

The Events of the Missing Week

by G. Campbell Morgan

The sermon explores the events of the missing week, including the Church's removal, the revelation of the man of sin, the gathering of the remnant, and the judgment of the Church, ultimately leading to the apocalypse of Jesus and the marriage of the Lamb.

Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 2:7

Topics: "The Antichrist", "The Rapture"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan discusses the significant events that will occur during the 'missing week' between Christ's return for His Church and His second coming. He emphasizes the fear and wonder that will grip those left behind, as well as the profound impact of the Church's removal on society, which will lead to both a rise in evil and a turning of many towards God. Morgan highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in restraining lawlessness and the eventual revelation of the Antichrist, while also assuring that a great multitude will come to faith during the tribulation. He concludes with a hopeful vision of the Church's purification and eternal union with Christ, amidst the chaos of the world.

Transcript

OUR last chapter dealt with the "week" of years between the Parousia of Christ and His Apocalypse. Let us now consider the events of the interval, both on earth and in heaven. Fear and wonder will take possession of those who are left when our Lord comes for His Church. There will be on every hand strange questionings, producing conviction in thousands of souls, turning them, even during that terrible time, with their faces toward God. We might easily give free play to imagination concerning the effect produced upon those who remain. Fathers, mothers, Bone, daughters, brothers, and sisters, will be missing, taken away to meet the Lord in the air; and the consternation ensuing may be readily pictured. Rev. John MacNeil of Australia, who has recently gone to his rest, has a very graphic passage in one of his books, describing this period when the taking away of a mother from her daughter may be instrumental in turning the latter from frivolous worldliness to the knowledge of God and the service of Christ.

But we are more interested in the effect produced upon the character of the age by taking from the world those who are found waiting for the coming of Christ. The influence of Christian character on the present age is revealed under the figures used by Christ Himself with regard to His people. He calls them the light of the world and the salt of the earth. Remove the light, and darkness ensues; take away the antiseptic, and there will be unlimited opportunity for extension of corruption and development of evil. The presence

of godly men and women is to-day affecting the life of London to a larger extent than we think. We all feel that we are doing comparatively little for God in our great city. Doubtless I speak to many who have labored in London for more years than I have lived; but the twelve months spent here have burdened me with a conception of its need which by its vastness almost discourages effort. Still, the life of 'the great city' is enormously influenced for good by its godly citizens.

The effect of the Church's removal must be twofold-many will turn to the Saviour; but, on the other hand, many will throw off the restraint which up to that time will have rested upon them. Corruption and evil of every kind will increase. It is in this way that the man of sin will be revealed.

2 Thess. ii.7-10: "For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work; only there is one that restraineth now, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall be revealed the lawless one. . . . whose coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceit of unrighteousness for them that are perishing."

There may have been historic and local applications of these words, but it is the Holy Spirit Who hinders the full manifestation of that mystery; and the end of my quotation gives, in very solemn terms, the marks of the lawless one's coming and rule. Coincident with the Thessalonian prophecy are the words in Dan. xi. 36:

"And the king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods: and he shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished."

Now turn to 1 John ii. 18:

"Little children, it is the last hour: and as ye heard that antichrist cometh, even now have there arisen many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour."

Verse 22. - "Who is the liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? This is the Antichrist, even he that denieth the Father and the Son."

Chap. iv. 3: "Every spirit which confesseth not Jesus, is not of God: and this is the spirit of the antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it cometh; and now it is in the world already."

The spirit of antichrist is the mystery of lawlessness, the essential spirit of evil and of opposition to God; and it has been in the world from the moment of the Fall until now. The late F.W. Robertson, of Brighton, in one of his remarkable sermons, traces the diversity of manifestations which the spirit of antichrist has had in various ages, such as power, idolatry, or mammon; but it is ever the self-same attempt to underwork good by evil.

In that sense, the mystery of iniquity, the spirit of lawlessness, antichrist, is at work today; but when the Church is removed find the Spirit of God in His dispensational fullness is consequently taken away from the earth, there will be nothing to hinder the working of that Satanic power which will become concrete and incarnate in the person of one man. I have already referred in these addresses to a work which I recommend every one to read as being a most valuable contribution to the consideration of this whole subject, namely, Professor Denney's book, in the Expositor's Bible Series, upon Thessalonians. He emphasizes the fact that when Paul wrote to Thessalonica, he most certainly regarded antichrist as a person to be manifested at a given time. (With the Professor's explanation of Paul's intention we agree;

from his interpretation of the fulfillment we differ.) This will be in the interval between the coming of Jesus for His people and His appearing with them.

Daniel ix.-xi. discovers a great world-power which arises during that period conquering the earth and entering into covenant with the Jews gathered into Jerusalem, in their unbelief; and it is a remarkable sign of the present times that there are now more Jews in Palestine, driven thither by persecution, than in the days of Nehemiah. In the midst of the seven years antichrist will break the covenant, cause sacrifice and oblation to cease; and a terrible period of suffering will follow-Jacob's day of trouble and calamity. Then, Dan. ix. 27:

"Upon the wing of abominations shall come one that maketh desolate; and even unto the consummation, and that determined, shall wrath be poured out upon the desolator."

Here we have in an individual the most awful manifestation of evil the world has ever seen; one claiming to have Divine power and yet directly energized by Satan. During the latter part of the "week" will come the breaking of seals, sounding of trumpets, and pouring out of vials described in Revelation.

These seven years will see a marvellous gathering to God of stricken, smitten, and afflicted men. The hundred and forty-four thousand of the Jewish nation will be sealed ; and the great multitude, which no man can number, out of every nation, shall be brought to Christ. Let us read John's account of this multitude in Rev. vii. 13-17:

"And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, These which are arrayed in the white robes, who are they, and whence came they? And I say unto him, My Lord, thou knowest. And He said to me, These are they which come out"

and here the Revised Version makes an essential correction, as compared with the Authorized, by using the definite article:

"Of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He that sitteth on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat: for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes."

We have been singing these words in our anthems, and continually reading them as if they applied to this dispensation; but it is only true in a general sense. Undoubtedly the Church shall have all tears wiped from her eyes; but the passage refers to the great company of those who come, not through trials such as yours and mine, but, by God's grace, out of the great tribulation which follows the taking away of the Church and the revealing of the man of sin.

How is this ingathering to be accomplished? I give you my answer with reserve, because many devout students of prophetic truth differ from me here. Personally, I am convinced that not all Christian people will be taken to be with Christ on His return, but only those who by the attitude of their lives are ready for His appearing. They who remain and pass through the tribulation will be awakened by the stupendous events of their times to the privilege and responsibility of witnessing for the truth in that age. Even in the day of Jewish sorrow God will dwell with His ancient people, who will then become heralds of the Cross; and

under stress of plague, famine, and suffering beyond imagination, an innumerable multitude will "wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb." Those years will be such as the world has never seen -first, in regard to the manifestation of evil in forms more awful than we have ever known; and, secondly, in the marvellous crowding to Jesus Christ of a "great multitude which no man can number."

What of the Church during that time of tribulation? She is in the heavens with her Lord, all the retarding forsee and probationary days of earth being ended; and Rev. iv. to xix. gives a view to her position. During that interval the judgment-seat of Christ will be set up; and it is most important to distinguish between that, the bema, and the great white throne. The former is for the Church, and is set up directly she is taken from the earth; while the latter, which is an entirely different thing, comes after the Millennium.

2 Cor. v. 10, 11: "For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest unto God."

These words do not refer to the general Judgment. If you examine the beginnings of the epistles, you will find that in each case the writing is addressed to the saints, and it is of them the apostle speaks when he says, "We must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ." As sinners, our judgment was accomplished at the Cross of Christ, in view of which the Spirit convinces of judgment, not to come," but past. To the bema of Christ, we His servants must come; and all our services will be tested by His eyes of fire. This need not affright, but should fill us with godly fear and heart-searching as to the kind of work we are doing for God.

"We must all be made manifest" ; for God does not dissociate our work from ourselves. Outward effort counts for nothing unless I am a Christ-soul; and then my life is my work. The question for each one should be, Of what sort is my life? If it is self-centred and unwatchful, so also is my work-"wood, hay, stubble" (1 Cor. iii. 12). But if my life is surrendered to the King, if I am loyal to Him and absolutely under His control, mine is King's work- "gold, silver, precious stones." I like to connect this scene at the bema of Christ with John's vision of the Master, in the book of Revelation, where He is pictured as with eyes of fiery flame. Here is a man whose whole Christian life of service has been "wood, hay, and stubble" ; and the eye of fire consumes it. The man is saved, yet so as through fire. There is another whose work has been "gold, silver, and precious stones" ; and the eye of the Master purifies it of dross, burns out evil, until the work sparkles with beauty even under the glance of the King Himself.

Then shall Christ's Church, not only redeemed but purified by the fire of His eye, be presented faultless, without spot, blemish, or wrinkle, in the white light of His Father's glory and holiness. Jude 24 and 25 described this much better than any words of mine can possibly do.

"Now unto Him that is able to guard you from stumbling, not falling-"and to set you before the presence of His glory without blemish in exceeding joy, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory."

Rev. xix. 7, 8, gives what I believe to be the next event:

"Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and let us give the glory unto Him : for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And it was given unto her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright and pure: for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints."

The dress of the Bride in this remarkable ceremony of eternal union with her Lord will be that which was purified in the fire at the judgment-seat. To this succeeds the apocalypse of Jesus, "Behold, He cometh with His saints." Thus we have traced the course of events upon the earth-the full manifestation of evil, the consequent sore tribulation, and a great gathering out of both Jew and Gentile ; while in the heavens the Church has been brought to judgment, purified, presented to the Father, and eternally united to Jesus Christ. I hope it has been made clear that, during that period, the world is by no means God-forsaken. Every mundane event will be directly under Divine control; and through all the awful chaos, which will be far more terrible than anything hitherto known, God will be working toward the consummation-the coming of Jesus to set up His own reign.

I shall probably repeat again and again my personal conviction that ours is an unmeasured dispensation as far as man is concerned. "Times and seasons," which ended for awhile with the cutting off of Messiah, will be resumed when He takes away His Bride who is also rejected of men. While that is so, the signs of the times seem to indicate in the most definite manner that our age now nears its close. The general unrest plainly points to the coming of Jesus. Another portend is the return, long and distinctly foretold, of the Jew to Palestine, in a state of unbelief. Ritualism in all its varied forms is one of the surest signs of the end of this age. When the heart and spirit of true religion has gone, men ever attempt to replace it by outward show. The revival of sacerdotalism, the new assumptions of the Romish Church, and the Romanizing of the Anglican Church to so large an extent-(mourned by devout souls within her communion, quite as intensely as by those outside it)-all point to a consummation close at hand. Another proof that the coming of the Lord draweth nigh may be found in the fact that never has there been a time when all the forces of evil were allying themselves as they are to-day. The spirit of lawlessness is more and more throwing off restraint, raising its proud head, and laughing at the testimony of the living Church of Jesus Christ. To take one example-twenty years ago those who were fighting hard against the blighting drink traffic knew where to plant their blows ; but it is no longer so. The action which turned breweries into limited liability companies has permitted the roots and ramifications of this giant evil to invade our churches until we do not know where the mischief ends. Without entering into party politics, we may see how banded iniquities contrive to win their own victories in elections, whichever side they may favor.

It is no less a sign of the times, that never was spirituality more marked in the Church of Jesus Christ than it is to-day; and to that blessed fact I bear testimony with fervent gladness. Everywhere, true men and women are hungering and thirsting after God, as never before. Let there be the spiritual declaration of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ and the purposes of God, and men are found eager to hear, learn, and obey. The great spiritual movements of the last twenty years-Keswick, Northfield, Southport, Star Hall, and the holiness movement of the Salvation Army-all prove that God is giving the promised latter rain, that the end of the age draws nigh, and that the King Himself will soon appear.

We stand, as did the men of old, in the valley, and ask the same question as they: "Watchman, what of the night?" Men of God upon the heights of vision, seers of the present day, looking out upon the great horizon, send back to us the old answer, "The morning cometh; the night also." The signs of the times are such as reveal the power of spirituality, side by side with the development of evil; but, thank God, beyond the night that comes is the larger day and gladder age for man.

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