

A Brand Plucked Out of the Fire

By John Thiel, [mp3](#)

Scripture Reading: Zechariah 3:1 And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. 2 And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: [is] not this a brand plucked out of the fire?

A brand plucked out of the fire – what sort of a picture comes up in your mind when you appreciate the depth of such a situation? We observe here that there is danger from which God’s people are snatched. There are some other scriptures which give us a little understanding of this.

Amos 3:12 Thus saith the LORD; As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear; so shall the children of Israel be taken out that dwell in Samaria in the corner of a bed, and in Damascus [in] a couch.

A brand plucked out of a fire, or pieces of a sheep that is already half-devoured being plucked out of the mouth of the lion. Israel taken out of Samaria – Israel taken out of the corrupt Israel, Samaria, and Damascus, which is the world.

1 Peter 4:17 For the time [is come] that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if [it] first [begin] at us, what shall the end [be] of them that obey not the gospel of God? 18 And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

A brand plucked out of a fire, pieces of a sheep taken out of the lion’s mouth, the righteous scarcely being saved. These are expressions to help us understand where we are situated in our time.

The assaults of Satan are strong, his delusions are terrible; but the Lord's eye is upon His people. Their affliction is great, the flames of the furnace seem about to consume them; {5T 474.3}

This is the description of the time in which God’s people will be severely tested, and we are finding this to be our time. There is a strong suggestion here. Does it not appear that this is a time in which destruction is already taking its course? Already the flames of fire, of final destruction, are taking place, and God is at work to pluck His people out of this destructive experience. That is exactly what the scripture of Zechariah 3 is talking about – Joshua and the Angel.

Zechariah's vision of Joshua and the Angel applies with peculiar force to the experience of God's people in the closing up of the great day of atonement. {5T 472.2}

What are we reading about? We are reading that the brand being plucked out of the fire *applies with peculiar force to the experience of God's people in the closing up of the great day of atonement*. The day of atonement started in the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary in 1844. Are we now in the closing up of the great day of atonement? Obviously. It is so imminent. Long has the day of atonement been extended to our situation. What is the condition of humanity at the closing up of this great day of atonement, when Jesus finishes His work, and is about to come back to take up His people? What does Jesus say is the condition of humanity, and especially of Christianity, at this time?

Luke 18:7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?

They cry day and night to God in this period.

Luke 18:8 I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

What is this suggesting? Will He find many people doing this? This is suggesting the blasé attitude of humanity at this period of time. In that attitude there are all sorts of descriptions for this period of time. Isaiah gives us one of them:

Isaiah 60:2 For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.

What shall cover the earth? Gross darkness! Jesus explained what darkness is. He says, When people think they have the light, but it's darkness, how great is that darkness. As people are living in this time of earth's history when knowledge is increased, so much light is shining, but it's all being twisted – it's darkness, gross darkness. This is the condition of the time we are looking at.

This is the description of that time:

Isaiah 59:14 And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. 15 Yea, truth faileth; and he [that] departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: and the LORD saw [it], and it displeased him that [there was] no judgment.

Truth faileth – and anyone who departs from evil, who wants to depart and uphold truth, makes himself a prey. You are someone who is going to be attacked in such a time.

Isaiah 59:12 For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions [are] with us; and [as for] our iniquities, we know them;

Our iniquities, do we not know them? Our weaknesses and our shortfalls – we have dishonoured the Lord in these last days more than at any other time, because so many people have been affected by the time in which we are living. You will become a prey; at the hand of whom? Who will attack God's people, those who would stand 100% for the truth?

Isaiah 66:5 Hear the word of the LORD, ye that tremble at his word; Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the LORD be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed.

If we will be faithful, the brethren will make us a prey. If these people want to stand up for truth under all circumstances, they will become a prey, they will be attacked. This time is further spoken of in Amos:

Amos 5:12 For I know your manifold transgressions, and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate [from their right]. 13 Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it [is] an evil time.

It is an evil time, the time in which there is little faith left, a time in which those who would stand firm for the pure truth will be a prey, a time in which everyone knows what their sins are, but they are in a state of mind which makes them think, It doesn't matter. As we read, *our iniquities, we know them*. It is a time when sin has been made prominent. This is the picture – the whole world in darkness, the whole world in injustice, both in religious and irreligious circles. And among the religious there is also sin.

Two Classes

One class is written of Revelation 3:17. What are these Christians identified by?

Revelation 3:17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

This is one class of religious people. They are so full of themselves they don't even know they are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. They are God's professed people. This is one class – a class of professors of religion who do not know their wicked condition.

On the other side, the other company is described in verse 20. Jesus says:

Revelation 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

So you have two classes of Christians waiting for Jesus to come, in the period of Laodicea, the hour of God's judgment. One class is saying, "Oh, let the Lord be glorified! These people are terrible over there; we are alright." Jesus says to them, You know not how wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked you are. This is the picture of Matthew 24 – the wise servant and the evil servant. One is smiting the other. And these people that are being smitten are themselves sinful, because Jesus is standing outside the heart wanting to come in. If they will open the heart's door, Jesus will come in to them.

Let us again observe the first class, those who do not know that they are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. They have come in their past history out of the false churches. The Laodicean people have come out of the false churches of Sardis. It is expressed here:

Amos 4:11 I have overthrown [some] of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning:

Here is another term of a brand plucked out of the fire. They themselves had come out of that fire, and into the pure truth – the Laodicean people. This class says, Now we've been redeemed, we are fine. But what does God say?

Amos 4:11 ...ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

This is a certain class of Laodicean Christians who have been plucked out, but they have not continued with the Lord.

Amos 4:12 Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: [and] because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.

He is speaking to people who have been plucked out but have not continued with the Lord. "I am outside the door," says Jesus. "I am going to come; are you ready? Prepare to meet thy God. Where is the faith?" Can you see? This is the time that this is all talking about.

The second class, who have also been plucked out of the fire, are fully aware of their position. The first class has been plucked out, but they are not aware. But the other class, they have been plucked out, and notice God's response to these people who are aware of their condition and are trembling at God's word. This is how God regards these people:

Isaiah 66:2 For all those [things] hath mine hand made, and all those [things] have been, saith the LORD: but to this [man] will I look,

Who? Who will God look to, in this time?

Isaiah 66:2 ...[even] to [him that is] poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.

You read God's word, and you can hear what God is saying, and you tremble; why? Because you are aware of how far short of the mark you are. Here are a people, like Joshua in the book of Zechariah, who are dressed in filthy garments, and they are trembling at God's word; whereas the others are not. The others are spoken of here:

Isaiah 66:5 ...Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the LORD be glorified:

These people are saying, "Praise the Lord! these are no longer with us. They are sinners, look at them." And while they are saying, They are sinners; they themselves are sinners. They have been plucked out, but they have not walked with the Lord.

Joshua and the Angel

This is when we now let the Spirit of Prophecy unfold to us the realities of Joshua and the Angel in this period of time. What is described about these people who are to be as a brand plucked out of the fire?

The people of God have been in many respects very faulty. Satan has an accurate knowledge of the sins which he has tempted them to commit, and he presents these in the most exaggerated light, declaring: "Will God banish me and my angels from His presence, and yet reward those who have been guilty of the same sins? Thou canst not do this, O Lord, in justice. Thy throne will not stand in righteousness and judgment. Justice demands that sentence be pronounced against them." {5T 474.1}

Here they are. Here are these people that tremble at God's word. Satan has an accurate knowledge of their sins, and they have been in many respects very faulty. But notice now a very important point. While they are faulty, like everyone else is,

But while the followers of Christ have sinned, they have not given themselves to the control of evil. {5T 474.2}

What is the difference here? All are sinners, all have sinned against God, whether they be the Laodiceans who think they haven't, or those whose heart's door Jesus is standing at and who tremble. But there is a difference. One group do not acknowledge and do not tremble – these people have given themselves over to their ways of living, and have never truly repented. "*But while the followers of Christ have sinned, they have not given themselves to the control of evil.*" This company, on the other hand, while they are sinners, do not give themselves over to that.

They have put away their sins, and have sought the Lord in humility and contrition, and the divine Advocate pleads in their behalf. {Ibid.}

Notice what this divine Advocate is suffering:

He who has been most abused by their ingratitude, who knows their sin, and also their repentance, declares: "'The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan.' I gave My life for these souls. They are graven upon the palms of My hands." {Ibid.}

Our sins have really been abusive to our Lord and Saviour. And as we see what we have done to our Lord and Saviour, we feel absolutely broken. There is a contrite spirit there. There is a spirit that sees that, I am not good enough! How can God love me?? There is a contrition which says, I don't want to continue down this path! I want to change. I want the Lord to purify me. I do not give myself over to this wrong. That is what it says, *They have not given themselves to the control of evil.*

...the anguish and humiliation of God's people is unmistakable evidence that they are regaining the strength and nobility of character lost in consequence of sin. {5T 474.4}

Because they are contrite, because they feel like this, it is an evidence *that they are regaining the strength and nobility of character* that they have lost.

It is because they are drawing nearer to Christ, and their eyes are fixed upon His perfect purity, that they so clearly discern the exceeding sinfulness of sin. {Ibid.}

Why do these people feel so bad because of the evil of their sin? It is because they are letting Jesus shine into their heart. That's why. He stands at the door and knocks; and He comes in, and they feel absolutely sinful. "*It is because they are drawing nearer to Christ, and their eyes are fixed upon His perfect purity, that they so clearly discern the exceeding sinfulness of sin.*" As Jesus comes into your life, what do you think is revealed in there? The heart with all its impurity.

Their contrition and self-abasement are infinitely more acceptable in the sight of God than is the self-sufficient, haughty spirit of those who see no cause to lament, who scorn the humility of Christ, and who claim perfection while transgressing God's holy law. {Ibid.}

Have you heard the doctrines of the churches around us? "You'll never be perfect. You'll never be sinless. Just believe in Jesus, you are perfect because of Him." Claiming perfection, while they transgress God's holy law. They are Laodicean; they see nothing about their true condition.

Meekness and lowliness of heart are the conditions for strength and victory. The crown of glory awaits those who bow at the foot of the cross. Blessed are these mourners, for they shall be comforted. {Ibid.}

Are you mourning? Are you despairing about your condition? Are you sure that you can see that you are just not right, and that you're not perfect? And you wonder why God would even spend His time for you? This is what God honours. He remembers that we are but dust. He knows our human frailty. And we come in our human frailty before Him, and we tremble at His word, and we cry for mercy. What will God do? He accepts that. He honours that. In meekness and lowliness of heart, there is strength and victory from Him. This is the path.

"The Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan, even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" {COL 169.1}

Can you see what the fire is? We are doomed by the fire of destruction because of our sins. But we are being plucked out of them.

When Satan seeks to cover the people of God with blackness, and ruin them, Christ interposes. Although they have sinned, Christ has taken the guilt of their sins upon His own soul. He has snatched the race as a brand from the fire. By His human nature He is linked with man, while through His divine nature He is one with the infinite God. {Ibid.}

Here is the atonement again.

Help is brought within the reach of perishing souls. The adversary is rebuked. {Ibid.}

The accuser of the brethren is rebuked. He accuses them justly, doesn't he? They have sinned indeed. "Look at them, they're no better than me," he says. "You've cut me out of heaven, why don't you cut them out of heaven?" Why not? Because these people have been crying to the Lord. They have sinned, and they have believed in the atonement of Jesus as it really is. And they make a connection with Jesus in this atonement until He purchases them so fully that they become a brand plucked out of the fire. They have truly confessed their sins.

The Angel's Words

What are the words as the Lord is showing to them their condition and they are trembling at His word?

Zechariah 3:3 Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. 4 And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him.

They're all dressed in filthy garments. But now Jesus says, *Take away the filthy garments from him.*

Zechariah 3:4 ...And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. 5 And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD stood by.

These are the words. These people are trembling, standing in filthy garments, with no goodness in them, but crying to God – and He says, *Take away the filthy garments... I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee.* What does it mean?

You who feel the most unworthy, fear not to commit your case to God. {COL 174.2}

Don't be afraid to tell Him about it. "Lord, here is unworthy condition."

When He gave Himself in Christ for the sin of the world, He undertook the case of every soul. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Romans 8:32. Will He not fulfill the gracious word given for our encouragement and strength? {Ibid.}

So here we are. We feel the most unworthy... and we are called upon to trust in God. And what will He do? He will cause our iniquity to pass from us.

Christ desires nothing so much as to redeem His heritage from the dominion of Satan. {COL 174.3}

What is His desire? He desires nothing so much as to redeem these people.

But before we are delivered from Satan's power without, we must be delivered from his power within. {Ibid.}

Now notice what happens. How does He cause the sin to be removed?

The Lord permits trials in order that we may be cleansed from earthliness, from selfishness, from harsh, unchristlike traits of character. {Ibid.}

Can you see why He says, I will *cause* your iniquity to pass from you? What will He do? He will *cause*, He will permit trials to do some work with us, to remove earthliness, selfishness, harsh, unchristlike traits of character. Trials will do that. They will pummel us, until we become soft.

He suffers the deep waters of affliction to go over our souls in order that we may know Him and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, in order that we may have deep heart longings to be cleansed from defilement, and may come forth from the trial purer, holier, happier. {Ibid.}

These words are profound! Don't just read them and let them flow over your head. It says, *He suffers the deep waters of affliction to go over our souls in order that we may know Him*. How can you know Him if you don't see yourself as you really are? So He permits these waters of affliction to show us what we are like, so that we will know Him as our Saviour, by experience. He will *cause* our iniquity to be removed.

Often we enter the furnace of trial with our souls darkened with selfishness; {Ibid.}

We don't even know how selfish we often are.

...but if patient under the crucial test, we shall come forth reflecting the divine character. When His purpose in the affliction is accomplished, "He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday." Psalm 37:6. {Ibid.}

This is what it means for God to take away the filthy garments and place the righteousness of Christ, the pure garment, upon us. To "cause our iniquity to pass from us" is to take us through the path which God's people experience in these last days. People are trembling at His word, they see their character defects; and as the trials and tribulations pour upon them, they are discovering the things that they will let go. They will discover that the sin itself is not as serious as their condition. Sins are committed, but those sins that are committed come from another source – it comes from selfishness, from earthliness, harshness, unchristlike traits of character; they are the ones giving us the trouble.

The fire will not consume us, but only remove the dross, and we shall come forth seven times purified, bearing the impress of the Divine. {ML 92.3}

The fire from which we are plucked, is the fire of purification. As the fire is permitted to take its course, it is only to consume the dross, not to consume them. They are plucked out when they are purified. But while they are still in there, the purification takes place. There are many different facets of God's word that illuminate our experience. And in this time, in this evil time, God is using this time to purify His people who tremble at His word.

Let us go to and embrace this last message of hope in this last hour of opportunity, that we will not despair with the things that we are going through. But this is the message that the Lord is imparting to us – Joshua and the Angel – this is our experience. Take courage, the Lord will take us through, and we thank Him so much for it.

Amen.

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