

When the Lord Speaks

*“The LORD is in his
holy temple: let all
the earth keep
silence before him.”*

—*Habakkuk 2:20*

IN ONE OF THE PROPHE-
cies descriptive of the raging
nations in the great “time of
trouble” with which the pres-
ent age is ending, Jehovah

says, “Be still, and know that I am God.” (Ps. 46:10) The people of the world today generally have little inclination to listen to anything the Lord might say to them. For this reason, they blindly continue on in their futile attempts to restore order among the strife-ridden nations and peoples of the earth.

The ability to listen is a great asset even in human relationships. He who never listens to what another says shuts himself up in the small world of his own thoughts; and yet probably all of us are to some extent guilty of this habit. Are we good listeners, or are we discourteous toward those with whom we converse by frequently interrupting them in the midst of thoughts they are endeavoring to relate to us, or by silently ignoring them?

In our fellowship with the brethren, it is especially important that we cultivate the habit of being good

listeners, for each one has thoughts that will refresh and strengthen us as New Creatures if given the opportunity to express them. Some of the richest spiritual gems of thought have been expressed by those who are not viewed as teachers in the church. Let us realize this and try not to monopolize every conversation in which we participate.

A COMPARISON

The loss of blessings through failure to listen to each other emphasizes the still greater importance of giving ear to the truths the Lord expresses to us through his Word. It is unfortunate if we show a lack of courtesy to our brethren by constantly interrupting them when they endeavor to converse with us, but we are both discourteous and irreverent to God when we fail to give attention to him or treat lightly what he has to say.

Throughout the Old Testament particularly, the Lord pleads with his people to give ear to his instructions. To be impressed with this fact, we note that word “hearken” is used in many exhortations to stress the importance of giving heed to Jehovah’s Word. One of the Hebrew words used in the Old Testament and translated “hearken” is explained in *Strong’s Hebrew Dictionary* as meaning “hearing with intelligence,” and with the implied object of obeying.

In the New Testament we have the exhortation, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” (Rev. 2:7) This admonition is used in connection with the messages to each of the “seven churches” referred to in chapters 2 and 3 of the Book of Revelation. This repetition should

impress us with the importance of hearkening unto the Lord. If he has given us “ears” that are capable of hearing and obeying his instructions and admonitions, how serious it would be not to listen to “what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”

In each of these messages to the seven churches there are expressed both commendations as well as condemnations. These messages are directed to the professed followers of the Master, some of whom are true to their profession, and some who are not. To a large extent the message to “the church at Ephesus,” found in Revelation 2:1-7, is one of commendation, but not altogether. The Lord says, “I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.”—vs. 4

Perhaps the loss of our first love is manifested by our inability to endure hardships resulting from the faithful carrying out of our consecration vows. It may be that the “light affliction” of the “former days” now seems to be an extremely burdensome trial. (II Cor. 4:17) If to any extent a change like this has occurred, we should take the Master’s warning seriously to heart, and endeavor by divine grace, not only to remember the former days, but also to regain our original first love enthusiasm for the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren.

“FEAR NOT”

The Spirit’s message through Jesus to “the angel of the church in Smyrna,” recorded in Revelation 2:8-11, reveals the presence “of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.” These, apparently, were as the “tares” which had grown up amongst the “wheat” in Jesus’ parable

of the wheat and the tares. (Matt. 13:24-30) The true disciples were encouraged to remain faithful despite the opposition which might be leveled against them by those of “the synagogue of Satan.”

“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer,” Jesus said to the church at Smyrna. While Jesus was still with his disciples in the flesh he said to them, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32) One of the purposes of the messages to the seven churches is to remove fear from the hearts of the Lord’s people. However, this objective will not be accomplished in us as individuals unless we give ear to what the Holy Spirit says through the Word of God.

To the church at Smyrna the Master further said, “The devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” (Rev. 2:10) Imprisonment is not necessarily a literal fulfillment in the experiences of a great number of the Lord’s people today. However, during the past century hundreds of God’s people suffered in prisons and concentrations camps in Europe. In the United States, some also, due to their religious conscientious objection to participating in war in any form, were sent to prison. As to the future, we do not know if the current chaotic conditions might worsen to such an extent as to bring about a similar situation again in some part of the world.

We are not to borrow trouble, nor are we to look for it. “Fear not,” is the Master’s plain admonition. We know that we will be given strength and “grace

to help” in our every “time of need” and for whatever experience we are called upon to endure. (Heb. 4:16) Faithfulness in enduring the little vexing day by day trials often requires greater courage and stamina than standing up against severe persecution. It is not for us to determine the experiences which are best suited to our needs. Our chief concern is that we remain faithful even unto death. If we do, as the message to the church at Smyrna says, we shall receive a crown of life.

“MORE THAN THE FIRST”

The message of the Spirit to “the angel of the church in Pergamos” reveals that there was much in this assembly of which the Lord did not approve. (Rev. 2:12-17) Nevertheless, it did contain some fervent and pure-hearted individual followers of the Master who held fast to his name, not denying the faith, but suffering as “faithful martyrs.” (vs. 13) There were also those faithful ones of the church in Thyatira, who were told, “I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.”—Rev. 2:19

This information is not given merely as an item of interest, but rather that we might endeavor to be like these faithful brethren, who, amidst all the unfavorable circumstances which surrounded them in the Pergamos and Thyatira periods of the church, progressed in grace and in godlikeness. They did not permit the iniquities which surrounded them to cause their zeal to “wax cold.” (Matt. 24:12) Even if our greatest trial is simply in waiting for the outworking of the divine plan, let us actively

wait, continuing zealously to increase in love, service, faith, patience and good works.

The message to the unfaithful in the Thyatira church is a drastic one, emphasizing that dire punishment would fall upon those who practice evils of various kinds. Speaking symbolically of Jezebel, or Babylon, the Master said, "I will kill her children with death." One of the purposes of this, the Lord explains, is that "all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works."—Rev. 2:23

The glorified church of Christ beyond the veil will be made up of those who, individually, were faithful unto death. The Lord is not taking groups, congregations or church organizations into the kingdom to live and reign with Christ. It is blessed to fellowship and work together in our local ecclesias, and to cooperate nationally and internationally in a general service of the brethren and proclamation of the Truth. However, participating in these activities does not, in itself, assure us of receiving the heavenly reward of joint-heirship with Christ. As noted in the foregoing verse, the Master said that he will give to each one of us, as individuals, according to our works.

On the other hand, one of the tests which the Lord permits may be how humbly we obey the instructions of his Word to "be subject one to another." (I Pet. 5:5) This is essential if we are to work together to the glory of his name. We might be very faithful in serving the Lord independent of association with others of our brethren, but the Lord who searches the "reins and hearts" might be

more pleased if we worked together with those of “like precious faith.”—II Pet. 1:1

The general fellowship of the brethren in gatherings and in the service of the Truth is the Lord’s arrangement. It began at Pentecost and was encouraged in the Early Church by the apostles. (Acts 2:42) The spirit of division and of going separate ways was deplored. However, individual faithfulness to the Lord was then, and still is, required of each one who proves worthy to live and reign with Christ. May we realize at all times that the Lord sees into our hearts, and that only if they are pure and fully dedicated to him, will we enjoy his approval, and, as a joint-heir with Jesus, receive “authority over the nations.”—Rev. 2:26,27, *International Standard Version*

EVEN IN SARDIS

The mingling of the true and the nominal [in name only] disciples of the Master throughout the various stages of the church’s development, as illustrated by the “seven churches which are in Asia,” is again clearly indicated in the message given “unto the angel of the church in Sardis.” Jesus said, “I have not found thy works perfect before God.” (Rev. 3:1,2) However, he also said to this church: “Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.”—vs. 4

To this church the Lord also said, “Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.” (vs. 1) Here, apparently, is described a state of spiritual lethargy on the part of many in this church, and which is such a crippling malady in any Christian’s life. This

is a timely reminder to all of us of the possibility of becoming spiritually drowsy. We do not actually have to practice wrong in order to lose the Lord's favor. Permitting our first-love enthusiasm to cool and drifting aimlessly along will do it. Are we hearing and heeding this message from the Lord's Word and developing our character by it?

How wonderful is the reward that is promised to those who overcome! The Lord says, "The same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels." (vs. 5) Can we think of anything more wonderful than to have our names confessed before the Heavenly Father, and before his angels? This is one of the rewards for obediently hearkening to what the Spirit says unto the churches.

MESSAGE TO PHILADELPHIA

In delivering his message "to the angel of the church in Philadelphia," the Master mentions some of his own qualifications. We read, "These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth."—Rev. 3:7

Jesus is both holy and true. We can depend upon his word. How unwise it would be not to give ear to him! In addition, he has the "key of the house of David." (Isa. 22:22) This is the greater house of David in which Jesus himself is the supreme ruler, and the overcomers of the Gospel Age the joint-heirs with him. (Rom. 8:17) However, he possesses the key, the authority, to open this door of opportunity to whomsoever he will, and to close it whenever he

determines it is the proper time to do so, in accordance with his Father's plan.

As we have noted, within the different time periods for each of the seven churches, there have been some who practiced various iniquities spoken of in these messages. The door to the special "house of David" class is closed to these, and no man can open it for them. It cannot be opened by human philosophy, nor by a mere outward show of righteousness or works. Likewise, it cannot be closed to those whom the Lord judges to be overcomers.

However, let us give ear to the Lord, rather than to human philosophy, and continue on zealously to do his will, that we may be among the overcomers. The Lord says, "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, ... and I will write upon him my new name."—Rev. 3:12

While these messages to the seven churches have certain chronological applications, yet in principle they all apply throughout the entire Christian age. It has been true of "the called" of God in every part of the age that they have had set before them an "open door" of opportunity to prove worthy of joint-heirship with the Master. (Rom. 8:28; Rev. 3:8) Human creeds or philosophies cannot close this door.

Revelation 3:8 continues, "For thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name." None of the Lord's people have sufficient strength of their own to be overcomers, but all must make the endeavor. If our hearts are in harmony with God's Word and we are willing to acknowledge him and accept the opportunity of

suffering and dying with Jesus, we will be given the necessary strength for every “time of need.” (Heb. 4:14-16; Ps. 46:1) This is what the Lord is saying to us. However, if we fail to keep his word, we will not be in a position to fully receive needed encouragement, and we may faint by the wayside.

LAODICEAN CHURCH

The Lord’s message to the Laodicean church, like the others, also includes both criticisms and commendations. “I know thy works,” he says, “that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.” (Rev. 3:15,16) This is addressed to those believers whose life of consecration is losing its fervency and zeal.

What a realistic illustration the Lord uses to indicate lack of faithfulness on the part of these! A drink that is hot or cold is palatable and enjoyable, but it is distasteful if lukewarm. Evidently, many in the church of Laodicea are like the lukewarm drink, and risk being rejected by the Lord.

Those in such a condition may claim that they are “rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.” The reason they say this is because they have ceased to hearken unto the voice of the Lord and have begun to follow their own supposed wisdom. This eventually leaves them outside of God’s love and care. While such feel secure in their own wisdom and strength, they do not realize that from the Lord’s standpoint they are “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.”—vs. 17

These words could apply to any one of us as individuals and would apply should we embrace the

viewpoint and attitude of self-reliance, and in our spiritual pride fail to give proper heed to the voice of the Lord. Let us not take the position of the Pharisee in Jesus' parable who thanked the Lord that he was not like the publican, assuming that the Lord's favor to him was a certainty. (Luke 18:9-14) Rather, let us have a reverential fear, lest, as Paul states, "a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it," by failing to hearken unto the voice of the Lord, and by disobeying his instructions.—Heb. 4:1

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock," Jesus said. "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." (Rev. 3:20) These words are addressed to us individually. If we are of those who hear the Lord's voice, open the door of our hearts, commune with him, and obey his instructions to the best of our ability during our earthly sojourn, we will be part of the overcoming class.

At this time especially, in the end of the Gospel Age, it is all the more important that we give heed to Jesus' voice and that he "sups" with us. This includes the privilege of feasting with him on the precious "meat in due season" with which we have been bountifully fed during the present Harvest period.—Matt. 24:45

How humble it should make us to realize that we have been given ears to hear the knock of our precious Lord! However, it is necessary that we continue hearkening to his voice. Only by so doing can we hope to be overcomers. Indeed, precious is the promise to those who are thus faithful. Jesus said, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me

in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”—Rev. 3:21

GIVE EARNEST HEED

Paul wrote that “we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.” (Heb. 2:1) It is not enough that we once heard the Lord’s voice and obeyed it in making a full consecration to do his will. In the daily carrying out of our consecration vows it is essential that we continue to listen and to give earnest obedient heed to his voice if we are to continue in his favor.

There is always the danger that the cares of this life, the deceitfulness of riches, the weaknesses of the flesh, and the temptations of Satan, may dull our ears to that all-important voice of the Lord, hence the need of daily giving “more earnest heed” to what he is saying. Let us be watchful also, lest we interrupt the Lord with our own selfish opinions and fail to hear his messages which are so essential for our guidance and strength.

Paul wrote concerning the spiritual weapons of our warfare, that they are “mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; Casting down imaginations [Greek: reasonings], and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” (II Cor. 10:4,5) How foolish we would be to set up our own opinions and reasoning above the instructions of the Lord. Instead, let us hearken unto his voice, and zealously endeavor to obey his every instruction. “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”—Rev. 3:22 ■