

THE PROPHETIC WORD IN CRISIS DAYS

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by

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CHAPTER THREE

THE CRISIS OF THIS PRESENT HOUR

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“And as some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, he said, as for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

“And they asked him, saying, Master, but when shall these things be? and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?

“And he said, Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them. But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by.

“Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven. But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake. And it shall turn to you for a testimony. Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to mediate before what ye shall answer: For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist. And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. But there shall not an hair of your head perish. In your patience possess ye your souls.

“And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.

“But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

“And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

“And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.

“And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.

“And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man” (Luke 21:5-36).

At the very beginning of His famous discourse on the Mount of Olives, Jesus made it clear that crisis involves transition. It is a period marked by the passing away of an old order of things, and the ushering in of a new. The day would come, He declared, in which the solidly-structured and beautifully-adorned temple in Jerusalem would be utterly destroyed, so that no stone would remain upon another. To His Jewish disciples, this could only mean that the existing way of life would be broken up and supplanted by something vastly different.

The prediction of a period of crisis was the burden of Christ's prophetic ministry. He even ventured so far, in the Olivet Discourse, as to look ahead through the centuries and mark out the major movements that would transpire throughout the entire age of the church. The age would commence with bitter persecution of His followers (Luke 21:12). There would be wars and commotions (verse 9), but this would be no indication of the imminence of the end. The age would conclude with the return of the Son of man with power and great glory (verse 27).

It is significant that the destination of Jesus' crisis message was the people of God. Those who raised the question which brought forth the discourse addressed Him as **“master”** (verse 7), indicating that they sustained a very special relationship to Him. They were warned not to be deceived (verse 8). They were exhorted to possess their **“souls in patience”** (verse 19), and to **“look up”** when certain predicted events would come to pass, knowing that their **“redemption”** was drawing **“nigh”** (verse 28).

Jesus directed this crisis message to His own people, His disciples. Obviously His message is characterized by warning, and He intends through warning to protect His own.

Inasmuch as the Word of God everywhere represents the return of Christ as imminent, the warning of crisis has ever been with the people of God in every century of the Christian era.

The coming of Christ is the great crisis event toward which the entire dispensation is moving. It will shatter the present order of things and usher in a completely new arrangement of life.

The interests of God's people depend upon the passing away of the present evil world system. The fulfillment and fruition of all our hope awaits the ushering in of the new order of existence which Christ will institute at His coming. The interests of worldly people depend upon the continuation of this present order, but the Christian hope is rooted in the coming order. How important, therefore, to warn God's people lest they be swept away in the coming crisis. How important that they survive the coming crisis and live to enjoy the fruits and blessings of the new order.

But how shall Christians detect the nearness of the coming conflagration? The apprehension of crisis is entirely a spiritual matter. The basic requisite is separation from the sinfulness of the present order and unto the true worship and fellowship of God. This is evident in Jesus' warning lest our hearts be **“overcharged with surfeiting”** (verse 34), and in His injunction to be constantly watching and praying (verse 36).

Those who become involved with the sin of the present order will neither watch nor pray, and their spiritual senses will be overtaken with sluggishness. They will be unable to peer through the darkness of the midnight hour and catch the first faint glimmer of dawn.

Thank God that the coming crisis is preceded by certain manifestations which betray its nearness. The spiritual Christian may discern four major symptoms or signs that point to the fact that the hour of crisis is drawing near, that the present order is gradually dissolving and making way for the new. The appearance of these symptoms in our time may be regarded as the crisis of this present hour.

First, the present crisis is basically spiritual in nature.

Jesus admonishes His own “. . . **Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them**” (verse 8).

Today as never before there is cause for alarm as a confusion of voices within Christendom is heard. In the Greek language the word **“Christ”** does not appear in the verse quoted above, and grammatical considerations lead us to conclude that false teachers are in view. The emphasis is on the word **“many.”** Many of them will come upon the basis of His name. That is, they will claim to represent Christ.

The gullibility of humanity in general has opened up unlimited opportunity for counterfeits of every kind. Myriads of false cults are deceiving many today. Eventually this same tendency to undiscerning credulity will open the way for the master counterfeit of the Antichrist of the end time.

The Word of God clearly teaches that the rank and file of humanity will welcome that sinister person as Christ. This is a prospect which should fill the hearts of the unredeemed with terror. Multitudes of unregenerates who have heard the Gospel and even joined churches will be left behind when the Saviour raptures away His own, and in due course they will give their allegiance to the false one.

Second, in addition to being spiritual in nature, the present crisis is manifesting itself as a moral crisis.

Spiritual defection always exhibits itself in the moral realm. When the anchor of the soul is lost, there are no moorings for behavior.

Jesus said, “. . . **take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and; drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares**” (verse 34).

Notice the reference to the “**heart**” which is the center of defection. The heart in Scripture always connotes the center of control for moral conduct. Speaking of the heart, the writer of Proverbs said, “. . . **out of it are the issues of life**” (Proverbs 4:23).

It is possible for the heart to become “**overcharged,**” or overburdened so that it ceases to function normally to guide and govern the walk of the individual.

Jesus suggests three things that can jeopardize the proper performance of the heart.

First, Jesus warned about “**surfeiting.**” The root idea behind the word is “*head.*” It also incorporates the thought of grogginess, or dizziness in the head. The expression suggests an impairment of mental ability, so that a person may be guided amiss.

For example false philosophies and ideologies may be ministered to the human mind with the result that a certain dizziness is produced in an individual so that he fails to see clearly and lacks ability to guide his own conduct properly.

The philosophy of *naturalism* is being widely disseminated today. From the moment that we place our youngsters in elementary school it begins to impregnate their minds. As they move up through high school and college there is an intensification of this program of mental defilement. It has spread through the cultural agencies of our society. Even the pulpits of our land are in many instances expounding a supernatural message that is so diluted as to actually promote the cause of naturalism. So widespread is this menace that it even affects the patterns of thinking of spiritual people, producing grogginess, dizziness, and erratic living on the part of men and women.

The second evil that can produce a malfunctioning of the heart is “**drunkenness.**”

This is an interesting word, built on a root meaning “*to be filled.*” Even today a staggering drunk is likely to evoke the expression, “He's sure full.”

In the fifth chapter of Ephesians the Apostle Paul exhorted Christians not to be drunk, but rather to be “**filled**” with the Spirit. Filling, in either case, involves control. As the drunk is under the control of alcohol, so the Spirit-filled Christian is under the control of the Holy Spirit.

Drunkenness in its usage here in Luke 21:34 is a symbol for every form of sensualism. As the Spirit relates us to God, so the soul relates us to the world about us. The five senses are windows of the soul. With the soul a person sees, hears, smells, tastes, and feels. The information that is gathered through the soul may be manipulated and made to operate in the realm of sense, producing sensuality. There never was a time so characterized by sensuality as the present.

Almost everything today moves in the realm of sensualism.

The evil fare of television, modern music, tobacco, narcotics, alcohol, sex — these are a few of the elements of our society which appear to the senses and draw away the affections of multitudes.

In the third place, the heart can be “**overcharged**” with the “**cares of this life.**”

The word “**cares**” implies worrying to the point of anxiety and even sickness. The word “**life**” has reference to biological life, or physical life. Clearly the pattern of our times is suggested here.

People are primarily concerned with food, clothing, wages, housing, and other “necessities” which minister to the physical life. Materialism is the supreme concern today. The pattern has become so fixed that many young people who seek admission to ministerial schools and who apply for service under missionary societies appear to be more interested in “benefits” offered than in the service they are to perform.

Not only is the present crisis spiritual and moral in nature, it is also developing, into a religious crisis.

It is inevitable that the spiritual and moral phases of the crisis will develop a religious superstructure to bear them. That which would never succeed under any other name will often succeed under the name of religion today. The word “*religion*” as such does not refer to Christianity at all. Christianity is a life. It is the life of Christ in a human individual. Religion may be represented by the various forms and systems which gather about Christianity. The spiritual and moral defections of our day are bound to gather around them a religious system to carry them on.

The Saviour warns in the seventeenth verse of our chapter that His followers will be hated of all men.

This and similar expressions in the same chapter suggest the growth of this false religious superstructure to such a level of power that the greater part of the earth's population will stand against those who adhere to the truth. This situation is further described in the seventeenth chapter of Revelation, where a gigantic ecclesiastical organization is presented to our view. This vile harlot system will gather up within its fold the accumulated apostasy of the end time.

A vicious trend commonly referred to as “*liberalism*” or “*modernism*” is sweeping the entire world today. It represents a denial of the basic tenets of the Word of God. So general is this theology of unbelief that one may practically count on the fingers of one hand the theological institutions in our country that are not to some extent impregnated with it. And this false theology bolsters the cause of apostate ecclesiastical organization.

Some sixty years ago the *Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America*, now called the *National Council of Churches of Christ in America*, came into existence. Its purpose was ecumenicity, and its avowed goal was to effect a unity of Protestant denominations.

As time passes it is becoming increasingly evident that it ultimately intends to bring together all religions.

The movement in this direction is gathering speed at an incredible rate. Last December a proposal to amalgamate four major denominations with a total of some twenty million communicants was received with almost thunderous acclaim. Recently the Archbishop of Canterbury went down and dialogued with Pope John, breaking down barriers of centuries, and symbolizing the awakening desire of multitudes to bring about a union of Roman Catholicism with the Church of England.

And what of Pope John's announced intention to convene an ecumenical congress in the near future? It can only mean that Rome is again manifesting her remarkable facility for spreading wide her skirts and gathering in the false religions of the world. Certain flirtations between the leaders of Protestantism, Catholicism, and Jewry provide yet another indication that the whole earth is rushing along more swiftly than we had realized in the direction of ecumenicity.

Finally, it should be observed that the present crisis incorporates aspects which are national and international in scope.

When the spiritual, moral, and religious foundations have crumbled away, it is to be expected that confusion among the nations will be in evidence. Jesus foretold such a situation. He referred to the coming of “**wars and commotions**” (verse 9) and he described a day in which nation would rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom (verse 10).

He continued the description in even more graphic terms: “. . . **and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken**” (verses 25, 26).

Jesus' description includes the features of universal strife, distress of nations, and growing terror among men. The world today is freighted with problems peculiar to these modern times, and there is diminishing possibility for their solution. These problems among nations cause distress, or pressure, and since no solution is to be found, perplexity results. The word "*perplexity*" suggests that there is no way out; every path that is followed in an attempt to find solution has a dead end.

The awesome potential of Communist China poses a new threat to the security of the world today. Many thinking people are not so concerned about Russia as about China. The population of China at the present time approximates 700,000,000. It is said that by 1975 China will have a billion people. This is almost four times the population of the United States, and three times the population of Russia. Were the hordes of China to move against the nations of the West, the almost endless waves of humanity that could be thrown against us would threaten our very existence. This is a matter of grave concern to our government and to other western nations.

Crisis is in the offing. The spiritual, moral, religious, and international signs of crisis are stamped into the fabric of twentieth century life and institutions.

“And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand” (verses 29-31).

The warning rings clearly and unmistakably in the ear of every Christian.

The present order is crumbling. It is about to pass away, and a new order will soon be ushered in with the coming of our Blessed Lord.

The glories of that new order, wherein dwelleth righteousness, will be shared by those who have duly heeded the crisis manifestations of our turbulent times, and have secured themselves to the Rock that is unaffected by the storms that beat upon the shores of this present hour.

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