

THE LAST GREAT ASSIZE ... and the witnesses for the prosecution
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(MAT. 12, 41:42; MARK 6,11)

In the year A.D. 79 Vesuvius erupted, to bury the city of Pompei beneath a sea of lava and ashes, Slaves chained to their posts perished; the people who fled into their homes were suffocated; in a few hours, a city disappeared. For some inscrutable reason Pompei was forgotten, until centuries later certain monuments attracted the archaeologists, and the uncovering of the ruins commenced. In June, 1957, I walked through this scene of devastation, asking why God permitted the catastrophe. Then the guide, accompanied only by men, went into the ancient house of Vetii, and my question was answered. The eruption of Vesuvius destroyed a city of lust. The Bible declared that God will judge the world in righteousness; and when we consider the various statements of the Lord Jesus, it is possible to trace the trend of events as they are to be revealed at the final great assize.

Call the Men of Nineveh-Matthew 12:41

Let us consider that judgment day; let us see the opening of the books, and watch as the accused are brought to trial. Then, "The men of Nineveh shall rise in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and behold, a greater than Jonas is here." Perhaps on God's eternal television screen will be flashed the ancient scene. We may see Jonah standing close to the sea; we may see the great mammal gently rolling in the shallow waters, while nearby the onlookers marvel at the phenomenon which had brought Jonah from his watery grave. The fish-god was dead; the preacher had returned from another world; his message was a supernatural warning - "and they repented at the preaching of Jonas." The ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, His resurrection from the dead, the reiteration of His warning through the ages, will all unite in the condemnation of this unrepentant generation. And when the accused ask, "But how were we to know whether the message was authentic?" the recording angel will summon the next witness.

Call the Queen of Sheba-Matthew 12:42

If the ancient scene is recaptured in all its scintillating brilliance, we shall see a sight probably unsurpassed in ancient history. We shall consider again how the news of Solomon's magnificence was carried by merchants to distant lands, and how the Queen of Sheba heard the story, and smiled. Such fantasy was surely the product of overwrought minds; the effervescence of vivid imagination. Yet the accounts continued to be told, and unable to silence her doubts, "she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon." "Queen of Sheba! Was it not beneath your dignity to travel so far on such an errand?" and the regal lady of a bygone age gracefully bows and replies, "I had nothing to lose; I had much to gain. I discovered that the half had never been told." Continues the prosecuting counsel, "Let me ask another question: What would you think of people who heard a similar message thousands of times, of people who only had a short distance to travel, and yet they lived and died debating whether the message were true or false?" The Lord Jesus said, "The Queen of Sheba shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it"

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Call the People of Sodom-Mark 6:11

Sodom was the most indecent of all the ancient cities, and its evil practices led to disaster. Yet the Saviour stated that in the day of judgment Sodom would be more acceptable than some of the modern respectable cities with which our present world abounds. "Men of Sodom, why did you not heed the warning of Holy Scripture?" "We had no Scripture." "Did you not attend the evangelistic meetings?" "We never had any meetings." "Did you not go to church -to Sunday-school; did you not hear a preacher?" "We never knew any of these blessings. We never saw a Bible, we never heard a hymn, we had no Gospel, no preacher. Perhaps if we had known these wonderful things, Sodom might have been a holy city." "Men of Sodom, what would you say of people who had all these advantages-a church in every street, a Bible in every home, a preacher in every pulpit? Men of Sodom, what would you say of modern folk who only have to turn a knob on a radio panel to hear as many preachers as they desire, and yet, who remain indifferent to every warning?" "Surely, such people would be fools." And before this array of witnesses sinful man must inevitably be condemned. "It is appointed unto man once to die, and after death the judgment." To be forewarned is to be forearmed. If I must appear before God's throne, I shall need the services of a competent lawyer; and it is worthy of note that the Lord Jesus offers His services without money and without price. I should consult Him before it is too late.

The Hymn that Stopped a Bullet

In his delightful book, Sankey's Story of Sacred Songs and Solos, Ira D. Sankey has told a remarkable tale concerning the hymn Jesus, Lover of my soul. "A party of tourists formed a part of a large company gathered on the deck of an excursion steamer that was moving slowly down the Potomac one beautiful evening in the summer of 1881. A gentleman who has since gained a national reputation as an evangelist of song, had been delighting the party with the happy rendering of many delightful hymns, the last being the sweet petition so dear to every Christian, Jesus, Lover of my soul. The singer gave the first two verses with much feeling, and a peculiar emphasis upon the concluding lines that thrilled every heart. A hush had fallen upon the listeners that was not broken for some seconds after the musical notes had died away. Then a gentleman made his way from the outskirts of the crowd to the side of the singer, and accosted him with: 'Beg your pardon, stranger, but were you actively engaged in the late war?' 'Yes, sir,' the man of song answered courteously, 'I fought under General Grant.' 'Well,' said the first speaker, 'I did my fighting on the other side, and think, indeed am quite sure, I was very near you one bright night, eighteen years ago this very month. It was much such a night as this. If I am not very much mistaken, you were on guard duty. We of the South had sharp business on hand, and you were one of the enemy. I crept near your post of duty, my murderous weapon in my hand; the shadows hid me. As you paced back and forth you were humming the tune of the hymn you have just sung. I raised my gun and aimed at your heart; I had been selected by my commander for the work because I was a sure shot. Then out upon the night rang the words-

Cover my defenseless head

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With the shadow of Thy wing.

Your prayer was answered. I couldn't fire after that. And there was no attack made upon your camp that night. You were the man whose life I was spared from taking.'

" The singer grasped the hand of the Southerner, and said with much emotion, 'I remember that night very well, and also the feeling of depression and loneliness with which I went forth to my duty. I knew my post was one of great danger, and I was more dejected than I remember to have been at any other time during the service. I paced my lonely beat, thinking of home and friends, and all that life holds dear. Then the thought of God's care for all that He had created came to me with peculiar force. If He so cared for the sparrows, how much more for man, created in His own image? and I sang the prayer of my heart, and ceased to be alone. How the prayer was answered I never knew till this evening.' "

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Henry Ward Beecher once said of this same hymn, " I would rather have written that hymn of Wesley's, Jesus, Lover of my soul, than to have the fame of all the kings that ever sat on earth. It is more glorious, it has more power in it. I would rather be the author of that hymn than to hold the wealth of the richest man in New York. It will go on singing until the trump brings forth the angel band; and then I think it will mount up on some lip to the very presence of God."

"I'm Going to See the Saviour"

I knew her very, very well; I had reason for this, for mine was the privilege of leading her to Christ. She had been a great sinner, and although she never referred to her past, the shadows which periodically crossed her face suggested she could not altogether forget what had taken place. She had frequented the indecent parts of her town; she had more or less lived on the proceeds of immorality. And then she met the Saviour. I cannot recall how she first came to my services: I only know that a crusade was being held in her town, and that one night this pale young woman entered the building, found a seat, and listened attentively to my story of Jesus. She was undoubtedly troubled. Responding to the challenge, she asked the Lord for forgiveness, and from that moment demonstrated the reality of her conversion. She did not live very long, but when the end drew near some of her Christian friends endeavored to encourage her to get well. Radiance illumined her face when she said, " But I don't want to get well. I'm going to see the Saviour, and that is all I want." Very soon her desire was granted. She left a fragrance behind; and although the years are swiftly passing, its beauty never seems to diminish. The day of judgment held no terror for her; her sins no longer tormented her conscience. She had found refuge in the Lord Jesus; within His arms she had found sanctuary.

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