

THE PROPHETIC WORD IN CRISIS DAYS

Prophetic Messages Delivered at the West Coast Prophetic Congress
in the Los Angeles, Calif. area in mid-1961

by

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE CHURCH THAT GOES THROUGH THE TRIBULATION

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“And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment that that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Revelation 3:14-22).

It's quite interesting as we survey Church history, from the days of the Apostles down to the present, to see how certain great doctrines in the Church have been developed in different ages.

For instance, at the very beginning, the apostolic church wrestled with the problem of the canon of Scripture. The question of inspiration was settled at that particular time. Then in the next period the person of Christ was treated. In the early church there was a period during which there was a great deal of conflict about the person of Christ. The church settled at a certain time the dispute concerning the person of the Lord Jesus, when they said, *“He's very God of very God, and very man of very man.”*

Then move down to the next period, and you'll find that during the time of Augustine they settled the question concerning the doctrine of sin. There was a great development at that particular time with reference to the subject of sin. Then about a thousand A. D. the great doctrine of redemption was before the church. It was settled at that time.

During the period of the Reformation justification by faith was the great issue, and it was settled at that time. Then you come to the period of John Wesley, and regeneration was the great subject. Then during the period of the Finney and Moody meetings the great doctrine of the Holy Spirit was dealt with and settled.

The proponents of modernism today try to give new views on inspiration and the person of Christ. But those questions were settled years ago, and the best of men's minds, guided by the Holy Spirit, said all that can be said on both sides of these questions.

No modernist in America in the past fifty years has ever said anything new that was not said long ago. It was considered heresy then, and put aside. And yet today, it passes as modernism or liberalism. Those questions were settled years ago. Now we have moved since World War I and World War II, into the field of eschatology, or the doctrine of last things. You and I are now living in a time when the great truths concerning prophecy are being dealt with and settled.

I remember that when I first entered the ministry a quarter of a century ago, prophecy was beginning to become a matter of great controversy. And the question at that time was not whether the Church will go through the great tribulation, but rather, "Are you premillennial? Are you postmillennial? Or are you amillennial?"

A premillennialist was a man who believed that Christ would come before the millennium, In other words, He would have to initiate the millennium. You could have no millennium without Him.

The postmillennialist believed that the Church would establish the millennium here on this earth. The earth would be evangelized and then Christ would come at the end of the thousand years. Well, two world wars, a world-wide depression, the rise of communism, and the popping of an atomic bomb have wrecked post-millennialism. And there is not a reputable theologian on earth today who is a postmillennialist. They all ran for cover.

Of course there are amillennialists today who don't believe there's going to be any millennium at all. But the millennial issue is really not the question of the hour. The biggest question at the present moment is this: 'Are you pretribulational, midtribulational, posttribulational, or do you believe in a partial rapture?' Right now, these questions are being debated, and I think you'll find good men on all sides of the question.

The pretribulational viewpoint is that the Church does not go through the great tribulation at all. I am a pretribulationist. I believe that there is adequate Scripture to support that viewpoint. Then there's the midtribulational view. This is the view that the Church is to be taken out in the middle of the tribulation. It will go through only the first half of the great tribulation period. And then there is the posttribulation view that the Church goes through the entire great tribulation. Then there are those who believe in a partial rapture. They believe that only the super-duper saints are to be taken out.

The answer to all of this is that no child of God can go through any part of the great tribulation, because of the fact that the tribulation is a time of judgment.

And only those who underestimate the extent of the great tribulation think that any child of God would go through it. We're told definitely that the Church is to be spared. **"Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation or testing which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth"** (Revelation 3:10).

The Lord says to His Church, *"I'm going to keep you from that hour that's coming on the earth. You cannot enter that period at all."* And the Lord said to the Thessalonians, *"You are not children of the night. You are not going through this period. You are children of the day, and not children of the night."* Therefore the child of God will not go through any part of the great tribulation. Do you want to know why? The explanation, I think, is very simple. We're saved by the grace of God. We're saved from hell, if you please, by the grace of God. And by the same token we're saved from the great tribulation by the grace of God. It's not a question of deserving it or whether you need it to purify the Church. The question is, "Does the grace of God deliver us?"

The great tribulation is a period of judgment. It's the great day of the Lord. It's the day of His wrath. Notice what he says to His Church. He says, **"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus . . ."** Now, if there's no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus, then they'll not be here to be judged. The Lord Jesus has delivered them. There is adequate Scripture that teaches this.

Now notice I John 4:17. **"Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world."**

We're going to have boldness in the day of judgment. Why? Because we're so good? No, because we're in Christ and as He is in the world, so are we in this world. Do you think Christ is going through the great tribulation? Of course not! Neither is this Church, because the Church is in Him. As He is in the world, so are we in the world today. There's an abundance of scripture to sustain the truth that the true Church will be taken out of this earth. That is what it means when it says, **"looking for that glorious appearing," "looking for that blessed hope."** We're looking toward a blessed hope.

Paul said to the Thessalonians,

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope . . . For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (I Thessalonians 4:13; 16, 17).

That's the hope of the Church. We're not looking for the Antichrist. We've not looking for the great tribulation. We're not looking for the man of sin. We're looking for the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, to take those that are His own out of this earth.

The picture is the same as that which existed in Sodom. God had a man in the city of Sodom by the name of Lot. Lot was not all he should have been, I grant you. On the basis of the Genesis story, one could raise some question as to whether Lot was ever God's man. But the Word of God has already answered that question, and we must not speculate. Peter in his epistle says, **“For that righteous man vexed his righteous soul”** in the city of Sodom.

Actually Lot didn't like it down there.

It looked good when he was way up on the hilltop with Abraham and looked down at Sodom and saw the wide boulevards and the lovely new subdivisions. And Lot said, “If only I could move down there, and get one of those little lovely bungalows, and send my children to those lovely schools they have down there, and raise my family. My wife would get into society, and we would move in the upper crust.”

He got down there and got in the upper crust; you find him sitting in the gate, and that means he became a judge. He was Judge Lot, and a very important man in the city of Sodom. And as we look at that man, we doubt that he was God's man. But he was God's man; and when it was time to judge that city God said to Lot, ***“You get out of the city. I can't destroy this city until you are out of it, because you are my man.”***

You see, God couldn't let judgment fall on that which was His own. And so God got Lot out of the city.

Now I have a question in my mind about Mrs. Lot. I'm not sure about Mrs. Lot. I can answer quite a few questions, but not all of them. One difficult question is, “Why was she turned to a pillar of salt?”

She got out of the city, but she didn't want to leave. She loved that city. You might take her body out, but her heart was back there. She belonged to the bridge club, the Shakespeare Club, and the Country Club, and her children were there. She said, “I just don't want to go. Everything that I love is in that city.” So God turned her to a pillar of salt. But I believe God was thinking of Lot. She did not believe God would destroy that city, and that's the reason she turned around to look back. She said, “You don't mean, Lot, that you have been told that this city is to be destroyed. That is one of the loveliest cities in the world.”

There are many people today who do not believe that judgment is coming on the earth in which we live. Nevertheless, the judgment of God is to fall upon this earth in which we are living. Now they didn't believe that.

Even when Lot went to his own sons-in-law, his testimony was so weak that he seemed to them as one that mocked. They didn't believe he was sincere. They said, “Run on Lot, we know that you bought some real estate out yonder. We know that you have invested here. We know that everything you own is in this city. You don't believe that this city will be destroyed. We haven't seen you gathering any treasure in heaven. You haven't given us any inclination that you are interested in the things of God.”

They thought the man was mocking. And none of them came out of the city. Mrs. Lot turned and looked back. She didn't believe that God would destroy the city.

I have always agreed with the Scottish commentator who says that the Lord was thinking of Lot. Had she not turned to salt, she would have henpecked him the rest of his life for getting out of that city. God took His man out of Sodom. Why? Because it was to be judged, and until His man was out of that city, it could not be judged.

As long as the Church is in the world there will be no judgment.

Oh, we are having trouble. He said, “**In the world ye shall have trouble.**” And we are going to have trouble in the world. I always like to put it like this, — the Church is not going through the great tribulation, but we are going through the little tribulation. All of us are having a little tribulation in this world.

We have been sent a certain amount of tribulation here and now, but not the great tribulation. We will have trouble in this world, but the true Church will not go through the great tribulation.

But the question arises, “What church is it then that is going through the great tribulation?”

When the Lord comes and takes His own out of this earth, He will not take denominations or church members. I think it's going to be rather surprising when He takes His own out of this earth.

Dr. George Gill once said that the Sunday after the rapture takes place, there will be many churches that will go on just as if nothing had happened, because they won't miss a member. Actually we today in America would be absolutely startled if we knew how few church members are really born-again Christians. I think we would be amazed.

I have made a point of asking Christian leaders across this country what percentage, in their opinions, are Christians. I get replies ranging anywhere from seventy-five percent to twenty-five percent; and most men believe that only twenty-five percent of church members today are actually born-again Christians.

So you can see that many churches will continue on after the rapture. They won't miss very many, and in many of them the preacher will be present. They won't need a new pastor. One man said to me in downtown Los Angeles, “Dr. McGee, I don't see how in the world you get a crowd, especially in the middle of the week.” I said to him gently, because he is a liberal, “You know, if you would start preaching the Bible, people would come out.”

And he said to me, “Haven't you graduated from that yet?”

He doesn't believe the Bible, yet he is a prominent minister in Southern California. There are a great many churches today and a great many ministers that do not believe the Word of God at all. Why some of them continue is a matter of amazement to me.

I honestly wonder why some of them continue in churches because they are nothing in the world but religious clubs. Some of them are spiritual mausoleums today.

There is a church, therefore, made up of just church members, not born-again believers. They are not going to be taken out; they are going through the great tribulation. It's the church of Laodicea in which this division takes place. This is the seventh church, the last church, and we today are living somewhere in this seventh period.

Christ takes His own out of the Laodicean church after He gives it sufficient warning.

“Unto the angel (the messenger or pastor) of the church of the Laodiceans write, These things saith the Amen.”

This is the only place where Amen is used as a title. It is a title of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Amen, and it simply means, Verily. It means He is true, and He is dependable. When He writes to the church in Laodicea that cannot be depended upon, He says, **“I am the One that is the Amen.”** This is the only place that He is called **“the Amen.”** He is called the Faithful and True Witness, and He is the One today who can be depended upon.

People are divided today into two classes. I do not refer to Fundamentalists and Modernists, Methodists and Baptists, etc. They are divided into these two classes — those that are hearing Him, and those who will not hear Him. And hearing Him means to obey. There are those who will obey Christ and there are those that will not. He is the Faithful and True Witness, and the only One who can be depended on in these days. He is also called **“The Beginning of the Creation of God.”** That means He is the One that was the Beginner. He's the One that originated.

Now, he says to the Laodicean Church, **“I am the Beginning of the creation of God.”** What a message He is giving to the Church in this hour. He says, **“I know thy works,”** and He is the only one that does know them. **“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot.”** Cold means to be antagonistic to it; hot means to be zealous for it. He says here, **“I would thou wert cold or hot.”** He says, **“I would rather have you cold than lukewarm.”** One lukewarm Christian hurts the cause of Christ more than ten communists. He says, **“I would rather have you cold than have you lukewarm.”**

A lukewarm person is one that makes a mere profession. The Lord Jesus said, **“I wish you were cold or hot. I'd rather have you in opposition to me, than to profess to believe and not to believe.”** What a tremendous thing this is!

“So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.”

The church that the Lord Jesus spues out of His mouth is not the Church that is caught up to meet Him in the air. They are going in opposite directions. The one that is spued out of His mouth is going away from Him; the one that is caught up to meet Him is going toward Him.

This is two-way traffic. The church is going in two different directions. An organized church is being spued out of His mouth, while those that are His own are to be caught up to meet Him in the air.

Note what He says, **“Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind and naked.”**

I want to give you just one brief quotation; I think that ought to be enough. Dr. Percy is quoted by *Moody Monthly* as saying:

“The phenomenal growth in church membership from twenty percent of our population in 1884 to thirty-five percent of our population in 1959, 61,000,000 Protestant church members, would indicate the possibility of a church on fire for God. And there are other indications — wealth beyond the fondest dreams of our forefathers, an income of five billion in 1959, a building program that will seat 800,000,000 spent for new church structures, mass evangelistic meetings attended by tens of thousands, use of other mass media, such as radio and literature, increasing constantly.”

This is a picture of the church today. **“Increased in goods,”** and a wealthy church!

Have you ever stopped to think that the church that evangelized the Roman Empire did not own an acre of ground, had no building, no publishing plant, no radio station, and no airplane? The church that evangelized the Roman Empire had nothing in the world but zeal for the lost and they carried the Gospel to the ends of the Roman Empire.

We are living in a time when a great many people are beginning to believe that mechanical devices are going to do the trick. But a mechanical device is not always the answer. A great many people think that if you can just get enough airplanes, and enough radio stations, and if we just give enough money, we'll evangelize the world. Did you know that right now we have a manpower shortage that is amazing? Less than ten percent of the graduates coming from our Bible Schools today are going into foreign missions, and fifty percent of them are casualties after they get to the field. What a tragic picture! Too many machines and not enough men! The church is increased with goods today, but it is a church that is impotent. No longer can the church say to the impotent man, **“Rise and walk.”** The church has lost its power; it's a Laodicean church.

“Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich.”

The Lord Jesus says, **“I want you to have real gold, and real gold is to have a treasure in Heaven, and I want you to have white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed.”** White raiment is the righteousness of Christ that comes by faith. It is something that you cannot buy. He gives it to the weakest saint, the worst sinner that won't do any more or less than trust Him as Saviour.

“That thou mayest be clothed, and the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.”

We have many brilliant men in the ministry today but spiritually they are blind. We need eyesalve. We need the Holy Spirit to open our eyes that we may behold wondrous things out of this Book.

The church today goes after psychology and book reviews. It is interested in many things, but not the eyesalve — the Holy Spirit whose ministry is to open the Word of God to our understanding.

The apostate church, this church that has turned its back upon Him, will enter into the great tribulation period. Here is a church that wasn't taken out of the earth. It goes into the great tribulation period. It is not called a bride; it is called something else. We see it in the 17th chapter of Revelation where we read:

“And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven bowls of wrath, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither and I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great harlot that sitteth upon many waters.”

Now this is the picture of the church that goes into the great tribulation. It is not a bride; it is a harlot. A harlot is one that sells herself, and this church has sold herself to the world. It should have presented itself to Christ, but instead it has made an alliance with the rulers of the world.

This harlot church is the church **“With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.”**

If you don't think that the world is going to be religious in the great tribulation, you're wrong. That's when religion is going to have its great day. There's a difference between religion and Christianity. Religion is the most damnable thing that has ever been on this earth. Look in China and India where they have had religion for millennium after millennium, and you see what has happened. Religion brings people down; only Christ can lift men up. There will be plenty of religion in the great tribulation period.

“The kings of the earth have committed fornication; and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet colored beast.”

This beast is the Roman Empire and this woman is the false apostate church. The woman can be identified.

“And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.”

And it is said to be the city that is on seven hills.

“The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth.”

And Rome is known in history as the city of seven hills. Augustine called it that, and all of the great writers of the past have referred to Rome as the city of seven hills. It is a religious power centered in the city of Rome.

And then we are told that **“the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”**

Now all harlots in John's day had to have their name written on their foreheads. That was the mark that identified them, and here this one is identified by the word **“MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT.”**

Why is it a mystery? A mystery in the Bible is something that was never revealed in the Old Testament. For instance, the true Church is called a mystery because it was not revealed in the Old Testament. Why is this apostate church a mystery? Because not even Paul wrote about this one at all. Only John tells us about it.

You see, when John wrote Revelation, all the apostles were dead. He is the last one. He lived to be about a hundred years of age. He was past ninety when he wrote the book of Revelation. He was the last one that lived. He said, **“this is a mystery.”** No other one had seen this. It is called Babylon the Great because Babylon is the fountain head of idolatry and false religion.

This is a combination of all religions in the last day, and truly the world is moving toward one church, as it is moving toward one government. Now the Antichrist hates this church for the very simple reason that he wants to be worshipped. He not only breaks his covenant with Israel in the middle of the week; but he also breaks his covenant with the false church. He wants to get rid of her and so he destroys her, we are told:

“And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the harlot, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.”

Thus we see how the Antichrist hates this false church. He gets rid of it somewhere past the middle of the great tribulation, in order to make room for the worship of the Antichrist alone. And the great tribulation concludes with worship of the Antichrist only. He shows himself as God, Paul says, sitting in the temple of God. The people of Israel discover then that they have been deceived. They thought he was the Messiah, but you see an image went into the temple, and that is the abomination, **“When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet.”** Jesus warned those that are in the field to go to the mountains and those on the housetop to get out and get going, because the great tribulation will break in all its fury at that time. Antichrist is then moved to become a great world dictator, and he destroys the apostate church.

But we who know Christ have a different hope. I trust that wrath is not what you are expecting. That is something that a merely professing Christian is looking for. We have a more wonderful hope. Listen to this language:

“But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night” (I Thessalonians 5:1-2).

The day of the Lord comes like a thief. But are you looking for a thief, or are you looking for the Lord Jesus? Is He coming for you like a thief? No. The thief is always the most unwelcome guest that can come to your house. You don't want him. The Lord Jesus never comes as a thief for those that are His own, for the thing that bars the thief generally is a lock and key, and probably a bar over the door to keep the thief out. But the Church is looking for Him. He doesn't come as a thief for His Church. But when He comes to the earth to establish His Kingdom, He is coming as a thief.

Why? Two reasons.

He will come when they are not expecting Him, and the world does not want Him. Do you think any of those men who are in positions of world power would like to see Jesus? If He came to this earth and said, “Now fellows, you've had your little day; I'm here to take over,” do you think any of them would step down? World leaders today don't want Him. He says He will come as a thief in the night to the earth. While they are talking of peace and security, all at once calamity will come upon them.

There will be no escape, but you who know Christ are not in the dark that the day should overtake you like a thief. You're children of light, children of the day. We do not belong to night or darkness, and we must not sleep like the rest. Keep awake, and sober. Sleepers sleep at night, and drunkards are drunk at night, but we who belong to daylight must keep sober, armed with faith and love, and the hope of salvation for a helmet. God has not destined us to the terrors of judgment. We are not looking for the great tribulation.

We are not looking for Him to come as a thief in the night. We are looking for Him to appear to take His Church out of this earth, and I trust it will be soon.

I'm getting a little weary along the way; I'd like to see Him come.

I think of the story that Dr. W. B. Riley used to tell down in my southland. He told the story about the time the stars fell on Alabama back in the seventies. It was a phenomenal event. It was a meteorite shower, and when they began to fall, one colored fellow awoke. He looked out the window and saw these stars coming down, and said, “Wake up, Mandy, it's the end of the world and the Lord is coming. You get up and get the children up and get them dressed and wash their faces good. I'll go down to the cemetery and when ol' Massa come up out of the ground in resurrection, we'll come by and get you and the children, then we'll go away to meet the Lord in the air.”

His theology was a little mixed up, but he had a hope that we need today, a real hope that the church needs in this hour, an expectancy, and an anticipation that He is coming, and that He may come soon for those that are His own.

What a glorious day it will be when we shall be removed from this old earth and stand in His presence!

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