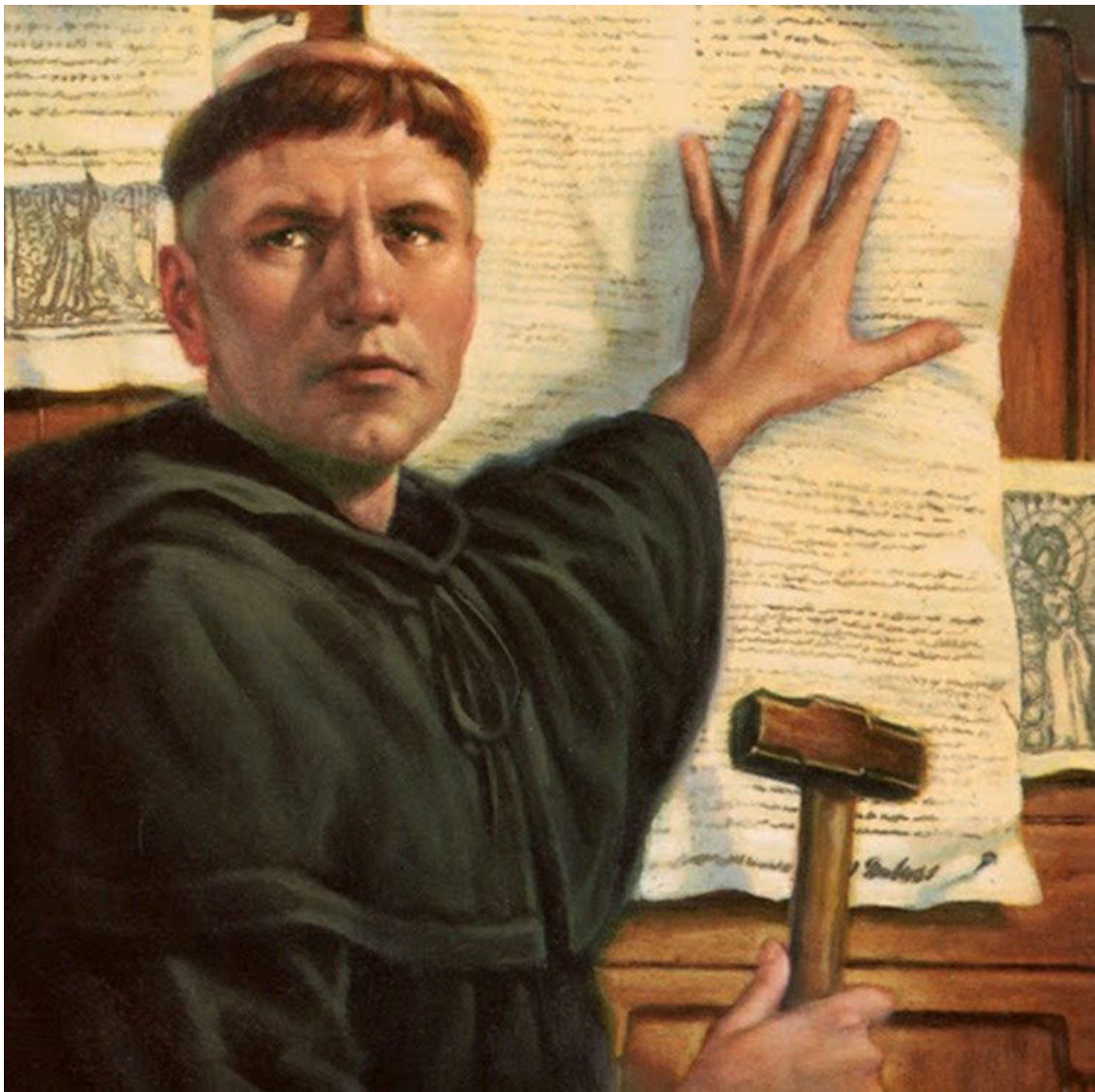


The Reformation & Martin Luther



William Marrion Branham

Introduction

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The Reformation & Martin Luther

Revelation 3:1b,

"I know thy works, that thou has a name that thou livest, and art dead."

Revelation 3:2b,

"For I have not found thy works perfect before God."

Now here, indeed, is a very strange thing. In every age to this point the Spirit has first of all praised the true believers, and then denounced the false vine. But in this period there is evidently such wanton disregard for the Lord and His Word that the entire message to this fifth age rings with condemnation.

"I know thy works."

What were these works that came up before the Lord and caused His displeasure? Well, you know that each age lapped over into the next age, so we have a continuation of the works of the fourth age into the fifth. These works as you are well aware were:

The leadership of the Holy Spirit was superseded by a human hierarchy.

The pure Word of God and its free benefit to all men was deposed for creeds, dogmas, church orders, etc.

The worship in the Spirit and Gifts of the Spirit and all that which pertains to true community fellowship of the saints was cast aside for liturgy and literal idol worship, pagan feasts, etc.

Maryolatry was assuming a greater place in the Christian worship, until she had actually assumed a place of Godhead and the Son was brought from His lofty position of over all to

being subservient to a man called the pope, who termed himself the vicar of Christ.

Those who fought this terrible anti-Christ church were destroyed. Those who stayed with it found themselves the pawn of the church whether they be peasants or kings. Their lives were not their own, and neither were their lives Christ's, but they belonged body, soul, and spirit to the Church of Rome. They talked about the blood of Christ, yet they purchased their salvation with money, and bought forgiveness of sins either by gold or penance. The wealthier of them found it a happy situation when Pope Leo X allowed them to buy indulgences for sins not yet committed so that they with ease of conscience could plan their awful crimes and then proceed to carry them out, knowing that the pope had already remitted their sins. The Word of God was kept from them, so who was to know the truth! Since truth comes only from the Word, the people were shut up in a dungeon of the Roman Church, awaiting death, and after death the judgment. But the great whore, drunk with the blood of martyrs and with no thought of the judgment, reeled savagely on to kill men with both spiritual and physical death.

Now toward the end of the fourth age which would be the beginning of the fifth age also, the invasion of Constantinople by the Turks sent the learned scholars of the East with their Greek manuscripts to the West. The purity of the Word and the teachings of true believers were thus disseminated. And not only were these fine teachers of great importance but also the invention of what became the basis of our modern printing presses was discovered, facilitating the production of books. Thus we find the great hunger and demand for the Bible could be answered.

God raised up many mighty men of which Luther was but one. Calvin and Zwingli were two other luminaries and besides these were many, many more who are not so well

known. However, though all this was not in vain, the mighty work of God was actually hindered by these very men. For one thing, they did NOT oppose the Church-State marriage of the Nicene Council but actually fostered that union.

The defense of the Gospel by the state was welcomed though there was no Word for it. And though we can see “the wrath of man praising God,” in such events as Henry the Eighth taking up for the reformation and the rejection of papal authority, it was a far cry from the truth of Pentecost and protection of an omnipotent God.

In spite of Luther's constant teaching against outside interference in local church matters he was not able to clear men's minds of the “Bishop, Archbishop” concept of church government. Thus the church took one step in the right direction but still remained shackled, so in short order she was again imprisoned in the same dungeon whence she had attempted to escape.

Still the cup of the abominable works was not yet full. Not only did Luther through poor judgment incite to battle and thereby cause the death of multitudes; but Zwingli's party persecuted unto prison the godly Dr. Hubmeyer, and though it did not commit him to the stake, it was actually responsible in great measure for his eventual death by fire. And Calvin did no less, for he demanded the arrest of Servetus who had seen and taught the oneness of the Godhead. The State then tried this brother, and to Calvin's dismay he was burned at the stake.

If there was ever a time of denominational zeal it was at this tragic time. The words of Comenius describe much of this era. Comenius wrote the “ONE THING NEEDFUL.” He compares the world to the labyrinth, and shows that the way out is by leaving what is needless, and choosing the one thing needful—Christ. The great number of teachers, he says is the reason of the multitudes of sects, for which we

shall soon have no names left. Each church reckons itself as the true one, or at least as the purest, truest part of it, while among themselves they persecute each other with the bitterest hatred. No reconciliation is to be hoped for between them; they meet enmity with irreconcilable enmity.

Out of the Bible they forge their different creeds; these are their fortresses and bulwarks behind which they entrench themselves and resist all attacks. I will not say that these confessions of faith—for we can admit in most cases that they are so—are bad in themselves. They become so, however, in that they feed the fire of enmity; only by putting them away altogether would it be possible to set to work on healing the wounds of the Church. "To this labyrinth of sects and various confessions another belongs; the love of disputation... What is attained by it? Has a single learned strife ever been settled? Never. Their number has only been increased.

Satan is the greatest sophist; he has never been overcome in a strife of words... In Divine service the words of men are usually heard more than the Word of God. Each one chatters as he pleases, or kills time by learned disquisitions and disproving the views of others. Of the new birth and how a man must be changed into the likeness of Christ to become partaker of the Divine Nature (II Peter 1:4), scarcely anything is said. Of the power of the keys, the Church has almost lost the power of binding, only the power of loosing remains... The sacraments, given as symbols of unity, of love, and of our life in Christ, have been made the occasion of bitterest conflict, a cause of mutual hatred, a centre of sectarianism...

In short, Christendom has become a labyrinth. The faith has been split into a thousand little parts and you are made a heretic if there is one of them you do not accept... What can help? Only the one thing needful, return to Christ, looking to Christ as the only Leader, and walking in His

footsteps, setting aside all other ways until we all reach the goal, and have come to the unity of the faith (Ephesians 4:13). As the heavenly Master built everything on the ground of the Scriptures so should we leave all particularities of our special confessions and be satisfied with the revealed Word of God which belongs to us all. With the Bible in our hand we should cry: I believe what God has revealed in this Book; I will obediently keep His commands; I hope for that which He has promised. Christians, give ear! There is only one life, but Death comes to us in a thousand forms. There is only one Christ, but a thousand Antichrists... So thou knowest, O Christendom, what is the one thing needful. Either thou turnest back to Christ or thou goest to destruction like the Antichrist. If thou art wise and wilt live, follow the Leader of Life.

But you, Christians, rejoice in your being caught up,... hear the words of your Heavenly Leader, 'Come unto Me.'... Answer with one voice, 'Even so, we come'".

Now I just said that this era gave tremendous growth to the denominational spirit. If the Corinthian attitude of "I am of Paul, I of Cephas" was ever exhibited, it was now. There were Lutherans, Hussites, Zwingli's party, etc. Such fragmentation of the Body was deplorable. They were living a name but were dead. Certainly they were dead. They died the minute they organized. The great groups organized and tied themselves in matrimony to the state. That did it. They were finished. Here were those Lutherans who had criticized the Roman Church. They knew the unrighteousness of political and spiritual unions—yet Luther (as when Peter was overbalanced by the Judaizers) went right ahead and made the state instead of God, the defender of the faith. This is the first denomination of repute that came out of the harlot, but when Luther died it was not long until it had a hierarchy like the one it had fought. This move of God, by the time the second generation came along was right back under the wing of her mother. She had gone back and did not even

know it. They had taken on their own name above His Name. They were living their own name, too.

And all the denominations are doing that very thing today. They are living their own name, and not the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is easily seen for every church is known by the way it worships but none are known by the power of God. There is your test. And I want you to notice right here that this era did not have the signs and wonders amongst them. They gave up the power of God for the power of the state. They clung to their own name; they made their names great. It was that old spirit of getting everyone into its fold. Today the Baptists want the Methodists to come over to the Baptists. The Methodists are out to proselytize the Presbyterians. And the Pentecostals want them all. Each claims to offer the most and to hold out the greatest hopes—a sort of door to heaven, or at least, the way to a more abundant entrance. How tragic it all is.

This denominational spirit has made all the denominations write their manuals and teach their creeds, set up their offices and church governments and then each claims that she, and she alone, truly speaks for God as she is the best qualified. Now if that isn't exactly what the pope and the Roman Church are doing! They are right back there with their mother, the harlot, and don't know it.

In closing our comments on this verse, "thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead," I cannot impress upon you too strongly that this age, though it brought the reformation, was most sternly rebuked by God instead of being praised, because IT SOWED THE SEED OF DENOMINATION THAT ORGANIZED RIGHT BACK TO THE HARLOT, after God had opened a door of escape. When the move away from the Catholic Church took place, it was not truly Spiritual as a whole, but more political. Most of the people took up with Protestantism because as I have stated, they hated the Roman system of political and financial

bondage. Thus, instead of this being a great Spiritual move with all the earmarks of Holy Spirit influence as when God used purely Spiritual means to accomplish His ends at Pentecost, it was indeed a WORK WHEREIN THE WRATH OF MAN PRAISED GOD, and the results paralleled the history of Israel when she left Egypt and wandered in the desert, not making it to Canaan Land. However, much was accomplished in that where the yoke of Rome was even partly broken, men could now receive the Word of God and yield to the influence of the Spirit without such great fear as formerly. This opened the door to the great missionary age that followed.

The Jezebel of Thyatira was in no mood to give up her hold upon the people, and thus we see her daughter Athaliah raise her head in the Sardisean Age with the hopes that she would be able to strangle the true seed by her schemes of organization.

The Warning

Revelation 3:2,

"Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die for I have not found thy works perfect before God."

I wish it could be said that the Sardisean Age was a restoration instead of a reformation. I cannot say that. The Word does not call it a restoration, but certainly calls it a reformation. Had it been a restoration, that age would have been another Pentecostal age. But it was not. The best that could be said of it was, *"Strengthen that which remains, that is ready to die."* There was something missing. My, yes, there certainly was. This age had justification, but it had missed sanctification and the Baptism with the Holy Ghost. That is what God's original plan was. That is what they had at Pentecost. They were justified, they were sanctified, and were filled with the Holy Ghost. Why, listen to me, the

reason for being justified and sanctified is to the end that you might be baptized with the Holy Ghost.

That is the reason that there is a church. It is the temple of God filled with God, even the Holy Ghost. The same Spirit that was in Jesus while He was here on earth, causing Him to do the mighty works which He did came back upon the church at Pentecost so that they did the works that He did. This age did not have those works. Oh, they had the written Word, (but not the revealed Word). This was the reformation period. But fear not little flock, God said, "I will restore," and this reform was going to be the start of it. He was going to (according to His promise) take the church back from the depth of Satan in the Dark Ages to the Depth of God that they had at Pentecost and in the first few years of the existence of the church.

Now be careful, and get this. It says in this second verse that I read, "For I have not found thy works perfect before God." Do you know what the meaning of 'not perfect' really is? It is 'unfulfilled.' This age was an unfulfilled age. It was just the start of getting back. That is why I said the Bible called it Reformation—not restoration. It had started out in the doctrine of justification which meant salvation was all of God. Oh, how Luther preached the sovereignty of God and election. He knew it was all of grace. He separated the church from rule by ecclesiastical hierarchy. He tore down the idols. He cast out the confessions to the priests. He denounced the pope. It was wonderfully good, as he started, but God had said 1500 years before, "Luther, you are going to start things, but your age will see it all unfulfilled, I am leaving that to later." Hallelujah, our God reigneth! He knows the end from the beginning. Yes, Luther was His messenger. It didn't look like it, as we examine the flaws. But there was a man called Jonah, he had flaws in his life too. He was a prophet though you and I might not want to say so on the basis of how he acted. But God knows them that are His and He has His way just as He did with Jonah. He had His way

with Luther in that age, and He will have His way until the consummation.

Now this was an unfulfilled age. It was an age of reformation. But that is how God wanted it. I want to illustrate that to you the way I did to a very wonderful Lutheran brother who is a president of a very fine seminary out West. I had been invited to his place to have dinner with him and to speak to him concerning the Holy Spirit. He was puzzled about many things and he said to me, "What have we Lutherans got?"

I said, "Well, you have Christ."

He said, "We want the Holy Ghost. Do you think we've got It?"

I said, "Potentially, you are believing unto It."

He said, "What do you mean, potentially? We are hungry for God. We read a book on Pentecost and the gifts of the Spirit, so some of us flew out to California to see the author. When we got there he told us that though he had written the book, he did not have the gifts. Now when we saw the operation of gifts in your ministry we wanted to talk to you, for you must know something about them."

Now this brother's seminary is out in the country and surrounded by many acres of farm land on which the students can work and thereby pay their way through college. He also has factories that go along with the farm to give added employment. So using his fields to illustrate my case I said, "Once there was a man who went forth on his own ground to plant a field of corn. He pulled up the stumps, cleared off the rocks, ploughed and disked it and then planted his corn. Each morning he looked out across the field; but one morning instead of barren ground he saw myriads of little blades coming up. He said, "Praise God for my field of corn." I then asked him, "Did the man have

corn?"

He said, "Well, in one way he did."

I said, "Potentially, yes; and that was you Lutherans in the reformation, putting forth your blade, see? The corn began to grow. (After it had rotted in the ground during the Dark Ages). After several joints there were fine large stalks, and one day a tassel of silk appeared. That tassel of silk looked down at the blades and said, "You old formal Lutherans haven't anything. Look at us, we're the breeders, the great missionaries. Our day is the missionary era." That tassel age was the Wesleyan Age. They were the greatest missionaries and even excelled us in our age. What did that age do? It scattered like pollen in the breeze.

"Now what is the next step? Logically we think that is the actual forming and harvesting of the grain—the completed cycle. But not so. There is another stage. That stage is when the husk or chaff is formed to cover the seed. And that is exactly what happened in this Spiritual cycle. At the turn of the twentieth century, in the start of the Laodicean Age, there was widespread belief that the Holy Ghost was falling exactly as He did at Pentecost. People were talking in tongues and claiming to be baptized with the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in tongues. But I have walked in the grain fields many times, and there in late summer I have plucked the heads of wheat and rubbed them in my hand to get some grain, when to my surprise there WASN'T ANY CORN OF WHEAT IN THAT CHAFF, THOUGH INDEED IT SURELY LOOKED AS IF WHEAT WERE THERE. This is a perfect picture of the so-called Pentecostal move.

And that this is a proven fact is found in that these people ORGANIZED ON A DOCTRINE and bound themselves right back as did the organization ahead of them, proving that instead of being the real seed, they were the chaff or protecting cover for the wheat seed which should come. This

chaff stage was the danger period that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24:24, "*deceiving the very elect if it were possible.*" Oh, man felt that this husk, the so-called Pentecostal Age was the true seed. But it proved to be just the carrier to carry the life over into the age in which the true restoration comes and the Wheat Bride is manifested in the power spoken of by Ezekiel 47:2-5,

"Then brought he me out of the way of the gate northward, and led me about the way without unto the utter gate by the way that looketh eastward; and behold, there ran out waters on the right side.

And when the man that had the line in his hand went forth eastward, he measured a thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the waters were to the ankles.

Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through the waters; the waters were to the knees. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through; the waters were to the loins.

Afterward he measured a thousand; and it was a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over."

"And the way that it was done was by God's perfect will and programming. The Lutherans had the Holy Ghost potentially under justification; the Methodists had It potentially under sanctification and today It is brought back, a restoration—the Holy Ghost is here."

"Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die."

Now the ideas expressed in the two words, "watchful"

and “strengthen” are these. To watch contains not only the idea of being awake but to be alert. To be otherwise insinuates danger and loss. To strengthen means more than just to give strength, it means to fix and establish for permanency. These two commands refer to what is left of the TRUTH which itself is ready or “about” to die. This expression of the Spirit comes before me as an illustration. A group of slaves, in total bondage physically and morally have risen up and escaped from their captors (indeed that is what Sardis means: the escaped ones). They are pursued and their great and glorious gains are all but lost. They have not been retaken, but about all that can be said is that they have escaped—not clean escaped as some were according to the Word. They had lost much of their liberties.

Now the Lord says, “You are potentially back in captivity; see that you don't go back. To keep from going back become alert and remain ever watchful concerning the things of your captivity or you will lose all. Strengthen yourself now in what you have left in such a manner as to permanently establish what you have and thus ensure against future loss. This will be your opportunity to fulfill what you have not fulfilled.” But did they go on? No sir. They did not heed the voice of the Spirit and another age went into captivity and so God raised up others who would carry out His will. God by-passed the Lutheran denomination as He has all others, and they will never come back. God had to go on and in a new age bring further truth and a little more restoration.

Judgment

Revelation 3:3,

“Remember therefore how thou has received and heard, and hold fast and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know the hour I will

come upon thee."

I want to read another translation (Wuest) of this verse,

"Be remembering, therefore, in what way you have received (the truth as a permanent deposit) and what way you heard (it) and be safeguarding (it), and have a change of mind at once."

It is very evident from this verse that God had given them truth as a permanent deposit. It was received and is irrevocably theirs. It now remains to be seen what they will do with it, whether they will regard it or not. And that is true. They had been given the basic truth of the whole Gospel, "The just shall live by faith", "Salvation is of the Lord." They had heard the truth of the Bible which cast down the doctrines of Rome and set at naught all papal authority. They knew the truth that the church does not save. They understood the Lord's supper. They had light on water baptism. They put out the images. Truth? Why there never was an age with any more men with so much light to shed. They had enough illumination to completely overhaul the old system or start out fresh and let God lead them, line upon line and precept upon precept. They received the truth. They wanted it and heard it.

But the question was, how did they hear it? Did they hear it to build upon or was it with the same attitude that many Greeks had—something to discuss and theorize over? Evidently the rich Word of truth was being heard in an academic manner, rather than for practical outworking, for God was demanding a change of mind concerning it. If this is the Word of God which indeed it is, then it must be obeyed. Failure to obey would bring judgment. When the guards of the sacred temple were found sleeping, they were beaten and their garments burned. What shall the Lord do to those who in this age have relaxed their guard?

"I will come on thee as a thief."

Ancient Sardis was constantly harassed by bandits that swooped down from the hills and pillaged the people. Thus they knew only too well what the Spirit was saying in that the coming of the Lord is as a thief. Vigilance and preparation alone will suffice to be ready for His coming. Now we know that this is a message for the false vine, for the coming of the Lord will be as it was in the days of Noah. The eight saved were well aware of the impending flood, and being aware were prepared and saved. But the world of the ungodly was swept away. Though they daily were in contact with the righteous and heard the truth, they turned it aside until it was too late. Those completely carnal people in that ancient period type out today the nominal Christians whose lives are full of earthly things, and take pleasure in them to such an extent that they have no desire for the Spiritual, and are not at all aware of, nor readied for His appearing.

The Eulogy

Revelation 3:4,

"Thou has a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white; for they are worthy."

Of course the word 'names' means 'people' as it says in Acts 1:15 concerning those in the upper room, "the number of names together were about 120." But to me it goes far beyond just signifying people; it brings out that truth that is set forth in every age which was spoken to us by our Lord with great emphasis. It is this: the church system of these ages is made up of two vines, true and false. God in His own sovereign purpose has put them all together, calling them the church.

See in this age how He has rebuked them saying, *"unto the church which is"*—not "churches are" in Sardis,—but lumping them together—"the church which is"... *"I know thy works... you are dead... your works are unfulfilled..."* And

then He goes on—"Thou (this church in Sardis) hast a few people in you that are right, and not wrong like the majority. These walk in clean garments and they are worthy of Me." Now these people that were the true saints of God were walking "all pleasing unto the Lord." Their garments were clean. You see in those days the garments would sweep along on the road and pick up dirt and defilement. These were watching how they walked so that they were not corrupted by the world. They were in the Spirit and walking in the Spirit. They were holy and without blame before Him. Thus they were fulfilling their purpose for that is what Ephesians 1:4 says is the purpose of God for us, "that we should be holy and without blame before Him."

Now from this verse which shows the elect of God to be a "Few Names," you can see clearly what we have been teaching about this age. It was chaotic. It was UNFULFILLED. It was split scores of ways, and God rebuked it almost in its entirety. It was weak and sickly and ready to die. It was not the glorious era that carnal minded Protestant historians have tried to make it. One quick look at that tree saw it was cankered and blighted, denuded of leaf and barren of fruit except for some deformed and wormy fruit that was fast dropping to the ground. But hold a moment! Look closer. There at the top, in the light of the sun, were some 'first fruits'—a 'Few Names'—perfect in Him for they were born of Him, filled with Him and walking with Him by His Word.

Thank God for 'those few.'

"And they shall walk with Me."

That is what God says He will bestow upon them for this upright walk. That is part of their inheritance that He has reserved for them. If they were willing to walk with Him through the toils and snares of life and be an honor to Him, He was going to reward them. He is not forgetful of our labour of love. God will always recompense us for our

efforts to please Him.

Yes, they had walked through the world and had not partaken of it. They had not let the world systems overcome them. When the illustrious names of that age had yielded to the blandishment of the state and chosen political mindedness rather than Spiritual mindedness and were on their way back into the world, these few stood for the Word of God, and thereby honored the Lord. Now He would honor them in return. For they shall walk with Him in white. They had identified themselves with Him on earth and now He would identify Himself with them in the New Jerusalem. And how marvelous will be that identification! It makes me rejoice and yet it makes me weep to think of His condescension, for you will note that He is not dressed in another color different from the saints, as earthly leaders would so do. No, they are like Him; He is like them. They are like Him, even as John said; for "they see Him as He is."

"For they are worthy." Do you realize Who is saying this? It is Jesus, the Worthy One, Himself. This is the only One Who is accounted worthy to take the book out of the hand of Him Who sits upon the throne. And now this Worthy One is saying to His saints, "You are worthy." Here is this One, the only One qualified to judge, (and indeed all judgment is committed unto Him,) and He says, "You are worthy."

These words are as astounding as are the words in Romans 8:33b,

"God says I am righteous."

(Way Translation.) There in the white light of God's righteousness, hear the sweet voice of Jesus as He says, "These are Mine. They are righteous. They are worthy. They shall walk with Me in white."



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