

CRISIS AT THE CLOSE

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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.

The Crisis of Christ

In this world, we look upon Jesus as a helpless babe in Bethlehem. We see the humility, the condescension, and we can choose to follow Him. We see Jesus at Nazareth growing up as a child in a humble peasant 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. 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, 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?

Let me make very plain that there are some experiences that Jesus went through that we shall never in this life fully fathom. Jesus, as the infinite Son of God, had many experiences as our sin-bearer that we can never enter into as He entered into them. 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. 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. 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.

Everything was at stake back in the Garden of Gethsemane. And in this closing crisis, everything is again at stake. Back then, the entire universe gathered around to behold that great crisis. We are told that, today, the whole universe is watching with inexpressible interest to see the closing scenes here on earth in the great controversy between Christ and Satan. And the part that we are to play in this closing conflict is very similar to that of Jesus.

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. Christ warned His disciples, "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) Jesus told His disciples that they would all be offended, that they would all desert Him as we went into that dark hour.

"Before His crucifixion the Saviour explained to His disciples that He was to be put to death,...and angels were present to impress His words on minds and hearts. But the disciples...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." (GC 594) Do you know what is coming? It is your privilege to know.

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. In verse 15 we see that a death decree will be passed against those who will not worship the image of the beast. In other words, persecution was ahead of Jesus and His disciples back then; and persecution is ahead of the remnant that follows the Lamb today. Back then, Jesus said to His disciples that there was going to be a sifting. He foretold definitely that they were going to forsake their Lord because they had not prepared. And He has warned us that many are going to forsake Him.

"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 also warned us that many will have that same experience. Was Christ betrayed by one of His own number? Yes. So He has warned us that those who are offended and leave God's people will betray them. 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.

The Crisis of Our Time

Jesus said that His followers would be sifted. Likewise, 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....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....Chaff like a cloud will be borne away on the wind, even from places where we see only floors of rich wheat." (5T 79-81) "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." (GC 608) One way or another, we will either be the betrayed or the betrayers.

Just as crisis came at the close of Christ's earthly life, crisis comes at the close of our experience here in this world. The crisis of Jesus was the crisis of eternity, the crisis of the cross. The crisis which the remnant people of God are soon to enter into will answer forever Satan's charges and vindicate forever the character of God. God has chosen His remnant church to make that demonstration. And, in doing so, we shall meet the opposition that Jesus met. We shall go through the experiences He went through.

Preparation Through Prayer

The picture of the sleeping disciples in Gethsemane has its counterpart today. "By these sleeping disciples is represented a sleeping church....It is a time of clouds and thick darkness, when to be found asleep is most perilous." (2T 205) God must find people today who will not be drowsy spiritually, who will press through the darkness, who will learn to pray as Jesus prayed.

If you study the divine commentary in *The Desire of Ages* on Gethsemane, you discern that there is a growing crisis as the minutes tick slowly by. There is a longing in Christ's heart that some way may be found that He may not have to drink the cup; but He comes out of the awful struggle with only one plea—that the Father's will shall be done. That is one of the greatest lessons in prayer that you and I can learn. There was laid upon Him in the Garden of Gethsemane an immense load that will never be laid upon us. If it would be laid upon us for even one second, it would crush us. "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." (Isa. 53:6) Hours before Jesus ever went to Calvary, He tasted the sufferings of death for every man.

Even in eternity, we shall know very little concerning that part of the Gethsemane experience. Christ took it for us that we might never have to know the awful gulf, the black dark pit into which He went. But as Christ took that infinite burden and suffered that infinite anguish, there were in His human heart the longings that would naturally fill our hearts. It was a longing that some way might be found that He might not be separated from His Father. The anguish of the hiding of His Father's face in the dark hour pierced His soul. In the garden He prayed, "Oh my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." But He adds, "Nevertheless, not as I will but as Thou wilt."

It is perfectly proper for you to bring your wants and desires and longings to God. But it is very appropriate to say as Jesus said, "Nevertheless, not as I will but as Thou wilt." Unless that is in our prayers, we have not begun to pray as Jesus prayed. When we enter into a prayer experience with God, we have not prayed with the mind of Christ until all we desire and choose is the working out of the Father's will. Notice when and why Jesus went to Gethsemane. He knew that His hour was come. That particular night, He pressed to the place of prayer that He might be ready for the mob. Knowing that His hour was come, He took Himself to the place of prayer.

I wonder if we know our hour. I wonder if we know that the time has come for us to meet the mob, and that the little time that remains between now and the coming of the mob is set aside on heaven's calendar for

one purpose—entering into the prayer experience. It will accomplish for us what it did for Jesus. “Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.” (Heb. 12:4)

For each victorious one, there will be an experience of agonizing prayer. “I saw some, with strong faith and agonizing cries, pleading with God. Their countenances were pale and marked with deep anxiety, expressive of their internal struggle. Firmness and great earnestness was expressed in their countenances; large drops of perspiration fell from their foreheads.” (EW 269) I don’t suppose that very many of us know firsthand about that kind of prayer experience.

So, how should we pray? First, have a place to pray. “Have a place for secret prayer. Jesus had select places for communion with God, and so should we. We need often to retire to some spot, however humble, where we can be alone with God.” (MB 84) Second, have a time to pray. “My voice shalt Thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto Thee, and will look up.” (Ps. 5:3) Third, learn to pray aloud. “Learn to pray aloud where only God can hear you.” (GW 425) Learn to do it. We’re in a school of prayer. The students of this school are going to endure. He is waiting for us to open our hearts heavenward to receive the blessings He wants to impart. Speaking directly to God helps you to feel that you are actually communicating with heaven. Fourth, if the mind wanders, bring it back. “If the mind wanders, we must bring it back; by persevering effort, habit will finally make it easy.” MYP 114)

We should know that we are in the final hour, and just ahead of us is the crisis that the national Sunday law will bring, the crisis that persecution will bring to God’s church. And we should be seeking the Lord for that special preparation necessary to meet the special crisis. Confidence in ourselves can lead us to be so sure that we will face the crisis of the future that we fail to intercede and agonize in prayer to receive the necessary preparation.

After finding a place a short distance away, Jesus knelt down and prayed, saying, “Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but Thine be done. And there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him.” (Luke 22:41-43) “The worlds unfallen and the heavenly angels had watched with intense interest as the conflict drew to its close. Satan and his confederacy of evil, the legions of apostasy, watched intently this great crisis in the work of redemption. The powers of good and evil waited to see what answer would come to Christ’s thrice-repeated prayer....In this awful crisis, when everything was at stake, when the mysterious cup trembled in the hand of the sufferer, the heavens opened, a light shone forth amid the stormy darkness of the crisis hour, and the mighty angel who stands in God’s presence, occupying the position from which Satan fell, came to the side of Christ. The angel came not to take the cup from Christ’s hand, but to strengthen Him to drink it, with the assurance of the Father’s love. He came to give power to the divine-human suppliant....He assured Him...that His death would result in the utter discomfiture of Satan, and that the kingdom of this world would be given to the saints of the Most High. He told Him that...He would see a multitude of the human race saved, eternally saved.” (DA 693)

So today, as God's people enter into the prayer struggle, they too are to receive a heavenly visitation. There is another angel coming down from heaven with great power. "And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory." (Rev. 18:1) But remember, the agonizing prayer struggle comes before the glory. Before the visit of this mighty angel, God's people must enter into an experience that brings them to the place where there is just one thing they will want—the Father's perfect will. Humanity must be so blended with and subservient to the divine will that the remnant will be prepared to give an exhibition during their trial such as Jesus gave in His trial. And we are going to be tried in every way that men and devils can invent. To be prepared for that, we must have a blessing of a heavenly visitation such as Jesus received. But in order to be prepared for that, we must enter into the prayer experience. We must reach the place where our will is swallowed up in God's will, and our one desire is expressed in the words of Jesus, "Not as I will, Father, but as Thou wilt."

The Final Test

The coming outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the latter rain is not to take the saints out of the world of trouble; it is not to lift them above or beyond the possibility of suffering; it is to prepare them for the greatest ordeal of suffering that any human beings have ever experienced. This is the time of Jacob's trouble. We have been told that there will be some like Judas who will betray their brethren. We know not who they are. As we approach the crisis of the remnant church, there will be those who have, for one reason or another, become offended. May God help us now, that every root of bitterness may be discovered and taken out, and with humility and love we may so place ourselves in the hands of Christ that we will be willing, like Him, to suffer, and be unwilling to be used to cause others to suffer.

That bring us to the study of another character in this great drama—Peter. He was not like Judas, but he failed in Gethsemane. This illustrates that there is more than one route to failure, more than one way to be defeated, more than one sin that leads to disaster in the crisis hour. Peter needed to be converted deep down in his soul. When Peter was filled with fear, he was the one who suggested to the other disciples that they had just as well save themselves. Judas led the mob that took the Saviour. Peter led the group that fled away from the Saviour in the crisis hour. When the persecution breaks, when people are being put in prison, there will be those who will put up a great fight as Peter did. But their fight will only be the prelude to their flight. "Some who are now ready to take up weapons of warfare will in times of real peril make it manifest that they have not built upon the solid rock; they will yield to temptation....Not having received the love of the truth, they will be taken in the delusions of the enemy." (6T 400)

"Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." (John 16:32) Somewhere between now and the coming of the Lord, each in the remnant will be tested all alone. Somewhere between now and translation day, you will stand as Jesus stood—all alone. "It is impossible to give any idea of the experience

of the people of God who shall be alive upon the earth when celestial glory and a repetition of the persecutions of the past are blended. They will walk in the light proceeding from the throne of God. By means of the angels, there will be constant communication between heaven and earth." (9T 16) *The Great Controversy* pictures some of the remnant of God being in prison cells, and angels coming with light to them.

Jesus learned in prayer, and we too are to learn in prayer. Here are two points about prayer. First, mix Bible study and the Spirit of Prophecy with prayer. Take your Bible to the place of prayer, and perhaps take *Steps to Christ* or *The Desire of Ages*. Down on your knees, let God talk to you, and you talk to Him. Having read a verse or two, close your eyes and talk to Jesus about it. In your own way, thank Him for what He did for you. Open up your mind to let God talk with you about what you've read. Second, mix faith with prayer. "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." (Mark 11:24) Let us dedicate ourselves, as never before, to learning the science of prayer. "In the prayer of faith there is a divine science; it is a science that everyone who would make his lifework a success must understand." (Ed 257)

The Final Demonstration

As far as the death of Jesus is concerned, there are many ways in which He might have died. But there was a demonstration to be made. What is it that God wants to demonstrate? That divine love can be revealed in human flesh, forgiving its enemies and praying for its persecutors.

Satan is studying your character and taking notes on what he finds. He is studying to find the particular thing that will make you lose your patience and lose your temper. We ought to be wise enough to make our weak points our strong points, so when the devil finally comes he will view us with amazement, because we are a fortress impregnable to all his efforts. "Now, while our great High Priest is making the atonement for us, we should seek to become perfect in Christ. Not even by a thought could our Saviour be brought to yield to the power of temptation. Satan finds in human hearts some point where he can gain a foothold, some sinful desire is cherished, by means of which his temptations assert their power. But Christ declared of Himself: 'The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me.'...This is the condition in which those must be found who shall stand in the time of trouble." (GC 623) I want to stand, don't you? I want to get all the irritation and impatience out of me. We need to know our Father as He knew His Father. He knew that His Father was managing things. He didn't try to interfere or defend Himself. He didn't get angry or discouraged. He didn't wilt. He wasn't intimidated.

God is going to have here on earth a group of people who will make a grand demonstration that there is power in Jesus to make a man loving and meek and patient under the most awful circumstances. Do you see how important it is to get the victory daily? For if we fail now, what will we do later? God will develop us for

that later time, if we let Him. Never must there be an angry word or sarcastic look; never should we take advantage of our opponents by some twist of a word; but rather we can give a sweet, calm, confident presentation of the truth. Again, we need to be practicing. God is furnishing us the material on which to practice. That is the purpose of daily life experiences.

How did Jesus get through that struggle? "Faith and hope trembled in the expiring agonies of Christ because God had removed the assurance He had heretofore given His beloved Son of His approbation and acceptance." (2T 210) "The darkness that will then rest upon our path must not discourage us or drive us to despair. It is the veil with which God covers His glory when He comes to impart rich blessings." (5T 215)

You and I need to be getting an experience from day to day in knowing for ourselves the will of God and in knowing that God accepts us. We can't afford to drift along to the time of trouble without that assurance. If we go into the darkness of Jacob's trouble with a prior experience in claiming the promises of God's word by faith, we will be anchored and able to go through it without an intercessor. "Those who are unwilling to deny self, to agonize before God, to pray long and earnestly for His blessing, will not obtain it." (GC 621) This is why time has extended—to provide an opportunity to have this experience. Before the trial and test must come a day-by-day experience over a period of time to develop a character and a prayer experience that can successfully meet the crisis at the close.

As Jesus at Calvary went through those dark hours in which He wrestled against the power of Satan, so the remnant church in the darkness of Jacob's trouble will wrestle against the powers of darkness. As Jesus was without an intercessor, so the remnant will be without an intercessor through the time of trouble. As Jesus stayed His heart upon God by repeating the promises, and by reviewing the experiences He'd had heretofore, so the remnant people will by faith alone press their way through the darkness. And as Jesus was delivered by that glorious angel that brought the summons from His Father there in that dark hour of the morning, so the remnant church will be delivered at the midnight hour as the voice of God speaks from heaven, and glory takes the place of darkness.

This generation is to answer the charge of Satan that the law of God cannot be kept. As Jesus demonstrated in His life here on earth that the law of God can be kept in human flesh by laying hold of the power that God had provided, so God is going to have a group of people down here in the closing scenes. They have the seal of the living God in their foreheads. For 6,000 years Jesus has been the intercessor, standing between the human family and a broken law. But sometime before Jesus comes, He will have so developed His people that He can step out between them and that law. And the people of God will stand there so fully clothed with the righteousness of Jesus that the law can find no fault with them, and Satan stands viewing them as a fortress impregnable to all his delusions. To him, they are an incomprehensible mystery.

As a result of this experience, we will be able to participate in Revelation 15:2-3. "And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints." Friends, is it not a glorious hour in which to be living? Thank God for the privilege.

(I am indebted to the thoughts of W. D. Frazee, in "Crisis at the Close")