

HOW GOD'S MAN MET A CRISIS

"And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." Revelation 1:17-18.

If I were to ask you a question: "What helps you most during these faith-testing times?" your answers would be both revealing and inspiring. Some would say, "Prayer;" others would say, "Bible study;" others would say, "Church attendance;" and still others would say, "Helping the unfortunate." Suppose I bring forward Joh, from whose testimony our text is taken, and ask him to tell us what helped him most during those trying hours when he was away from his family and his flock and was facing death. Obliging John says in substance: "If by relating my long and bitter experiences I can help anyone, I shall be grateful. I had three experiences which greatly helped me. First, I saw something; secondly, I felt something; and thirdly, I heard something."

I. John Saw Something.

John tells us that he saw something -- in fact, that he saw two things:

1. He saw the risen and reigning Lord.

After he saw the risen and reigning Lord walking in the midst of the churches, John painted the most inspiring pen picture of the Lord to be found in any literature -- one that tells us about His clothing, His head, His hair, His eyes, His feet, His voice, and His hands.

John said that his risen and reigning Lord was "clothed with a garment down to the foot;" and one is made to exclaim, "Oh, what official dignity!" John said He was "girt about the peps with a golden girdle; and we want to say, "Oh, what compelling love!"

John said, "His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow;" and we want to cry out, "Oh, what beautiful holiness!"

John said, "His eyes were as a flame of fire;" and we exclaim, "Oh, what penetrating knowledge!"

John also tells us that "His voice was as the sound of many waters;" and we feel like saying, "Oh, what supreme authority!"

Then John adds, "And he had in his right hand seven stars;" and we want to shout, "Oh, what powerful keeping!"

Continuing his description of our Lord John said, "And his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength;" and we exclaim, "Oh, what fadeless glory!"

John also said, "And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace;" and with full voice we exclaim, "Oh, what inspiring conquest!"

Would to God that all of us might catch a clearer and larger vision of Christ as He moves silently and majestically amid the churches.

2. John saw the imperishable throne of God.

Through heaven's door John saw the imperishable throne of God. We are living in a time of rapid and bewildering changes, when there are but very few stable governments, if any, in the world. How inspiring to catch a vision of the unchangeable One, and of something big and beautiful and permanent because it is divine! John saw a living Christ and an enduring government -- one with an imperishable throne.

Man has three kinds of sight: physical, intellectual and spiritual. He can look out and behold God's beautiful world with his physical eyes. With his intellectual eyes he can look through the microscope and see the little things near him, and through the telescope he can gaze at the stars and planets and maybe others worlds until with Kepler he can exclaim: "I think Thy thoughts after Thee, O God!" And with the eyes of his soul, of his spiritual eyes, he can see Christ and His triumphant saints in this world and the encircling hosts of heaven above him.

Men sustain great losses -- material, social and spiritual. Material losses have to do with things, such as money and property. His social losses have to do with his fellows -- his loss of confidence in his partner, in his neighbor, or in his friend. But his greatest losses are spiritual and have to do with God, when he loses his ability to see God, and to be inspired by the unseen hosts of heaven. For example, one man suffers a great loss when he has to give up his wife in death, another man sustains a great loss when he loses his earthly possessions, and still another suffers a much greater loss when he loses his desire for God and the ability to have intimate fellowship with Him in prayer.

We must ever see the risen Lord, and be the heralds of the dawn. We must not sound the note of defeat, but ever the high note of victory in and through Christ. All about us men are saying, "The night cometh," but we should be shouting, "The morning dawneth." While some delight in saying, "Sin abounds," we should ever be ready to add, "but grace doth much more abound." When men say, "Satan is loose and is mighty," we should remind them that "God is almighty." As heralds of the Good News, let us point the way home.

II. John Felt Something.

Not only did John see something, but he also felt something -- felt the Lord's Spirit on the inside. John said, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." That being true, he really felt something on the inside. He also felt something on the outside -- he felt the "Lord's right hand upon him."

We must ever bear in mind that Christianity is a heart-felt religion. Did you feel anything when you were saved? I did, and I shall never forget it. Did you feel anything when the Lord called you to commit yourself to Him for some definite service? Did you feel anything when you surrendered to the Lord? I did. When I have been obedient to the commands of my Lord, without exception I have had a feeling of satisfaction and joy.

II. John Heard Something.

John heard the Lord speak two inspiring words to his poor heart, namely, "Fear not,"

and how he needed those words. Today, we are living in the midst of an epidemic of fear. Fear is one of man's most common enemies. It touches every one of us in some way. Few of us are entirely free of the common anxieties which put a blight on life. Fear is a very distracting, disturbing and confounding adversary.

Many are in the thralldom of fear today. Even many of God's people are afraid. Some are afraid of the past, others of the present, and still others of the future. The range of fear is astonishing. Men are afraid of themselves, disease, failure, losses, being laid on the shelf, unemployment, poverty, loneliness, the loss of loved ones, death, and what comes after death. If anybody ever had a good reason for fearing to live, that person was John, to whom the Lord said, "Fear not." Listen for a moment as the Lord speaks to His followers, saying, "Therefore I say unto you; Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" (Matthew 6:25-26).

Fear is a great detriment to the life of any Christian. It destroys happiness, lowers efficiency, prevents progress, and dishonors God. How can one conquer fear? Freedom from fear is not a program which has been developed in a school of learning or been arranged by a human agency, but it is a gift from God. "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (II Timothy 1:7). A sound mind, the practice of love, and the acceptance of God's power are the means by which fear is conquered. In the Bible we have the promise of God's presence and of His power in verses like Isaiah 41:10, which says: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." The awareness of His presence and the assurance of His power give us a courage which no danger can dispel, no suffering exhaust, and no death can destroy. I do not know of any encouragement which can surpass that which is given in God's glorious promises, if we will only appropriate and apply them.

Many are afraid to die, though some, as you well know, are not. To lonely John, who actually faced death, the Lord appeared and said in substance: "John, don't be afraid to die. I became flesh and dwelt among you disciples, and I became dead and triumphed over death. I chose the death route in order that you might enjoy the life route."

God's children live in a tabernacle of flesh, on this beautiful earth, and in that spiritual house — "A house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." When we die, we simply change houses — move out of this earthly house of our tabernacle over into our "Father's house." Thus we can say, "Absent from the body — at home with the Lord," which, according to the writings of Paul, "is far better." Oh, that we might hear the Lord say, "Fear not to die!"

"I suffer out my threescore years,
Till my Deliverer come,
And wipe away His servant's tears
And takes His exile home."