Lord does not come to us just to punish us. He sustains us as we go through the process of being judged. He carries us through as we are being worked upon.

***His Voice Being Like the Sound of
Many Waters Conveying His Power***

Furthermore, His voice is described as being "the sound of many waters." Such a sound is not something that produces fear, but it is something strong. It is not said to be like thunder, which produces fear in men. Rather, it is like the sound of Niagara Falls, which is enjoyable to listen to in its power.

***As the Son of Man, Jesus Holds the
Leading Ones in His Right Hand***

John also tells us that in the Lord's right hand He held seven stars who were the "messengers" of the churches.(1:16, 20). This sometimes bothered me, for I thought that since the church is already a shining lampstand, it has no need of shining stars. Why should there be stars mentioned along with the lampstands?

We all must realize how crucial it is that, for the lampstand's sake, the Lord holds some stars in His hands. These stars are those the Lord has entrusted the church to - the elders. Some may feel the elders are out-of-date, or not in the "flow," or that they are useless, or ancient, or whatever. What such saints should realize, however, is that the Lord is not holding them in His hands. He is holding the elders. With the churches, there are the stars that the Lord is holding in His hands. Many of you may think you can do better than your leading ones, but for this portion in the church life, God is not holding you; He is holding those He has appointed.

In the churches, there is such an order. For the sake of His testimony, He holds certain ones in His hands. Sometimes some may feel that they are frustrated by the elders in our locality, but God is upholding them. Without them, the church life would not be able to shine properly. We should recognize and honor those who are stars in the churches, for the Lord, as He walks among the churches, is holding them in His hand. To Him, they are His co-workers, laboring together with Him for His testimony in each locality.

What the Lord Speaks to One Church Should Become the Blessing of All the Churches

Finally, we should consider Revelation 2:7, where it says, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." After the Lord has said something to the messengers, or stars, of each of the seven churches, He says "What I have said to one church, let everyone hear it." This indicates that one church's blessing should become every church's blessing, and that one church's learning should become every church's learning. What the Lord does in one church should become something for all the churches. No church is independent. All the churches must stand together in fellowship and bear one testimony of Christ. Together they bless each other in Christ. This is wonderful.

Now we should be able to begin to realize how basic was Peter's vision, how profound was Paul's, and how conclusive was John's. May we all pray, "Lord, I thank You. I have Christ, and I have the church. I have the Body of Christ and I have the practical church life. I also thank You that I have the living Christ who walks in the midst of all the local churches." We all come from our particular local church, but no church stands alone. We are not struggling to stand for the Lord and follow Him by ourselves. We are bearing this testimony together. When one church is blessed, all the churches are blessed. The speaking of the Lord to one church becomes the Lord's speaking to all the churches. May the Lord have mercy on us that we may enter into what is contained in this marvelous revelation.

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