

When Church Fails

"I am about to desecrate My sanctuary, the stronghold in which you take pride, the delight of your eyes, the object of your affection." Ezekiel 24:21 "I will forsake My house, abandon My inheritance; I will give the one I love into the hand of her enemies." Jeremiah 12:7

At the close of this age, Satan will be given authority for an appointed time to overpower the church (Daniel 7:21-25; Revelation 13:7). This will be a time of great tribulation and persecution just before the second coming of Christ. During this hour of darkness, many of Christ's servants will be imprisoned and killed (Matthew 24:9). And many professing Christians will fall away from the faith (Daniel 11:33; Matthew 24:10; Revelation 13:10). But even in this darkest hour, the victory is the Lord's, for Jesus declared the powers of hell would not prevail against His church (Matthew 16:18). Our God will have a faithful remnant who will spiritually endure and overcome this crucible to triumph over Satan. "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; and they did not love their lives even when faced with death (Revelation 12:11)."

Why would God allow His precious church to suffer persecution and death? Consider this: why would God allow Jesus, His precious Son, to suffer crucifixion and death? Because, from out of His Son's death would arise many sons and daughters. Then why would God allow His church, whom He loves, to be overpowered by the enemy, even for a season? The Lord will allow this dreadful calamity because, once again, He is after something of far greater eternal value. He wants a holy bride whose love and devotion to Him is pure and unadulterated. Throughout the Bible, the relationship between God and His people is compared to a marriage covenant. God's chosen and beloved people could count on His faithfulness to honor this covenant and protect and provide for them. However, God's covenant was also conditional upon His people's faithfulness to Him. "If you will obey My voice and keep My covenant, you will be My treasured

possession and you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:5-6)."

Unbelief and unfaithfulness to God result when God's people trust in their own ability and righteousness rather than in God (Jeremiah 17:5; see also Deuteronomy 8:17-19). When His people abandon their love toward Him for other things, God no longer calls them His bride but a harlot with other lovers. Jesus said, "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me (Matthew 15:8)." During such times, God sends His prophets to warn His people to repent of their spiritual adultery and return to Him. However, if they continue in their idolatrous ways, God abandons them to lawlessness and allows them to be defeated by their enemies. Instead of God's divine protection, they will experience calamity.

When the children of Israel had forsaken God, they mistakenly thought they could look to the temple of the Lord to keep them safe from destruction (Jeremiah 7:1-15). In the same way, when Christians who are lawless look to church for security rather than to God Himself, calamity is coming. Our relationship with God may be under New Covenant grace but we still have a holy responsibility to remain faithful to the Lord. When the church at Pergamum allowed idolatry among their members, Jesus warned if they did not repent, He would war against them with the sword of His mouth. When the church at Thyatira engaged in immorality, Jesus said He would kill those who did not repent. When the church at Sardis was spiritually dead, Jesus warned if they did not repent, He would erase their names from the Book of Life. When the church at Laodicea turned lukewarm toward the Lord, He warned if they did not repent, He would vomit them out of His mouth (Revelation Chapters 2 & 3).

Even God's faithful remnant can expect to experience His refining fire (Daniel 11:35). God disciplines His church so that it might share His holiness (Hebrews 12:4-10). "For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God, and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for

those who do not obey the gospel of God (1 Peter 4:17-18)?" At the close of this age, Satan will be given power over the church until the strength of God's people is shattered (Daniel 12:7). But it is not God's power within us that will be broken; it is our natural strength. As the apostle Paul said, "We were under great pressure, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened so that we would not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead (2 Corinthians 1:8-9)." If we are willing, God will press us, even to the point of death if necessary, so we might fully embrace His Son and His completed work on the cross. God not only wants us to know Christ died for us (Romans 5:8); He wants us to know we died with Christ (Romans 6:8). Knowing we have died with Christ is the secret to defeating Satan and overcoming sin. When we know (*believe and act*) that we have been crucified with Christ and that our sinful nature has died and been removed, we will be freed from the power of sin (Romans 6:6-7). Then we will no longer depend on our own strength to overcome Satan and sin (Philippians 3:3). Instead, we will trust Christ, who lives in us, to be our overcomer and hiding place in the coming tribulation and persecution (Galatians 2:20).

In the coming darkness when Satan wages war against God's people, many will fall away from the faith. At that time, let us fix our eyes on Jesus who will never forsake us. Men can fail us, church can fail us; but Jesus will never fail us. Stand firm with God's faithful remnant all over the earth and lift your head high because the coming of the Lord is near. Do not be surprised when this fiery ordeal comes upon us. Jesus will use the great tribulation to purify His bride like a crucible refines gold (Revelation 7:9-14). Then our Lord will return with His army of angels and overcoming saints to crush the enemy, judge the world and rule the nations.

"For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this!" Isaiah 37:32

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