

Notes of a Lecture on Revelation 3:7-13

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon explores the faithfulness of Christ and the importance of holding onto His words amidst the failures of the church.

Scripture: Revelation 3:7

Topics: "The Return of Christ", "Faithfulness in Weakness"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the enduring faithfulness of Christ amidst the failures of the church, particularly reflecting on the message to the church of Philadelphia in Revelation 3:7-13. He highlights that despite the weakness and confusion in the world, Christ remains the Holy and True one, offering strength and blessings to those who keep His word and do not deny His name. Darby encourages believers to wait patiently for the Lord's return, assuring them that their faithfulness will be recognized and rewarded. He contrasts the true church's spiritual state with the failures of institutional religion, urging a return to genuine worship and reliance on God's presence. Ultimately, he reassures that Christ's love and grace flow abundantly to His people, even in times of trial.

Transcript

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I read the address of the Lord to the church of Philadelphia. This truth stands very simply on the Scripture. No exhibition of ruin, no exhibition of weakness in those who love the Lord, is in any wise incompatible with the fulness of Christ being made perfect in them: His fulness in their emptiness, His strength in their weakness, His riches in their poverty. I call your attention to remark the position which you and I are in now. Turn back to Pentecost. Christ had ascended into heaven. He had shown the speciality of His love to His people in sending down the Holy Ghost to them. There was really a people of God upon earth who were thoroughly unselfish, thoroughly unworldly, whose hearts had been carried away from earth into heaven with the Lord Jesus, and they were waiting here on earth till He came back, a people whose hearts were absolutely up there like a lake which reflects upon its surface the image of the object above it. They mirrored the Christ who was before their hearts. Now I find nothing of the sort. I may find souls, but no such company. I could not say, if you know the face of the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven you will find all His lineaments reflected in a people down here. In Thessalonians we get a company waiting for the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of ripening evil.

That which was set up ecclesiastically has utterly failed, but the blessed Lord does not fail. We get the same thing in Rev. 22:11 - a strange mixture of light and darkness, profession and inconsistency, and a little further on the Spirit and the Bride inviting the Lord's return. This brings to our mind distinctly a state of things like the address to Philadelphia: awful confusion on earth, a mixture of good and evil, the Word of God came in suddenly to call His people; and I find that, in spite of the confusion and the ruin, there are those who are enabled to be responsive to the mind and thoughts of the Lord Jesus Christ. We hear around us a great deal about the Church, the Church, the Church, "the temple of the Lord are we," and that which assumes to be this is that which is characterised by the power of Satan (Rome) or the power of the world.

It is remarkable and comforting we don't get here the Lord walking in the midst of the candlesticks holding the seven stars, i.e., we do not find any of these characteristics, but have quite another character, not an official one, that which was His own, and could not be put off: "He that is Holy, He that is True." These two titles are evidently divine. We could not say of John, he was the holy and the true one. He was called to be holy and to walk in the truth. But when we come to the blessed Lord, it is exactly Himself - His separatedness from evil, His faithfulness in all that belonged to God when on earth, now in heaven, and when He comes back again will still be the same. He is presented in a time of failure, of weakness and exhaustion among His people down here, still as the One expressing the character of the Father.

We are called, when put in a place of responsibility in the power of the new life, to meet it. If all has failed, God has not changed. I can look to Him, the giver, and receive something which changes not.

God is the giver - in every respect Holy and True. It was not saying now, "I have done with you," but "Behold, I have the key of David," and "I have set before thee an open door." He had got the key just at the time when all was failing. He could not present one of the insignia of the Church, because they had all been lost, betrayed away; but He could say, "I am not changed." He was the opener and the shutter. Mark the extent of Christ's two services. If Christ opens, who can shut? He had opened, He has opened. It is not "Come and see"! There was no display of power, nothing outwardly wonderful, but the course was opened to them, and "Shutteth and no man openeth." He is not here speaking of His sovereign prerogative: "I have set before thee an open course, and if you do not enter in I can shut it up again." Quite true; but here it speaks of being shut to the adversaries. He can come in when all the power of Satan seems rampant, and can put a stop or overturn either in grace or providence, i.e. - take for example the late events in Spain - He controls the passions of men; "even the wrath of man shall praise Him, and the remainder of wrath will He restrain;" or in our own land, Henry VIII. Remark how beautifully He comes out just after and meets their hearts - not one word about their works, and all about Himself He had begun by saying, "I know thy works." Well, about works. What were they? There was nothing that man could take notice of Verse 8. Only two things: "thou hast kept My words and hast not denied My name," and what have you got to shew? Nothing for man's eye to notice. Who knows if I have kept His word and not denied His name? I ought to know, and the blessed Lord knows it. If His word is something treasured up in your soul, and if, in spite of feebleness, you have not denied a certain character which was displayed, you have on you the tokens of that character which first gladdened your heart. It is exceedingly precious in a day of weakness and feebleness, when the Lord says, I've done with the churches, but I've relation (or connection) with a people on the earth, to know Himself as the fountain of all blessing, the source of all strength, His strength like a river flowing into our souls. Will our consciences bear the challenge about the "word of God dwelling in us richly"? They ought to. Does He see the word dwelling in you? God's eye marks, and not only this, but the practical dwelling on the character of the blessed Lord which that word reveals.

They took Him for everything; in their weakness they found Him at their side. In ver. 9 we get, in connection with the adversaries, the expressive hand of the Lord, and this is not an unusual thing. Even now He brings the opposers down to own that these very people whom they had despised are a people loved of the Lord. And knowing His mind, the result will be, I will write on you the tokens that I have loved you. There are tokens even the world cannot deny. It is often forced to confess, certainly these people have the favour of God upon them. Ver. 10: You have been identified with Me in the wilderness, you have kept My patience, you have recognised that I am in no hurry to rise up and take the kingdom, and you are waiting with Me. There is an hour of trouble coming to try the dwellers on earth, such as those spoken of Phil. 3:9; but you who have not denied My name, &c., have not seized on anything as your rightful portion; but you are waiting for the portion I have to give you, and are counting on it. You were willing to wait till I rose up; you were not satisfied with all the good things here without Me, but you waited till you and I could be together. I will keep you from that hour. Verse 11. There was a crown. What had they got to hold fast? Not their crown. Christ has got my crown; I have not got it. They were to hold fast that which characterised them. There was the difficulty of overcoming when iniquity abounds and the love of many waxing cold. How at such a time does the faith act which overcomes? By two things: - by treasuring up the word of Christ and not denying His name. Then it will be like a river flowing in from the blessed Lord Himself, and keeping - not will keep - your hearts bright and fresh while you are holding fast that word, that Name, and that patience.

Then He brings out royal, divine, blessed words to cheer their hearts, especially characterised by association with Himself. There is something peculiar in the promise, ver. 12. It is very different to that given to Laodicea. Supposing this had been addressed to Laodicea, it would have been out of keeping. They were a carnal people, boasting of their riches. He gives them something that even the natural mind can appreciate. They were seeking the highest place on earth, so he says, Follow Me, and I will give you something better than it all - you shall sit with Me on My throne.

But here were these poor weak things who had got no excellence. He knew every one of them, and He says, I have got certain things very near to Myself, and I propose to place you in permanence; then when the time comes many will be placed in the temple of God who have been thought little of here. He puts them in the place of blessing to go no more out. I will write upon him the name of My God; not merely a stone here, but the most precious of all things to His heart, "My new Name."

What were the thoughts of the Lord Jesus about the name (Eph. 1:21; Phil. 2:9)? The name of the city of My God. God has got a character which He shewed out there. You shall bear that character. Many thoughts are crowded together here - a dwelling place, "a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker are God," the special name, New Jerusalem, which none but He could give. Jehovah will provide perfection - the place where all His character can shine out. They might be oppressed with difficulties.

What did it signify if these poor Philadelphians and Christ were of one mind together? The very difficulties were found by God to display the riches of His grace, to shew forth the fulness that is in Christ. I suppose all the churches had contemptible thoughts about Philadelphia - a poor set of things, weakness within and difficulties without. Christ looks upon them - evil is ripening around - and He says to these poor weak things, I can let My heart flow out to them, the grace that is in Me flow out, and there will be no mistake.

It is very important to see that man has spoiled all, and will spoil everything God has put into his hands, and even till the Lord comes it is just the same. God has not changed: He can make the most desolate place to blossom and bud. Christ is not changed: He is coming forth to change. His people now are

suffering on the earth. When He comes this will be changed. There ought to be a people waiting for Him to come. Have you tasted the unwearied freshness of the love of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Are your thoughts moved by His thoughts? What is thus connecting you in all your weakness with Himself in heaven? We want stirring up. It is a time of weakness; man's mind is full of pride and exalting itself. It ought to be a time when the blessedness of what Christ is to His poor weak ones is more and more tasted by us. This leads us to know His nearness. Christ can keep nothing back from you; He has not forgotten His poor people down here. He counts nothing too good to hold out for their benefit and encouragement.

In worship we seek not sermons, but the presence of God; the accomplishment of that promise "where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them." I do not go there to hear a sermon, nor do I like to hear one; I go to worship, to find the Lord, and worship Him; and I judge that if brethren are incapable of enjoying this, it is a very bad sign. I do not go with my ears open to hear man, however gifted, but to worship God: and I beg to press this on brethren. I feel thankful if any one be led of God to give a word of exhortation or comfort. I know that the flesh has abused this, forgetting the word, "Swift to hear, slow to speak." My brethren, be not many teachers. But I add most decidedly, that though I have seen liberty used for license (and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty), I have found where God was owned incomparably more of His presence and blessing than where man's arrangements had taken the place of God. There might be evils to deplore and to correct, but there was God to enjoy because God was owned. Elsewhere I have found decent things of man, a fair show in the flesh, but a sepulchre. The God I found delight in was not there; for even God's grace or gift in teaching is a wholly different thing from God's presence in the way of worship. But I add that where in worship this latter is slighted, I have never even found the former. It is written, "Cursed be the man who putteth his trust in man." Correct the evils, brethren; but let us not disown God nor His goodness. If you cannot know His presence in worship, nor what the blessing of this is, humble yourselves; you have suffered great loss, you have spiritually declined. I shall be glad often to wait not merely to compose my spirit, to gather up my strength from the Lord before I enter on His work or open my mouth to speak in His Name, but to wait in the hope to gather up strength through the blessing conferred upon some other beloved one of God, or by joining together, whoever may be used as our mouthpiece, in thanksgiving, and prayer, and praise; for "the joy of the Lord is your strength." - J. N. D.

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