

Sardis and Philadelphia

Part 1

Speaker	Michael Johnson
Date	30.11.1999
Duration	00:48:23
Online version	https://www.audioteaching.org/en/sermons/mjo016/sardis-and-philadelphia

Note: This text is a computer generated transcript of the sermon. In some cases it may contain errors.

[00:00:00] Would you like to turn again to the book of Revelation, the book of Revelation, Chapter 3, Revelation Chapter 3.

Revelation Chapter 3 and verse 1. Revelation 3 verse 1.

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis writes, These things saith he that hath the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars, I know thy works, that thou hast a name, that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received, and heard, and hold fast, and repent.

[00:01:08] If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names, even in Sardis, who have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 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, I know thy works.

[00:02:10] Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it, for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie. Behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee, because thou hast kept the word of my patience. I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly. Hold thou that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out.

[00:03:08] And I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and I will write upon him my new

name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

I want to try, with the Lord's help, to pursue the same kind of theme that we took up in the considering this afternoon in the Bible reading, the Lord's word to Ezekiel and to Laodicea.

Particularly looking at them in the prophetic sweep of time character that they're applying it very definitely to where we are as individuals today. I don't know whether you find this, but it's very often easy when we sit in meetings, we say things and everybody nods in a sense, because we've all been brought up to see things in that way. [00:04:16] But it's a very chastening and very helpless experience to me to meet people who don't see things the way we do, and then it isn't sufficient just to say them, you've got to back up your viewpoint by solid scriptural consideration. And when we talk about the prophetic sweep of time character, I think there's some very good scriptural support for this. For example, I gave one this afternoon, it speaks of the seven churches as the things that are. And I particularly pin that, that the third thing that John was exhorted to do in Revelation 1 verse 19, write the things that thou hast seen, the things that are, and the things which are about to be after these things. I particularly pin the expression, the things that are about to be after these things, with what is said in chapter 4 verse 1, after these things I heard, John says, which seems to be a very plain statement that what has gone before is the things that are. [00:05:24] But there are other scriptural reasons, I'll just give one of them. It is said that what is in the book of the Revelation is a prophecy. Now that doesn't only apply to what emerges from chapter 4 onward. I cannot escape that when it speaks about the words of the prophecy of this book, there is a prophetic element. But we are in a position, and this is not a scriptural support, but it's a very powerful one. We are in a position to look back and to see how closely history has paralleled what happens, the Ephesian condition of things, giving away to the successive waves of persecution, which commenced with Nero and ended in Diocletian. [00:06:12] How it parallels what is found in Smyrna. And then what generally the Christian world will say was the high spot of Christian testimony, when a man like Constantine who one minute was putting people to the sword because they were believers, the next minute is putting people to the sword if they wouldn't submit to baptism, and faced with either life or death, who wouldn't submit to baptism. People perhaps have learned to look at things through the scriptures, hang their heads in shame and say what the Christian world generally says was its best day, in fact was its saddest day, when far from being pure and consistent in its commitment to Christ, the church began to identify the world and began to lose its distinctive character. [00:07:02] So I think there are other reasons which I could mention, but I think there's solid support for saying we are seeing a prophetic sweep of time. And if that is right, and I think I probably first found this in that very valuable book by Hamilton Smith, *The Seven Churches*, that clearly in Thyatira there come to light the features which pinpoint its pictorial presentation of the Church of Rome and in Sardis then the presentation of the Protestant churches, maybe a hundred years or so after the Reformation. And I make no apology for saying this, but in Philadelphia, the beginning of the Brethren movement, I don't hesitate to say this, I'm not ashamed to say it, that with all the problems that we have in meetings today, and with all the decline, I wouldn't be anywhere else because it's one of the few places where you can answer to every part of the word of God, and that ought to be cherished. [00:08:08] And I didn't pick these things up by myself. I sat at the feet of men who had laid their lives out to get the truth of God, and what they committed to us was very much like the exhortation of Paul to Timothy where he says, That which thou hast learned of me, among many witnesses, commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also. And it is a commitment that comes over in life. You cannot minister beyond the formation of God within you. And when we listen to some of these men who made very little of this world, we sense that there were men who were passing on truths that they didn't only learn with their divinely renewed minds, but truths which had formed them inwardly and had shaped the kind of lives that they lived.

And when they communicated it, it came over in a living fashion. [00:09:06] And I shall never cease to thank God for the opportunities of sitting at the feet of men who lived by these things and whose lives bore the unmistakable impress on them. And so in taking up Sardis, what I want mainly to talk about, once referring it to the marks of the Protestant movement, is the danger of not going all the way, of falling short. And in Philadelphia, just the simple fact that there is today still an open door for us.

Now, when we talk about the Protestant movement, and I wouldn't wish anybody to carry away any other thought than this about the Protestant movement, and particularly the reformers, that what they accomplished by their commitment was amazing. [00:10:04] They got for us the Word of God, the three things that emerged out of the Reformation, the Reformation words, where only the Scripture, only Christ, and only faith. And they raised up three pillars which are absolutely vital to this day.

I wouldn't want to do anything other than make us cherish in our hearts men who were prepared to lay down their lives. We might look at that when we come to the words, remember therefore, how thou hast received.

At the same time, to be aware that in the light of the amazing amount that they recovered, when they threw off the overburden of centuries and they got down again to the pure Word of God, they did not carry the applying of the Scriptures to every area of the Christian setting. [00:11:06] And by that I mean particularly the nature and calling of the Church and the way in which the Church is to be administered as it moves on through this world. But first I think if we again follow the pattern that we tried to preserve in the readings this afternoon, the presentation of the Lord as he is, and then the assessment that he makes of the condition in each church, and then the challenge that he raises with them, and the results that flow from accepting in a wholehearted manner that challenge which is so presented. And I would like to say this again, I do not know of any words which so represent the position of where we are as brethren at the moment. Honestly, when you read the words, things that are ready to die, is that not an accurate reflection of where we are? [00:12:04] I learned years ago to count the power of your meeting by the number that you get at a prayer meeting, for example. I guess we have about 60 who are at the breaking of bread on a Lord's Day morning, with something around 16 when it comes to the prayer meeting and the midweek meetings. I honestly feel that if there's anything which represents where we are in a descriptive way, it's the Lord's words to Sardis. Firstly, the presentation of the Lord himself. In verse 1, the Lord Jesus said, These things said he that hath the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. Now, I think we should be quite unashamed about saying that Christ is always sufficient for every circumstance. And I think that is as applicable to us as it is to anyone.

[00:13:02] I know that when you talk about having the seven spirits, the seven spirits of God, people will say, yes, that's the kind of thing which is needed in the Protestant movement. Place given for the Holy Spirit of God to lead things. And I wouldn't, for one moment, diverge from that. But at the same time, I think we need to be persuaded that Christ is absolutely sufficient for every circumstance in which we find ourselves. Now, it is a pattern in the north of England, much more to have open ministry meetings rather than addresses. And I'm not going to go into the things that support either of them now. I think there are clear cases for both of them in Scripture. But not on a few occasions of late when issues like open ministry meetings have been raised, people have looked round and said, we haven't got the gifted people today. Well, I'm firmly persuaded of this, that open ministry meetings, meetings of a prophetic character, are really for people who have a word from the Lord for the moment and not necessarily someone who is particularly gifted as a teacher. [00:14:20] I gave this illustration recently when the value of these meetings were being called in question and I think you'll

see what I mean when I relate it. It's some years ago now that my good friend Ernie Brown and I, still young men, were sitting down one evening and someone got up in an open ministry meeting and he read the feeding of the 4,000. I've never yet heard anyone speak on the feeding of the 4,000. And Ernie whispered to me, I've been waiting for this for years. The brother who read it said, I'm not going to speak on the feeding of the 4,000. I'm going to speak on the fact that what God has done once, he can do again. [00:15:02] He only spoke for five minutes. He cited an illustration of a man who said, what I've done once, I'll do again. Samson, there's no man on earth can say, what I've done once, I can do again. God alone can say that. That's what Samson said. When on the last occasion, he'd revealed the secret of his strength to Delilah, and Delilah said, by Samson, the Philistines are upon thee. Scripture says, Samson says, I will arise and disengage myself as at other times, and wish not that the Lord be departed from him. There's only one can say, what I've done once, I can do again. I guess everybody who's in that meeting to this day will remember it. But it's the sequel that interests me, and it seems to me it gives the character of an open ministry meeting. Five years later, we were in a house, and the value of these meetings was called in question. And the sister in whose home said, let me tell you about an experience. She said, I have two sons. The older of my sons always nailed his colours to the mast. When he went into the forces for his national service, I didn't have any doubt about what he would do. He would nail his colours to the mast, and he'd come out stronger, and so it was. [00:16:25] But she said, you know my second son, who's never nailed his colours to the mast, who always seems diffident. She said, I used to say to myself, experience in national service will turn you upside down. And she said, I was worried beyond measure. I went along to a meeting, and a brother spoke on the feeding of the 4,000, and he said, what God has done once, he can do again. She said, I came out of that meeting lifted up that what God has done for my older son, he'd do for my younger son. I come back to where we are. We need to be reminded that Christ is absolutely sufficient for every circumstance. [00:17:10] Now when the Lord takes up the description of the assembly here, I'm particularly interested in the words that come at the end of verse 2. Just quickly referring to the others, having an aim to live and being dead, the need to be watchful and strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die. He says, for I have not found thy work perfect before my God. I have not found thy work perfect before my God.

Now if anybody has read anything of the Reformers, I happen to get a magazine from a fellow believer at work, The Banner of Truth, which is the present day, parallel to the Puritan writers. You'll know certain things about it. Amongst the things that are good in there, and they're extremely good and extremely challenging on things like the Lordship of the Lord Jesus, on things about disciplining our lives, on matters of living in a holy way, and I don't think the things that they say can be better. [00:18:23] There are certain things that you will never find there. You will never find anything about acceptance. If you expect to find something on Ephesians 1, 6, accepted in the beloved, you will be disappointed. If you wanted to find something on the nature and the calling of the Church, you'll be disappointed. You won't find it was there. Because with all the things that God gave the Reformers to recover, they did not go on to look at what the Scriptures had to say about the nature and the calling of the Church. Now I think it is absolutely indisputable, when you look at the kind of verses that are found at the end of Romans 16, where Paul says, [00:19:11] Now unto him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, according to the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which in other ages was not made known, there is clearly something quite unique about the calling and the nature of the Church. But of course, if you begin to go on to those kind of things, what you're beginning to do is to move away from the side of man's relief and blessing to that which is connected with the satisfaction of God himself. As a young believer, I used to keep on hearing this said, and I never understood it. It doesn't make me in any way want to stop saying it today. I used to hear older brothers say, we need to get over to God's side of things. I didn't understand at the time

what they meant. I'm not saying I understand it all that much better now. [00:20:09] But I can understand that in the scriptures there is one side of the presentation of scriptures which is connected with my relief and my blessing. There is another side of the scriptures which is connected with what God himself gets out of it, what ministers for the pleasure of God and what is for the present satisfaction of Christ. And when it says, I have not found thy works perfect before my God, I hope to show you in a moment, I think it is definitely connected with the revelation of the Church as fruit of the work of Christ and the will of God. Now it is rather interesting that I have not found thy works perfect before God, you can check this out afterwards, but the word perfect, if you keep your finger in that verse and turn back to Colossians chapter 1 and verse 25, Paul says in Colossians 1 verse 25, [00:21:17] Whereof I am made a minister according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you to fulfil or to complete the word of God, even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints.

What Paul is saying there in simple words is, to him was given the dispensation to complete the word of God by making known the truth of the mystery. In Ephesians 3 Paul makes a very important distinction, he says the truth of the mystery he received directly from the Lord in the glory, a little lower down, a couple of verses down later, he says the apostles, the rest of the apostolic company got it by the spirit, but he got it directly from the Lord in glory and he says it was that which completed the revelation of the mystery. [00:22:19] Now to my mind it's not just instructive, it's significant that the word for complete, the word of God, the word complete or fulfil in our authorised and the word perfect are from exactly the same root led words which are very much closer together. I think I said this earlier this weekend that just for the sake of repetition I was out at a business a couple of years ago and quickly became convinced that I was dealing with a Christian businessman and a Christian businessman who put his principles into practice. And what he said and what he recorded in his records showed the impress of somebody who had honesty and integrity in his dealings beyond what you normally find today. [00:23:09] And after a while he said to me, yes he said, I can see that you are a pre-tribulational dispensational millennialist. And I went through and said yes that's right, I do believe that we're not going through the tribulation, I do believe in dispensations, I also believe in the thousand years reign. He said I am a tribulational non-dispensational millennialist. What he says is I believe we're going through the tribulation, I don't believe in dispensations, I don't believe in a millennium. Surprising thing isn't it that apparently we can both find it in the scriptures. We had an interesting conversation together. Why I refer to it is he doesn't see the church as a distinct calling and having a distinct nature in the scriptures. He believes the church consists of all believers back from, well if we use Hebrews 11, back from Abel. May surprise you to know that he is in the majority, numerically. Doesn't mean a lot to me, I think if you pin it on scripture you're absolutely right. [00:24:17] And the thing which the Lord identifies in Sardis that they fell short on was this which is connected with the pleasure of God and the satisfaction of Christ. And I'm absolutely sure of this, that in the ranks of brethren today, and it's for you and for me to examine our hearts, where do we stand in relation to this? Is our commitment, that commitment which gladly embraces everything which pertains to our blessing here and which says yes at the end of the day we're bound for glory or is it the preparedness to lay yourself out to get hold of these things so at the end of the day it's not living in a selfish way for what ministers to my pleasure but rather that which is connected with the president's service Godward and the satisfaction of Christ. [00:25:10] No one who reads, I think, Matthew 16, on this rock I will build my assembly could fail to take from it the fact that Christ speaks of something which is personally precious to him and if that's where his interest lies and if that's the kind of thing which ministers to his pleasure it's nothing short of a tragedy. If we fall short and we don't go on to what belongs to perfection, can the Lord say to us, I have not found my work perfect before my God? Then he challenges them, he says, remember therefore how thou hast received.

Now I don't know whether any of you have read this book, I'm not going to attempt to give you a synopsis of it this afternoon, this evening, but if you haven't got it, get it because I know of no better opening up of the words, remember therefore how thou hast received. [00:26:07] There's a book that came on the, off the press I would guess about three years ago, it's called God's Outlaw. It's the story of William Tyndall and every time you take up your authorised version, say to yourself, 85% of what you read in our authorised came from the head of William Tyndall. You've heard of the man who, well you may not know the man by name, but you've heard of someone who across a table in a place called Little Sodbury in Gloucester, someone said to a high Roman Catholic dignitary, if God gives me the strength, the day will come when the boy who follows the plough over the lee will know more of the Holy Scriptures than thou do'st. And then for the rest of his very short life, hounded like David as a partridge on the mountain, he spent his time in putting into the English language, the rude English language, the Scriptures of truth. [00:27:11] So 85% of our authorised came from the pen of William Tyndall. Words were coined by him. The Passover was William Tyndall's word. It was a word that he coined when he began to write the Scriptures in our own language. And I refer to it, you see, because he was driven out of England by Henry VIII and he was hunted through the Low Country. And it wasn't just that, but arduously translating both from Greek and from the Hebrew into the English tongue the first time that anybody had really done it. He wasn't doing it in easygoing circumstances. At times he had to pick up his manuscripts and fly because Henry VIII's agents were on his tail. On one occasion he did it and he goes into a boat and the boat is wrecked and he loses all his manuscripts of the Pentateuch and he has to carry on again. [00:28:09] He was consumed by the passion of putting into the English language the word of God so that men wouldn't be dependent upon the priests that they could read for themselves and by the help of the Holy Spirit of God understand it. But eventually he's apprehended and in Brussels at the age of 42 years he lays down his life as a martyr. And he wasn't alone, he wasn't the only one. And I'm persuaded that when the Lord says to Sardis, remember therefore not what thou hast received but how thou hast received. It's been received at the laying down of lives. It's been received at the hand of people who are prepared to hazard everything, to put into our hands the truth of God. And the Lord says to them, remember therefore how thou hast received and hold fast and repent.

[00:29:06] We covered in the reading a little this matter of repentance but it's well worth lingering over this matter of looking back and being prepared to judge things which have brought in the present state of things and not attributing it to others but confessing my own part in what has happened. Taking sides with God against myself and then, as our brother said, taking a complete U-turn and adjusting things in your lives consistent with scripture. When the Lord spoke to Sardis, and I have no doubt that Sardis does picture the Protestant movement, with all the things that were to be commended he was talking about things which hadn't gone on as far as the scriptures of truth go on. Hadn't touched that side of things which goes away beyond man relief and it gets into that area where you embark upon things and you take in the things which are connected with the pleasure of God and the present glory and satisfaction of Christ. [00:30:16] So if I say that in the prophetic sweep of time Sardis is talking about the prophetic sweep of time approach to Protestantism, it's talking about a voice of the Lord Jesus to you and me today, he that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying unto the churches.

I'm sort of ashamed of this but when you look back you see sometimes how easily you come by some things and yet when it's a question of getting it down into the very centre of your spiritual being it's extremely costly. I remember being given the book of Hamilton Smiths on the seven churches and you didn't have to read very long before you could sort of divide this all up and I have no doubt that when I used to look at the Lord's words to Philadelphia I used to say yes that's us, that's the brethren,

we're Philadelphia. [00:31:19] And yet really when you see what the Lord says about Philadelphia he's talking about something which is intensely rare in character. I don't have any doubt that if you want to apply Philadelphia in an historical way it certainly covers about the first ten years, maybe a little more, the first ten years of the movement of Brethren. I don't know whether anybody has ever been able to get a copy of the first magazine that was issued by Brethren. It was called the Christian Witness and there are about seven volumes I think. And the thing about it is not because of the truth that is in it, it's marvellous to read it, people who are gripped by it, but as you read it you sense that you're reading words of people who were determined, cost what it may, to be governed by what they read. [00:32:18] I think someone once gave me that very interesting history of Miss Stoney in which someone records their first gathering together, was it in Fitzwilliam Street, which was a furniture store, and how on a Saturday evening they used to move back the furniture and they used to set a table so that a few of them, godly souls who were in various communities, there was no movement of Brethren as such there, but people who were dissatisfied with what was there and found in the scriptures something beyond it. And one of them writes of the immense joy that flooded into their souls when they were doing this and then they would discuss who should actually break the bread on the Lord's Day. [00:33:04] Until someone reading 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 said, he came away from those scriptures with the impression that they shouldn't be deciding because there is only one who is there as the leader when saints gather together, it's the Holy Spirit of God. And actually pinpoints the discussion that took place and they said, yes, they felt that was what the scripture said and if that was what the scripture said that was what they wanted to do. You see the Lord says, I have set before thee an opened door because thou hast a little strength, because thou hast not denied my name, because thou hast kept my word.

It isn't just an opened door, it's an opened door. What it's meaning is this, you have an opened door, anybody can leave a door open. [00:34:01] We had four children and doors being left open by children was normal. But when it speaks about an opened door, it is something which is deliberately left open. And what I want to suggest tonight is that as long as there are those conditions there, a little strength, not denying his name and keeping his word, there always will be until the Lord comes a jaw of opportunity to answer to all that is found in the scriptures. Now a little strength.

I willingly bear tribute to this brother, I was brought up in the Anglican church and I was in the forces, 20 years of age, when the Lord spoke to me and I got converted and I had an awful lot of things to unlearn. And I was greatly helped by a young man who was in one of the meetings of brethren, who when we had our Bible studies, all would go back to the scriptures to support what was said. [00:35:01] And it made an impression on me, not only that, I mean he was very faithful, I was courting an unconverted girl. And this man came to me one evening and he said, have you read 2 Corinthians chapter 6? I didn't know what 2 Corinthians chapter 6 said, and he read it with me and he said, Thou shalt not be diversely yoked together and equally yoked together believer with unbeliever. He said, you have no place courting an unconverted girl. Very thankful to say that he delivered me from something that could have been an immense snare. He was very straight with me. I corresponded with him for a few years and several times in his letters he would quote Psalm 48. These were the words, go round about Zion, mark well her bulwarks.

What he was saying is, these are the brethren, go round and you'll see all the God given marks. I don't think that's the kind of thing which is in view when the Lord says, thou hast a little strength. [00:36:05] Nothing of pride, anything to be proud about.

I think if we're honest and we look things fairly in the face, we have to say, what an amazingly small

response to the marvellous nature of the grace which has reached us.

The Lord says, thou hast a little strength.

And has not denied my name.

Now I don't hesitate to say this, that what belongs to the personal glory of the Lord Jesus lies at the very centre of things. When we talk about his deity, when we talk about his eternal sonship, we're talking about things that are right at the very heart of things.

I know some of these words are not found in scripture, but after all words mean things. And you don't get words like the Trinity, or like substitution, or like sovereignty.

[00:37:05] The words are not found in scripture, but the teaching of scripture is there. And right at the very heart of these things is what belongs to Christ personally. I remember reading some years ago, in one of the writers of the early days, he said, What is the use of faith in a false Christ?

And what pertains to Christ's person and glory, his personal glory, lies at the very heart of things. And it's a thread that runs through the Lord's words to Philadelphia. He speaks of my word, my name, the word of my patience.

One of the things which totally grants the open door is cherishing that which belongs personally to Christ.

An old man said to me years ago, be very careful when anyone says about the Lord, he is not this, or he is not that.

[00:38:03] Because right at the very centre of things, and it's the foundation of Philadelphia, is that which belongs to the person of Christ himself. But the Lord says a third thing, he says, and has kept my word.

Now certainly that means taking account of full revelation.

There's a very interesting remark that Paul makes to Timothy 2.

He says, strive diligently to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth, cutting the word of truth in a straight line, being prepared not to cut it obliquely so that it doesn't challenge some area of my life, but being prepared to face fairly and squarely every challenge of scripture, and if in my life individually, or any area of my life, whatever it pertains to, [00:39:03] there are things that won't stand the scrutiny of the word of God, then cut it in a straight line, and allow it to adjust every area of my life. I know that we're not back in the 1830s, but I can never read the words. Behold, I have set before thee an open door, because thou hast a little strength, and hast not denied my name, and hast kept my words. And I'm persuaded that right down until the very last moment, when the Lord calls us up to himself, where those kind of conditions prevail, then there always will be an open door of opportunity to answer to these things.

When he speaks about keeping as well, I come back to a theme which was in Sardis, all the things that are found in full revelation are not maintained in books, [00:40:01] large numbers of books on

redwood shelves.

I'm persuaded that a lot of them are not read very much, but at the end of the day, if they are, the truth of God is not carried on in writings and books, and thank God for every writing which exalts Christ and distinguishes things that differ. At the end of the day, the only thing which enables the truth of God to be carried on, to be kept, to be guarded, is by being moulded by it, allowing it to get down into the very centre of our beings, truth in the inward parts, so that it governs every area of our lives.

The challenge of the words of the Lord Jesus in Philadelphia is the fact that there are overcomers in Philadelphia.

I, some years ago, when I first had contact with Brethren, didn't realise that there were different companies of Brethren, and I embarked on a very foolish thing, really. [00:41:03] I got the history of Napoleon Noel, and I tried to follow the line, because somebody had said to me, only one group can have the Lord's presence, and I guess for 18 months I wasted a lot of time by trying to decide which was the right one. When you come into Philadelphia, and in the presentation of the Lord Jesus himself, in verse 7, it's talking about he that is holy, he that is true.

It's a moral presentation of the glory of the Lord, the things that came to light in him down here. But it's talking about those same kind of features coming to light in those who form Philadelphia. It's a question of moral formation and character down here in this world. And the Lord responds to the answer to that challenge. He says, to him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, [00:42:03] and he shall go no more out forever, and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, New Jerusalem, that cometh down out of heaven from my God, and I will write upon him my new name. Will I make a pillar in the temple of my God?

I don't know, but I think sometimes we tend to discount the contribution that sisters make to meetings. Certainly the small gathering where I first broke bread was carried along on the devotion and the exercises of soul of sisters rather than brothers. And recently the dear sister in the north of Scotland went to be the Lord, and someone who'd known her a long time as I had, wrote and said, I do not doubt that she has gone to be a pillar in the temple of my God. Not a pillar that supports things, there were pillars that supported things in Scripture, but there were also pillars in Scripture, notably the two pillars in Solomon's temple, [00:43:05] Joachim and Boaz, that supported nothing. They were freestanding, but they were wreathed about. On them were all sorts of things of beauty. I think what it is saying is this, that people who adorn the doctrine of God down here by the kind of lives that they lead, they will adorn that world where Christ is central and supreme. He doesn't only say that, he says, and they shall go no more out forever. I think I've learned from Scriptures and I've learned by experience that characteristically the path of the faithful disciple today is a path outside. Hebrews 13 is one.

Outside the camp is where we reach Christ. That's where he's found. But in that day it will not be a question of going out, it will be the question of being found in and going no more out forever, because in that world everything which answers to renewed spiritual desires with us is fulfilled. [00:44:07] And then you have this remarkable word from the Lord Jesus. He says, I'll write upon him the name of my God and the city of my God, and I will write upon him my new name.

I don't want to say anymore that what I would like to do is to turn the Scriptures that we've been looking at by way of challenge to you and to me. The word to Sardis is a question of going on, not

stopping at some particular point.

If the Old Testament is a pictorial presentation of it, of it, of it, it's a bit like the two tribes, Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, who stayed on the wilderness side of the Jordan. They went so far, but they didn't go in to the land that flowed with milk and honey. They did not take up the inheritance of God.

[00:45:02] The Lord's words to Sardis that I'd like to pinpoint on your mind. Be watchful and strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found thy works perfect before my God.

In Philadelphia, the Lord's words to Philadelphia, behold, I have set before thee an open door.

I don't think we're here for a long time.

In fact, a little while ago, I picked up, I think I would have done it, on Daniel, written about 1896.

And he said, I don't accept the church to be a place of worship.

I don't accept the church to be a place of worship. I don't accept the church to be a place of worship. And he said, I don't accept the church to be on earth, [00:46:01] when Israel are back in the land. Well, what he would say, if he looked and saw, that 48 years past Israel being back in the land, the church of God is still on earth. He said, I wouldn't accept the church to be on earth, because I would feel that looking for the Lord's appearing was still much more a matter of sight rather than faith.

He says, three things to be fulfilled for the Lord's appearing. They've got to be in possession of the temple site. They've got to be back in the land.

There's got to be a possession of the temple site. There's got to be an ordered system of sacrifice. They're back in the land. They have got the temple site.

And if the editor of the magazine called, well it used to be called The Lamp and the Light, but I think it's changed recently, that in various parts of the world, all the materials for the building of the temple is already existing. [00:47:04] Don't think that we're alone here in this world. What a delightful thing it would be that as a result of our being here together today, it leaves some impression upon us that the things that we're talking about, teaching them and responding to them, lies at the basis of the kind of full-hearted response for which the Lord Jesus is altogether worthy. What a sad thing it would be if he came and he found us careless and unconcerned.

What a wonderful and happy thing for him it would be if he found us affected in conscience and humbled in heart and yet desiring in life and character individually and thus in a collective way, answering a little nearer to that which we are by divine calling.

And sevenfold the word is repeated.

[00:48:03] He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. God grant that we have an ear to hear, a conscience to be affected and a heart capable of being touched by his unchanging foot.