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A sermon preached by the late Mr. J.E. Hazelton from the text in Rev 2. 8 to 11. The letter to the Church at Smyrna.

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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

These are the words of our blessed Redeemer in glory, words that were spoken first of all of the Church in Smyrna, and words which are spoken of His Church throughout all the ages. They are the words of Him who is the great Head of the Church, and who in glory today is deeply and divinely interested in everything that pertains to His blood-bought people here below. In the Isle of Patmos our blessed Lord was pleased to give to His servant John the words of this message as well as the words of the messages to the six other Churches that are named in this connection. "What thou writest" the Lord said, "let them read." Every word that the Lord spoke was a divine truth and the Lord said to John write concerning the glorious sight which thou hast had of My glory now I have passed into the heavens, write to My people concerning My unfailing interest in them; write unto those who were given Me before the foundation of the world, of the goodness and mercy which shall follow them all the days of their life. Our Lord did not commit these blessed truths to oral tradition, but He said to the Apostle, write them; let them be focussed and expressed in human language that they may be the possession of My Church down all the ages. Moses said when he came down from the Mount with the two tables of stone in his hand, "the writing is the writing of God"; and this message is no less the writing of God than those ten words inscribed upon the tables of stone.

The Apostle John, in common with all the writers of the Scriptures of Truth, was not simply a mechanical instrument. The language and the spirit is from the human point of view, that of John, but the Holy Spirit possessed the whole man so that, as he writes, he finishes each letter with these words "He that hath an ear to hear let him hear what the SPIRIT saith unto the Churches." John held the pen; the words were the words of our risen and ascended Lord, not written, as I apprehend it, the moment that the Lord Jesus delivered them, but blessedly brought to John's remembrance by the Holy Spirit when he subsequently sat down to write what he had heard and seen and tasted and felt. It was the Spirit of the living God speaking through His servant. There are those who make light of the Old Testament scriptures, who scorn Moses and deny him to have been the author of the five books that bear his name. There are those who would rob us of the Davidic authorship of the Psalms. Those who do so, who profess at the same time to be followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, if I mistake not, come perilously near to committing the unpardonable sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost, for the Apostle speaks on more than one occasion in this way, "as the Holy Ghost by David saith." Here then in this message we have the words of the Lord Jesus, the words of the blessed Spirit coming down to us through the pen and writings of His servant John.

Now in connection with this special message there is much that is symbolical, but every word, every syllable is a picture and a representation of divine and eternal truth, and I pray that these symbols in this letter, and the revelation given to us here of our dear Lord, may have an articulate voice and a loving eye and a powerful hand to each one of us. Oh!, I do pray that, as I preach to

you, my words may not glide over the surface. What is the good of a sermon that does not take hold of the people? hence we need to pray for the power and grace of God the Holy Spirit.

Now here brightly the number seven shines, and the number seven is stamped upon this Book of the Revelation more clearly and powerfully than any other portion of Scripture. There are seven sets of titles by which our dear Lord reveals Himself in these messages; there are seven sets of exhortations; seven sets of reproofs and seven sets of promises; and it has well been said that if we take the seven sets of promises which are given to these seven Churches in succession, we have a great and wonderful light shed upon what Heaven is, and what God's people are going within the veil to possess and to enjoy. Seven! It is the covenant number. Seven! it means that all God's dealings with His dear people are in accord with the "covenant ordered in all things and sure". And this covenant is the key to all history; and all that our God in Christ is doing in the world and in the universe is in absolute harmony with that covenant into which He has entered on behalf of His dear people.

Now we come to an afflicted Church! Smyrna and Philadelphia were the only two churches that were in deep affliction to whom these epistles were sent, and you will notice that to both Smyrna and Philadelphia our blessed Redeemer in heaven affords unmingled commendation. The Church of Smyrna was a suffering Church. Her history was to be, and at the present time was, one of toil and of tribulation but our dear Lord speaks concerning the future - he foretells concerning the Minister of that Church, and the members of that Church, suffering, imprisonment, and death; and you will notice in all the messages which the Lord of Life and Glory sends to these seven Churches (which are in effect a picture of His one Church in all ages) that He suits the revelation of Himself to their peculiar circumstances and needs. He reveals Himself to one as a Conqueror; to another as the First and the Last; to another as the glorious Saviour who has the key, opening and no man shutting, and shutting and no man opening, just as He did in Old Testament times. Joshua needed strong encouragement, and the Lord appeared to him as Captain of the hosts of the Lord. And so, dear friends, today, according to our need so will our blessed Lord reveal Himself. He is infinite in His nature; He is wonderful in the offices He bears; He is full to overflowing of divine compassion and love; and whatever may be the special need of any godly man or woman in God's house this morning, according to that need the Lord will reveal Himself, and according to your necessity He will grant His supplies; this unmistakably shows that His eye is ever upon those that hope in His mercy; that His hand is ever upon the pulse of your soul; that He knows when your spiritual life is intermittent; He knows when you are subject to fainting fits, and when you walk in darkness; and just as He manifested Himself in a special way peculiar to the need of the Church of Smyrna, so it is with every individual member of that Church. Oh! what a mercy to have a precious Christ, thus manifested to our souls, to have His person, His blood, His love, His power manifested to our poor souls by divine communications thereof.

In passing, who was the Angel of the Church in Smyrna, the Minister, the Pastor, the Bishop, whatever title you may be pleased to bestow upon him? There is but little doubt that the Angel to whom this message was first sent was none other than Polycarp, who was one of the pupils and disciples of John. There is a distinct reference here to the coming martyrdom of the Angel of that Church, and when Polycarp, at the age of about 140 years, was seized and hurried into the amphitheatre, it was decided not to cast him to the beasts, but to have him burnt at the stake. The Proconsul offered him his liberty if he would but revile Christ, and Polycarp said "fourscore and six years have I been the servant of my dear Redeemer, and He has never done me any wrong, how then can I blaspheme my King who hath saved me?" 86 years he had known and loved and served the Lord. They burnt him at the stake and the Jews (those of the synagogue of Satan) were among the most active in adding fuel to the fire.

Let us look at these verses from five points of view as bearing on our hopes, condition and position. First of all we have the universal dominion of our Lord Jesus - "I am the First and the Last, which was dead, and is alive." Secondly, we have His intimate acquaintance with all His people - "I know thy works", and I know the blasphemy and opposition of thy enemies. Thirdly, we have the imperishable wealth of every poor sinner brought to trust in Christ, "thou art rich". And fourthly, there is fear disarmed; and lastly a blessed rest and grace compensation given.

First of all we have the UNIVERSAL DOMINION of our dear Lord, and that universal dominion based upon His great and glorious redeeming work engaged for in heaven, and wrought out in the utmost beauty and perfection upon earth. These things saith the First and the Last, He who is from eternity to eternity; He who was first in the "covenant ordered in all things and sure", undertaking the cause of those that were given unto Him.

Christ be My first elect He said,  
Then chose our souls in Christ our Head.

Christ, the Son of the Father eternal; Christ first in the Garden of Eden after the fall of men; Christ first of all in the types and ceremonies of the Old Testament dispensation; Christ first in the Psalms and in the Prophecies; and Christ first in the beginning of His redemptive work as executed upon this earth. Oh, dear friends, I pray that, especially at this season of the year, we may be led to some solemn and sacred thoughts concerning the Person of Him who as the Son of Man was born in Bethlehem of Judeae. Is it not a wonder of wonders that He who is the First and the Last, the Son eternal, has allied Himself with our nature, that the Son of God has taken upon Himself the seed of Abraham? That the Lord of Glory condescended to be born of a virgin? That He for whom all things were created and by whom all things were created should lie in the manger an Infant of Days? Is it not wonderful that He who was the First should also be the Last, and should thus come in love and

grace and mercy? Do we know anything of His person? Is it our desire? Is His work our hope? Our blessed Lord in the 17th chapter of John has this wonderful clause in that most wonderful prayer: "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." Here you observe a knowledge of Jesus Christ, the Sent One, is equal to a knowledge of the only true God, and is it not a wonderful mark of the possession of divine life to know Jesus Christ whom the Father sent, to know Him to be God, to know Him to be Man; to know Him to be the GOD MAN, the First and the Last? Oh! to know Him as the alone Saviour, to know Him as the glorious One in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; to know Him as the great object of our hope and faith is to have an unmistakable mark of being a possessor of life divine.

Jesus Christ! This is the title by which He calls himself in these seven epistles. What does the word "Jesus" mean? We simply say it means Saviour. That is what half the word means, but the word itself means Jehovah the Saviour, "Je" being the same as "Jah", Jesus - Jehovah the Saviour, who is the First and the Last from eternity to eternity. Jesus coming to be our Redeemer God, and coming too to put all His enemies under His feet. Now our Lord says that not only is He the First and the Last, but He is the glorious One that was dead and is alive. Here we come at once upon His sin-atoning work as being the basis of His universal dominion and of the power which He exercises on behalf of His people. Ignatius who was martyred prior to Polycarp, one of the earliest of the martyrs of post-apostolic times, used often to say "He on the Cross is my love." Now how is this with you? A risen Saviour speaks here, the First and the Last, He who was dead and is alive. Why should Christ die? His nature was capable of death, but there was no reason in that pure, untainted and spotless human nature, why He should ever die. 'Twas free from sin, and yet He died! Why? He possessed the capacity to die, having assumed our nature. He died because He was our Surety, our Sponsor; because He came to die, and because Calvary's altar was that towards which His eyes were ever directed. OH! think of it in the utterance of those first recorded words of our most blessed Lord, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" Think of His last words - excepting the committal of His soul to His Father - "It is FINISHED" - the business for which I came is completed, "I was dead and am alive again for ever more."

Have you noticed that the welfare of Israel was invariably marked by their regard to the Altar? There was only one Altar, the Altar of Burnt Offering. There was, of course, the Altar of Incense, but there was just that one Altar on which sacrifices were to be offered, and when Israel was receiving most of God's blessing Israel's heart was directed to the Altar, to the Altar in Jerusalem. Look at it in connection with patriarchal times! You will find that wherever Abraham, Isaac and Jacob went they built an Altar. What does all this mean? That their one trust was in the work of the Messiah who was to come, and so, dear friends, the sin atoning

sacrifice and meritorious death of our dear Lord is ever before Him in the heavens, and that Church will stand or fall in proportion as it cleaves to the Altar, even to Christ and to Him crucified, even unto Him who was dead and is alive. Oh! we bless the name of our God for the great mystery of godliness! "God was manifest in the flesh", and whilst there are the two natures in the Person of our Lord, the human and the divine, we can clearly distinguish, but we can never divide. All that He did as Man has the Godhead behind it, and all that He did as God He did with human lips, heart and hands. He multiplied the bread and the fishes in His human hands; the hands were human, but they were the hands of the Son of God! He dies upon the Cross; His human nature pours out its life's blood, but it was the Son of God, Emmanuel, God with us, who hung in shame and agony, and blood, and contumely, putting away His people's sins. "I am He that was dead and am alive again", and we bless the Name of our God that He reveals to us here the eternity of His risen life. "I am the First and the Last". I was dead, but no more shall death have dominion over Me. "I know" said Job, "that my Redeemer liveth" and when the Spirit of the Living God stirs up and evokes faith in our hearts, the eye of the Church brightens when she can say "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

The angel said, "Come and see the place where the Lord lay". O, dear friends, this morning may we hear this word "Come and see the place where Jehovah Jesus lay, in Bethlehem's manger, on Mary's knee, surrounded by the shepherds and the wise men from the east. "Come see the place where Jehovah Jesus lay", for

Cold mountains and the midnight air  
Witnessed the fervour of His prayer.

My Lord has gone before you. "Come see the place where Jehovah Jesus lay" when in Gethsemane's garden He poured out His heart's cry with tears and those falling drops of blood. "Come see the place where Jehovah Jesus lay" on that rugged tree of Calvary, Surety, Substitute of His dear Church and people, <sup>that</sup> He might make full and complete atonement. "Come see the place where Jehovah Jesus lay" in that empty tomb from which He arose and is alive again for ever more.

Here then is the great and blessed Gospel concerning Him who is the First and the Last, who, in death, demonstrated that He is the Lord of Life, and in life demonstrated that He is the Lord of Death - First and Last, All and in All.

A word or two about HIS INTIMATE ACQUAINTANCE WITH US. He who lay in the bosom of His Father says in Heaven "I know, I know!" What a difference the tone makes, does it not, in which an utterance of this kind is made? Someone approaches with some tale of woe to a person in a hurry. "I know, I know all, about it", and away the un-sympathetic one goes. He who says "I know" is the Saviour whose lips drop words that are "sweeter than honey and the honeycomb", and looking at this afflicted Church of Smyrna, and through it at all His people, He says "I know thy works; I know thy work of faith and

labour of love." And what is the work of faith? Not simply service done in the Lord's name. It is that, but the "work of faith" is to come to Jesus, reaching after Christ, longing for Him. "I know thy works and labour of love." I know thy tribulation, and I know thy poverty. I know just where you are, and where the shoe pinches, where the pressure is felt. "I KNOW", and it is He who has all the resources in Heaven and earth at His command who speaks, and then He looks at the raging wolves outside that Church, and He says "I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan." What a mercy to have a Saviour in the heavens who knows all about the palpitation, and the heartbreak, and the yearning, and the tribulation, and the poverty of those to whom He sends this message! All is perfectly known to Him who carried our sicknesses and bore all the sorrows of His people. All human memories and experiences are enshrined in His heart in heaven. "I know thy tribulation", the roller that passes over the corn for the purpose of separating the chaff from the wheat. "I know thy tribulation", and no grain of faith that I have given thee, no grain of hope or love shall ever be suffered to perish in tribulation. We have a Saviour who marks the falling of the tear; the tear falls downward, and the sound flies upward to the ear of God. He knows the groan, the desire, the tendency of the heart, the tendency of the spirit. "I know" all that pertains to thee, and I know all that thine enemies would, were it possible, inflict upon thee.

Let us pass on now, as our time is almost gone, and say a little next about the IMPERISHABLE WEALTH of the people of the living God. I would point out the very beautiful enclosure in brackets of these words here. Everything in relation to the Word of God has a divine meaning. What are the words in brackets? "But thou art rich", - a bracket on each side. Outside there are all the enemies of the Church; inside there is a tried and tribulated people, and in the divine enclosure is Heaven, - "but thou art rich". It is a garden in a wilderness. Here is the wilderness, poverty, tribulation, blasphemy, the unbelieving Jews and Satan - that is all wilderness is it not? And then there is the garden in the wilderness. Outside all is cold and desolate; inside is the "inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." Inside are all the riches of grace and glory in Christ Jesus. "Thou art rich", everything thou needest stored up in Me; the place to which thou art going is taken possession of by Me. "Thou art rich", heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. Is there not a reason why these words in the original and in our version, are put within brackets? However hard may be "the work of faith and labour of love", whatever may be the tribulation, however great the poverty, "thou art rich" for thou hast Christ, thou wantest Christ, thou art labouring to come unto Christ and after Christ. "Thou art rich" with Christ. Oh! dear tried believer, if you have a ray of hope, a drop of the anointing oil, a drop of the precious blood, it is the earnest and the pledge of a remuneration, not because of you, but because of the Lord Jesus Christ, that shall be yours, world without end, Amen.

FEAR DISARMED - "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer." Oh! this is what we want, as we said last Sunday. We may

say in the words of that lovely verse,

Be still my heart, these anxious fears  
To thee are burdens, thorns and snares.

We want the Word of the Lord himself - "Fear none of these things"; then all fear is taken away. "Fear none of these things." What was there that they had to face in Smyrna? The synagogue of Satan, unbelieving Jewish antagonism. What had they to face in another Church? The throne of Satan - "I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is" - there you have heathen antagonism, the synagogue of Satan, the blasphemy of unbelieving Jews, the throne of Satan, all the power of the devil in heathendom arrayed against the Church of Christ. The depths of Satan - all the power of false teaching. "Fear none of these things". The Devil is at the back of it all - the Lord Jesus says so. It is because the Devil is endeavouring to strike at Christ that he assails the Church and persecutes and tempts the individual members thereof. But all is numbered and measured. "Fear none of these things". The persecution will be but "for ten days". He does not say that the Devil, the Accuser, will cast you into Hell, but to prison. He does not say that the whole of the Church will endure that persecution, but the Lord says "some of you". He does not say that the Church will be persecuted and tried for ever, but "for ten days" only. "Fear not, be not dismayed, for I will be with thee."

Then finally there is the wonderful COMPENSATION, - "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life." There you have one of the felicities of Heaven. "I will give thee a crown of life", and "he that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death". What a mercy to be made faithful, to be kept faithful! What a mercy to have a deepening sense of our own absolute weakness and dependence upon the Lord, and to seek day by day that He would hold and keep us. There is a life beyond life for the faithful and there is a death beyond death for the wicked, and that is the "second death". Death never means in God's Word annihilation. The "second death" means that eternal separation from God and all things holy, which will be the portion of those who live and die at a guilty and impenitent distance from the Lord our God. God give unto us then, that this morning we may be under the Spirit's teaching, realising more and more the blessed personality of the Speaker - I and thou - ~~BE~~ thou faithful" said the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the Saviour in whom are inexhaustible riches. ~~My~~ He, this day, lead us to look to Him who was dead and is alive, who is the First and the Last, now and for ever more, Amen.