

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

by

Various Authors

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CHAPTER EIGHT

THE MISSING ONES

J. W.

ONE SUMMER EVENING, for a part of our family worship, I read the fourth chapter of I Thessalonians. Before retiring to rest I seated myself on my easy chair, and mused on the last few verses of the chapter, which were as follows:

“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. 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.”

And as I mused, I fell into a deep sleep, and had a most wonderful dream. My mind seemed to be clear and distinct, and my intellectual faculties stronger and brighter than in my wakeful condition.

I thought I had awakened in the morning, and was somewhat surprised to find that my wife was not beside me as usual. Supposing, however, that her absence was but temporary, I waited, expecting her speedy return; but after the lapse of what I considered a reasonable time, as she did not make her appearance, I arose and dressed.

My wife’s apparel was where she had placed it on retiring, and I felt confident she was somewhere about the house. So I went to my daughter Julia’s room, thinking she might know the whereabouts of her mother; but after knocking several times without response, I entered, and found that she was also missing.

“Strange, passing strange,” said I to myself; “where can they both be?”

Then I went to the room of our son Frank, and found him up and already dressed, which was something quite unusual for him at an hour so early. He said he had passed a very restless night, and thought he might better get up.

I told him of the absence of his mother and sister from their rooms, and requested him to look around and see if he could find them. In the meantime I hurriedly finished dressing, and soon Frank returned and said the missing ones were nowhere to be found, and that every door leading outward was securely locked, as on the preceding evening. We were at our wit's end, and what to make of this strange occurrence we did not know.

On again visiting Julia's room we found on a stand her well-marked open Bible. One prominent verse attracted my attention, it read:

“Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh.”

This passage, my wife had always declared, referred to the coming of Christ for His saints, the redeemed Church, while I insisted that it meant only the preparation for death. But I am digressing. Frank and I concluded that, without waiting for breakfast, we should each take a different route, and visit some of our most intimate friends in quest of our dear ones.

I first called on my wife's sister, Mrs. E., who, with her husband, were good, respectable people, members of a Christian Church, though rather world-minded. After I had rung the bell several times, and waited somewhat impatiently, she appeared, and apologized for her dilatoriness by saying that she was in a “peck of trouble,” and had to prepare breakfast herself, for her servant girl, whom she had always considered to be a real good Christian, had played her a mean trick.

“She has gone off somewhere, without even putting the kettle on the range, or saying a word to any of us. But what puzzles us to know is how she got out of the house, for the doors are all locked and the keys inside, just as we left them last evening on our return from Mrs. B.'s progressive euchre party.”

“Indeed,” said I, “it is exceeding strange,” and then I explained to her the object of my morning visit.

When she heard of the mysterious absence of my wife and Julia she became so very nervous that I was glad to change the subject by saying that, as I had not breakfasted, I would join them in their morning repast. When her husband heard my story he treated it with a good deal of levity, and declared that my wife was only playing me a practical joke, to induce me to rise earlier in the morning. He was sure the missing ones had secreted themselves somewhere about the house, and when I returned home I would find them all right.

As we seated ourselves at the table, Mrs. E. said we would have to take coffee without milk, as her milkman, who had heretofore been very reliable, had failed to make his appearance.

Presently the doorbell rang, and Frank entered in a state of great nervous excitement, saying he had been all over inquiring for his mother, and that in almost every house he found trouble similar to our own. Almost everyone was anxiously searching for missing ones. He also stated that the streets were thronged with excited people, hurrying to and fro, many of them weeping bitterly.

Breakfast was scarcely over before inquiries were made at the door as to missing neighbors, and among those who called was Mr. H., who greatly astonished us by stating that his two youngest children, ten and twelve years of age, had gone off with their grandmother, who had been bedridden for over six years. At this announcement Mr. E. showed evident signs of alarm, and related a conversation he had held yesterday with a friend, whose religious ideas he had looked upon as quite heretical.

His friend insisted that a vast majority of church members in these days were but nominal Christians, "**lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God,**" and that the love of the masses for religious things had reached a very low ebb.

"My friend also assured me," said Mr. E., "that the Scriptures clearly taught that when the elect number of Christ's Church would be complete, Christ would come as unexpectedly as a thief in the night, and call His saints, both dead and alive, to meet Him in the air. The transformation would be effected in the twinkling of an eye; and although the call would be made with a shout and the sound of a trumpet, yet none would hear it but those for whom it was intended. Then would be realized the import of Christ's words: '**In that night there shall be two in one bed; the one shall be taken and the other left, Two shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken and the other left.**' I fear that time has now come, and sad to say, we are among the left ones!"

Now as the morning was far advanced it was suggested that we go down to our business places. Frank had already gone to his office, and I, with a heavy heart, wended my way along the avenue among an unusual throng of men and women, whose faces betokened intense sorrow.

In the business parts of the city I observed that many stores were closed, and that those that were open did not appear to be doing any business. Every tavern that I passed was open, as usual, with groups of men outside, apparently engaged in serious discussion. As I passed by the City Hall, there was no perceptible diminution of the usual crowd of political "hangers-on" around the building.

When I reached my own store, I found that my bookkeeper, and the faithful old porter who had served me so many years, had not yet put in an appearance. My two other clerks were on hand, doing nothing; nor did I feel like asking them to do anything. I then went to the Chamber of Commerce, and found the largest gathering of merchants that I had seen there in many months.

Instead of the lively, noisy bustle of buying and selling, and clerks and messenger boys running to and fro, there was a solemn gloom pervading the whole assembly. By unanimous consent, and in consequence of the great calamity that had overtaken the community, it was voted that "three days" grace be allowed on all contracts falling due this day."

I will not attempt to set forth any of the reasons and speculations that were advanced as to the cause of our present troubles, but all agreed that the visitation was a supernatural one, and that in some way we who were left on the earth were blamable for it.

In the afternoon, by common consent, business of all kinds was suspended, except in the vicinity of the taverns, where a great deal of disorder prevailed. Here and there were groups of people in earnest conversation. At one of them was a man who seemed to be well-versed in Scripture, and as I approached he was saying:

“This is the day spoken of by Christ, but none of us believed it, and now we are beginning to realize how foolish we were.”

In the evening nearly every church in the city was open, with overflowing congregations. Everybody was anxious to know the cause and meaning of the “great visitation,” and to learn how lost hopes might be regained. Many of the pastors had gone with the missing ones, but some were present in their churches. All order of service was dispensed with, and noisy confusion prevailed. Crimination and recrimination were bandied to and fro between the pastors and the people, the latter asserting that if the pastors had done their duty, and taught their flocks the plain truths of the Bible, instead of lulling them to sleep with philosophical and moral essays, they would not now be in their present sad condition. In my own church the pastor was present, with scores of persons whom I had but rarely seen at meetings.

Most of the active workers and constant worshipers were absent. Audible groans and deep drawn sighs were occasionally heard from various parts of the room. Some were bemoaning the loss of children, others of husbands, of wives, of fathers and mothers.

The pastor was speaking when I entered the room, and was entreating the audience to endeavor to allay their feelings. He said:

“None of you realize the keen disappointment I experience at this result of my labors. I am accused of having preached too much about the affairs of this life, and too little about the heavenly state, and the things to come; and of having kept you in ignorance of the imminency of the awful visitation which has manifested itself among us this day. In reply to these accusations I can only say that I have taught you the same theology that was taught to me in college, namely to treat the Bible as a book largely of spiritual symbols and allegories.

“But I now confess that I was sadly mistaken, for, after what has occurred, I cannot help believing that God’s Word means just what it says. I am glad, however, now to be able to say for your comfort that, since this morning, I have made a prayerful examination of the Scriptures as to our present condition, and find that we are yet in the place of hope.”

Here a chorus of voices ejaculated, “Thank God for that!”

The pastor proceeded: “Although we had lost the glorious privilege of the raptured saints, salvation is yet ours, if we humbly and truly accept it. We may have to pass through greater trials and tribulations than the world has ever experienced ere we reach the Kingdom, but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.”

Here the electric light suddenly went out, and there arose such fearful screams that I sprang to my feet in terror—and—awoke!

My wife, who was in an adjoining room, hearing my sudden uprising, hastened in to see what was the matter. Oh, how glad I was to see her, and to realize that my terrible experience in my easy chair was only a dream! But the more I thought of it afterward, the more solemn seemed the Scripture truths which it contained, and the more was I impressed with the importance of having our lamps trimmed and burning, ready to go out and meet the Bridegroom.

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