

CHRIST WHO STANDS AT THE DOOR OF EVERY LIFE

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock. if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. (Rev. 3:20)

There are 1,189 chapters in the Bible, and these contain 41,173 verses, some of which are famous throughout the world. During many generations, Christian authors have written books with the attractive title My Favorite Bible Verses. I possess one of those volumes and was amazed to discover the writer had omitted an outstanding promise. Certain verses shine as stars against the dark background of man's iniquity, and occasionally a fascinating one resembles a chandelier where many lights combine to banish darkness or a diamond with many facets, reflecting the glory of God. Such a verse is found in Revelation 3:20 where, writing to the church in Laodicea, Jesus said He was knocking at its door. That great statement has inspired art, music, and poetry in every age. Holman Hunt's picture "The Light of the World" has attracted millions of viewers, and many hymns express the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is never far away.

During the New Testament era, Laodicea was a prosperous and very important trade center close to the river Lycius and not far from Colossae and Philadelphia. It was famous for the export of fine black wool. The city was destroyed by an earthquake in A.D. 62 and completely restored by its citizens without any financial aid from the state. The population was affluent and independent, but unfortunately, these characteristics became evident within the local church.

"Behold I Stand" ... How Patient

The Lord said to the members, "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I

209

counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see" (Rev. 3:17-18).

It is not known how the church reacted to the Lord's indictment, but the congregation survived and increased so that centuries later in AD. 361, one of the ecclesiastical councils that determined the canon of Scripture was convened in the city. Laodicea was a station on a main caravan route where Roman influence was evident. The banking officials issued their own currency. It is believed the letter to the Ephesians was jointly sent to Ephesus and Laodicea, and perhaps to other assemblies in the valley. Increasing wealth and overflowing congregations were not a guarantee of spiritual growth. That the Savior was standing outside the door suggests He had been there for some time. Christ was, and still is, very patient.

"At the Door"... How Purposeful

Christ was close to the place of entrance. It seemed incomprehensible that He who placed worlds in orbit should be concerned with a place where, temporarily at least, entry was denied. God always has desired fellowship with His people. When Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden, He descended to walk and talk with them. When Jacob was trying to escape from the wrath of his brother, Esau, the Lord gave to him a vision of a ladder that reached from earth to heaven, to help him realize that communication was not only desirable, it was possible.

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During four decades of travel in the wilderness, Jehovah resided in the midst of His people, leading them with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Through priests, prophets, and kings, He promised His presence would never depart from Israel. The Bible describes how Christ was made flesh and dwelt among us because He yearned to be with His children. That same desire was evident when He stood at the door of the Laodicean church. In spite of the disappointing conditions within the assembly, Jesus wanted to enter. This was an echo of God's message spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18).

Christ stands without your door,
And gently knocks;

210

But if your sin the entrance blocks,
He may depart and leave you
To the pleasure of your heart.

"And Knock" ... How Persistent

When the Lord taught His disciples to pray, He concluded His lesson by saying, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Luke 11:9). Asking represented a petition. Seeking suggested continued prayer until the petition was granted. Knocking was an advanced state of communion—a perseverance that never gave up until the door was opened. That ardent desire may be found in the text under consideration. Jesus was determined to continue until further effort was a waste of time. This was more than a casual interest in an unresponsive church; it was a determination to complete a mission. The Savior ardently desired admittance to the church bearing His name, and although an immediate response was not forthcoming, the Lord remained at the door determined to be heard.

At the conclusion of one of my evangelistic services, a woman came up the aisle to say, "Sir, I do not understand why the people did not come forward tonight to accept the Savior. If I had been unconverted, I would have rushed forward." I smiled and replied, "Sister, how old were you when you were saved?" She answered, "I was twenty-seven." She seemed very thoughtful when I said, "Well, there was quite a period when the Lord did not give up on you."

I remember an elderly Canadian gentleman who placed his face into upturned hands and said, "It's a bit thick! It's a bit thick. I gave my life to the Devil, and now when I have one foot in the grave, I ask God to forgive me." God never gave up on him. The Savior never ceases His entreaties to anyone until He is convinced further effort is useless. God knocks on the door of human consciousness in various ways. People may not respond to the divine entreaty, but at least they know why their troubled souls are disturbed.

"If Any Man"... How Predictable

The Laodicean church was probably the most wealthy of all the New Testament assemblies. If the city officials had any interest in Christianity, they found a home with that company of believers. The congregations would include bankers, councilors, judges, businessmen, and owners of all kinds of property. The elders would be impeccably

211

dressed as they performed their duties; the choir would be a joy to behold. Maybe one or more millionaires were valued members of the

CHRIST WHO STANDS AT THE DOOR OF EVERY LIFE

church family, and the pastor would be fully accredited. If that place existed today, it would be a tourist attraction. Its marble pillars and wonderful music would be invaluable assets of the church and community! But!

An artist was commissioned to paint a picture of a dead church, and to the surprise of the sponsor, he produced something that looked like the church in Laodicea. It was immaculate and crowded, and in the entrance was an offering box for missions. Completely covering the coin slit in the lid was a cobweb! The church had everything but was bankrupt. It was elegant but shabby. The people had excellent eyesight but no vision!

At the door of such a church stood the Savior, who said, "If any man open the door He did not say, "If any millionaire, councilor, alderman, industrialist" He said, "If any man." That could have meant the janitor, the street sweeper, the office boy, the window cleaner, or any person occupying the back seat. Any person, old or young, capable of opening a door was invited to respond to the plea of the excluded Savior. That was not surprising, for any person acquainted with Jesus would have anticipated His statement. It was written, "The common people heard him gladly." That included the untouchable leper, very poor widows who placed small offerings in the collection box at the temple, and even the detestable Romans who had occupied the country. When the Savior said, "Any man," He was expressing another truth found in the Bible: "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). Unimportant as a man or woman may be, that one has the capability of introducing Christ to unconcerned companions.

"Hear My Voice"... How Pleading

It may be significant that the Lord, as the Good Shepherd, was calling His straying sheep. Throughout the Middle East sheep follow their shepherd to green pastures and water. Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:27-28). That the Savior was standing outside His church suggested something was wrong. When a shepherd called, he was either encouraging the flock to hasten to new pasture or trying to locate a lost animal. The cry of a missing lamb attracted instant attention, but stubborn sheep needed correction.

212

Dr. F. M. Barton described how a tourist visiting Switzerland reached a shepherd's hut in the mountains. Looking inside she saw a sheep with a broken leg. When she asked about the cause of the accident, the man admitted he was responsible for the broken limb. He explained, "That animal would never obey my voice; it led other sheep astray and often to places of great danger. So I broke its leg. At first, when I tried to feed it the thing tried to bite me, so I decided to leave it alone for a few days. When I returned it showed signs of submission and even affection. When that sheep is well, and it will be soon, it will be a model animal in the flock. No sheep will hear my voice more quickly, and none will follow more closely at my side. It will have learned obedience through suffering" (quoted in part from One Hundred Great Texts [New York: R. Smith, 1914]).

The members of the church in Laodicea were stubborn sheep refusing to respond to the call of their Shepherd. Yet instead of leaving them, Christ continued His entreaty in the hope that someone might respond to His request. His voice may still be heard through conscience, friends, bereavement, problems, and the written Word of God. Blessed are they who obey His call.

"And Open the Door"... How Problematic

A small child stood with her mother looking at Sir Holman Hunt's

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picture in London, England. The masterpiece was titled "The Light of the World" and depicted Christ knocking at the door of the human heart. The little girl was very quiet as her eyes examined every detail of the immortal picture. Then suddenly she said, "Mother, why is there no handle on the door?" The thoughtful woman explained it was on the inside, and if the door were opened the person inside would have to do it. Jesus never knocks the door down nor forces an entrance. He asks for admission but never demands it. Therein lies the source of all the problems existing between God and humanity, between Christ and His church.

The same affectionate desire was expressed when God said to Solomon: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (2 Chron. 7:14).

It is a saddening thought that even the Lord is frustrated when men and women refuse to submit to His will. He, who had no difficulty creating billions of worlds, who organized the movements of the

213

planets, who shakes mountains and calms raging seas, remains outside when confronted by the closed door of the human soul.

God gave to humankind the ability to exercise choice. The Savior said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). Yet if men refuse to accept His invitation, Jesus cannot fulfill His promise. Hitler and others of his type used all kinds of military equipment to make people conform to their infamous demands. Yet their kingdoms disappeared and the dictators died. The kingdom of God will last forever. Swords will be beaten into plowshares because the citizens of His eternal kingdom will be they who permitted Christ to occupy the throne of their affection. They will be redeemed men and women who will say, "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

"I Will Come in to Him"... How Promising

Herein is one of the basic differences between Christianity and the other religions of the world. No preacher ever suggested that Mohammed would dwell in the souls of Moslems, or that the presence of the prophet would abide with the faithful eternally. No Buddhist orator ever predicted that his god would transform evil men and transform bodies into temples where he would exist forever. Millions of people stare at their idols and hope their prayers will be heard. Christians look within and listen to "a still, small voice." This is evidence that Christ lives with His people.

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit transforms the most unpretentious of dwellings into an attractive, glorious palace. The Savior of the world had an extraordinary standard of values. He took a lily of the field and said, "And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Matt. 6:29). The edifice erected by the king of Israel was probably the most magnificent structure ever made by man; lilies of pure gold might have enhanced the beauty of that glittering building. Yet Jesus considered it inferior when compared with the insignificant lily of the fields. That the Lord desired to enter the church at Laodicea was surely wonderful, but He is equally as desirous of abiding with the humble, the poor, and even the most degraded human beings. His promise, "I will come in," is one of the most attractive statements in the Scriptures.

"And Will Sup with Him"... How Pleasant

Luke described how two disciples were met by the risen Christ as they journeyed toward their home in Emmaus: "And they drew nigh

214

unto the village, whither they went: and he [Jesus] made as though he would have gone further. But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them. And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them" (Luke 24:28-30). They sat at the same table, and although the meal was never completed, "he was known of them in breaking of bread" (v. 35).

What matters where on earth we dwell
On mountain top, or in the dell?
In cottage or a mansion fair,
Where Jesus is, 'tis heaven there.

The Savior loved to be in the midst of His people. The Bible described Him among the forgiving, the family, the followers, and the faithful (see the author's commentary Matthew's Majestic Gospel [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1986], 338). It is an unusual event when a king invites a commoner to dine at the royal table. It is even more amazing when a monarch dines with an ordinary workman. Yet such is the miracle of grace. Every person on earth may enjoy the privilege of being host to the King of Kings.

"And He with Me"... How Precious

Miss Henderson, a missionary in India, was sitting on the veranda of the Dufferin Hospital. She was enjoying an afternoon reading when a high-caste Hindu woman sought an interview. When the woman approached, the missionary rose to greet her, and as she did, a copy of Holman Hunt's picture of Christ standing outside the closed door of the human heart fell from her book to the ground. The Hindu woman said, "Tell me about this; what does it mean?" Miss Henderson explained the gospel story, and the visitor eventually departed. The following winter the missionary went to visit the same woman. When she approached, she saw the door was wide open and she became worried, for as a trained nurse, she knew the dangers of being exposed to the wintry conditions. Miss Henderson said, "You should not have your door open. The mountains are covered with snow and it is cold." The woman replied, "I know it. I have seen the snow and have felt the cold, but I thought that your Jesus might pass by, and I wanted Him to find the door wide open" (quoted in part from F. M. Barton, One Hundred Great Texts [New York: R. R. Smith, 1914]).

215

The picture provided in the Laodicean text is twofold. Christ and the listener could be cohosts. The responsive person would entertain the Lord, and the incoming Christ would reciprocate. Either would be offering his best to the other, and that would be precious fellowship.

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