**VOLUME 6; CHAPTER 02 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE KING AT THE DOOR by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*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.*

*Revelation 3:20*

THE FIRST AND TRUE APPLICATION OF THESE WORDS IS AN application to the Christian Church; but, with a fine sense of appropriateness, the Christian consciousness has taken the principle involved, and made personal application of it. For while in the letter to the church at Laodicea these words spoken by the Lord outside the Church had application to that church and those within its doors, we do no violence to the principle involved, but indeed come to understand it more perfectly, when, in all simplicity, we listen to these words of Christ as addressed to the individual. The door at which He stood knocking was the door of the Church; yet it was to one man that He made His appeal. If we make our application to the Church we must remember that the call of Christ was to an individual within that church, and that the way back for the excluded Christ to fellowship with those who bore His name and wore His sign was through an individual life. Therefore, the two applications are not only permissible but important.

My principal purpose this evening is to make the second of these applications the personal one. Yet, standing as we do on the threshold of the new year, I feel that I cannot wholly pass over the first value of my text. I have no desire, neither have I the time at the present moment, to enter into any discussion of the application of the whole of these letters; but, taking them in all simplicity, we accept them as letters sent to seven churches then actually in existence; and, moreover, this church at Laodicea was certainly known to Paul, for his references to it in the letter to the Colossians are very striking. An examination of them in the light of this letter is interesting and valuable. The fact that arrests our attention is that here, so soon after the presence of the Lord in the world in the days of His flesh, was a church bearing His name, gathering together ostensibly for His worship, making its boast in its own sufficiency, while His estimate of it was that it was Christless, He was not in the midst, He was outside the door. I say that a picture such as that must cause pause to all of us who are united in church life. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."

To summarize, for I am going into no detail in this application, what is the picture of this church at Laodicea? It is that of an influential church without influence. We should have taken the church at its own estimate, and our Lord made perfectly clear what that estimate was, "Thou sayest, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing." That was the language of the Church. That was our Master's interpretation of the underlying thought of the Church concerning itself.

His estimate of the church was very different. "Thou art the wretched one, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." That phrase, "the wretched one," really means burdened one. We often hear of churches being burdened debt, but never of churches being burdened with wealth; but that was our Lord's estimate of this church. Therefore, in His view, it was pitiable, for such is the thought of the word "miserable," not that the church was conscious of its own misery; therein lay the profoundest tragedy of its condition, it was not miserable, but it was pitiable, in the old sense of the word "miserable" with which we are familiar the liturgy of the Episcopal Church. "Have mercy upon miserable offenders," pitiable offenders as the thought really is. We "have need of nothing," said the church; but the Lord said, "Thou art … poor and blind and naked." A church without influence, wealthy but poor, satisfied but pitiable. I have no desire to do any other than thus to glance at the picture. As the minister of this church, in the midst of many of my own people, I make no application of it; I dare not, I do not know; but I confront the possibility that a church may bear the name of the Lord, may be perfectly satisfied with its own success and its own influence, may make its boast in the fact that it has now become wealthy and has need of nothing, while yet the Master is outside, declaring it to be pitiable, and poor, and blind, and naked. That is the background of condition.

Now hear His word to such a church, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." He has not yet abandoned that church. If He is excluded from His own church He stands still near to that church. How near? At the very door, knocking and asking for what? For one man who will let Him in! And promising that if there be one man within the church who comes to consciousness of poverty, and misery, and blindness, and inefficiency, and if that man will admit the Master, He will pass in and set up the table of perfect fellowship with that man. If that should have happened at Laodicea, perhaps it did, I do not know; but suppose some one man opened the door and the Master crossed again the threshold and sat down with that man, what happened in that moment? That man excommunicated the church. We have often heard of a church excommunicating a man; it is possible for one spiritually minded man absolutely loyal to Jesus Christ to excommunicate a whole church.

I now pass to the personal and individual application of this simple and sublime word of Christ. In doing that I am anxious first of all to look at the One Who is speaking. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." Who is this? Where shall I go for a description of Him in the New Testament? I will confine myself to the writings of John. We were looking at one of them on Sunday evening last, as we found it in the prologue to the gospel beginning with the stately words, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" - then omitting the parenthesis of the next twelve verses and catching up the statement at verse fourteen - "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth." On that description I am not going back. That is the Person referred to here. In this book of Revelation the same One is described for us in symbolic language. In all the symbolism of that description of the One upon Whom John looked we have suggestions concerning His glory and His grace, which as we meditate upon them fill the heart with a sense of wonder and amazement in the presence of this Lord Christ of ours. The first word is an arresting word. "I turned to see the voice which spake with me. And having turned I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the candlesticks one like unto a son of man." Bear in mind - this is mechanical, but if you will ponder it, it may be helpful - that description occurs in the New Testament, in the gospel stories eighty-five times, eighty-three of which are occasions when Jesus used it concerning Himself. It was His favorite description for Himself - "the Son of man." I am not going to tarry with the significance of the word save in this one and simplest respect; brings us face to face with the fact of the humanity of our Master, brings us face to face with the fact that the One upon Whom John looked in Patmos, was, whatever else He was and is - and other facts and forces of His being are symbolically suggested - He was of our own nature, a man of our humanity, the Son of man. Then we find the symbolism of character: the hair white as wool, suggestive according to Eastern symbolism of purity and age; the feet of brass, which burnt as though burnished in a furnace, suggestive of that procedure in judgment in invincible strength which had been spoken of by all the prophetic writings ere the coming of the Christ Himself; the voice as the sound of many waters, the concord of all the voices that had sounded ere His voice sounded, merging into one final truth all the divers portions that had been spoken to the fathers in times past by the prophets; or, briefly and inclusively, the infinite music of the full and perfect speech of God to men through His Son, the Son of man. This is but to touch upon some of the suggestive thoughts of the symbolism of the vision. It was this Person Who said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." As we think of the statements of the prologue to the Gospel, and of this symbolic description at the commencement of the Apocalypse, and merge them into one, and endeavor to realize all they suggest, let us remember, however hard it may be to understand it, that the declaration of the text is that the One Who stands at the door and knocks is the Creator, the King, the Lawgiver, the Judge; but He is the Redeemer also, for He says, "I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever more, and I have the keys of death and of hades."

Ere we listen to the word of the text, let us turn to the particular description with which this letter opens: "These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God."

There is nothing more wonderful in these letters than the fitness of the description of Jesus at the commencement of each one to the peculiar need of the people to whom the message was sent. Here none of the symbolism of the description is employed. Here every word is mystic and awe-inspiring. "The Amen" is a title which by its very simplicity arrests the attention, and of which, when we inquire as to its meaning, we find the root signification is that of nursing, nurture, strengthening, establishment, so that the Amen reminds us that He is the essential, final Truth. It is exactly equivalent to the word which fell from the lips of our Lord when He said, "I am the Truth." Then He is "the faithful and true witness"; and while the Amen is the positive description, this is relative. He Who is the Amen, the essential truth, eternal truth, is, in His dealings with men, the faithful and true witness, not true alone but faithful also, not faithful merely but true also. The thing He will say will be the thing of truth, and He will say the thing of truth however it may burn.

Then the final title, so simple and yet so startling, which links this letter to Laodicea with the teaching of the letter to the Colossians, "the beginning of the creation of God."

Thus it is seen that Christ stands at the door of the Church, or at the door of the individual life, in all the essential grandeur and dignity of His own being, which is far beyond our comprehension; yet in order that we may understand, and be able to hear the knock at the door, and the accent of the voice, "the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the beginning of the creation of God," is "the Son of Man." All these things are the commonplaces of our New Testament and of our understanding thereof. Yet I have taken time, of set purpose, to remind my own heart of them ere I turn to the consideration of this word of Jesus.

Now listen to the text, "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." There are two things I shall ask you to notice. First, the attitude of Christ described; and, second, the responsibility resting on us in view of that attitude.

What is His attitude? First, He is the excluded One, excluded from heaven by Love, excluded from earth by hate, for "He came unto His own, and they that were His own received Him not." And if we think of the Church, think of Him excluded from the Church, neither by hate nor by love, but by luke-warmness, the tepid condition which is loathsome to the heart of this Christ of ours.

Now let us take this one thought about the Church and make application of it in the case of the individual. They did not know He was outside. They thought they were Christians. They named His name. They professed to believe His teaching. They had His institutions in their midst. They observed the ordinances of His commandment. They were a fully organized church. They did not know, did not dream He was outside.

The peculiar individual application of this text, then, is not to the man who is openly and avowedly anti-Christian. I believe that at the door of that man's heart and life also Christ is knocking; but the peculiar application of this word of Christ must be to the man who is a Christian in name.

I pray you therefore to place the measurement of the picture of the Laodicean church on your own life, and find out whether in your case these things be so or not. How shall we do this? How shall we find out whether we individually are poor, pitiable, blind, naked, devoid of the essential Christian character? There is one test, very simple, but very suggestive, and very searching. How shall we detect the difference between the church with Christ in the midst and the church with His name in the midst, and Himself excluded? How shall we detect the difference between the man truly Christian and the man who names the name of Christ but is not Christian? What is the testing word, the discriminating thought? This is it, lukewarm! May I use another word, far more common, but perhaps more arresting, tepid!

That is a startling affirmation to make, yet I make it on the basis of this flaming revelation in the letter to Laodicea. "I would thou wert cold," and the word may be rightly translated frozen - "or hot," flaming, "so because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold" - are you not appalled by these words of Jesus? - "l will spew thee out of My mouth." That is the test. Can you sing about the Cross without any tears? Can you talk about the holiness of God without any tremor? Are you lukewarm? Then it is more difficult for the Lord Christ to deal with you than with a frozen man. Is it not true? The most difficult congregation in the world to which to preach the gospel is the congregation that regularly listens to it and refuses to obey it! The one man it is hardest to bring into living relationship with Christ is the man who sits right there in front of the preacher Sabbath by Sabbath, and hears the message but never answers it; admires it, talks to his friend about it, and agrees as to the accuracy of it, but in the center of his own life does not obey it; that man is lukewarm, tepid! Know well that Christ is not within because thou dost only admire Him! Know this, Christ is outside if thou art only prepared to patronize Him. He is the excluded Christ. This is the first picture that my text suggests. Behold, I stand outside, and knock. I do not think there will ever be any hope of Christ finding His way into the central life of some of us, until God in His infinite mercy awakens us to the fact that He is not within, but outside!

But this is also the picture of Christ seeking admission. The first is the human side; it tells the story of your condition, many of you who are listening to me. I am not preaching about men and women who are not here, but to men and women who are here, so help me God! Let us hear what the picture suggests about Christ. If He is excluded He is asking to come in. It is so old a story that men do not believe it because they know it so well, and a man does not know how to preach it so as to arrest the attention of the men who know it. Oh that I could so say it that men would be startled by it and believe it; this Lord Christ wants room in your heart and life, notwithstanding the fact that you have excluded Him by your own will, notwithstanding the fact that you have insulted Him by your patronage and admiration while you have withheld your obedience. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock."

What does He want to do if He comes in? To give you gold instead of poverty, to provide you with the white raiment that the shame of your nakedness do not appear; with gentle fingers to do for you what He did for the blind man long ago, anoint your eyes with salve until the light shall stream on them and you shall see. He has described your condition, burdened, pitiable, poor, blind, naked; and He says "Behold, I stand at the door and knock," with wealth for thy poverty, with sight for thy blindness, with raiment for thy nakedness. Thy condition is not My will for thee, says the Lord Christ to this heart of mine; I fain would make thee wealthy with all My wealth; I fain would open thine eyes until thou canst see the vision that I see; I fain would clothe thee with the white raiment that is My very own.

What does He want to come in for? He wants you to be His host, He is asking your hospitality. He wants to be your Host, He desires to give you hospitality. Was there ever statement more perfect than this? "I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me"; I will be his guest, he shall spread the table for Me. I will be His Host and he shall sit at My table. I do not suppose there is another figure in the New Testament quite so wonderful as that of a revelation of the Lord's purpose as He knocks at the door of the human heart. How can a man say a thing which in the very saying may be spoiled? Yet let me try! God is robbed of one of His own homes so long as He is excluded from the heart of a man; and that is not a piece of my imagination. I go back to the Old Testament and I find the truth. Let God speak by the lip of the ancient prophet, "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, Whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." The dwelling places of God, eternity, and the heart of a man! Jesus says, I want to come in to My own home; I built it, furnished it, all the material is My handiwork; let Me in! Be My host, let Me come in and live there. Let Me be the Guest in My very own home, and then I will be Host as well. I will spread the table for thee!

He always wants hospitality. He is very homeless in London by comparison. Will you not make home for Him in your heart? No room for Him in the inn. Let Him in, that He may sup with thee. He is hungry for thy love. He is homeless until a man shall open his heart and let Him in. He shall be thy Host; yet not wholly at His own charges, for thou shalt be His host. And in that perfect fellowship, My heart - as though Christ should say - will find rest, and thy heart will find rest.

What is our responsibility? To admit Him, that is all!

That is all, did I say? It is a very old story, but it will help us now, the story of Holman Hunt's picture. When Hunt painted his great picture, "The Light of the World," the picture of this thorn-crowned King knocking at the door, a friend of his who saw it before the public exhibition said to him, "Hunt, you have made one mistake here." "What is that?" asked the artist. "There is no handle on the door." Hunt looked at his friend and said, No, that is not a mistake; that is the door of the human heart, and it must be opened the inside. "I stand at the door and knock." He desires to enter, but He will not force an entrance. I am responsible in this matter. If ultimately I should miss the way, I cannot put back the blame on God. I must open to admit Him. You may have heard His voice tonight in some whisper other than any word spoken by the preacher. You may have been conscious of the nearness to you of this Lord Christ; but He is still outside, until you swing your heart's door open and bid Him enter. Why do not men open the door? I would like to tell you another story. My dear friend, Mr. Collier, of Manchester, told me this story, and it made a very profound appeal to me; it is full of simplicity from the standpoint of the child, almost quaint and humorous, but it is a wonderful story. One night they were having a lantern service, and a working man was present with his boy by his side, looking at the pictures of the life of Jesus. When Holman Hunt's great picture was flashed on the screen, they were singing,

Knocking, knocking, who is there?

Waiting, waiting, oh, how fair!

and the boy gripped his father's hand and said, "Father, why don't they open the door?" The man said, "I don't know; s'pose they don't want to!" "No," said the boy, "it isn't that. I think I know why they don't; they all live at the back of house!" Why don't you open the door? Because you are living at the back of the house? You have receded into the baser, meaner, things of your own life, and, living there, you do not hear the knocking at the front door! You have descended in life voluntarily to mean motives, intellectually to limited outlook, emotionally to unworthy passions. You are living at the back. But for this hour some of you have pressed from that back region in the front, and you have seen the light from the windows out of which you seldom look. God grant that you may have heard the knocking. Will you open?

I quoted two lines a moment ago from a hymn, and I am always sorry that the hymn ever appeared in that form. It is the mutilation of a great poem. Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote something far finer than those two or three verses. Let her poem make my appeal;

Knocking, knocking, ever knocking!

Who is there?

'Tis a pilgrim strange and kingly,

Never such was seen before.

Ah, sweet soul, for such a wonder

Undo the door.

No, that door is hard to open;

Hinges rusty, latch is broken.

Bid Him go!

Wherefore, with that knocking dreary,

Scare the sleep from one so weary,

Say Him - No!

Knocking, knocking, ever knocking?

What! still there?

Oh, sweet soul, but once behold Him,

With the glory-crowned hair;

And those eyes so strange and tender

Waiting there.

Open, open, once behold Him -

Him so fair.

Ah, that door! Why wilt Thou vex me,

Coming over to perplex me?

For the key is stiffly rusty,

And the bolt is clogged and dusty;

Many fingered ivy vine

Seals it fast with twist and twine;

Weeds of years and years before

Choke the passage of that door.

Knocking, knocking! What! still knocking?

What's the hour? The night is waning;

In my heart a drear complaining,

And a chilly, sad unrest!

Ah! His knocking! It disturbs me,

Scares my sleep with dreams unblest!

Give me rest,

Rest - ah, rest!

Rest, dear soul, He longs to give thee;

Thou hast only dreamed of pleasure,

Dreamed of gifts and golden treasure,

Dreamed of jewels in thy keeping,

Waked to weariness and weeping.

Open to thy soul's one Lover,

And thy night of dreams is over,

More than all thy faded dreaming!

Did she open? Doth she? Will she?

So, as wondering we behold,

Grows the picture to a sign

Pressed upon your soul and mine;

For in every heart that liveth

Is that strange, mysterious door -

Though forsaken and betangled,

Ivy-gnarled, and weed bejangled,

Dusty, rusty, and forgotten -

There the piercéd hand still knocketh,

And with ever-patient watching,

With the sad eyes true and tender,

With the glory-crowned hair,

Still thy God is waiting there.