

Christ's Message to Laodicea

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a deep sense of our own insufficiency and need for Christ's righteousness in order to reach the end of God's great purpose for His Church.

Scripture: Colossians 2:1, Colossians 4:13

Topics: "Spiritual Vision", "Pursuit of God's Calling"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of Christ's message to the church in Laodicea, urging believers to recognize their spiritual poverty and need for Christ. He highlights that true Christianity involves a deep awareness of one's insufficiency and a relentless pursuit of the 'prize of the on-high calling' in Christ Jesus. Sparks warns against complacency and self-sufficiency, encouraging the church to seek spiritual vision and the righteousness of Christ. He concludes by calling for a zealous commitment to God's purpose, reminding believers that they are called to share in Christ's throne and to live with a sense of divine destiny.

Transcript

"For I would have you know how greatly I strive for you, and for them at Laodicea..." Col. 2:1.

"I bear him witness, that he hath much labor for you, and for them in Laodicea... Salute the brethren that are in Laodicea... And when this epistle hath been read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans..." Col. 4:13,15,16.

"Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on, if so be that I may apprehend that for which also I was apprehended by Christ Jesus. I count not myself yet to have apprehended: but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the on-high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded..." Philippians 3:12-15.

We will hold those Scriptures in mind. In these closing verses of the third chapter of the book of Revelation, we reach the concluding phase of the first movement of the risen Lord toward the consummation of divine purpose in this age. Throughout this time we have sought to have the great end of God for His Church overshadowing everything, kept clearly in view, because what we have here, in the first part of this great book and in the last chapters, is the great purpose of God in our salvation.

Paul, as we have read this evening, said that he was on full stretch to apprehend that for which he had been apprehended by Christ Jesus. And then, without defining exactly what that was; that object, that purpose... he did add "the prize of the on-high calling of God in Christ Jesus". It was unto that that he concedes himself as having been apprehended by Christ Jesus. Not only to be saved but to be brought to a great and glorious destiny in and by Christ Jesus. He calls it 'the prize of the on-high calling'. The end of this present part of the book of the Revelation, which book is bringing us very near to the goal, the intention of the book is to get the Church ready for the end, for the great time of crisis in view. At the end of this first part of this book which has to do with the Church, we are told what it was that Paul meant by the prize of the on-high calling. This is it: "To him that overcometh I will give to him to sit with me in my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father in His throne". That is the great object and goal for which people are saved and apprehended by Christ Jesus; to a place of sharing with Him, their Lord, the throne of government of this universe. That is the meaning of Christianity. That is in the heart of the Lord in giving the gospel, in appealing to men. It is that, dear friends, that is in view in our Christian lives. Nothing less than that. A great calling, an on-high calling, a wonderful prize: throne-sharing with Christ in government.

Well, it is of course quite significant, is it not, that that is the last note in this phase in this section of the book. And we can say, because it is quite true, that it has been that, that has governed all that has gone before. The wonderful presentation of the Lord Jesus in person in chapter one was in order that by showing His victory, the glory of His risen person, the standard should be set. And then through all these seven messages to the seven churches, as representing by their very number the whole Church in all ages - in all that is said through these: This thing is governing, this end is overshadowing, it is to this that everything is moving, the judging and the condemning and the demand to put away everything that would thwart that end and the encouraging and the confirming and the exhorting in relation to other things that will help toward that end. The End governs everything - the on-high calling, the prize of the on-high calling of God in Christ Jesus. That is in view. That explains everything. It explains all the Lord's dealings with His people. If at all times when the Lord is dealing with us we could but pause and be quiet and think "what's the meaning of this, why this?" and allow ourselves to entertain this great governing truth: He's getting us ready for the throne. He's doing something now that relates to that glorious end; He's paving the way, He's preparing us, He is cancelling out things in us that would hinder our progress toward that end. He is seeking to inculcate and develop in us the things that will hasten us toward that end. If only we could be convinced that that is exactly what it all means, it would be a tremendous help.

Now, you notice that the Lord in these letters says that quite clearly to His people. We were thinking earlier in the day about that suffering church, that suffering church, called to be faithful unto death. The Lord simply told them in plain language that their tribulation was all with a spiritual and divine purpose and quite clearly to prepare them, to qualify them for their great eternal destiny. And that's how it is.

I think, dear friends, perhaps our obsession with the importance of this life is often a great limitation upon our appreciation of the heavenly calling. We make FAR too much of this life from one standpoint, from another perhaps we don't make enough of it. From one standpoint we make far too much of it, that if we don't see everything accomplished here and now in this lifetime and all our hopes and expectations realized, then we're disappointed beings. The Lord never looks at it like that at all. Never has anything been made perfect in the lifetime of any one believer except the Lord Jesus. It is like that. On the other hand perhaps we do not make enough of the TREMENDOUS importance of what the Lord is trying to do with us IN this lifetime. However, be that as it may, there is this that stands over our lives now, these lives here, it's this tremendous heavenly calling unto which we have been apprehended by Christ Jesus. But

unto the realization of that or what Paul calls the 'attaining' unto that; certain things are necessary. And in this message to the church in Laodicea the Lord makes perfectly clear what is essential in the final issue - this Man. And He does that in the first place by presenting Himself in certain terms. You notice how He introduces Himself here: "These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God". That may not be very clear as to what it really means. Well, I suppose everybody is quite clear on the first, if you aren't, then you're terrible hypocrites for I've been hearing a lot of 'amens' tonight. That prayer drew out many 'amens' tonight. And we're accustomed to using that word, is it just a word? Is it just something we tack on at the end or at a certain point? Is it a habit, a custom? What DO we mean? No, we understand that the meaning of that word "amen" is verily, truly, positively, YES! We mean it! "These things saith the Amen..." the Amen. The One in Whom and about Whom there is no uncertainty or indefiniteness.

My dear friends, if you and I at all value our salvation, we owe it to Him Who was so THOROUGH in the work that He did for our salvation. Where should we be if He had been indifferent about our salvation? If it had been a willy-nilly matter with Him whether we were saved, whether He was neither cold nor hot about this; where should we be? No, everything about that work of redemption sees Him as One Who, without any reserve whatsoever, or two minds, divided heart, GAVE Himself for our sin that He might redeem us unto God and from all iniquity. He did not stop half way, thank God. He did not suffer Himself to be turned aside or to be influenced by secondary interests; not at all. He is the girded Servant of the Lord. He came, as we have sung, from the mansions of glory having laid aside His robes of comfort and ease... girding Himself as a servant He's come forth, on business and thorough-going business. He's finished the work. These things saith such a One. "The faithful and true witness..."

The faithful and true Witness, you see these are strong, emphatic words. He has been faithful, absolutely faithful. The apostle Paul called upon Timothy to remember Jesus Christ who before Pontius Pilate gave His testimony faithfully. Yes, He was a faithful witness and a true... the point is, and the underlining is that everything here is emphatic, it's positive, it's definite, it's real, it's utter! It is unreserved.

"The beginning of the creation of God..." How does that come into this? Well, first of all we've got to get that word "beginning". It is not the word that means the first of the creation; that He was the first one created and then there were a lot more after Him created. It is not that word at all, [it is] the Greek word "arche" which means the source of everything, the fountain head of everything, the One in whom and from whom everything has come and Who is Himself the Standard and Model of everything. That is what we mean when we speak of an 'archi-tect' - one who produces the model, out of whom comes that which is to be; the source of everything. And that's the word here, the beginning of the creation of God. How? See Him coming forth - for it says that in Him and through Him and unto Him were all things created, ALL things were made by Him, that's the Scripture. Was He lackadaisical in the creation? Was He careless in it? When the thing was completed, the evening of the sixth day, was there a lot left to be desired and a lot that needed improving upon? No, the verdict is, "it is VERY good", it is very good. The Divine verdict. He had done His work thoroughly and well, He had applied Himself to it.

What we now, even in a wrecked creation, a ruined creation, can trace of His creative fingers impresses us with the wonder of it, the wonder of the Mind there, the wonder of the Power there, all there. My point is, dear friends, that this is only one further, it's the third phrase that bears upon this one thing: you're dealing with Somebody Who is very thorough! Thorough in creation, thorough in redemption and thorough in His own person and His own witness. And that is how He is introduced to Laodicea as though He would say "this and this alone will bring you to the end". Such a spirit, such a mind, such a devotion, such a

thoroughness, such an amen disposition is ESSENTIAL if you're going to reach the end. You have got to mean business! You've got to mean business to reach that goal and obtain that prize. That's perfectly clear as the basis of His speaking to Laodicea and He goes on then to show the Laodicean's attitude of mind and heart will never get THEM there, never get them there. "I have this against thee, thou art neither hot nor cold..." There's ALL the difference between sitting with Him in His throne and being spewed out of His mouth and those are the alternatives resting upon this matter of downright and utter committal, devotion and persistence unto God's great End. Like that.

Then He analyzes this thing and in so doing indicates some things, other things, more things, essential to the attaining. Notice: "because thou sayest I am rich and have gotten riches and have need of nothing". Laodicea was a very wealthy city, it was the great banking centre of Asia minor, and which, and out from which, all the wealth of the province flowed. And the Lord took hold of that, they were proud of their wealth in Laodicea, the world was, but in the church at Laodicea there was a complacency, a satisfaction, a sense of being quite sufficient - of having got there and there was not much more to do about it "rich and increased in goods and have need of nothing". The Lord says "That will never get you to the prize, that will never get you to the prize. One ESSENTIAL if you are to come to that for which I have apprehended and chosen you, one essential is and must remain, a sense, a deep sense of your own insufficiency, of your own need, of there still being FAR more in Christ than ever YOU have discovered or possessed." It's this sense, deep sense, of spiritual need which is essential! ANY kind of gratification or satisfaction that you haven't much further to go or to gain... you're content with the little that you've got or perhaps you want a little more... but here is the spirit of the great apostle "and we've discerned it over Laodicea and I would have you know, I would have you know of my travail, my conflict for them of Laodicea".

Dear friends, anything in the nature of settling down with less than God's FULL content of Christ as our calling, will rob us of the prize - will rob us of the prize. It will just be the people who are deeply, DEEPLY conscious that they have not attained neither are they already complete but who have YET everything to gain in Christ, however much they may have. That is the spirit, the mind, the disposition that is here demanded of Laodicea: "So I counsel thee because thou knowest not that thou art wretched, miserable, poor, blind, naked: I counsel thee first of all to buy of me gold refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich". This is not buying salvation. Salvation is without money and without price. If there is something to be secured, it is not salvation by our effort or our works or even our earnestness. Not that, that's of grace, but BEING saved we are saved unto something that will draw us out and extend us to the full in the matter of faith. And it is in the fire, in the fire that faith is refined and will be the currency by which the crown is won. I'm not going to dwell upon all the details here; I just want you to catch the spirit of this without an exhaustive exposition.

"Thou knowest not that thou art poor, thou knowest not that thou art blind... I counsel thee buy of me eyesalve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see." Thou knowest not that thou art blind; here again is a local touch taken up in connection with one of the temples in Laodicea there was a famous medical school and from that medical school all over the Greek and Roman world an eyesalve went. It was famed for this ointment for eye trouble. Everybody knew what this meant in Laodicea and yet, and yet, right there in the precincts of the place where the world was getting its natural eyes healed, the church was blind. Spiritual blindness was there. "Knowest not that thou art blind?" Let us say right away without too many words, an absolute ESSENTIAL of reaching that end of God is to have a vision, to have a spiritual vision. I ask you my dear friends, every one of you personally now, to challenge your own hearts; have you got a spiritual vision? Are you drifting on from day to day? Are you going on without a mighty incentive for the divine

eternal purpose? Are you in the shadows or in the dark as to what it all means, and what the end is intended to be? Or is there before you, before your enlightened spirit, a clear vision of what God has determined as the issue of all things and has called you into in fellowship with His Son? Are you CLEAR about it?

You know quite well that no one ever gets anywhere without a vision. An artisan will never get anywhere without a vision, no one will ever make any progress unless they clearly see what they are after, what they are aiming at. In any realm of life in order to get somewhere you want to know where it is and what it is you're going to. Here, an essential is that you should see! The whole force of these letters and the presentation of the Lord Jesus is a REVELATION that is going to MASTER our being; a revelation of Jesus Christ that shall capture us and draw us on and make us people of a purpose, people who KNOW where we are going and what we are going after. Are you like that? Have you got the vision of God's eternal purpose in Christ for the Church into which you have been called by His grace? Have you got the vision? Is that something that is coming down into your life continually? Are you tired of hearing that phrase "the eternal purpose... the eternal purpose"? Has it lost its music, its charm, its captivating power? Ah, that's Laodicea you see; lost vision. Lost vision. That is ESSENTIAL to our eyes.

"I counsel thee to buy of me eyesalve that thou mayest anoint thine eyes that thou mayest see." What do you mean when you talk like that figuratively and symbolically "buy of me eyesalve"? Well, again I've only to take you back to such familiar words in Paul's letter to the Ephesians "That He would grant unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him... the eyes of your heart being enlightened that you may KNOW what is the hope of his calling" there it is! Buy eyesalve? That means lay yourself out with all your being before God that the Holy Spirit will open the eyes of your heart; give you to see what God means for you as a part of His Church. Buy eyesalve.

"Knowest not that thou art... naked: I counsel thee to buy of me... white garments, that thou mayest clothe thyself, and that the shame of thy nakedness be not made manifest". Again, there it is here, this thing, as a manufacturing centre for a beautiful fleece which they cultivated in their surrounding fields and made wonderful garments which were world famed. A glistening fleece of Laodicean manufacture. They knew what it meant. Here, in a place where everybody knew of this beautiful garment's material, that people were proud of wearing those Laodicean garments, right in the presence of them all as the Lord looked at them, He saw them naked, but they didn't know it, they didn't know it. "Knowest not that thou art naked?" He saw them as they were by nature and you know dear friends, when our eyes are opened about ourselves, the one thing we want is to get covered up somehow. As soon as Adam's eyes were opened the one thing he wanted was to get covered up, he went and hid himself. And we know ourselves, and of course you know what I'm talking about, when we begin to know ourselves in the light of God, one thing we feel to need is "Oh, for a covering. Oh, for a hiding... Oh, to get out of the way, out of the scanning of those eyes, if only we could hide ourselves from ourselves!" This is no pleasant view when we begin to see ourselves... but they didn't know it, that's how they were, that's how God saw them but they had no sense of nakedness, they were priding themselves in the garments of their own flesh, their own making.

Again the Lord says quite clearly, if you are going to reach the end, you must have a very, very poor opinion of yourself and realize your absolute need of a clothing that you can't make for yourself; the white raiment of Christ's own righteousness. That's your only way to the end. So Paul says "that I may gain Christ, not having a righteousness of mine own, but the righteousness which is of God through faith" - that's the white raiment. We've got to sense our need of that because of our deep and overwhelming sense of our own unrighteousness. These are the people that are on the way to the throne. Any sense

whatever or degree of self-righteousness, of being at all fit, will put us out of the running for the prize. This may be comforting for most of us but this is, after all, the gospel isn't it? And it all just amounts to this, that on the one side of this great argument, the Lord is saying you've got to be a people who are characterized by such a strong sense of need, which only the Lord Jesus can supply. You've got to be a people like that if you're going to get there to the place we are called. How different this is from the whole world's attitude, why, the world's attitude is always certain fitness, certain ability, certain self-sufficiency and self-importance to receive the prizes.

It's not the spirit of the world to feel absolutely unfit and unworthy and worthless! That's not the spirit of the world but this is the spirit of Christ and this is the spirit called for. "As many as I love, I reprove and chasten." These people are a chastened people. Well, some of us know a little about that... what it is to be chastened. "But as many as I love, I reprove and chasten" then the appeal: "be zealous..." be zealous! That word simply means be on fire, be burning, be not like that stream that runs alongside of Laodicea which is not a hot stream nor a cold stream... It was well known what He meant, there it was, a river just by the city, of tepid water - neither one thing nor the other. "Be not like that but be zealous, be hot therefore and repent, behold I stand at the door and knock..." We could dwell much upon that but it has been dwelt upon so much, it just means this: that where conditions obtain such as these - no sense of the need of Him, no sense of our own undone condition and helpless condition - well the Lord is outside of that, He's not inside that at all, He's outside of that. But He says I stand at the door and knock... that knocking may mean many things, many things... the Lord is trying to get on the inside by many a form of knocking and then this: "if any man open the door... I will come in... will sup with him, and he with Me." Looking at that word 'sup', I find there are three words, one that applies to the Greek breakfast which was but a bit of bread and a drink and that sufficed. Another was another little larger meal that they had during the day; but there's another word which is used for the FULL meal of the day and that is the one here. "I will come in and there will be a full meal." You see, everything that you look at in this part of the Word is something positive isn't it? Something full that the Lord is after, not something partial, not just the early morning scrap with which you start the day but the FULL meal! He's after fullness. "I have come in and there will be fullness." It's all that!

Well, He calls for us to be of THAT mind, of THAT spirit, of THAT disposition, for again He says it's just the people who have but One Thing... this ONE thing I do... leaving the things which are behind, all the things and having only One Thing, "this one thing I do leaving the things which are behind I press toward the mark of the prize of the on-high calling of God in Christ Jesus".

Oh, dear friends, don't be satisfied with less than God meant for you when He saved you. Don't settle down to something that is not His FULL thought for you. Don't you be robbed of your prize by any compromises of any kind or any carelessness. Be you an "amen" man, an "amen" woman. May our churches be like that, be like that, that everybody can say, "Those people know where they're going, what they're after, there is no doubt about them, they're on business bent! They're not just a people either drifting or just having meetings, they're a people who are marked and characterized by a sense of a great Meaning, a great Purpose." The Lord make us like that.

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net