

## What Manner of Persons Ought You to Be?

By Arch Chater

We live in a world that is becoming increasingly volatile and unstable and I quote an extract from the American Scientific Journal, Science August 2005:

*“The devastating Sumatran earthquake and tsunami, the largest modern natural disaster in terms of people and area affected is just one grim reminder that societies are facing increasing diverse and costly natural and human triggered threats. Many trends are exacerbating the risks.”*

We find there are those with little or no Scriptural knowledge of end time events who are noticing and are alarmed at what is happening in the world and cannot explain it. When Sister White, prophet of the Lord to the church wrote under divine guidance, the book Prophets and Kings, she wrote with divine insight and I quote from page 277.

*“How frequently we hear of earthquakes and tornadoes, of destruction by fire and flood, with great loss of life and property! Apparently these calamities are capricious outbreaks of disorganized, unregulated forces of nature, wholly beyond the control of man; but in them all, God's purpose may be read. They are among the agencies by which He seeks to arouse men and women to a sense of their danger.*

We of all people should know and understand what these signs mean.

Luke 21:28

“And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.”

For a long time, God has had four mighty angels holding back Satan's desire to spread desolation and disaster world-wide. These unceasing and escalating disasters we are seeing on our TV screens, are solemn warnings for us to prepare for the judgment is near. We would do well to heed the questioning concern, raised by the apostle Peter long ago. Peter, after writing to the believers of his time, to all the churches in Asia Minor, having elucidated to them, made known to them, the end time events in what was to befall this world and the ungodly, he concluded by saying to them, “What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?” 2 Peter 3:10-12.

In view of the certainty that every evidence of sin is to be destroyed, it behoves all who know of the impending day when the present world will be dissolved into a holocaust of fire, it behoves all of us to separate every sin from our thoughts and from our lives. Peter's questioning concern applies equally and more so to every human being alive today. The peoples of the world are facing the world's final crisis and there is widespread consternation around the earth about the future.

Today the signs of the times declare that we are standing on the threshold of great and solemn events. Everything in our world is in agitation and turmoil. Before our eyes the Saviour's prophecy is being fulfilled, events that are to precede His coming.

Matthew 24: 6, 7

“And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. (7) For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.”

There are those who would say we have experienced these things in the past. Today we see these events happening in rapid succession, with increased violence and increased intensity and ferocity – an escalation as never before. The Christian would have to be blind not to understand the implications and the outcomes involved with the dramatic increase in the woes besetting the world. Even the thinking worldlying who has no Scriptural knowledge, questions the way in which the world is heading. Calamities by the air, land, sea; fires, floods – devastation in all forms and the outbreak of terrible diseases such as AIDS, Ebola, foot and mouth, mad cow, bird flu – such diseases are multiplying and spreading and are daily fare for news commentators of the world. The peoples of the world are becoming desensitised to the depths of degeneration, the evils and the wrongs that are committed. The state of this world and its people will cause God's restraining hand to be eventually withdrawn from the four angels holding back the four winds of trouble and strife such as never was (Rev 7:1).

No amount of reasoning or explanation given by others for these current day events, should convince the alert Christian, the student of God's word, of anything else but that these happenings are signs of the end times and that prophecy is being fulfilled before our eyes and the kingdom of God is nigh at hand (Luke 21:31).

In consideration of all these things the apostle Peter's questioning concern should ring out loud and clear to each one of us. “What manner of persons ought ye?” 2 Peter 3:10-12.

Time is almost finished. Do you, do I reflect the lovely image of Jesus as we should?

Quoting from Early Writings p 119.

*“I saw that the remnant were not prepared for what is coming upon the earth. Stupidity, like lethargy, seemed to hang upon the minds of most of those who profess to believe that we are having the last message. My accompanying angel cried out with awful solemnity, “Get ready! get ready! get ready! for the fierce anger of the Lord is soon to come. His wrath is to be poured out, unmixed with mercy, and ye are not ready.”*

What solemn and cutting remarks made about the remnant of God's people. It is talking about many or some of us? And what is God's answer for this malady? The remedy is well known to us.

Revelation 3:18

*“I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, 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.”*

What is this counsel telling us? Christ is saying to each one, “I am the merchant-man. Buy of me, these things that you may have purity of character, being clothed with the garment of my righteousness. Our obedience to God's commandments has been made possible by Jesus obedience to His Father's commandments. His character imparted to all who will heed the counsel of the merchant-man Jesus Christ as He calls “Buy of me my wares.” And the cost – submitting oneself, willingly and thankfully to the refining and purifying process of the Lord in our lives in that He may remove the dross and bring forth the gold in our characters; the gold being faith and love.

The faith that Jesus exhibited was unshakeable trust in the loving character of His Father. This faith empowered Jesus to overcome all temptation and we need to develop this faith also.

This is Lord's desire for each one of us, and it might require the fires of affliction to bring it about. God has always permitted His people to be tried in the furnace of affliction, through trials and sore conflicts that the character of Jesus may be revealed in the life.

Remember the experience of Job. Job eventually realised that the Lord was allowing him to be tested, when he said in Job 23:10, “When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”

Are we preparing ourselves? How many may find the coming of the Lord as a thief in the night, their lamps low on oil, found without a wedding garment? God is very concerned for His people. He always been so. So concerned He delays His coming. He says, “I have no joy in the death of the wicked” and “I am long-suffering and not willing that any should perish” (Ezek 33:11, 2 Peter 3:9). But there is a limit to God's long-suffering and the close of probation for man is fast approaching.

A situation existed some hundreds of years before the birth of Christ that has all the ear-marks of the present situation today. A situation that embodies within it a lesson for each one of us. A lesson which demonstrates how God's people refused to accept His warnings for them and the disastrous results that followed.

The law of cause and effect has not changed and the cause in those days, the turning away from God, the compromising of His commandments and the desecration of His Sabbath day, brought about the removal of His blessings from His people with the inevitable result of penalties and retributions. God's plan to bring salvation and happiness to His people has not changed, and always embodied in His plans is the keeping of His commandments – not legalistically so, but motivated by love for Him.

We have many examples in Scripture, depicting the result of disobedience to God and His law and the stories invariably involve disaster, annihilation and what greater example do we have than the flood – the consequence of the rejection of the spirit of God. And does not the world again face disaster and annihilation for all those who chose to ignore His plea and His gift of salvation and who chose to violate His law and desecrate His holy Sabbath.

Let us revisit Jerusalem some hundreds of years before the birth of Christ and review the outcome of a people who departed from God, disobeyed Him, compromised His commandments. These people were professed followers of God and His law. There is a lesson here from us.

*“Christ saw in Jerusalem a symbol of the world hardened in unbelief and rebellion, and hastening on to meet the retributive judgments of God..... The great sin of the Jews was their rejection of Christ; the great sin of the Christian world would be their rejection of the law of God, the foundation of His government in heaven and earth.”* Great Controversy, p 22

Let us visualise Jerusalem many years before the birth of Christ and visit the building of Solomon's temple. King David had amassed a tremendous amount of gold that Solomon his son used in the building of the temple. We note on approaching that the building is well under construction and we see the beauty of the Most Holy Place and note that the whole interior is overlaid with gold (1 Kings 6:20-22). What a marvellous spectacle the temple must have been. In the Most Holy Place of the temple, two beautifully carved cherubim of great size, with outstretched wings, lean over the position where the Ark of the Covenant will rest. A tremendous object lesson was to be mirrored here in that magnificent building. The temple was an emblem, a type of the temple of God, the heavenly sanctuary where our Lord now dwells between the cherubim where mercy, righteousness and judgement meet and is the dwelling place of His throne.

God gave the pattern for the earthly temple (1 Chronicles 28:19) and God's presence was to be manifested in the earthly temple in the form of a cloud hovering over the Ark of the Covenant, the sacred chest containing the law for His people. And as long as His people were loyal to Him, His presence was manifested there. He was their protection, their haven, their defence and scripture tells us, He would set them on high above all nations of the earth (Deuteronomy 28:1).

We look around Jerusalem itself and see other great natural defences in the form of rising hills, great deep valleys and surrounding the city, great walls – all symbols of God guardian care, and as long as God's people were loyal and true to Him, He was their protection. Today, many people are inclined to place too much importance on the walls they build around themselves.

The earthly things with which we surround ourselves, for our security and protection, those walls are not wrong in themselves, but our attitudes to these walls; our attitudes to our homes, our possessions, our money, our authority, our status in society and the importance we place on them and the manner we conduct ourselves as followers of Jesus Christ, can sometimes come under serious question.

Do we hide ourselves within these walls and risk being led on a pathway of selfishness, self-gratification, greed, self-righteousness and presumption being attached to the things of the world? Our life, our salvation should rest in the Master's hands – not in the great walls that we can build around ourselves here on earth. There is nothing we can do that has not been done for our salvation. Nothing we can do that will add or take away from what the Lord has done for us. We have nothing to offer but ourselves and that with sinful hearts. Our alliance should be to Him. Our submission should be to Him. Our dependence should be on Him and our salvation by and through Him. Should we fear anything at all as we give ourselves wholly to Him? If we harbour any fears or doubts for our salvation, then surely it is sin that erodes at our faith.

Anything that is not of faith is sin. Doubt is the opposite of faith. It denotes a lack of faith in the completely loving character of the Father and His ability to save sinners. When the goodness of God's character is questioned, doubt is cultured and faith is destroyed. Sin is nurtured and will reign.

The sin of doubt expressed in the life may be as a result of some unconfessed sin or sins unrepented of, some lingering sinful desires that we might cherish or cling to or indulge in. These will surely undermine what remains of our faith and leave us justifiably more doubtful of God's love and His ability to save us.

Let us return to Solomon's temple. God manifested Himself in that beautiful temple and are not our bodies the living temple of God also? “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Cor 3:16)

Will not the Holy Spirit reside in each believing, repenting, confessing Christian today? Will not the Holy Spirit support, strengthen and fight the battle of sin in each one today if each will but ally themselves with Jesus and chose to be loyal to Him? The answer is “yes” on all accounts. Which is the stronger force in the life of the Christian? The force of sin or the power of grace?

Paul said, "Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: (21) That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 5:20, 21). In the place where sin abounded, God's grace much more abounded. Through God's love and grace, ample provision has been made to meet all the dire results of man's apostasy.

When sin reigns in the life, it reigns against grace, it beats back the power of grace.

Wasn't Paul continually kicking against the pricks prior to his conversion. Jesus said to Paul, "Why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9:4,5). Paul's conscience had been resisting the appeals of the Holy Spirit until Paul eventually submitted and allowed grace to reign supreme in his life.

Salvation for God's people depends on their submission and their loyalty to Jesus Christ. Let us again return to Solomon. Were God's people loyal in Solomon's day? Was Solomon loyal? Did Solomon remain loyal? Did the people continue to follow God's way for them? Yes, Solomon was initially loyal. Solomon prayed for wisdom and knowledge and because he was humble, the Lord not only blessed him with a wise and understanding heart, but God gave him riches, honour, and a long life also (1 Kings 31: 9-12).

In Solomon's day, the country with its beautiful capital seemed destined to lead the world. The temple was completed and dedicated and Solomon in a dream was given a blessed assurance (1 Kings 9:4-7).

*1 Kings 9:6*

*"But if ye shall at all turn from following me, ye or your children, and will not keep my commandments and my statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods, and worship them: (7) Then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them; and this house, which I have hallowed for my name, will I cast out of my sight; and Israel shall be a proverb and a byword among all people."*

***I will cut off Israel out of the land.***

Do not we form part of spiritual Israel today? Do not these same words equally apply and bear the same solemn warning, to God's people today also? God is holy and sin cannot abide in His presence and when men continually sin, deliberately sin, they cut themselves off from God, His blessings and from life.

God is merciful. God is gracious to the repentant sinner, but He cannot afford to weaken His government by failing to uphold its righteousness and justice. The attributes of God's mercy always precedes the attributes of His justice.

Repeatedly through the prophets, the Lord warned Israel of the tragic consequences of transgression and the warning stands bold for those of spiritual Israel today; for you, for me and for those who would defiantly follow the same pathway, ignoring God's way for them, substituting traditions and compromise in place of His law. Any of God's laws that are compromised are not kept.

Solomon, who was so richly blessed, forsook his loyalty to God. Had he remained loyal, what an object lesson of divine blessing it would have been for mankind, nevertheless, his disloyalty to God, in itself remains an object lesson; a lesson for any who treat with gay abandon, the Lord's divine request to walk before him with integrity of heart.

We cannot afford to compromise the commandments of God. We do so at our peril. The object lesson, left to us by Solomon, instead of being one of divine blessing, is one of the results of departure from right principles.

Solomon decided his way was better than God's way. He would compromise God's law as many do today. He began by marrying heathen women. God had forbidden such alliances (Exodus 34:14, 16; Deut 17:17). Solomon fooled himself into believing that he would convert some of these attractive pagan women and bring prestige to his court.

What a vain hope, as many a Christian could testify to, from bitter experience. That these unions seldom work.

2 Corinthians 6:14

*“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?”*

Solomon didn't convert them; they led him away and into idolatry. Solomon even built pagan shrines close to the city of God. How careful we need to be in all things, to obey God's commandments and instructions to the letter – without deviation or compromise or following tradition. Standards that are allowed to slip and become compromised, causes a falling away, gradually at first, then the gap widens. It is not unlike a cancerous growth, insidious in its work, working within, eating away at the vitals until the whole is poisoned and the victim is unaware until it is too late. So it is always with sin in the life.

Solomon's life of paganism and compromise led him to be indifferent, uncaring to the needs of his people and their rights, their welfare. The needs of others became secondary in his growing love of luxury and the things of the world. He treated his people harshly, taxing his people harder and harder. He became self-centred, self-assured and widened the gap between himself and his God.

Is this not in evidence today as many choose a life of self-centredness and follow the enticements and allurements and sinful practices the world offers purely for self-gratification, succumbing to the carnal desires of the heart. Is there not a lesson here for all?

I quote from 4 Testimonies p 88

“Fearful is the power of self-deception on the human mind!.... To be without the graces of the Spirit of God is sad indeed; but it is a more terrible condition to be thus destitute of spirituality and of Christ, and yet try to justify ourselves...”

Too often we rationalise our behaviour and devise explanations for our acts. It is presumptuous to believe that such behaviour is acceptable to God.

Those who consider they are keeping the commandments of God but who deliberately compromise any of the commandments, are deceiving themselves. Are any of us greater or wiser than Solomon was? And yet Solomon in all his wisdom and knowledge departed from God. Does the object lesson left us by Solomon tell us more? Was there further degeneration caused as a result of his ways? Yes there was. Solomon's character traits and disposition were passed onto his son as his result of his departure from God. As soon as Solomon died, Rehoboam his son, took power and set about to increase the burden on the people. Question. Had Solomon set a good example for his son? I think not. What were the words of Rehoboam and why was he like this?

1 Kings 12:11

*“And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.”*

Rehoboam's behaviour became worse than his father's. His father was his example. Rehoboam had been surrounded by evil influences from his infancy; the result of Solomon's union with idolatrous women and pagan practices. Does this not tell us something? How careful we need to be in all life's choices and decisions and instructions and examples to our children, that we do so in accordance with God's will and His law. Noble characters are not the result of accidents.

Ministry of Healing, p 131

“The children will be what their parents make them. If parents could be led to trace the result of their action, and could see how, by their example and teaching, they perpetuate and increase the power of sin or the power of righteousness, a change would certainly be made.”

Returning to Jerusalem we find that because of the conditions prevailing, the people had had enough. The tribes revolted and separated into two kingdoms. Israel formed itself to the North and Judah to the South. Israel the northern kingdom became noted for its idolatry worshipping the sun, moon and stars, sacrificing children. They left the commandments of God far behind.

They rejected God's messengers and God's way for them.. Satan will use every means to cause each one to compromise their standing with God to cause them to separate themselves and through the compromise of His commandments, be deceived into believing that their compromised position is acceptable to Him. What presumption!

5 Testimonies for the Church, p 175

*“To spare any sin is to cherish a foe that only awaits an unguarded moment to cause our ruin.”*

And what of the people of Judah of the southern kingdom? They refused the continual pleadings of God through Jeremiah and were also to suffer judgements that had befallen the Northern kingdom, Israel, years before. They also had forsaken God's way. They were little better than the northern kingdom. Idolatry, Sabbath breaking, pagan practices, compromising God's commandments, had become more prevalent and the day of reckoning was near at hand just as the day of reckoning is fast approaching for this world of ours today for similar reasons.

These people had obviously reasoned that there was little harm in breaking the first 4 commandments of God. Would it hurt, they considered, if there was an altar or two erected to the sun god Baal. Let us not compromise our Christian lives with the erection of any worldly images or idols and there are too many of them to enumerate. Worldly images that command our money, our time, our attention, our reading, our viewing, our listening and lead us away from God and misshape our characters to our eternal loss.

Jerusalem presented a sorry plight in those days, Sabbath-breaking, departure from right principles, sun and idol worship prevailed. They worshipped the planets, but they forgot who was responsible for their origin – witchcraft, stealing, murder, adultery, idolatry, spiritualism, coveting.

Do these sound like sinful practices that only pertained to those days hundreds of years before Christ? I think not. Will God continue to protect individuals and countries of peoples who willingly disregard His commandments and set His laws at naught? Certainly not and this applies equally today. Storm clouds are gathering and we would have to be blind not to see them and take stock of our lives, just as storm clouds hung over Jerusalem in those days when their cup of iniquity was full to overflowing and its destruction was imminent. So it will be again.

The armies of Nebuchadnezzar were on the move – ambitious to conquer all the known world and what could the people, Jerusalem do, to stem the onslaught that was impending? What can God's people's do today to prepare themselves for the trouble that will befall this world? Does not God always provide a way of escape?

As the people moved in and out of Jerusalem a voice was heard ringing out loud and clear. It was the voice of the prophet Jeremiah, whom the Lord had commanded to place himself at the gates of the city and warn the people not to break the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment by conducting business on the Sabbath day (Jer 17:19-22).

Visualise the setting. Merchant-men coming and going, scoffing at this man Jeremiah, saying , “I have business matters to attend to this day, buyers to see, sales to place. I'll lose contacts if I don't attend to them today.” And maybe his assistant adding, “I'll lose my job if I don't work today. Anyhow, it is no different from any other day.”

Do you think God would have worked miracles in Jerusalem had everyone heeded the warnings of Jeremiah, honouring and keeping the Sabbath day and observing God's laws? God's word said He would have (Jer 17:25). The city would have remained forever. God knew and Jeremiah knew that if the people of Jerusalem had begun to follow God's way for them, from the heart, honouring His Sabbath faithfully, then the other sinful practices would cease also. Wouldn't that hold also today? How well do we observe the Sabbath? God would have saved Jerusalem from Nebuchadnezzar. It is no different today. God has a way out for His people, but there is a divine warning for these last days also. The warning voice of the first angel who is:

*“Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.’ Revelation 14:7.*

Friends, salvation is available for all who choose to follow God's way. Compromising of God's commandments is the middle of the road and is Satan's ground. Turning away from God, ignoring or compromising His Sabbath day, these things we know will eventually bring destruction upon the earth to those who refuse God's way, just as it did for Jerusalem. And who shall stand?

Revelation 14:12

*“Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.”*

Faith IN Jesus Christ and the faith OF Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2:5

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:”

What course did the people of those days choose? They listened at the city gates to Jeremiah and refused the counsel given through the prophet, or they procrastinated and put off any action for a more convenient time. Fatal was the delay and fatal is the delay today. We live in the last days where there is little time for procrastination; little time for those who would decide to wait for a better time, a later time, a more convenient time, to accept God's plea to turn to Him and obey His commandments, uncompromised and remember and honour His Sabbath day. Too often man looks upon the history of Israel with God's blessings and His pleas and His retributions from a corporate viewpoint, when man's salvation is singular. The choice is singular. God deals with each one of us individually. It is faithfulness formed between each one and God on a one-to-one basis that should ever be before us. No-one has salvation through the merits of another, except through the merits of the man Jesus Christ and the life of our Saviour lived out in each one and there is no such thing as "once saved, always saved." It's a fallacy. It's a lie.

And what of Jerusalem? As the sinfulness of the people increased, the storm that loomed over the city closed in with ominous and deadly threatenings. Nebuchadnezzar had his army besiege the city and onslaught after onslaught was thrown against the city until the city fell amid massive destruction and massive slaughter. Everything was demolished and burnt. The holy city, the holy temple of Solomon's time was gone and why? Because they cast aside and desecrated His holy Sabbath day. Jer 17:27 confirms this statement. After prolonged entreaties, pleas, promises and warnings, God's long-suffering with these people came to an end and with it, so did Jerusalem and the disobedient, as God foretold.

Looking down in time to our day, what did Christ see? And I quote once again, Great Controversy p 22. *"Christ saw in Jerusalem a symbol of the world hardened in unbelief and rebellion, and hastening on to meet the retributive judgments of God."*

In the fate of the chosen city, we may behold the doom of a people who have rejected God's mercy and trampled upon His law. And when God's retribution falls on the world, what of God's people? Who will be delivered?

God's people, His elect, whose names remain in the book of life, will be delivered every one. Friends, it is only those who are overcomers, it is only those names will remain in the book of life, for Jesus said in Rev 3:5 "He that overcometh, I will not blot out his name out of the book of life." Overcomers: those who continue to overcome sin in their lives through Christ living in their lives.

Colossians 1:27

"Christ in you the hope of glory."

It is indicative friends, that one's name can be blotted out of the book of life, for "blessed are they that do His commandments, that they might have right to the tree of life" (Revelation 22:14).

But friends we can all be overcomers and the type of person Jesus would have us be, for He has promised that "He is able to save them to the uttermost, all that come to God, by Him, for He ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25) It rests in each one's hands. Choose this day whom ye will serve.

Serving God, is not equivalent to performing good works. True obedience which results in good works, is an automatic response, motivated by love as the beautiful character of Jesus is comprehended. All works which are motivated by fear or selfishness or performed without a loving motive, are meaningless and worthless.

1 Cor 13: 1-3.

"And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing."

Christ has declared that He will come to gather His elect from the four winds, the extremities of the earth (Matt 24:30, 31). Before Christ returns and His elect are gathered, there are to be troublous and momentous times ahead for God's people. These times are fast approaching and are near, very near and for all those who plan to be among those faithful ones, eagerly awaiting the return of their Saviour Jesus Christ, Peter's questioning concern must ring out loud and clear, "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy manner of conversation and godliness?"

"Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (2 Peter 3:14)

May each one, each day, place their hand in the hand of our Lord and take heart and hold fast for He will not let go, for it is that hand that was nailed to the cross for you and for me.