

THINGS WHICH CANNOT BE SHAKEN - THE LIVING CHURCH

By F. M Perry

When God through Christ created all things, on the evening of the sixth day, after He had completed everything, including mankind, God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was good." (Gen. 1:31). At first every thing God made, including mankind, was good. It was not long after creation, however, that the people of the world could no longer be called good. The Psalmist wrote, and the Apostle Paul quoted in the New Testament, "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one." (Rom 3: 10-12). This is descriptive of the people of the world today. At first everything God made was good. Now, there is not even one who is good. What happened?

The scriptures tell us that God; before the foundation of the world, purposed to have on earth a people of His own creation, made in his own image, who would freely display the character of His own Son. (Eph. 1: 3-4). But what happened right after creation? The Roman letter tells us (Rom 5:12), "Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned." The trouble is that Satan intervened in God's plan, or tried to intervene. Using this earth as his operating area and man as his tool, he usurped God's creation to make it something centered in himself and reflecting his own image instead of God's image.

But even though God allowed Satan to try to influence mankind, He did not allow Satan to thwart His eternal purpose in Christ. The Living God has, despite Satan, made it possible for us (of whom not one is good) to become sons of God to live with God in that great spiritual kingdom now ruled over by His Son, the Living Christ. We all have access to the Living Word which tells us how to become new people of His own creation, people who display the character of God's own Son, people who are members of God's spiritual Kingdom, the Living Church.

But Satan would like to keep us ignorant of who we are and whom we can become. Satan would have us believe that this earthly life is every thing, of greatest importance to us. Satan would have us despise the thought of spiritual things and a spiritual king and have us reject the Son of God.

So today we are confronted by two worlds, two spheres of authority, having two totally different and opposed characters. For me now it is not just a question of where I will be taken after this life, to heaven or hell. It is also a question of these two worlds today. Do I belong today to an order of things of which Christ is the sovereign Lord. Or do I belong to an opposed order of things having Satan as its head.

That order of things of which Christ is head, the Living Church, is my subject. Before we start exploring the nature of Christ's church (which might be the subject of several sermons), lets explore a little more the nature of Satan's kingdom and its hold on us. We must come to realize how deeply involved we are in Satan's worldly order of things before we can hope to be free from it. And how do we get out of Satan's kingdom and into Christ's kingdom? Lets consider these things first.

My salvation and your salvation, a gift from God through His Son Jesus Christ, forgives us of our past sins. But not only that. We once belonged to Satan's order. We had to come out of that order. When we were saved, we left one world and entered another. We are saved not just in the future, but now out of that whole organized realm which Satan has constructed in defiance of the purpose of God.

Satan's realm is almost all embracing on this earth. Of course, it is full of sin and worldly lusts. But no less a part of it are many highly regarded things, many human standards and human ways of doing things. The human cus toms and human philosophies devised by human minds are included in Satan's realm. Also in Satan's realm we must place the world's religions, even much of world Christianity. Wherever the power of natural man dominates, there you have an element in the order of things which is under the direct inspiration of Satan.

If that is Satan's world, what then is salvation? Salvation means I escape from that. I go out. I make an exit from it. I belong no more to Satan's pattern of things. I set my heart on that upon which God's heart is set. I take as my goal His eternal purpose in Christ. When I step into that, I am delivered from Satan's realm. Jesus said, (Mark 16:16), "He who has believed and is baptized shall be saved. " What Jesus says He plainly means. So I take that step of faith. I believe and am baptized and I come up a saved man. That is salvation. But what am I saved from? Not only am I saved eternally from the consequences of my past sins, I am saved from Satan's world in which I live, now at the very moment I am baptized. Tremendous things hang upon baptism. It is no less than a question of two violently opposing worlds, and of my translation from one into the other.

1 Peter 3:20-22 says, "The patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you – not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience – through the resurrection of Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him." Baptism saves us now, Peter says. Through baptism we are fundamentally severed from Satan's realm of today.

The salvation of Noah's family in the ark is a picture of the people, the only people who came out from Satan's corrupt system of things in the world at that time. Not only were they saved from drowning and received personal life. But the coming out itself was their salvation. Salvation is a present exit from a doomed order which is Satan's.

So today when believers are baptized they go symbolically through water, just as Noah passed in the ark through the waters of the flood. And this passage through water signifies their escape from the world. It is their exit from the system of things that, along with Satan himself, is under the sentence of God's wrath.

When you are baptized, you do not go down into the water alone. As

you step down into the water, a whole world goes down with you. When you come up, you come up in Christ, in the ark that rides the waves. But your world stays behind. For you, that world is submerged, drowned like Noah's world, put to death in the death of Christ. It need never be revived.

Figuratively speaking then, when you go through the waters of baptism, everything belonging to the former system of things is cut off by those waters never to return. You alone emerge. For you it is a passage into another world. You go out of the world that is doomed under judgment, into a world that is marked by newness of life. So the same baptism which puts you and me on salvation's ground in Christ, buries Satan's whole system of things. Not only does your own history as a child of Adam end in your baptism; your world also ends there. In these cases it is a death and burial with nothing resurrected. It is an end of everything to do with Satan's system of things as far as you are concerned.

This means that you cannot carryover anything from that former world into the new one. What belonged to that former realm of things in Adam stays there and may never be recalled. Formerly perhaps you had bound yourself to be first and foremost an employee of a company, a member of the military forces of your country, a household servant, or even the director of your own business, whatever worldly profession you may have had before becoming a Christian; and today you may still be serving in that capacity. But you will find that when coming to the church of God and the service of God, there is neither bond nor free, neither master nor slave, neither employer nor employee. Again, you may be a Jew or a Gentile, or any of a hundred-and-one things that were of repute--or even disrepute--in Adam. When you pass through this baptism in water, all that system of things which formerly governed your life goes down, never to return to the foremost place that it once occupied. Instead, you must see yourself in Christ, where there is neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian nor Scythian nor anything else, but one new man. (Col 3: 11).

The expression in 1 Peter 3 which said, "Baptism now saves you ...

through the resurrection of Christ," now colors your whole future. It implies that you have passed into something altogether new which God has created. The ark which finally came to rest on Mt. Ararat, came to rest on renewed earth which became filled with new creatures from the ark, typifying a new creation. Out of the death of Christ, God brings into being an entirely new creation. When God unites you with Christ, the King, He is introducing you into that newly created Kingdom.

So we have here two worlds. On the one hand there is the world in Adam, held fast in bondage to Satan. On the other hand there is the new creation in Christ, the sphere of activity of God's Holy Spirit. How do you and I get out of Adam and into Christ? Peter said, baptism now saves you. And the scriptures give us even more help in understanding what happens in baptism.

1 Peter 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." How did you get into Adam's world in the first place. You were born into Adam's race. How then do you get out? Obviously by death. How then, in turn, do you enter the realm of Christ? The answer is, by birth.

As we go through the act of baptism, God causes us to die to sin and to be born again to arise to walk in newness of life. Rom. 6:4-5 says, "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection." In baptism, death puts an end to our relationship with the old world, and resurrection brings us into living touch with this new world.

The record of the great Revelation from Christ to the Apostle John, the Book of Revelation, gives us much help in seeing the irreconcilable extremes of the two worlds that are with us now. In Revelation 17:3, John said, "He carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast." In 17:5, he says, written on her

forehead was, "Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth." That represents one world.

In Revelation 21: 10, John says, " And He carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." That is the new world.

First, John saw Babylon from the wilderness. Then he was taken to a great and high mountain to view the holy city. In order to have God 's view of things we must be taken like John to a "mountain top." From that mountain top, through the eyes of faith, we can see God's eternal plan. Many cannot see God's eternal plan today. Or, if they see it, many understand it only as bits and pieces of doctrine, because they are content to view it from the wilderness. Dry understanding of these bits and pieces does not move us. Only the great revealing from the mountain top really lets us see. From the wilderness we may see something of Babylon, but we need spiritual revelation to see God's new Jerusalem. Once we see it we shall never be the same again. As Christians, therefore, we pray for that opening of the eyes of faith, so we can be carried to see the view from the mountain top.

The harlot Babylon is always referred to as "The Great City", and emphasis is always placed on her attainment of greatness. But the Bride, Jerusalem, is by contrast referred to as the Holy City and the emphasis is placed on her separation to God.

Rev. 21:2, 10 says, "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband." She is from God, and she is For Her Husband. For this reason she possesses the glory of God. Similarly, any holiness in us as Christians comes from God. And this holiness in us from God is the only part of us that is wholly set apart to Christ. It is a rule of God, that only that which originates in heaven can return there, for nothing else is holy. We must understand this principle of holiness and its origin. The minute we let go this principle and try to be holy any other way, we are right back in Babylon.

The very first thing that John describes about the Holy City (Rev. 21:12) is the wall about her. A wall is to provide separation. Separation is the first principle of Christian living in the Holy City, the Living Church. If we are to be in that Holy City in the last great day, then we must build that wall in us even now. This means that we must guard as precious all that is of God now, and refuse and reject all that is of Babylon now. We must be uncompromising in following this principle of separation from the world.

Nehemiah, in his day, succeeded in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. But he did it only in the face of great opposition. For Satan cannot abide the separation of men to God. Satan hates distinctiveness. Nehemiah and his colleagues armed themselves, therefore, and equipped for war, they built the wall. We must arm ourselves too, spiritually. This is the price we must pay in order to be holy to the Lord."

Eden was a garden without artificial wall to keep the foes out. So Satan had entry to the garden of Eden. God had intended that Adam and Eve should "keep" the garden, or "guard" it. (Gen. 2:15). But they fell prey to Satan's wiles. Today, through Christ, God would bring into the hearts of His redeemed people an Eden to which Satan will have no access whatever. Rev. 21:17 say, "And nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life."

What has happened to Babylon the Great? Rev. 18:2 says, "Fallen, Fallen, is Babylon the Great." The sentence of death is passed on Babylon the Great. Babylon the Great lives today, but the sentence of death is already passed down. The world realm of Satan is a living force today, relentlessly pursuing and seeking out subjects. But, the sentence of death, though it lies in the future, is nevertheless certain.

A person under sentence of death has no future beyond the confines of the condemned cell block. Likewise, the world, being under sentence, has no future. Satan's world system has not been terminated yet. But its termination is a settled matter. And it effectively is terminated in a Christian's life, even today, when he is baptized into the death of Christ.

Suppose it is announced that a certain bank must close because it is bankrupt. Would you run down and put money into that bank. No, not a cent more would you pay into it, because it has no future. You would put nothing more into it because you expect nothing from it.

Satan's world is under just such a decree of closure. Babylon fell when she tried to wage war against the Lamb (Rev. 17:14), because the Lamb is the Lord of Lords and King of Kings. There is no future for Babylon the Great, the world.

Many people recognize that this world is bad, and seek deliverance from it. Buddhism, for instance, teaches so. But many in Buddhism seek deliverance from the world through mere withdrawal from the people of the world. They cannot really withdraw from the world. As Christians we both "eat and drink" in the world. But, we do so in the realization that "eating and drinking" belong to the world, and is under a death sentence with the world. So eating and drinking have no grip upon us, and it is our function to portray that message to the world. We must still go on living in the world and using the things of the world, but we must not try to build a future with them. The Cross of Christ has shattered all our worldly hopes of a future in the world. Our Lord Jesus, we can truly say, through His death, burial, and resurrection, has ruined all our prospects in the world. We have nothing to live for here except insofar as He might have use for us here. So we can understand Paul's statement, (Phil 1:21) "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

If we are to be saved from the world, then all this must be revealed to us through the eye of faith as we study God's revealed word. We cannot escape from the world by running away from it. We'll only discover how much we love it and how much it loves us. Wherever we flee, the world can track us down. But when it really dawns on us that the world is doomed, then we will lose all interest in it and it will lose its grip upon us. We must come to know that the world is anti-Christ and it is doomed. Our dear brother Paul said in Gal 6:14, "May it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

When we finally see through faith the revelation of the finished work of Christ, He shows us ourselves there on the cross. And He shows us our world there too. You and I cannot escape the judgment of the cross. Neither can the world escape the judgment of the cross. When I finally come to KNOW this then I do not try to repudiate the world in which I live. Because I KNOW that I can't do it, but that the cross has already repudiated it. I do not try to escape from the world which clings to me. I know that by the cross I have already escaped. The cross is the way of deliverance.

This way of deliverance comes as a surprise to us. God's way is not man's way. It's a paradox. Man seeks to solve the problem of the world by removing himself physically from the danger zone. But physical separation does not bring about spiritual separation. And the reverse is also true. Physical contact does not necessarily bring about spiritual capture by the world. Spiritual bondage to the world is the fruit of spiritual blindness. Deliverance from the world is the outcome of having our spiritual eyes opened. The essential character of the world is enmity with God. To come to KNOW this is a step toward deliverance.

What is your occupation in this world? Are you a technician, an engineer, a teacher, a lawyer, a merchant? The Lord does not instruct us to run away from these callings. But He does want us to RECKON their true value. He wants us to write down in our account book that these worldly and material things are under a sentence of death. The world governments for which we work are under a sentence of death. The world of merchandise and trade is under a sentence of death. All things under the direction of men in which we have our occupations are under a sentence of death. If you truly KNOW that and RECKON it to be so, then you can come out of the world even though you must live in the midst of it.

When you were baptized, the Lord added you to His living church. The word church in the Greek language of the original New Testament, means the "called-out ones." If God has called you at all and has added you to His church, then He has called you to live in the Spirit outside the

world system.

Jesus said in John 8:23, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world; I am not of this world." The sense of this passage is: Your place of origin is below; My place of origin is above; Your place of origin is this world; My place of origin is not this world. The question is not, Are you a good or a bad person? But the question is, What is your place of origin? Jesus said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:6). We first were born of the flesh in Adam. As Christians we have been born anew of the Spirit in Christ.

So, in the sense that we have been CALLED OUT of the world, we are the CHURCH, God's living church, the called-out ones. But that is not the end of the matter. We are called out of the world for a purpose. God has us remain living in the world, although called-out of it spiritually, in order to accomplish His purpose through us in the world.

Paul said in Rom 12:5, "We, who are many, are one body in Christ." So from the standpoint of what we become after we are called-out of the world, we are the Body of Christ. We are the expression on earth of Him who is at the right hand of God.

From the standpoint of God's choice of us, we are the "called-out" of the world. But from the standpoint of our new life we are not of the world at all, but from above, in Christ, in His body. On the one hand we are a chosen people, called and delivered out of the world system. On the other hand, we are a regenerated people, utterly unrelated to the world system, because by the Spirit we are born anew from above. We are a new spiritual creation.

So it is revealed to John that the holy city comes down "out of heaven from God" (Rev 21: 10). Therefore, as the people of God, heaven is not only our destiny but also our origin. The new life we have as God's gift came from heaven and never was in the world at all. It has no correspondence with the world but is in perfect correspondence with heaven. Though we must mingle with the world daily, our new life will

never let us settle down and feel at home here.

This is the view that we have from the mountain-top and it is not the view that the world has of the church, even the world of much of so-called "Christianity." The world of denominational Christianity is struggling very hard to bring about the unity of the denominations. Serious and weighty discussions are being carried on among men to determine on what grounds men can agree so that the denominations can have unity. But the view from the mountain-top tells us that God's church is already ONE. Struggle as we may, we can have no effect upon it. The church is from God. Those who are placed in it were placed there by God. They are a new creation of God. God's church has perfect unity. It cannot be otherwise.

Many in so-called world Christianity say the church is not important. Many say that the world of organized churches has ceased to be useful to men. Even those who would retain the organized churches, are beginning to point out that great changes must be wrought in them if men's interest is to be held. But the view from the mountain-top show us that what men say and do in this regard does not make one shred of difference in God's church. The church is of the utmost importance to God. He created it. He adds to it whom He will. When God looks at it, He sees the body of His Own Son. Is the church important? It is as important to God as His only Son. And it is important to God's children, as important as Jesus Christ is to them, as important as the head is to the body.

The living church is not subject to the councils, nor the synods, nor the congresses, nor the lectureships, nor the Pope, nor the College of Cardinals, nor death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing. The living church is a perfect gift from God that cannot be shaken by earthly powers nor by the evil spiritual powers of Satan.

Friends, God is calling you out of the darkness of this world-system into the marvelous light of the living church. If you have not understood

before, I hope you will understand now that God expects you to believe, repent, and be baptized. Your baptism is your appeal to God for a good conscience. God will not turn down that appeal. Everything has already been done in readiness to meet your appeal. Jesus has died for you, been buried, and raised again, once and for all. He is now at the right hand of God ready to welcome you into His body and to serve as your Head. God is calling you out of the world. When you answer that call, He will add you to the number that make up His called-out ones, the living church. If you believe but have not been baptized, we hope that you will come forward and ask us to assist you in being baptized into the body of Christ.

Friends, you who have been baptized, our Lord knows that you are still tied to the flesh. He knows you must still live in the world. He knows the difficulties that causes you. He wants to take you with Him to the mountain-top so you can see God's living eternal church in all its glory. He wants you to know the things of God which surpass knowledge. He wants you to be filled up to all the fullness of God. He wants to use you in carrying out His eternal purpose. Everything has already been done in readiness to use you. Your old man in Adam has been buried in the waters of baptism. God has created within you a new spiritual man, and that man has been born into the living church. God has sent His Holy Spirit to dwell in you and to lead your new man into usefulness.

Paul presents the invitation to you in Rom 6:12, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body as instruments of unrighteousness, but **PRESENT YOURSELVES TO GOD AS THOSE ALIVE FROM THE DEAD, AND YOUR MEMBERS AS INSTRUMENTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS TO GOD.**"

(This sermon was delivered by F. M. Perry on more than one occasion from 1969 through 1977.)