

CRISIS AT THE CLOSE #1

Christ Foretells the Sifting

Study by W. D. Frazee - January 1, 1961

In the great plan of salvation there are two special crises - the crisis at the close of Christ's earthly life, and the crisis that comes at the close of the experience of the remnant. Between these two experiences there are a number of most interesting parallels. We want to study those parallels during this coming week. The thought of parallel is suggested for us in our opening text. The first five verses of Revelation 14 give us a picture of the hundred forty-four thousand. Concerning them it is said:

"These are they we not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. Revelation 14:4.

What do they do? They follow the Lamb wherever He goes. If He goes to Mars or Saturn they go with Him. If He goes to Arcturus they go with Him. If He goes through Orion they go with Him. If He goes to those unnumbered suns and worlds in Andromeda they go with Him. Wherever He goes they go. I want to go, don't you? Thank God, we can. It will be a wonderful tour. How long it will take I don't know, but I am sure that those who follow Him there will first follow Him here. Those who go with Him in heaven will first follow His footsteps here on earth. We must begin where He begins in order to arrive where He has arrived.

So it is concerning His earthly life. If we can parallel the experiences that He came down here to earth to share with us, there will be no question about sharing with Him those glorious experiences of the hereafter.

In this world we look upon Jesus as a helpless babe in Bethlehem. We see the humility. We see the condescension, and thank God we can choose to follow Him. In that humiliation? Yes, in that humiliation.

We see Jesus at Nazareth growing up as a child in a humble peasants home, bearing the burdens of daily toil, giving an example of patience and love. And as we see that, we can choose to follow Him there. As He goes to Jordan to be baptized we can follow Him there. As He goes to Capernaum in His medical missionary ministry we can follow Him there. But as we look at His life we see Him come at last to Gethsemane, and there beneath the shadows of the olive trees we look upon a great crisis. Shall we follow Him there?

As we watch we see the mob come. We see the Saviour taken, and hurried to earthly courts there to be abused and mistreated, falsely accused and tortured. Will we follow Him there? We see Him led off to Calvary. We see Him nailed to the tree and hung up between the heavens and the earth. Will we follow Him there?

Ah, if we will learn something of what it means to follow Him through those scenes of crisis, we shall also share with Him the glory of the triumph, for triumph awaits those who follow Him. Triumph prefigured by His resurrection glory, and the hour of ascension back to the Father's house. All of these in one way or another we are to share with Him in this last hour.

Let me make very plain there are some experiences that Jesus went through that we shall never in this life, or even in eternity fully plumb the depths of. Jesus, as the infinite Son of God, as well as the Son of Mary, had many experiences as our sin-bearer, as the atonement for our transgression that we can never enter into as He entered into them. In fact, many of those experiences He entered into in order that we might not have to enter into them. He was our substitute. Concerning those we need to seek to understand as much as is possible in our poor, finite minds. And concerning those we shall study throughout the endless ages.

But while all that is true, it is also true that there are many things that Jesus experienced that we can and will experience to some degree. And I wish to study with you some of the

parallels between the closing events in the life of Jesus here on earth and the closing events in the experience of the remnant; those closing events which we are even now entering upon. And of all the experiences in the life of Jesus the ones that you and I most need to study are those that come right at the close of His life, because they have lessons of the deepest significance to teach us concerning the closing events of our lives here in this world if we follow on through the time of trouble that is just ahead.

You remember this oft quoted statement:

"It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones" *The Desire of Ages*, page 83.

Somehow that statement has meant more to me in recent days. Each word is chosen with care. And I believe we would do well to note the emphasis on the particular phase of Christ's life that has to do with the crisis at the close.

All the eternity of the past was focused on those closing hours of the life of Jesus in this world. All eternity focused on Gethsemane and Calvary. So it is true also that all eternity of the past, all the experiences of the six thousand years of the great controversy here in this world, focus on the closing experiences of the remnant.

Everything was at stake back there in the Garden of Gethsemane and on Golgotha. And in this closing crisis everything is at stake. Back there all the universe gathered round to behold that great crisis. So we are told that today all the universe is watching with expressible interest to see the closing scenes in the great controversy between Christ and Satan here in this world. And the part that we are to plan in this closing conflict is very similar to the part the Jesus acted in that great experience that took place back there.

So with the deepest interest we come to study these closing events in the life of Jesus, and to gather from them the lessons that will prepare us for our closing crisis.

Oh friends, won't it be a wonderful thing, if the Father, looking upon us, can see in each one of us the image of His Son reflected fully? That is our destiny. For this we were born. And for this we are now being prepared. And every experience that comes to us, if we are under the guiding hand, is arranged by the Lord to develop in us the characters that will be able to reflect the image of Jesus fully in the great crisis that closes the plan of salvation. "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."

Tonight we want to especially notice the preview of the closing crisis that Jesus gave His disciples, and the preview that He has given us of our closing crisis.

Jesus knew that His hour had come (John 13:1). Speaking to His dear disciples in the upper room, just a few hours before Gethsemane He said:

"Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe" John 13:19.

He told them what was coming. And the thing He was telling them about was the great crisis that was just ahead. Notice what Jesus said to Peter:

"Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for My sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied Me thrice" verse 38.

Peter felt bad about this. In fact, he was offended. But Jesus was seeking to awaken in Peter self distrust. Christ gave this warning not only to Peter, but to all the other disciples:

"Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of Me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee" Matthew 26:31,32.

Jesus told His disciples, You are all going to be offended. You are all going to desert Me as I go into this dark hour. But always in Christ's mind, as He foretold the future of darkness, was the glory beyond. And that should be in our minds.

The remnant church is to be brought into scenes of terrible darkness, experiences of sorrow and persecution and sifting. But always in the hearts of those who listen to Jesus will be the certain hope of the ultimate triumph of the church. And thank God, with the church will triumph every true-hearted believer.

Peter felt bad about this. So he answered:

"Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended" verse 33.

Peter was sure that he would be true. Jesus warned him. He said, Do you tell Me that you will be true to Me? Ah, this very night before the cock crows you will deny Me, not only once but thrice. You will deny that you know me.

"Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples" verse 35.

While Peter was speaking for himself he echoed the thoughts of all the others. They were all sure that they would all be true. They were positive of it. And that only made more necessary the Saviour's repeated warnings, but it made them very ineffectual. Those words never penetrated to their inmost souls. We marvel at that.

This wasn't the first time that Jesus had talked to His disciples about these trials and difficulties. It wasn't the first time He talked to them about this crisis. Jesus is up in Caesarea, Philippi, many miles from Jerusalem. He was talking to the disciples as to who He was. And after drawing from them the acknowledgment that He was the Christ, the Son of the Living God:

"From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day" Matthew 16:21.

Notice the setting of this. Jesus brought from their hearts the acknowledgement that He was divine and the Son of God. He acknowledged their acceptance of that truth. He said He would build that church on that great truth. Then having made that firm and certain He proceeds to tell them of the coming crisis. He says He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things.

How does Peter feel about that? He doesn't like that. His attitude in the upper room and on the road to Gethsemane reflected his attitude previously. He had never accepted deep in his heart the fact of the coming crisis. He never understood it because he never wanted to understand it. He chose to put it away.

I wonder if you and I have come to grips with what is ahead of us, dear friends.

Jesus made an earnest effort to open the future to His disciples:

"And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: And they shall kill Him, and the third day He shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry" Matthew 17:22,23.

The disciples were exceedingly sorry. That is all they got out of it. They didn't understand it.

"And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death, And shall deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify Him: and the third day He shall rise again" Matthew 20:17-19.

To show how little they got out of that graphic picture Jesus tried to present to them of His approaching sufferings, then came to Him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons and what did they want? They wanted the first place in the kingdom. With almost impatience and lack of attention they listened to His description of the coming crisis. Their eyes were on the coming kingdom, not the coming crisis. They were sure that the glory of an earthly kingdom was about to burst upon them, and they were asking for the front seats. You can see how little they got out of the description of the coming crisis. Notice how Luke presents it:

"Then He took unto Him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For He shall be delivered

unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge Him, and put Him to death: and the third day He shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken" Luke 18:31-34.

Have you ever seen children when a parent or teacher was trying to explain something to them say, Oh, yes, I know. That was the problem. The disciples had their minds all made up how things were going to happen. So when Christ tried to picture the coming crisis they understood none of those things. So we see them coming up to that last night. Nobody but Jesus knew it was the last night. We see them gathering in the upper chamber, and what is the spirit in their hearts?

"And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest" Luke 22:24.

Think of it. Jesus was about to be taken by wicked men and scourged and crucified. And here those who think they love Him the most are engaged in a political squabble over who shall have the highest honors and the highest seats. How it must have grieved the heart of Jesus. Those things grieve Him today.

Notice how the Saviour dealt with them:

"And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" verses 31,32.

And even that tender, loving appeal only awakened in Peter a reaction. He said:

"Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison, and to death" verse 33.

Jesus said:

"I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me" verse 34.

As we look at the whole picture we see how Christ again and again tried to make two things clear. First, the coming crisis

involving suffering and persecution and death to Himself. Second, in doing that His object was to help His disciples to seek and obtain the preparation that would enable them to go through that sifting without losing their faith. But we know the sequel.

I want to read a most significant statement:

"Before His crucifixion the Saviour explained to His disciples that He was to be put to death and to rise again from the tomb, and angels were present to impress His words on minds and hearts. But the disciples were looking for temporal deliverance from the Roman yoke, and they could not tolerate the thought that He in whom all their hopes centered should suffer an ignominious death. The words which they needed to remember were banished from their minds; and when the time of trial came, it found them unprepared. The death of Jesus as fully destroyed their hopes as if He had not forewarned them. So in the prophecies the future is opened before us as plainly as it was opened to the disciples by the words of Christ" *Great Controversy*, page 594.

Have the prophecies made our future as clear to us as what Jesus opened to the disciples about their future and His future? Tell me, is it plain to you? Do you know what is coming? It is your privilege to.

Thank God, those who understand the third angel's message know a thousand times more about the future than all the wise men of this world. How thankful we should be, and how we should show our appreciation by applying that knowledge to our daily lives. What do you say?

"The events connected with the close of probation and the work of preparation for the time of trouble, are clearly presented" *Ibid*.

Don't misunderstand me. That doesn't mean that everything a curious mind ought to know is presented. But what we need to know is clearly presented. Probably the reason why God hasn't told us all we would like to know is because if He did there would be so much that it would tend to get us off focus concerning the things we need to know. I give our Lord credit for making things clear we need the most.

In all our study of coming events we need to be very careful

least, like the disciples, we allow our minds to be diverted about something we want and thus lose the revelation of what God sees we need to know. Let's fix our minds most earnestly on that which is most clearly revealed. And if there are matters that are not so clear, let's leave them until in the providence of God they become clear as we go through the experiences ahead. The things we need to know are clearly revealed.

"So in the prophecies the future is opened before us as plainly as it was opened to the disciples by the words of Christ. The events connected with the close of probation and the work of preparation for the time of trouble, are clearly presented. But multitudes have no more understanding of these important truths than if they had never been revealed. Satan watches to catch away every impression that would make them wise unto salvation, and the time of trouble will find them unready" *Ibid.*

Some people today are filling out the parallels of the disciples. Oh friends, you and I may choose. In fact you and I will choose whether we will follow the Lamb in the experiences He went through, or whether we will share with the disciples the misunderstanding and disappointment and the failure.

We will choose. We are choosing day by day. So I ask, Has Christ foretold some things today as He did back there? He foretold approaching suffering and persecution as church and state would unite to put Him in a hard place. Has He foretold some things like that for His people today?

Yes. In Revelation 13:16,17 we read of a time coming when church and state are going to unite to enforce the mark of the beast, and that men won't be able to buy or sell unless they receive that mark. And in verse fifteen we see that persecution will become so severe that finally a death decree will be passed against those who will not worship the image of the beast which God says we must not worship.

In other words, persecution was ahead of Jesus and His disciples back there. Persecution is ahead of the remnant who follow the Lamb today.

Back there Jesus said to His disciples there is going to be a sifting. Satan has desired to have you that he may sift you as

wheat. I have prayed for you. And He foretold definitely that they were going to forsake their Lord because they had not prepared. He has warned us today that many were going to forsake:

"Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another" Matthew 24:9,10.

Jesus told the disciples they were going to be offended. He has warned us today that many will have that same experience. Was Christ betrayed by one of His own number? Yes. So He warns us today that those who are offended and leave God's people will betray them. We are going to go through those experiences that Jesus went through.

"And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" verses 12,13.

We are going through the experience of either Jesus or Judas. We can choose. Obviously we can't have both. We will either be betrayed as Jesus was betrayed, or else we will act the part of the betrayer and join in the persecution of the remnant, concerning whom Jesus says:

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me" Matthew 25:40.

Christ will again be betrayed in the person of His saints. Christ will again be persecuted in the person of His saints. Christ will again be mocked, derided, scourged, insulted, spit upon in the person of His saints. And how wonderful it will be when heaven, looking down upon this world, will be able to say concerning everyone of the remnant that they are going through their trial just as Jesus went through His trial. They are meeting their crisis as He met His crisis.

Won't that bring joy to the Son of God? Won't that bring joy to the Father's heart. Won't that bring joy to all the angels and the unfallen world? Won't it anger the devil and cause him to pour out more and more of his satanic fury? No wonder Revelation says:

"And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" Revelation 12:17.

Back there Jesus said His followers were sifted. We know what the sad results of that was. So down here today there is coming a mighty sifting in the church:

"The days of purification of the church are hastening on apace. God will have a people pure and true. In the mighty sifting soon to take place we shall be better able to measure the strength of Israel.

"The mark of the beast will be urged upon us. Those who have step by step yielded to worldly demands and conformed to worldly customs will not find it a hard matter to yield to the powers that be, rather than subject themselves to derision, insult, threatened imprisonment, and death. . . . In this time the gold will be separated from the dross in the church. . . . Chaff like a cloud will be borne away on the wind, even from places where we see only floors of rich wheat" *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, pages 80,81.

Those who have step by step have given up to worldly demands will find it easy to give up their faith and unite with the world. Keep in mind that it is the chaff that leaves and the wheat that remains. It is the false-hearted that flee, and the remnant remains. This remnant goes through. The sifting results in purging the church of those who have long troubled Zion by their worldliness, their lukewarmness, their pride, their selfishness. But do you see that the sifting can easily take in not merely the hollow, sounding hypocrites, but will take in those who mean all right, but don't have an experience to meet the crisis?

That is the lesson that I long God will impress our hearts with tonight. It is going to take more than a desire to follow Jesus. To follow Him we will have to share with Him in the preliminary experience. Otherwise, like the disciples, we will be surprised when the mob comes, and won't know what to do. Here is another warning from Jesus concerning the coming crisis:

"As the storm approaches, a large class who have professed faith in the third angel's message, but have not been sanctified through obedience to the truth,

abandon their position and join the ranks of the opposition. By uniting with the world and partaking of its spirit, they have come to view matters in nearly the same light; and when the test is brought, they are prepared to choose the easy, popular side. Men of talent and pleasing address, who once rejoiced in the truth, employ their powers to deceive and mislead souls. They become the most bitter enemies of their former brethren. When Sabbathkeepers are brought before the courts to answer for their faith, those apostates are the most efficient agents of Satan to misrepresent and accuse them, and by false reports and insinuations to stir up the rulers against them" *Great Controversy*, page 608.

That is what is ahead of us. One way or another we will either be betrayed or we will be the betrayers. We will either be like Jesus or Judas. We have our choice. We are making our decisions from day to day.

If you have time, read the chapter on Gethsemane. It would be well for us each day to contemplate the life of Christ, letting our imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones. And those scenes are given us not merely to look upon as historical interest. They are not merely to look upon to see the great work that Jesus did for us. All that is important. But we are to look upon them with the deepest, personal interest, knowing that we shall pass through those scenes and share some of those experiences. These are they which follow the lamb whethersoever He goeth.

