

Crisis at the Close 1 of 6

Christ Foretells the Sifting

#0361

Study Given by W. D. Frazee—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. And 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 remnant, the 144,000. Concerning them, it is said in the fourth verse:

“These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever
He goeth” Revelation 14:4.

What do they do? They follow the Lamb wherever He goes. If He goes over to Mars or Saturn, they go with Him. If He goes to Arcturus and his suns, they go with Him. If He goes through Orion, they go with Him. If He goes on 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, dear friends, we *can* go. It'll be a wonderful, triumphal tour. How long it will take, I don't know, but I'm sure of this, friends: 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 especially concerning His earthly life that I wish to study with you. If we can parallel the experiences that He came down here to earth to share with us, there'll be no question about sharing with Him those glorious experiences of the hereafter.

And so, in this world, we look upon Him 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 humility? Yes, even humiliation.

We see Him 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 too, can't we? Yes. 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 olives, we look upon a great crisis. Shall we follow Him *there*, my friends?

As we watch, we see the mob come. We see the Savior 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. Shall we follow Him *there*?

Ah dear ones, 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 that 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 God-man, the infinite Son of God, as well as the Son of Mary, had many experiences as our sin-bearer, as the atonement for our transgressions, 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 for our poor, finite minds. And concerning those, we shall study throughout the endless ages.

But while all that is true, it is also true, my friends, that there are many things that Jesus experienced that we *can* and *will* experience to some degree. It is those I wish to study with you especially—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's just ahead.

You remember that oft-quoted, wonderful statement in *Desire of Ages*:

"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 as I've been meditating on these themes. Each word is chosen with care in these writings. And I believe we'd do well to note the significance of the emphasis on the *particular phase* of Christ's life that has to do with the crisis at the close. The *crisis* at the close.

All the eternity of the past was focused on those closing days and hours of the life of Jesus in this world. All eternity focused on Gethsemane and Calvary. It is true also that *all* eternity of the past, *all* the experiences of the 6,000 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 again, in this closing crisis, *everything* is at stake, my friend. Back there, all the universe, as it were, gathered 'round to behold that great crisis. So we

are told that today, *all* the universe is watching with inexpressible 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 play in this closing conflict is very similar to the part that 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, to gather from them the lessons that will prepare us for *our* closing crisis.

Oh, 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? Won't it be wonderful? That's our destiny. For this, we were born, and for this, we are now being prepared. And every experience now 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 thus 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 notice especially the *preview* of the closing crisis that Jesus gave His disciples, and the *preview* that He has given *us* of our closing crisis.

We must remind ourselves that Jesus was never taken by surprise. Jesus *knew* that His hour was 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 that Jesus speaks definitely to Peter:

"The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied Me thrice"
John 13:38.

You remember that Peter felt bad about this. In fact, he was offended. But Jesus was seeking to awaken in Peter, and in the other disciples, *self*-distrust. Notice in Matthew 26:31, this same evening. 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.

Here is the clear prediction. You're all going to be offended. You're 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, dear friends.

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. Thank God that with the church will triumph every truehearted believer.

“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” Matthew 26:31.

Peter felt bad about this. So Peter answered and said unto Him:

“Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended” Matthew 26:33.

Peter was sure that he would be true. Then Jesus warned him. He said, “Peter, do you tell Me that you will be true to Me? Ah Peter, 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” Matthew 26:35.

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 Savior's repeated warnings, but it made them very ineffectual. Those words never *penetrated* to their inmost souls. We marvel at that, don't we?

Now I want to call your attention to some things, friends. This wasn't the first time that Jesus had talked to His disciples about these trials and difficulties. It wasn't the first time that He had talked to them about this crisis. Let's go back to Matthew 16. 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 acknowledgment that He was divine, that He was the Son of God, and He acknowledged their acceptance of that truth; He said He would build the church on that great fact, that great truth. Then having made that firm and certain, He proceeds to tell them of the coming crisis. He said He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things.

How does Peter feel about *that*? Well, 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 down in his heart, the fact of the coming crisis. He had never

really understood it because he had 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’s all they got out of it. They didn’t understand it. Turn now to Matthew, the 20th chapter, beginning with the 17th verse.

“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.

Now to show you how little they got out of that graphic picture that Jesus tried to present to them of His approaching sufferings, notice what’s next:

"Then came to Him the mother of Zebedee's children
with her sons... desiring a certain thing of Him" Matthew 20:20.

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, the high seats. You can see how little they got out of His 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, that when a parent or teacher was trying to explain something to them, say, “Oh yes, I know. I know. I know.” That was the problem, you see. The disciples had their minds all made up of how things were going to happen. So, when Christ tried to picture the coming crisis, they understood none of those things. 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 do we find 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 that He loves the most and who think they love Him the most, are engaged in a political squabble over who shall have the highest honors and who shall have the highest seats. How it must have grieved the heart of Jesus, just as those things grieve Him today, dear ones.

Notice how the Savior dealt with it:

“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” Luke 22:31–32.

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” Luke 22:33.

Jesus said:

“I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me” Luke 22:34.

As we look at the whole picture, do you see how Christ again and again and again tried to make two things clear? First, the coming crisis involving suffering, persecution, and death to Himself. And 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. Do you see that? It's clear, isn't it? It's clear. But we know the sequel. We shall begin to study it more fully in our next study as we go into Gethsemane.

I want to read a most significant statement:

“Before His crucifixion the Savior 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...” *Great Controversy*, page 594.

May I read that last sentence again? It's tremendous.

The death of Jesus as fully destroyed their hopes as if He had not forewarned them...” *Ibid.*

Think of it. Taken by surprise as though He had said *nothing* all the way along, and yet He'd done it repeatedly over and over and over again. Now we think that's terrible, don't we? And it was. Do you know what the next word is? It's a little word with two letters. "So."

“So in the prophecies the future is opened before us as plainly as it was opened to the disciples by the words of Christ” *Ibid.*

Oh, is it? Have the prophecies made *our* future as clear to *us* as what Jesus opened to the *disciples* about *their* future and *His* future? That's what this says.

“So in the prophecies the future is opened before us as plainly as it was opened to the disciples by the words of Christ” *Ibid.*

Tell me, is it plain to you? Do you know what's coming? It's your *privilege* to.

Thank God, dear friends, 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?

Now notice:

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

This says the events ahead are *clearly* presented. Let's believe it, friends. Now don't misunderstand me. That doesn't mean that everything a curious mind might *like* to know is clearly presented. Oh no. But what we *need* to know is clearly

presented. Probably the reason God hasn't told us all we'd *like* to know is because if He told us all we'd *like* to know, there'd 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 the most clear the things we need most. What do you say, friends?

In all our study of coming events, we need to be very careful lest, 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. My point is, friends, the things we need to know are *clearly* revealed. That's what this says.

“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.

Are some people today, then, filling out the parallels of the disciples? Oh friends, you and I may *choose*. In fact, you and I *will* choose whether we know it or not. Whether we will follow the *Lamb* in the experiences that He went through, or whether we will share with the disciples the misunderstanding and the disappointment and the failure.

I repeat, we can choose; we *will* choose. We are *choosing* day by day. So I ask the question, “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 22 (and this book Revelation, you know is the revelation of Jesus Christ), here Christ is speaking:

“I Jesus have sent my angel to testify unto you these things in the churches” Revelation 22:16.

And in Revelation 13, we read in verses 16 and 17 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 15, 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.

Now, 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. Has He warned us today that many were going to forsake? Turn to Matthew 24. While these words apply to the time just before the destruction of Jerusalem, they apply down here today, just before the coming of the Son of man.

"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.

Did Jesus tell the disciples they were going to be offended because of Him? Has He warned that many today 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. We're 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" Matthew 24:12–13.

We are going through the experience of either Jesus or of 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 every one of the remnant: 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 all the unfallen worlds? And 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"
Revelation 12:17.

That's this remnant, which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.

Now, back there, as Jesus said, His followers were *sifted* (we read that in Luke 22), and we know what the *sad* results of that were. A *sad* result. And 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”

Testimonies for the Church, Volume 5, page 80.

A *mighty* sifting is coming. Page 81, the next page, shows what the result of this sifting will be:

“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...” *Ibid.*, page 81.

You see the agencies of persecution that are going to be brought to bear upon us. 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.

"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" *Ibid.*

Keep this in mind: it's the chaff that leaves; it's the wheat that remains. It's the false-hearted that flee; 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 in the light of our study tonight, do you see that the sifting can easily take in not merely the hollow-sounding hypocrites? The sifting can easily take in and *will* take in, those who, like Peter and his brethren, *mean* all right, but they don't have an experience that's deep enough to meet the crisis.

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

Ah friends, that’s what’s ahead of us. One way or another, we’ll either be betrayed or we’ll be the betrayers. We’ll either be like Jesus or like Judas. We have our choice. We’re making our decisions from day to day.

If you have time, read the chapter on Gethsemane in *The Desire of Ages*.

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 vividly grasp each scene, especially the closing ones” *The Desire of Ages*, page 83.

And as we tonight have caught the picture, perhaps clearer than before, that those scenes are given to us not merely to look upon as of historical interest, 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 whithersoever He goeth” Revelation 14:4.

[Elder Frazee sings "I Will Follow Thee," and the congregation joins him in singing.]

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