

LESSONS FROM THE CHRIST OF PATMOS NO. 1976

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 7, 1887,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“And He had in His right hand seven stars: and out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword:
and His countenance was as the sun shines in his strength.”
Revelation 1:16.*

WE have carefully read John's description of the manner in which his Lord and Master revealed His glory to him. The figure is colossal, and I had almost said inconceivable. It would be quite impossible to draw a picture from the apostle's words. If any artist were to try to set it forth with His pencil, the figure would be singularly grotesque, and strangely unlike the idea which John intended to convey. How could anyone picture the voice like the noise of many waters? Or depict the feet as if they burned in a furnace? To make the portrait technically accurate would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, and the draftsman would surely lose the spiritual ideal in endeavoring to give it shape. The fact is, that the details of this celestial vision are deeply instructive, but there is no impression left upon the mind by it as a whole—I mean no impression which a man could translate to his fellow. Probably the seer of Patmos was himself unable to form an idea of what he saw; we know that he swooned at the amazing sight. He was utterly overwhelmed, and though he wrote under divine command he wrote of things beyond himself, and beyond all human minds.

The impression produced by one part of the vision inevitably obliterates that of other parts. Take, for instance, the expression, “His eyes are as a flame of fire.” Can you get the idea? Then add to it the further one—“His countenance,” which of course includes the eyes, “is as the sun shines in his strength.” You lose the brightness of the flames of fire in the superior glory of the sun; the eyes disappear as separate objects when the full countenance is seen in its overwhelming glory.

The vision is spiritual, and you can take each point in detail and learn from it, but it presents to us no resemblance such as can be drawn upon canvas; it is, as a whole, beyond the grasp of imagination. John might almost have said, after all he had seen, “I saw no similitude,” for, what he did see, albeit it was a gathering up of rich and rare similitudes, could not be made into a single image which could be represented to the eye, or to the mind. In this I greatly rejoice, for in it I perceive the prudence of the only wise God our Savior.

The tendency of the human mind is to idolatry. When we do not seek after another god we are still tempted to worship the true God under some visible, tangible form, and this is directly opposed to the divine will. The leaning of our evil heart is towards some form, symbol, or imagery which we judge may help our thought and intensify our worship. All this comes of evil, and leads to evil. Remember the stern command of God, never to be altered, “You shall not make unto you any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: you shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments.” God is a Spirit, therefore He is not to be imaged, and we are not to use anything as a help towards our conception of Him, for it will be a hindrance, not a help. That which can be seen or touched is to be kept out of our worship of the invisible God, for there is really nothing to which we can liken Him; the very attempt at making a likeness in reference to Him is profanity. I know the common excuse; that men do not worship the image, but that by its means they are helped to worship God, but this is exactly what the second commandment forbids. Carnal objects are not helps to spiritual worship; they are snares to the mind, and lead the heart away from God. I feel my soul horrified, and my blood boiling with indigna-

tion, when I see in what are called Protestant churches, not only a material altar, which is treated with honor, but upon it a cross to which idolatrous reverence is evidently paid by those who bow as they pass before it. It is very usual nowadays to see also the *Agnus Dei*, or a small figure of a lamb, and this, like the figure of a calf among the Israelites, is viewed with devotion. Why, we are not only going back to Popery, we are reverting to Paganism! I do not care what shape your image takes, whether it is a cross, a crucifix, or an *Angus Dei*; if it is anything to be seen or handled, it is strictly forbidden in the worship of God.

Had the portrait of our Lord been a suitable subject for reverence—and I can conceive of nothing for which greater claim can be put in—we should have had His likeness preserved to us by the special care of the good Spirit, who is ever mindful of the edification of saints, but we have neither painting nor statuary of any authority, nor, indeed, any which can be supposed to depict His matchless form. If this best of images is denied us, let us not tolerate the idols of human invention. The hammers of iconoclasts might find good work in breaking those images in pieces which now pollute our churches. Take these things hence; they are not becoming in the house of God; they do not help us towards spiritual worship, but they become grievous offenses to a jealous God, who counts such worship a spiritual adultery by which His own worship is defiled.

Do not imagine that the Jews in the wilderness, when they made what Moses calls a calf, really intended to pay divine honors to the image of a bull. They had learned in Egypt that the bull was the most venerable of all symbols of Deity; it is the embodiment of strength, and therefore it appeared fit to represent the power of God. They said in effect—“We will adore the unseen power of God under the image of the useful and powerful ox,” so they made an image of an ox out of their most precious things, and said, “These are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of Egypt.” Moses did not treat this ritualism with respect, but with indignation. He calls the ox a calf, for it was newly born, and but little in stature. He called it in grim ridicule “a calf,” and therein he set us an example, for objects of idolatrous worship should be treated by us with scorn, lest in any degree we partake in the crime of idolatry. We must keep ourselves from idols. When the Philistines called their god the God of Flies, the Jews ridiculed him as the God of Dung, thus showing their abhorrence of the imaginary deity. I do not blame our Reforming and Puritan fathers that they used names of ridicule and contempt for those things which Romanism has degraded into idols, for even the most sacred things lose all sacredness when elevated into objects of adoration, whatever may be the motive which leads to so great a crime. I may admire the sincerity which kisses the wounds of the crucifix, but I must none the less abhor the idolatry of the deed, and feel a horror of the image. Did not Hezekiah break in pieces even the bronze serpent when it became an object of worship? He called it Nehushtan, that is, a mere bit of brass. If ever there was a piece of brass which deserved religious regard from men it was that bronze serpent, by which so many had been healed. When used aright it was God’s channel of blessing, but when idolized it was broken in pieces as so much old metal. I feel glad, therefore, that even when the Lord Christ revealed Himself so specially to the mind of John it was in a spiritual and symbolic manner, and the wonderful similitudes used were of such a character that it is not possible to construct from them a figure which could be set up for purposes of worship.

My brethren, though we pay no homage to an outward and visible revelation, yet to Him who thus revealed Himself we ascribe all honor, and glory, and majesty, and power, and dominion, forever and ever. Unto Him whom as yet our eyes cannot see, unto Him who dwells in light unapproachable, very God of very God, even Christ Jesus our Savior, we pay the homage of our full and grateful hearts, not only now, but world without end.

Having thus removed your minds from any gross and carnal notion that our Lord is *actually* what this vision describes, I beg you to note that the spiritual teaching is all the more to be sought out and treasured up. I invite you to consider three of those similitudes by which the Lord Christ is set before us in this divine Revelation. They stand in very significant relationship the one to the other. “He had in His right hand seven stars: and out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and His countenance was as the sun shines in his strength.” These are not only in one verse by the will of the translators, but they were intimately connected in the mind of John, and were intended to come to us together, blended and united.

I. Learn from the first sentence THE POSITION OF INSTRUMENTALITY IN REFERENCE TO OUR LORD JESUS—“He had in His right hand seven stars.” The stars are said to be the angels, or

messengers, or, as many conceive, the ministers whom God used as messengers to the churches, and from the churches to the outlying world. The word may mean the entire instructive and enlightening gift of the church, whether found in one person or in many. God has ordained that there shall be men anointed of His Spirit, who shall, beyond others, be the means of conversion and edification, and these are as stars in the sky of the church.

Note well, that *instrumentality is of temporary use, and is intended for the time of darkness*. Churches themselves are “golden candlesticks,” and candlesticks answer their purpose best at night. When the sun is up, and the full day has come, do we need lamps? No, the church militant has her reason for existence upon earth in the fact of the surrounding darkness. The ministers of the gospel, what are they? Necessary to Christ? By no means, for the sun does not need the stars. They are necessary to the present darkness, with which they are to struggle as burning and shining lights until the Lord Himself shall shine forth in His glory. The Lord will use instruments till He Himself appears, but even those whom He calls “stars” are only the transient apparatus of a passing night.

This should make us think very humbly of ourselves, for, dear brethren, *this illustrates our weakness*. Were we lights of the first magnitude, the darkness would no longer remain. O stars! You by whom God shines! O stars! With your sparkling and far-reaching light, making glad the eyes of the benighted! What poor things you are, after all! For with all your shining it still remains night. Lamps of God though you are, you do but relieve the gloom which you cannot remove. If ministers were all they might be, there would soon be an end of them, but the fact of their continued necessity proves their weakness. O you that serve God best, remember that if you served Him better, the day would soon come when no man would say to his fellow, “Know the Lord,” for they all should know Him, from the least to the greatest. Consider, then, that instrumentality at its best, when used in blessed unity, as a church, is no more than a lamp, or candle, and what can this do as compared with our Lord, who shines as the sun? Instrumentality, when specially selected, enlightened, and upheld, is but as a star, and what can a star do? Yes, what can the whole host of stars do, towards turning night into day? This is a good beginning for our consideration of instrumentality, since we are apt to grow proud, and this may teach us lowliness. Whatever honor God may be pleased to put upon His servants by calling them stars, it is evident that they are only needed because it is night, and that they are far too feeble to cope with that night, and turn its darkness into light.

Still, *instrumentality is honorably spoken of* by Him whose judgment is supremely wise. The Lord Jesus does not despise the agency which He employs. Those whose testimony He blesses for the salvation of men are compared to stars.

Stars are *guides*, and so are the Lord’s true ministers. Some stars in yonder sky have done measureless service to wanderers over the trackless deep, and to those who have lost themselves in the labyrinths of the forest. That polestar has conducted many a slave to liberty. Happy have been the influences of the stars upon the hopeless who, being lost, have laid themselves down to die! Blessed are those men who, shining with the light of God, have turned many to righteousness; shall they not shine as the stars forever and ever? Are there not preachers of the word who have stood like that famous star “over the place where the young child was”? They have first led strangers to Jesus, and then have remained in faithful love shining over the place where the Lord abides. We preach Christ crucified; God forbid that we should preach anything else! We point to Jesus, saying ever, “Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world.” Ours is, indeed, an honorable office, to guide wandering feet into the way of peace. Honored is the least in all our ministry if he may do this.

A certain star, the morning star, is also the *herald* of the day. All eyes are glad to see the morning star, because they know that the sun is ever near it. Happy messenger of God who has the sound of His Master’s feet behind him! There have been men, and thank God there are such still, through whom God shines with rich promise of eternal day; their ministry heralds the coming of Christ to the heart. They preach so clearly of Him, that He is set forth evidently crucified in our assemblies. They hide themselves in their Lord. They have nothing to lift up but Christ, they bring nothing before men’s minds but Christ, their one sole theme is Christ in His first coming cleansing His people from their sins, and Christ in His second coming bringing them home to His glory. Of such men it may be said, “He made the stars also,” for those are God-made ministers, whose whole witness is for the glory of Christ Jesus.

It is an honorable comparison that the instruments of God’s good pleasure have put upon them in being compared to stars, for the stars are the *comfort* and solace of the night. Well do men sing, “Beautiful

star,” for, amid the surrounding gloom, the twinkling light is a thing of beauty and a joy forever. “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that brings glad tidings!” We do not rightly value the considerable amount of light which comes to the earth through the stars, but were they quite removed, we should soon find the thick darkness of night to be greatly intensified; it might even become like the darkness of Egypt that might be felt. In the same way we are apt to undervalue regular ministries which do not amaze us by any uncommon brilliance. We could not afford to lose these stars, however feeble their light. Let us thank God for the many ministries, gentle and obscure, which, nevertheless, keep the dense darkness from being utterly impenetrable. Despise not prophesyings. Thank God for all the agencies by which He works. He compares His faithful servants to stars; be sure that you think them heavenly bodies, bearing celestial light, shining from above. They are not as small as some think them, and they are not forgotten of Him who calls them all by their names, and leads them out.

Instrumentality is honorably placed, for we see the stars in the right hand of Him who is the First and the Last. God’s ministers are stars; but not stars up yonder in the sky; they are stars held in the right hand of their great Lord. Oh, what a position is this! God’s true servants are in the highest place! His right hand made them. None can make stars but the Maker of all things. It is God who makes ministers of Christ, and gives them light with which to shine. Because of this they are honorable in His esteem, and He places them in His right hand. Whatever some may think of faithful preachers, the Lord makes them the men of His right hand. They may be despised by those who oppose the Word, but they need not be ashamed, for while the right hand of God is their position, they are more honorable than the princes and kings of the earth. Dear servants of God, who are serving your Lord in great obscurity, twinkling feebly, and thinking that no one notices you, receiving no honor from men, never mind, for if the Lord God has given you light, you are precious in His esteem, and He sets you not only *at* His right hand, but *in* it. You are where seraphim might wish to be.

See, also, how *true instrumentality is graciously sustained*. The chosen servants of the Lord are under special protection, for they shine in Christ’s right hand. This is where the ministers of Christ need to be, for they stand in the front of the battle, and are in double danger. Their office has its temptations, and even their success has its perils. If you win souls for God, the devil will have a grudge against you. If you preach the word with power, all the hosts of evil will sharpen their arrows, and point their shafts at you. The stars of the churches have need to be in Christ’s hand, for all the fiends of hell will puff at them. If they could make a star fall, how greatly would they rejoice! Glory be to Him who keeps them all. “For that He is strong in power; not one fails.”

Our Lord Jesus holds the seven stars in His right hand. Does not this teach us the entire dependence of each one of us upon Him? Other stars may shine in their own natural spheres, but Christ’s stars can only shine as He, by the constant outgoing of His strength, holds them up, holds them out, and holds them fast. They would cease to be stars if they were not in the Lord’s hand. O my friends, who are working for the Lord in church, or mission hall, or Sunday school, place no reliance upon yourselves! Do not let your confidence lean upon your own natural abilities, or acquired knowledge, or garnered experience; let your dependence be alone upon that right hand which holds you up. The hand of the glorified Savior is worth depending upon. Behold an arm that never can be paralyzed, a hand that can never grow weary. Rely not on yourself in any measure or degree, but only upon that right hand of power and skill which will hold you up even to the end.

See, then, beloved, the special security of true instrumentality, for who can extinguish a star whose sphere is the right hand of God? I see the devil puffing against these stars until his cheeks are fit to burst, but he does not even make them flicker; what can harm those whom Jesus keeps? You know how some fine preachers have gone out in darkness, smoldering like candlewicks, filling the whole chamber of the church with a nauseous smell, and if professed ministers become unholy or untruthful, their end is sad for themselves and mischievous for all who are around them. May God save His church from the smoking flax of dying ministries. Blessed are they who, trusting in God, shine and shine on in His keeping. “Yes, they shall be held up.” Did He not ordain for them a lamp which shall never be extinguished? Has He not put them where they must be safe?

Instrumentality of the right kind is wisely directed, for it is in the Lord’s hand. This generation, like children playing in the marketplace, is not content with the moods and ways of the Lord’s servants, but wisdom is justified of her children. The Lord sends by whom He will send. In wisdom and prudence He both kindles His stars and removes them, He arranges their places and their magnitude, their rising and

their setting. “All His saints are in Your hand,” O Lord Christ, but specially those through whom You speak with men! As the judges in Israel came and went at the bidding of infinite wisdom, even so is it among the chosen ministers of the Lord Jesus.

Perhaps you think I am making too much of this subject, but I have no such desire. My design is very practical. The churches should pray that their risen Lord would give them more stars, and that He would uphold the stars that are already given, for there is unquestionably a very close connection between the prosperity of the churches and these stars. Whether it should be so or not is not the question, but the fact is unquestionable—very much depends upon the minister. If you have a warm-hearted, loving, zealous preacher of the gospel, you find before long earnest, hearty, godly, working people gathered about him, but where there is death in the minister—coldness, lukewarmness, want of zeal, and want of holiness, what do you see? Do not the pews reflect the dreary condition of the pulpit? Is it not so, that like shepherd like sheep? We act and react upon each other! Brethren, pray for us. It is my solemn conviction that one great need of the church at the present time is a more faithful ministry. We need fewer fireworks and more stars. One man whom God has given is worth a thousand that a college has made. When God takes a man and says, “Go and preach in the power with which I have endowed you,” that man will accomplish what a host of learned and well-trained men would not dare to attempt. Why have we not more mighty preachers of the word? Because we do not pray for them. Some of our ministers are half afraid that such men should come, for fear they should find themselves outshone. What better gifts can Christ give the church with His own right hand than pastors and evangelists? The church will never make any great advance until once more God sends here and there, and in fifty places, men with burning hearts and with trumpet voices to proclaim the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. We need men that will not yield to the current of the times, nor care one jot about it, but will hold their own and hold their Master’s Word against all comers, because the Lord of Hosts is with them, and the Spirit of God rests upon them. I would have you at this time realize the Christ with the seven stars in His hand, and I would have you pray, “Lord, fill Your hand with stars again. Light up the darkness of this period with flaming preachers of Your word to the praise of the glory of your grace.” So much about the position of instrumentality; follow me now to kindred themes.

II. And now, in the second place, I want you to notice with great care THE PLACE OF REAL POWER. Note, the second of the three sentences—“And out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword.” The sword-power, the war-strength of the church, does not lie in her ministers. The battle and the victory are not with them, but with their Lord. I have put them in their proper place; I have told you that they are stars, and I have reminded you of their usefulness; but the next symbol prevents your regarding them as forces to be relied on. We read, “Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword.” Not out of the stars, but out of our Lord’s mouth goes the strength which wins the day!

The true power of the church lies in Christ personally. You may have all the stars that ever made bright the Milky Way with their combined sheen, but there is no power in them to kill evil, or conquer sin. The stars of the church shine because God makes them shine. Their shining is not their own, it is borrowed light with which they are radiant. But the power that overcomes evil, wounds the hard heart, pierces the conscience and kills reigning sin, is of the Lord alone. “Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword.” Glory not, therefore, in men, for power belongs unto God. Boast not in the talent nor in the experience of the man of God, for he can neither kill nor make alive. The power of a church is the presence of her Lord. He has not deposited power in men, He retains it in Himself, and from Himself we must seek it. Behold the infinite resources of the church; all power is in Jesus, and Jesus is with His people.

The power lies in Christ’s Word, “Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword.” Beloved, the power that wins souls is the word of God, not my explanation of it, nor yours; not my amplification of it, nor yours; not my illustration of it, nor yours. The power is not in the stars, but in the word which made the stars. God’s word is the source of all things. Therefore reckon that every sermon is a wasted sermon which is not Christ’s word; believe that all theology is rotten rubbish which is not the word of the Lord. Do not be satisfied with going to a place of worship and hearing an eloquent discourse, unless the sum and substance of it is the word of the Lord. My brothers and sisters, whether you teach children or their parents, do not think you have done any good unless you have taught the word of the Lord. For saving purposes we must have the Lord’s word, and nothing else. It is not your word, O you most devoted soul-winners; it is not your word, O you most impassioned evangelists; it is not your word, O you most plain-

tive persuaders; it is the word of the Lord, and that alone, which will abide, and subdue all things to itself. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon; we can do all things with it, we can do nothing without it.

And notice again, that it is not only His word, but *it is His word as He Himself speaks it*. Does Christ then still speak the word in the church? Yes! It is not the truth in the Bible alone which saves, it is that truth taken by the Holy Spirit, and vivified and laid home to the heart. It is not the letter of the word which Jesus spoke eighteen hundred years ago which works wonders, but it is that same word as He now delivers it into our ear and heart by His own living, loving, heart-subduing voice. *I* may speak Christ's words in vain, but *He* speaks to purpose. The sword in Peter's hand cuts off an ear, but the sword in Christ's mouth slays sin and subdues men to Himself. You have heard a sermon full of precious truth, and yet it has done you no good; at another time you have heard the same truth, and it has overwhelmed you by its hallowed power. What was this difference? Is it not that in one case it was God's word out of the preacher's mouth, and in the other case it was God's word out of His own mouth? Yes, every word is a keen sword to slay sin when Jesus speaks it. My soul melts in repentance when my Beloved speaks to me. Nothing can stand against the word of Jesus; He speaks, and it is done! O my brethren, I have no faith in my own preaching, but I have all faith in my Lord's speaking. His word shall not return unto Him void. Out of His mouth no syllable shall come in vain. I charge you, look away from us, the twinkling stars, to our Lord, whose month is the conquering force of His church.

The word is in itself adapted to the divine end, for it is sharp and two-edged, and when it is spoken by the Lord, its adaptation is seen. The gospel is very sharp when the Spirit of God lays it home. No doctrine of men has such piercing power. Take care, O preacher, that you do not blunt the word, or try to cover over its edge, for that would be treason to the Lord who made it to be sharp and cutting. There is much about the true gospel which offends, and it should be our desire never to tamper with it, or to tone it down, lest we become enemies to the Lord's truth. Truth which is meant to offend human pride must be stated in its own way, even though seen to produce anger, and annoy self-righteousness. Doctrine which is cutting and killing must not be concealed or softened down. "He that has My word, let him speak my word faithfully, says the Lord." People are disturbed and troubled by the real gospel; under a false gospel they can sleep into destruction. Bring out the sword, it is made to wound, let it exercise its salutary sharpness. The gospel has two edges, so that none may play with it. When they think to run their fingers along the back of it they will find themselves cut to the bone. Whether we regard its threats or its promises, it cuts at sin. Whether we move it up or down, it makes great gashes in that which ought to be wounded and killed. Let us, therefore, know that the power of the church does not lie anywhere but in the word as Jesus Himself speaks it. Let us keep to His own pure, unadulterated, unblunted word, and let us pray Him to send it forth with power out of His own mouth into the hearts and consciences of men.

III. May the Holy Spirit fasten this on your memories! I must now conduct you to the third point, which is a very wonderful matter—THE SOURCE OF TRUE GLORY. The source of true glory in a church lies in her enjoying the countenance of her Lord. "His countenance was as the sun shines in his strength." When Jesus is pleased with the church, she enjoys noonday prosperity.

Brethren, endeavor to realize the idea of Christ's countenance shining as the sun. Let me then remind you of our former themes. Where are the seven stars? They are still in His hand, but I defy you to see them, for when the sun is once up, where are the stars? Ah, dear young people! When you first hear a minister preach with divine power he is everything to you; God enables him to bring light to your darkness, and for a season you rejoice in his light. When you get further on in the road, and come to see the Lord Jesus Christ Himself in the divine glory of His blessed person, then you will not glory either in Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, but you will glory in Jesus only. The stars are twinkling still, but you cannot observe them when the sun shines in noontide splendor, and so the human instrument is as useful as ever, but when Christ Himself is fully seen, the instrument takes a place far lower down. We are grateful for the stars, they have had blessed uses for our good, but we cannot mention them in the same day with the sun. Now that we have seen the Lord, we value His servants none the less, but still they are servants, and only servants, and He is Lord of all. An hour of Jesus is better than a year of all the apostles. Personal communion with Jesus is far more powerful for our good than the best preaching in the world.

If you catch the idea of our Lord's countenance being "as the sun shines in his strength," let me ask you where is the sharp two-edged sword which came forth out of His mouth? You have not forgotten it,

but at the same time it would be hard to discern it upon the face of the sun. When we enjoy Christ Himself, we do not think the less of His word, but it seems to be absorbed in Himself. He Himself becomes to us the *Logos*, the word. Even the gospel itself, glorious as it is, bears no other glory than that which we behold in the face of Jesus Christ. This is the glory which excels. This is the glory before which dispensations, and economies, and systems of truth appear to be mere reflections of that which is embodied and epitomized in Him. To see the face of our Lord and enjoy His love is to stand, like Milton's angel, in the sun.

I must hurry over places where I am tempted to linger. *To the saints the glory of Christ lies in Himself*; His own countenance is the center of glory. Consider the work which He has finished, and the reward with which His Father has glorified Him. Consider His divine nature, and the perfect manhood which He has taken into union with it. Consider all His infinite perfections, but especially His love, His boundless, changeless love to His people. This is the sun which makes our day, and fills us all with joy and gladness. What do we want more than His loving favor? I would to God that we were henceforth shut up to His praises, and were bound henceforth to see no beauties but those of our Lord. To think that He should love you, that He should so love you as to die for you, and that having died for you He should go up unto the Father for you, and fill all things for you, and reign in everlasting splendor for you; why, all this is a surpassing glory of love! If you once know that His countenance is towards you, then will you see such a glory in His grace and favor as you have never before imagined. Once behold the splendor of the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, and you will henceforth need neither candle nor star, for the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus will be as seven suns to you.

Notice that *the favor of Christ, if it is enjoyed by a church, is effectual for all purposes*. Why do we crave for stars when the sun shines? In the absence of human instrumentality, the Lord Jesus will more than suffice. Even for those purposes for which the sword goes out of His mouth the Lord's countenance is enough. A sunstroke is as effectual for overcoming as the stroke of a sword. Let Christ shine in the church, and He will destroy His enemies with the brightness of His glory. Let Him shine in the church, and you will have all the warmth, and all the joy, and all the delight, that a church can desire. Let Him shine in the church, and you will have all the life, and all the growth, and all the sweetness, and all the mellowness, and all the perfectness, that even the garden of the Lord can yield. If our Lord is with us, delighting Himself in us, and countenancing our endeavors, we shall, as a church, prosper better than if we had the endowments of the State, the approbation of the wise, and the patronage of the great. To make the church of God the grandest instrumentality conceivable, all that is needed is, that she shall please her Lord in all things, and therefore shall walk in the light of His countenance. "Lord, lift you up the light of Your countenance upon us." "Cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved." "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Your countenance." What a light it is! In the sun's beams we find the most needful and indispensable gifts, and in our Lord Jesus we find all things for time and for eternity. When the Sun of Righteousness arises, He brings healing in His wings. Then we are made strong, so that we go forth and grow up like calves of the stall. Let the Lord show us His face, and we have reached the height of our desires.

Yet note well that the brightness of our Lord cannot be measured; *neither could His glory be endured of mortal men* if once it were fully revealed. "His countenance was as the sun shines in his strength." John therefore could not gaze upon that countenance, but fell at His Lord's feet as dead. It would be a dangerous thing for you to stand still and attempt to gaze upon the sun. To turn a telescope full upon the sun, and place your eye to the glass, would be the extreme of folly. Our eye must be shielded, or it cannot look on the sun. And beloved, if the Lord Jesus were to manifest Himself to us as He really is, in all His unveiled majesty, we should die with excess of joy. If He were to turn the whole stream of His love into our hearts, our frail bodies would be unable to bear the blissful excitement which would follow upon such a heavenly discovery. You do know something of Him, and you are pining to know more, and well you may, for your life lies that way, but still, He must always be the best judge of how much He shall reveal, for "He knows our frame, He remembers that we are dust." He holds Himself in reserve until we are prepared to receive the amazing bliss of His glorious manifestation. Perhaps even in eternity He will have to hide Himself somewhat, for there is in Him such greatness that our littleness would fail before Him were His glory all revealed. Oh, cry to Him to show Himself to you, but still do not marvel if He answers you, "You cannot see My face and live." That holy man, Mr. Walsh, when the Lord revealed Himself to him, was obliged to cry, "Hold, Lord! Remember I am but an earthen vessel,

and if I have more of this delight I must die.” One said he would like to die of that disease, and I am very much of his mind. They say, “See Naples and die.” But to improve on it, another said, “See Naples and live,” and truly this is the better sight of the two. I would gladly see my Lord so as to live to His praise. Oh, for such a vision as should shape my life, my thought, my whole being, till I became like my Lord! Oh, to see Him so as to be changed into His image from glory unto glory! Perhaps some of us may even die in this sweet fashion, by the Lord’s letting in of His glory upon our souls in such a torrent that we shall be washed away into the bottomless sea of infinite delight. He may be pleased to pull up the sluice gates, and let the sea of glory in upon the marshy places of our dying hours. The little river of our life goes rippling down towards the sea, and in our closing hour its stream runs low; just then the tide from the shoreless sea comes up the river to meet the stream, and then the riverbed is filled by the fullness of the ocean. You shall realize that parable when heart and flesh are failing, and the Lord comes in to be your portion forever.

Yet once again, brethren, if Christ’s face is so bright, then *we know where to trace all the light and all the glory that we have ever seen or known*. Is there any beauty in the landscape? It is the sun that makes it beautiful. Is there any brightness in any object round about us? It is the sun that makes it bright. If it were dark, you would behold no scenery, and observe no beauty. Darkness is the grave of beauty, and the absence of Jesus would be the end of all human virtue. Is there any sweetness, excellence, holiness, goodness, grace, about anything on earth? It comes from Jesus only. Attribute it to Him, then, and bless His name.

Rejoice also, you that behold His face, and live in communion with Him, for *your faces, also, will shine*. You may look at yonder seven stars very long before you are made to reflect their light, but, dear friends, if you see Jesus, and abide in the light of His countenance habitually, your faces, your characters, your lives, will grow resplendent, even without your knowing it. We read that Moses knew not that his face shone; all saw it but himself. The sons of men will wonder where you have been to have gathered such brightness. I know some few men and women who seem to carry about with them the fragrance of the ivory palaces; there is a perfume about their words, their actions, and their very selves. All nostrils do not enjoy the aroma of holiness, but the heart of the spiritual man is refreshed thereby. One cries, “From where came this perfume? Oh, that I had it! Oh, that such fragrance was shed abroad in my life!” I have heard that in the old times, when they would attract doves to a certain pigeon house, they took certain birds and smeared their wings with a costly perfume, and sent them forth. Other pigeons were so delighted with their sweetness that they followed them to the dovecotes. Oh, that you and I may be so sweetened by dwelling near to Christ that others may come with us to see Jesus and His love! At any rate, may we so look on the Well-beloved that our own faces may shine, and others beholding our brightness shall glorify our Father which is in heaven!

God bless you, beloved. I wish we were in a better frame of mind for hearing and preaching. Truly this great heat and my own painful infirmity remind me of our Lord’s words, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Nevertheless, may our Lord reveal Himself to us according to the greatness of His compassion. Amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—REVELATION 1.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—417, 337.**

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