

THE PROPHETIC WORD IN CRISIS DAYS

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by

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE CRISIS OF THIS PRESENT HOUR

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“And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side. And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships. And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith? And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (Mark 4:35-41).

The twentieth century was ushered in with a fanfare of trumpets, playing on the high note of optimism. Many men, honestly and sincerely at that time, felt that the world was on the threshold of the millennium. Almost unbelievable are some of the statements that were made during that period. Dr. Justin A. Smith, an outstanding writer of that time, reflected the optimism of his era in a statement made in the year 1883:

“It has been said that in twenty-five years more, if the present rate of progress continues, India will become as thoroughly Christian as Great Britain is today; there will be thirty millions of Christians in China; and Japan will be as fully Christianized as America is now. The old systems, they tell us, are honeycombed through and through by Christian influence. It looks as if a day may soon come when these systems, struck by vigorous blows, will fall in tremendous collapse. Meantime, every weapon formed against Christianity breaks in the hand that holds it. Already the Lord's right hand hath gotten Him the victory. Surely, not in such a day as this, should faith fail or those theories of the future gain currency, which tend to paralyze rather than to nerve and inspire the arm of Christian endeavor.”

Writing in this same general period, Naville, in a book entitled “*The Problems of Evil*,” made this audacious statement:

“The civilizations of Europe, or to call it by its true name, which it derives from its origin, The Christian Civilization, is visibly making conquest of the world. Its triumph is only a matter of time. No one doubts it.”

In striking contrast to these bold predictions have been the actual developments of this century. Before half of the twentieth century had elapsed, mankind had witnessed two world wars, a global depression, the rise of communism, and the explosion of an atomic bomb.

At the conclusion of World War II, Dr. Adolph Keller of Europe, representing the *World Council of Churches*, addressed a public gathering in Los Angeles. In the course of his message he said, “We have witnessed the death of the so-called Christian civilization of Europe. It's five minutes to twelve in the history of the world.”

President Kennedy, who seeks to introduce us to a “new frontier,” eloquently characterized this hour in a recent message:

“I speak today in an hour of national peril, and of national opportunity. Before my term has ended, we shall have to test anew whether a nation organized and governed such as ours can endure. The outcome is by no means certain. The tide of events has been running out, and time has not been our friend.”

It is hardly necessary to belabor the thesis that we confront a cosmic crisis that has no parallel in the history of the world. There are signs on the horizon today that indicate that we are moving into a great crisis era.

Let us examine these signs on three fronts — the political, the social, and the spiritual.

First, on the political front, we witness the turmoil of nations, on the international scene.

The Psalmist raised the question, “**Why do the heathen [nations] rage, and the people [masses] imagine a vain thing?**” (Psalm 2:1). The query suggests that a great turmoil among the nations would one day characterize the world scene. Such a circumstance is in evidence today. From China to the Congo, from Cuba to Korea, from Berlin to Bangkok, from Laos to Latin America, from Algeria to Alabama, and from Karachi to Caracas there is a great disturbance.

Unquestionably the nations are raging today.

The inspired Psalmist answered his own question by stating the reason for the confusion among nations: “**The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed . . .**” (Psalm 2:2).

Ever since the turn of the century, the very time that we have already described as being full of optimism for the conversion of the world, there has mounted up like a great crescendo an unholy opposition against the Lord and against His Christ. Today this anti-God movement is taking very definite form. Communism is primarily against God and Christ.

While certain parallels between communism and Christianity may be pointed out, yet the contrasts between the two systems are very glaring. For example, the one great force of the Christian faith is love. The Lord Jesus Christ declared, “**By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another**” (John 13:35). Love is the supreme mark of the Christian. The Apostle Paul stated that the three Christian graces, faith, hope, and love, would endure throughout all eternity, and he added, “. . . **the greatest of these is love**” (I Corinthians 13:13).

But communism majors in hatred. Communism progresses in the world today because of its appeal to the natural man. This is possible because human beings are of such a nature that it is easier to hate than to love. Only a born-again child of God indwelt by the Holy Spirit and producing the fruit of the Holy Spirit, can manifest that love of which the Lord Jesus spoke.

Another characterizing feature of Christianity is truth. Jesus said, “**Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free**” (John 8:32). Communism, on the other hand, places the emphasis on the big lie. Through lying propaganda this vicious system has swept throughout the world. It is an incipient rebellion against God and His Christ.

In 1917 Lenin established Bolshevism with seventeen followers. In 1917 he took Russia with 40,000 supporters. Communism, in one generation, has conquered more than one third of the population of the world. We have cause for alarm today, because we are even now fighting for our very existence and some who are in high places inform us that we are losing.

Perhaps we are losing because we are playing such a hypocritical role in the world today, for while America points to traditional ideals, emphasizes historic spiritual values, and condemns the materialism of communism, she denies God and glories in materialism.

Curiously enough, from this foundation rises a strange paradox, for America and the Marxists reverse their positions when dealing with the peoples of other lands. In our campaign to advance American ideals and values, all too much faith has been placed in the volume of material goods which we make available to other nations.

Since the Second World War, it is said that we have sent abroad material assistance totaling approximately one hundred billion dollars in value. There are those who believe that an abundance of material things will convince the peoples of other countries that American ideals of justice and freedom are desirable above all. But sadly enough, this materialistic policy has not sold a bill of goods to the underprivileged nations, even though it has cost us a hundred billion dollars. We as a nation are not loved throughout the world today. We are progressively losing the battle to communism,

There is a crisis in the political realm today.

Turning to the second area, we must observe that a crisis also exists today in the realm of morals.

Not very long ago a large firm in Cleveland sponsored a statement in the press of that city. The

statement read as follows:

“Something more precious than gold is flowing out of this country, — character, integrity, self-reliance. It is the loss of these American traits that is leaving us more impoverished than the outflow of gold.”

So alarming is the moral crisis in America that many of our statesmen and other responsible leaders are combining their efforts in an attempt to turn the tide. We have to face the deplorable fact that twenty percent of all young men in the United States attaining the minimum age of seventeen years required for navy enlistment must be rejected because of previous criminal record. Another twenty percent must be rejected because of personality, psychological, or health problems. Seven percent of all enlistees fail to measure up to the rigors of recruit training. In other words, it is necessary to reject almost half of those who enlist. The navy finds it easier to put a uniform on the man than to put the man into the uniform.

The brittle moral fabric of our young men was evidenced by the behavior of those who were held as prisoners of war by the communists.

The North Korean communists found that only two soldiers were needed to guard a hundred American prisoners. Of the seven thousand prisoners, fifteen percent collaborated with the enemy one hundred percent of the time. Seventy percent collaborated once or more. The five percent who, because of their strong religious faith or patriotic views were regarded as too difficult to change, were segregated from the others.

There are in our land today four and one-half million problem drinkers. We are turning out from Hollywood an unbroken supply of filth on a mass scale. Someone summed up the situation in these words:

”The crook is made a joke; stealing is funny; swearing is entertaining; the double meaning is the end of wit; infidelity and illicit love, the spice of life. The home is chains; the shop and store drudgery. Prohibition is a calamity, and drunkenness is a lost virtue. The preacher is a fool and the church a mystery — memory of the funny Sunday School days. Mother is no longer revered and father is the sly old rascal. God is a convenient swear word and heaven is the biggest joke of all. The sun-tanned, bare-back, cigarette-sucking, poodle-leading, cocktail-drinking, home-breaking female is made the queen. Love is degraded into passion; children are no longer wanted; the marriage is not binding. This is the warp and woof of Hollywood.”

The Word of God is very specific in its description of moral conditions in the last days. The Apostle Paul sounded this note of warning in his letter to young Timothy:

“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away” (II Timothy 3:1-5).

In the third place, there are also unmistakable signs of crisis on the spiritual front today.

The Word of God foretells the coming of a time characterized by apostasy — a day in which men who once held the faith will move away from the faith. With sadness of heart we have seen a number of men forsake the ministry. Some have completely lost their faith, so that in certain instances they now ridicule that which they once preached. The church has gone very far afield from that opening day of the present dispensation, when the Holy Spirit came and began a mighty work.

The movement away from the faith and toward apostasy is especially evident in our great institutions of learning.

When he made his bequest at the time of the founding of Harvard University, John Harvard exhorted the students concerning the basic verities of Christianity:

“Let every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well the main ends of his life and study to know God and Jesus Christ, which is eternal life, and therefore to lay Christ at the bottom as the only foundation of all knowledge and learning. And seeing the Lord only giveth wisdom, let everyone act seriously, set himself by prayer in secret to seek Christ as Lord and Master.”

Those were indeed brave words, but today faith has disappeared from that institution and virtually all that remains is the Harvard accent.

At a recent session of the World Congress of Missions it was disclosed that in the past decade less than ten percent of the students in our Christian educational institutions were making preparation to serve on the mission fields. Mission boards are alarmed at this state of affairs today. Yet when Mr. Kennedy called for a peace corps, he had a thousand volunteers in less than twenty-four hours. Furthermore, it is predicted that a hundred thousand volunteers will soon have signed for that type of foreign service. Who is going to take the Gospel of Christ to the ends of the earth? We are witnessing times of deep apostasy today and it is almost unbelievable that this trend is developing so rapidly.

What should be the attitude of the Christian in view of the crisis in the political, moral, and spiritual realms today? We ought to face the facts. We ought to recognize that this situation exists, and that it is alarming. But it is not necessary to push the panic button.

The inspired Psalmist had the answer. He foresaw all of the commotion that is taking place on earth in our day. And he indicated the divine response to the ragings of the nations: “**He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision**” (Psalm 2:4).

Regardless of the situation on this troubled earth, God has not shifted to the edge of His throne. God is not biting His fingernails; He is not disturbed about the events that are transpiring on this earth. In view of this fact there is no reason for those who are His own to be disturbed.

We are reminded of the incident on the Sea of Galilee, when disciples were with our Lord in that little boat. He had gone to the rear and was asleep when the storm broke in all of its fury. It is one of the loveliest pictures of Him.

He had fallen asleep and even the ragings of the deep did not awaken Him. Under normal circumstances the disciples, who were fishermen, knew how to bring the boat into harbor, even in the event of storms. But this storm was different. It was Satanic. It was intended to send that little boat to the bottom of the Sea of Galilee.

The disciples tried every device they knew, but they were unable to cope with this storm. So they went to Jesus and asked Him, “**Carest thou not that we perish?**”

He arose, went up, and rebuked the storm. The towering waves immediately leveled out, and Jesus, who had rebuked the storm, now rebuked the disciples: “**O ye of little faith!**”

One can imagine Simon Peter getting the disciples together and saying to them, “We made a mistake, didn't we? Our faith lapsed and that is why we woke Him up. We should have known that any boat that He is in will surely make the harbor.”

The Lord Jesus never promised us that we would miss the storm; He only promised that we will make the harbor. Apparently these disciples learned their lesson on this occasion, because after the day of Pentecost when violent storms of persecution fell on them there is no lapse of faith, no complaining, no whimpering. Though most of them became martyrs, we do not find even one of them saying, “**Carest thou not that we perish?**”

We need to recognize that an hour of crisis is breaking upon the world today, but we should also recognize that we have unprecedented opportunity to live for the Lord Jesus Christ and to proclaim the Gospel. This is no time to sit on our hands. These are days in which Christians should move for God. We should take full advantage of mass media and make full use of modern devices in order to herald the truth of Christ to the ends of the earth.

Dwight L. Moody once said, “I looked upon the world as a wrecked vessel; its ruin is getting nearer and nearer. God said to me, 'Moody, here's a lifeboat. Go out and rescue as many as you can before the crash comes.'”

This is our business today, and it is the greatest enterprise in all the world. There is no reason for a believer to be pessimistic. We need not be struck with fear as the storm gathers and the waves thunder against the boat. The crisis of this present hour may be a terrific storm, but we shall pass through it unharmed, for the boat in which He is riding will surely make the harbor.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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