

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
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REVELATION 3 v 4/5/6

"Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches"

It may be - probably some would say, yes - that the messages of the last two sermons have been heavy. You may have felt perhaps searched, perhaps tried; it may be some of you have been disappointed, but I hope it may please God to grant that you will prove that what tries you leads to good, that the searching you may have felt has been to lead you more to examine your ways and try them before God. Light may have shined into some of you to show you your lacks. The light may have moved you to greatly fear lest you should answer to the awful word spoken to this church. "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead". To be dead in a profession, to have a cold formality, to seem to be Christians, and only seem to be so, to have that which shall be taken away from you; no tongue can say how terrible such a condition is. But the Lord spoke to this church by the angel, the pastor, and bid him, and it, watch and strengthen the things which remained that were ready to die. He told him and them to remember how they had formerly received and heard, and there is mercy in this direction. It, as it were, says they had received something though they had forgotten it, and now the Lord comes and says, Remember, look back to what I gave you, remember how you received it, what it did for you; the unspeakable joy you had in hearing of the forgiveness of sins and of the Lord Jesus Christ, the profound Person, the glorious Person of the Redeemer. Remember these things. And having thus spoken He now comes to a few in that church and speaks

of them in these ways. "Thou hast a few names even" - marking, greatly marking, the sad state that that church was in and yet, notwithstanding, even in that very dead church there were a few living persons. This should encourage some of us to hope and pray that even though we are living in the Sardinian state, we are not dead, and may we be allowed to pray that this may be true. So it can be - if it were true of some then - it can be made true of us today.

There is a great contrast. There was a dead church, in the midst of it some living people. There is another contrast in respect of numbers. The majority was wrong, a few were right. This may try you, may try me. It is very solemn to consider that of four hearers, as related in the parable of the sower, three were wrong, only one right. If this applied to this congregation, what a searching there might come; each be saying, Lord, am I one of the three? In reply to the question of His disciples: "Are there few that be saved?" the Lord said this: "Strive to enter in at the straight gate". May that holy violence be given to us of which we read: "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force". The sluggard's bed has no food, no nourishment, and his sluggishness kills him though he may have religious desires. The sluggard desireth and hath nothing. The diligent soul is the soul that shall be made fat. According to inspired Scripture there be few. It has always been the case; the great majority has been the world; a little flock belongs to Christ. "Fear not little flock". A little garden, gathered and made a garden, out of the wilderness and enclosed by grace divine. "A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse...." (S of S 4 v 12) A flock of sheep coming up from the washing. The order of the church likened to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariot. Everything pointing out this truth, that there are few. "Thou hast a few names in Sardis". There is a contrast as to the two states set out in this letter, the majority dead, the few alive.

And here we have to notice, first of all, the description of the few. It is given thus - they have not defiled their garments.

Secondly, the promise made to them - "They shall walk with Me in white"

And thirdly, the commendation of them - "For they are worthy"

First of all, we have the description of the few - they have not defiled their garments. They are lively in their souls, they are exercised before God, they walk before Him. Their garments may be taken for their profession. Their profession is that which they have made before God and in the church. And this profession, like garments, was defiled by the great bulk of that church. The minister and the majority had become carnal, worldly, conformed to the world and, as it were, quite dead. It would seem that there was no disturbance in the church, no heresies breaking out, but they were just all satisfied, and pleased. Ask them how they were? Probably the answer would have been, We are getting on quite comfortably, no disturbance, nothing to trouble us. We go on, week by week, and we are all comfortable together. The Lord saw this in the time of Zechariah, the prophet, when messengers were sent throughout the earth to take observations. The reply when they returned was this, "All the earth sitteth still and is at rest." (Zechariah 1 v 11) Religion was respectable, was popular; the world is not offended with it; no displeasure manifested, and the enemy is so content to see the city at rest and in quiet, and having dealings just in this quiet way; he did not disturb them. He did not disturb them by sending heresies, did not disturb them by stirring up enmity, and quarrelling, just left them alone like those cities of which we read, they were in quiet. What a description. What do you think of it? But now says the Lord, there are some here who are pained, and they keep their garments quite clean. Here we must look, first of all, at the root of this great difference thus marked by the Lord. All growth has a root. "Every plant which My heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up". But the righteous shall be as palm trees in the courts of the Lord. They shall be fat and flourishing to show that the Lord is upright, that there is no unrighteousness in Him. If you be planted by God, the sap will flow, and fruit will be seen. Brethren, examine yourselves. The Apostle shows his separation from the world and he gives the cause of it. He says: "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world". "I am crucified with Christ", he says, "nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth

in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2 v 20). How is it with you? What about the root? Do you ever find heavenly sap flowing? Do you find your souls renewed in strength? Do you find holiness coming from heaven into your heart, into your conscience, into your feelings? You will never walk in white with the Lord unless there be this root to your religion. You cannot keep your garments clean, your profession pure, unless there be a living root, and supplies from the fullness of the Lord Jesus. O, do not say, We feel there is something wrong and we will see to it, and we will try to get it away and have what is right. That will be no remedy. It was a solemn charge that the Lord by Hosea brought against Ephraim. When he saw his wound he went to king Jareb. Again the same prophet says, "They returned, but not to the Most High." Men may see themselves wrong in some things, and begin to rectify them, see to it, as it were, to put right what they discovered to be wrong, and they go the wrong way. Where do you go when you feel diseased in your souls? Where do you fly when you feel in danger? Do you go to some arm of flesh? Do you go to yourself? Do you return, but not to the Most High? Then you wont have undefiled garments. Be careful of the root. Let me press this on you, be careful of the root. See if you are "rooted and grounded in love". Now this walking without defilement - "which have not defiled their garments" - what is it? It is walking before God in those things which are professed, and here we must look, as the Lord may help us, at our profession. That is the first thing, and then see if we are enabled to walk in the profession we make without error, decay, death. First of all, what is our profession? We profess to believe that holy Scripture is given by inspiration of God, that the Bible, thus inspired and perfect, reveals the holy Trinity, the Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal. Do we hold this undefiled, inviolate? Can you tolerate the defilement of a denial of the inspiration of the Word of God? Can you connive at any denial of the Person of the Son of God, as the very immediate and only begotten Son of God? Can you tolerate anything that brings a reproach to the Trinity? For when the Sonship of Christ is denied, the integrity of the Trinity is invaded. We profess that this glorious God has eternally loved His church, that He elected and set up Jesus Christ to be her Head, and Husband; that He gave Him everything that His church, His bride, could need, that He gave life

to Him for her; that He sent Him to be her Surety, her Redeemer; that He imputed all her sins to Him; that the Lord Jesus was sent with a commandment to lay down His life. This is what we profess. That Christ, God's Elect, and God's Servant, is the Head of an elect people, people He purchased with His Own blood. We believe and profess it, that the Holy Ghost, the third Person in the Trinity, is sent to every person purchased with blood to quicken him into eternal life, to wound him, to kill him by the law and make him alive by the gospel; to cut him off from his old state, and out of his old head, Adam, and unite him to the new and living Head, Jesus Christ. O what wondrous truths we believe in that glorious gospel of Christ, that gospel that is good news from a far country, that brings forgiveness of sins, and justification, and sanctification, and redemption from the Head, Christ, to all His members. We believe in the incarnation of the Son of God, that He was born, as the Scriptures declare, of the virgin Mary; that He received the Holy Ghost without measure; that that divine Spirit was in Him, and on Him, as the Spirit of might, and of power, and of counsel, and of wisdom, making Him of quick understanding in the fear of God; that that blessed Lord Jesus Christ became the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth. The end of the law, being its perfect realisation. Realisation of its every commandment, and precept, and claim in the Person of the Lord Jesus who was made under it that He might redeem His people from it. We believe in the vicarious death of Christ on the cross, and that when He said - "It is finished" - the whole work was done with regard to the removal of sin, and the destruction of Satan, the closing of hell's gates. Everything was done, and virtually there is nothing remaining to be done. The application of all this is the work of the Eternal Spirit. And we do believe too, that that Holy Spirit comes in the fullness of time, the time appointed of the Father, to every person purchased by the blood of Christ to breathe into his soul eternal life; and that all the Scriptures are to be observed, every part, every doctrine, every precept, every holy commandment of the apostles and prophets of the Lord Jesus; these are to be observed, not one of them are we at liberty to break. Now this is, in a very brief way, a statement of what is most surely believed by all the people of God sooner or later under the teaching of the Eternal Spirit. You acquiesce, you say, Yes, we have no dispute with respect to that statement. Well now the

question comes - how do we hold it? How do we walk in it? "Thou hast a few names". Here is a professing church and the bulk of that church, perhaps every member of it on entering into it, had professed to believe in the doctrines of divine grace as revealed. They were in those days a great deal more particular about receiving members than we are. They would catechise them and would keep them for a year, teaching them constantly before they admitted them into membership, so the probability is that every member of this church in Sardis had made an open profession before many witnesses of all things essential to salvation. How long they walked in that profession; how long they kept their garments clean, and undefiled by any deviation from truth, by any admission of error; how long they kept awake at the throne of grace; God only knows. We have no record of that, but this is true in the letter that the bulk of these people had sunk into a carnal condition, and become as dead, and there were a few in that church, contrary to the minister's condition, who walked with unspotted garments. One says, the praise of this "few" was the shame of the pastor. He, indifferent to their condition; He, careless of the church committed to his care; He was shamed by this commendation of the "few". "Thou hast a few names". To keep these garments of ours clean, to walk without defiling them, then, appears to be this, that by the Holy Spirit animating them, strengthening their faith, they clave to what they had received. They felt the life, and the power, and the beauty of truth, and because the Scripture puts everything into Christ, and makes Him the Head and centre of all, let me direct your attention to this chiefly. What is He in, first of all, His blessed, glorious Person? What is Christ? Has gold, has possession, has respectability come in and deadened, and blinded, and turned away your heart and conscience from Him, so that He is not to you what He was? that He has not the attractions He used to have? Is His blood more and more desirable, and desired, or do you pass by those sins that you have committed and say, It is nought, It is nought? If you keep your garments undefiled then the Lord Jesus in His blessed atonement will be everything. And when you apply for redemption, for the forgiveness of sins spoken to your heart, then there is a keeping of your garments unspotted. Though you have sinned - "There is no man that doeth good and sinneth not" - the Lord does not say these were people who lived without sin, but He says that the garments of their profession they were enabled to keep undefiled; they did not spot

them and besmirch them. They kept them clean as before God by applying to the throne of God's heavenly grace and seeking the application to them of that which alone can cleanse from all sin. John's word would seem to apply to this case at this point. He says: "My little children these things I write unto you that ye sin not", that is, that you fall not willingly, and deliberately. "But" - if any man be overtaken - "if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father". When this is the case, the person is not asleep, he is not as dead, he is exercised, and he is brought to the blessed fountain of all purity and that cleanses his conscience, and what cleanses his conscience makes it tender, and keeps it tender, and enables, yea constrains him, to cry to God to keep him from the world, and to keep him from a deathly, sickly state. If you feel the grace of God with you, then you will be continually applying for the blood of Jesus Christ to make you clean, to keep you so.

Then take His Person. I put it in this way. After the atonement comes, as a rule you will find in the church of God the saints in the beginning, especially, are more concerned about guilt being removed from their consciences than they are about the Person of Christ. That is most before them, but when forgiveness has been brought to them, when they know that they were redeemed "not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from their vain conversation received by tradition from their fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ", then, as the Spirit works in them, they are led on, led to His Person. He becomes more precious. The perfection of His Person, Almighty God incarnate. Christ, possessing all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; Christ in whom it has pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell. This Person, this sun, this temple, this foundation, this life, this righteousness, this All and in All, becomes "The chiefest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely". You may not dispute this, but the question is, how do you live with respect to Him? How do you live with respect to Christ? If you are living rightly, if you are living with these garments of your Christian profession unspotted, your hearts are to Him. You say in that language of faith: "Let my beloved come into His garden". You ask Him to keep you company, to guard your head, to guard your heart, to present you to His Father, to preach His Father's Name in your heart, to bring good news to you, according to the office to which He was

anointed by the Holy Ghost, as He said: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord hath anointed Me to preach glad tidings unto the meek." You want Him to do that. You want Him to tell you His Name, to speak with power, shine into your heart in His glory, and give you to look upon that glory so as to be changed into its image, from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord. This is keeping your garments unspotted and, as you do this, through grace you will hate the world, hate the garments spotted by it. Carnality, world, and those things which distract, and divert your attention, will be hateful to you as long as, and whenever, this is the state of your heart with respect to Christ. Is He the chiefest among ten thousand? Could you honestly say before, and to, the Almighty - "Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee". Could you say it? Could you appeal to the Searcher of your hearts, and say, Lord Thou knowest that that is the state of my mind, that I desire none but Thyself?

Then, if you keep your garments unspotted, this also will be with you, you will make applications to the Lord, the Holy Spirit. He will be as necessary to you for your soul's salvation, for your preservation, for your final good, yea, for your landing in heaven, as is Jesus Christ. No Holy Spirit, no life, no teaching, no knowledge of God, no sealing up to the day of redemption, no knowledge of the Scripture, no applications of it, no opening up to us of its spirituality, and its meaning. How do you stand affected toward this Divine Person, the Holy Ghost? Do you seek to have Him? Do you seek to have Him in you as Christ promises Him? "He shall be in you a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Who can keep you from the deadening influence of sin, from its hardening power, but the Holy Spirit? Who can lead you into the doctrines of divine truth but that Spirit who caused them to be revealed and written? Who can make known the sweetness, and the fullness of a divine promise? Who can conduct you into the Covenant of Grace, but the Spirit who has revealed that Covenant and those promises? Who can sanctify your heart through the truth in its divine power on your heart but the Spirit? Do you stand well affected to the Holy Ghost? Do you pray to Him? May we pray to Him? Why ask the question if you believe Him to be God? If He be God, why, cannot you pray; you will pray to Him. He is God, and He is as much to be adored and prayed to as is Jesus Christ,

and as is the Father.

There are a few names in Sardis which have not defiled their garments. They keep these clean, cannot tolerate any denial of them. Any departure from them is grievous for they long to have them constantly in their hearts in their efficacy, in their purifying power.

And how do you stand affected respecting the glory of God? All men seek their own, the Apostle says, and not the things which are Jesus Christ's. But now what says the Scripture, even by the same Apostle Paul? Why, it says this : "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price". "Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are His, for ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price". This is the Word of God. Yea, so intimate is this, so does it come into a person's condition, that the Spirit, by Paul, says : "Whatsoever ye do, whether ye eat, or whether ye drink, do all to the glory of God". How do you stand with regard to this? How do I stand with regard to this? Is the Lord's glory ever before you? Do you seek it? Do you pray to have that upon you and in you? A few in Sardis did. O methinks the view of this church was very wonderful, as the Lord here expresses. He looked upon that congregation, probably a large one in that city then flourishing, and wealthy, now a miserable village, and saw in that congregation the sleepy, the dead ones constituting the great majority. When they met for prayer, and for praise, they sang, and they prayed without any heart, and then He saw just a few among them. As it is in Job, so we may say, "He looketh upon men and if there be any that say I have sinned and perverted that which was right and it profited me not, then He is gracious". And He looked upon a few, heard them sigh, and heard them pray, Keep us from evil. One says, Lord I have indulged evil, forgive it, and he could not sleep under it. Another says, Lord, I have sought something that was not for my soul's profit or Thy glory, pardon and remove guilt. And He saw these people walking with their garments unspotted because they sought constantly that fountain that could cleanse, did cleanse them from their sins, and all that was wrong. It is not walking in sinlessness, it is walking with God, and sinners do walk with Him when they walk by faith. We walk by faith in Christ, by faith in the Father's love, by faith in the love of the Son, by faith in the love of

the Spirit. We walk by faith in the Trinity, and what the Trinity has revealed and made known in Holy Scripture.

Now I have been perhaps rather long and some may even think tedious in speaking about this description of walking with unspotted, undefiled garments, but if it should lead any of you to examination of your cases, and lead you to seek the face, and favour, and power, and presence of God, it will not have been in vain.

Let us next look at what the Lord promises them. "They shall walk with Me in white" When they get to heaven? O, yes, but before then. When the Lord Jesus receives them as they come to His heavenly throne, and call on His great Name, He speaks to their hearts some comfort, and they walk with Him in that. They walk by faith in His comforting atonement, in His covering righteousness, in His sanctifying grace, in His pure, holy, blessed Word which sanctifies them. They walk with Him in those things. If you get five minutes of this at any time it will make a mark, it will leave an effect, and you will want it longer, and you will say to Him who thus blessed you

More frequent let Thy visits be
Or let them longer last

In this walking with God there are several things. There is intimacy. Is He a stranger? Sometimes a saint of God says to Him: "Why shouldst Thou be as a stranger in the land, as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night?" When you are in any captivity you want Him to return to you, and return you to your liberty, but when He graciously comes near you and indulges you, you say then: "Abide with Me". Let this truth abide in my heart. Let this promise animate my faith. Let it be a prop to my hope. Let it be a prospect before my eyes. When He shows you Himself, then you want to hold Him in the galleries, and gaze on Him. When He says: "Behold Me" then you say, let me behold that glory so as that I myself may be changed into its image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. "They shall walk with Me."

They walk with Him in trouble. That word of Christ is true in Sardis, even in that church, as it is true today in every person and

every church where there is liveliness, namely: "In the world ye shall have tribulation". It is sure to come, it is sure to come. Why, "What is the chaff to the wheat, saith the Lord". But then when tribulation comes these godly people are not alone. He does not leave them. "Lord in trouble they have visited Thee". Is not that true? Is it not true of some here? Lord, they visit Thee; they know none can help them but Thyself. They know that Thy arm is sufficient, that Thy grace can comfort them, that Thy love can cheer them, that it can make them willing to bear whatever cross is laid on them, and so they visit Him in trouble. Blessed be His Name, that is true of some of us. He causes us to visit Him. "Blessed is the man whom Thou chooseth and causeth to approach unto Thee, that he may dwell in Thy courts, and be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, even of Thy holy temple." Yea, they can say as the Psalmist said: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple." You would not think that is a bad state would you? It is no more a bad state than hunger is a disease. Hunger is health. A healthy appetite, a hungry appetite is health, and part of nature. So when one says, Lord I will abide in Thy house, that is not a bad sign. The man who says it may say, I wish I could get nearer, and the nearer he is, the more he will say, I wish I could get nearer, and that goes on. As long as he lives he wants to get nearer, and nearer, and nearer, and to hear more frequently the gracious voice of the Lord. They shall walk with me in trouble, enquire at my throne about their trouble, and ask Me to be with them in it. They shall come to Me, to My fullness for supplies, to My strength for support, to My wisdom for guidance. They shall come to Me for all things. They walk with Him in the hour when there may have come to them a good deal of affliction, but blessed be God affliction as sanctified is far from being a token against a person; rather a blessed evidence of love, and of sonship. They shall walk with Me in these things.

And also in a gospel church they shall walk in the holy commandments of the apostles and prophets of the Lord. They are not to be turned away from them, and whenever people are lively in their souls then the precepts are dear to them, dear as the promises, and the holy Word of God is given by inspiration. One may say, but you have left out the chief. I am going to bring it in. "They shall walk

with Me in white". Now what is this? What is this? 'Tis not a perfect profession. The best profession we make will have some imperfection in it. The best state of mind and affection you may ever be in will have some imperfection in it, and you will honestly and humbly confess that sin is mixed with all you do, and think, and say; you will unite with the Word of God which tells us that: "There is no man that doeth good and sinneth not" , but God will never walk with imperfection. O, one says, then you cut me off. No, He will walk with imperfect people, but not with imperfection. Therefore this white must be the clean, fine linen which is the righteousness of the saints. Imputed righteousness is the garment we shall wear here, and through eternity if we be the Lord's people. And the profession that is made, and that was so good, and was kept so pure, will be disowned. It was lost sight of, as we read, in the great day of the Grand Assize. When the Lord commended the profession, the practice, the godly practice of His saints, telling them what they did and how they visited Him, and cared for Him, and fed Him when He was hungry, and went to Him when He was in prison, they all had forgotten it, forgotten that they ever gave a cup of cold water. He remembered it, told them of it, that that made them fit for heaven; that that gave them a title to it. That in respect of which Jesus Christ walked with them while here, and caused them to walk with with Him, is nothing other than, or less than, an imputed righteousness without works given to them, put on them, and they had the sense, the sweet experience of it, so they walked with Him. And I think that as in the Song of Solomon, you will find her saying: "I am black", you will unite with her there, will you not? Yes, then she says "but comely". Comely as the curtains of Solomon, beautiful. All the tapestry in the world could never compare with this beauty, the beauty of the Lord which is upon His people. And so He walks with them, and He comes and says, Fair thou art, My sister, My spouse, there is no spot in thee. And when one walks with Him, then He comes and says: "A garden inclosed is My sister, My spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed" Not shut up in death as was the church here in Sardis. Not shut up in carnality nor in bondage, legal bondage. Not shut up under guilt; but a fountain sealed and shut up to all strangers, kept alone for the use of its owner; that is what is intended. "A garden inclosed, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed." In the East they would know the meaning and the force of that, water being so scarce at times. So

there was a spring in this garden, and devils, and men, and carnal people were not to come and use it as they would, but these people only, namely the garden . This was to be watered by the spring which the Lord shut up, and would not allow to be otherwise used but as He saw fit. This is when people walk with Him, this is when they are His manifested ones, when He comes and claims them, and they lay claim to Him and He owns, and allows the claim and calls them His Own, and commends them. Therefore briefly in the last place on this word, and I must close, He says "they are worthy". Do you say it? If you bear that witness to yourself, your witness is not true. You say, I am worthy, and you are just an unworthy person. If you say, O I am black, Lord, I have done nothing but fail all my days; I have sinned, and I have sin in my nature; my heart is depraved, and I am wrong in most things, He may come and say, You are worthy. Will you contradict Him? No, faith will humbly receive the commendation. She says "I am comely" This blessed church she believed it, she felt it, she knew it, because she had His righteousness, and His commendation. "I am comely". That is the worthiness. God the Father is content. God the Son sees of the travail of His soul and is satisfied. God the Holy Ghost is content with His work, and the sweet effects of it in the experience of the soul. "They are worthy". The Trinity has made them worthy, the righteousness of Christ has made them worthy, the blood of Christ has made them worthy, the love of Christ has made them worthy; and who shall contradict this? Who, I say, shall contradict this? Raise then your heads O lively, exercised Christians. Without their Lord they cannot be content; with Him they would walk. To such I would say, raise your heads, there is a good God who looks on you, a gracious Saviour who loves you. A Father in whose heart you live, a Saviour whose body you are as particular members, and the Holy Spirit who rejoices in His Own work in your soul. "They are worthy". And when they leave this poor world, as soon they will, when they get through all the tribulation that shall come in perilous times, then this worthiness will be no better, no greater, but they will know it in another manner, enjoy it in a different measure. They will be made overcomers, and be with the Lord. I must leave it all. May God enlarge, and explain, and make it more known, and more powerfully known in us for His Name's sake.

AMEN.