

The Elect

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*For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—
if that were possible. Mt 24:24 NIV*

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...Pastor Fairchild, having moved from behind the dumpster, could only stand in the shadows, hiding physically and emotionally from what he knew was happening. Pressing his grieving, anguished face against his hand, which rested just shy of the corner of the building, he could only wait. Weak, afraid, and helpless to muster any courage earlier to assist the man, his spiritual condition was glaringly before him. With every sound of cracking bones, the thud of the pipe, or devilish cries of glee from the murderers who relished their task, the pain of his own weakness was almost more than he could bear.

What would his Jesus do? Would He stand in the shadows as another human was being beaten beyond recognition? Would He fear those who were committing the act, or would He hurt enough for the souls of those doing harm to risk His own life to intervene? Wouldn't Jesus have power enough to stop them, and bring them to Himself with His love?

"Ohhhh," the pastor stifled a deep-seated groan that stemmed from knowing once again that he had little power to affect the people around him or his surroundings, or even overcome his own fears. Deep down he knew that he didn't have even a hint of the kind of love that Jesus had for others. In reality, his life was a sham, no more than a spiritual dog and pony show, performed for the benefit of others.

As long as things were going well, he could play the part of the pastor, looking and sounding spiritual, caring, and responsible. Now that things had gotten exceedingly rough, he was being exposed for who he really was - a powerless, Christian coward, full of lofty ideals and intentions, but void of the real heart of the Lord in any situation. He was living on the standards and promises of how he thought things should be, how he had taught them as truth to his people in much better, safer times when every decision seemed to have a clear answer.

Now that so much had changed, his kind of Christianity was useless. He couldn't pray his way out of trouble, because trouble was everywhere at every turn. He couldn't use his faith in faith to feel secure, as there was no security other than in Jesus; and although the opportunity was presented over and over, that relationship was never nurtured to the point of becoming a real, intense, personal relationship.

In the past, Pastor Fairchild was too entrenched in his traditions and methodology to respond to the many calls to intimacy from the Lord. Now striving toward any form of intimacy seemed impossible. He knew that the Lord was there for him; but there were so many barriers and he'd embraced so many corrupted beliefs over the years, that he didn't even know how to approach Him.

Each day's events and its accompanying horrors were unfolding so fast, that taking the time to deepen a relationship, even with God, seemed far less important than mere survival. Because he continually pushed aside God's ways over the years, so that he could fulfill his own aspirations and please the people around him, he now personally owned a broken down version of the Christian faith.

Turning away from what was so horrible that it seemed almost surreal, and sliding down the wall into a seated position, the former pastor of so many people put his head between his knees and sobbed with abandon. Overcome by all that was happening around him, in combination with his own fears, weaknesses, and pending future, he doubled over on his side and assumed the fetal position, rocking back and forth in the filth of the alley, unconscious of the humiliation incurred by his actions. In former times, he would've distanced himself from anyone who lowered himself to his present state. He would've advised that person to pick himself up, take the bull by the horns, and find a way out of his unacceptable circumstances. He hated

weakness. He would've created some kind of church program, along with a new staff position, to deal with the problem and separate himself from such spiritual immaturity.

Holding his stomach as if experiencing labor pains, he groaned in agony and continued rocking, incapable of controlling the grief that was rising up from deep within. Not even the assailants, who were no more than a hundred feet away, were a concern any longer. Rivers of pain overpowered him as he wailed. Could he even go to Jesus for help, forgiveness, and healing? He had turned the Lord aside so many times before, would he be accepted now?

Finally, he was able to catch his breath and control himself. He sat against the building, wiping the tears from his eyes, and sniffing away the residue of his time of realization. Still looking at the alley floor, his hands clasped around his knees, he quietly began to confess his lack to his Lord over and over.

“Oh, Lord, I'm so frightened. I don't know what's happened, how to function, what to do. How did I miss Your plans? Why was I left behind? How do I take care of my fam...”

The pastor's head shot up as he remembered his wife, small daughter, and twenty-two year old son, Ben, who had recently moved back in with them for safety. Pastor Fairchild desperately needed to know if they were still around, or had they been taken away, too? He pushed himself to his feet and ran toward the apartment, shaking off the call of the Holy Spirit once again. Without considering the consequences of being exposed to whatever might be lying in wait, he ran toward his apartment.

As he neared the entrance to the alley, his thoughts entertained, then rejected, the idea of stopping to see if he could help the unfortunate drunk. Remembering vaguely that the noise of the beating had ceased while he was dealing with his own fears, and seeing the man now lying motionless in his own blood, he passed him by without breaking his stride.

From Our Father's Heart

When will you understand that I have given you the life of My Son so that you can demonstrate it to others and fulfill My plans? They will crave My truth if you walk in the character of Jesus. They will embrace Him because they see Him in you.

You have a purpose in life. Come to Me to find out what that purpose is, so that I can use you. Embrace His life without restrictions and I will make your life significant. Marginally accept His life and you will condemn yourself to a life of wandering on the sidelines of what I am doing.

CHAPTER FOUR

“...and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

40) Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left.

41) Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.”

Mt 24: 39-41 NIV

Darting across the street and bounding up two stairs at a time to reach the entrance of the building where he and his family were staying, Pastor Fairchild grabbed the massive, worn brass handle and opened the front entry. The large, rusted hinges let out a mournful creak as the door opened into the darkened, musty hallway. Pastor Fairchild headed speedily toward his second-floor apartment, trying unsuccessfully to ignore the combined, overpowering odors - human waste, raw garbage, and decaying rodents – that hung in the air.

No semblance of order or cleanliness could be achieved any longer on a continual basis, so formerly repulsive circumstances were now the norm in every area of his daily living. It was a far cry from the immaculate grounds of His Holiness Christian Fellowship with its perfectly sculpted shrubs, meticulously kept lawn, and seasonal displays of every flower imaginable. How he wished things had not changed so drastically. How he wished things had not changed at all!

As he rounded the corner at the end of the long, dark hall, just at the door where his family lived, a repulsive odor of death, vomit, and urine almost choked him. As he slipped and almost fell because of something on the floor, which he didn't care to identify, he quickly observed then ignored the crumpled human form that lay under the nearby tall, gray-glassed hall window.

Bending close to the key lock so he could see in the inadequately lit hallway, Pastor Fairchild inserted the old skeleton key into the black plate below the knob of his apartment door and turned it. Expecting the door to open as it always did, he was surprised at the resistance he felt. The door moved from the strike plate, but wouldn't open more than a small crack. No matter how hard he pushed, it wouldn't budge one centimeter further.

“Shelley,” he called quietly through the crack, his face pressed into the small opening, fearful of alerting anyone else to his presence. The form at the end of the hall rolled slightly in his drunken stupor and vomited on himself again.

“Shelley,” he called again a little more forcefully, his lips pressed into the crack as he attempted to keep his tone directed into the minute door opening.

This time, he heard a rustling noise from within the apartment, as if someone had been startled out of bed, and then some hurried footsteps.

“Dad, Dad, is that you?” came the excited response from within the room.

“Yeah, Ben, it's me. Open up. Hurry!”

The combination of Ben dragging the couch he had positioned to block entry, and his father pushing hard with his shoulder against the door, allowed the crack to open wide enough to let Pastor Fairchild squeeze into the apartment. Before he was even completely in the room, Ben ran to him, embraced his neck, and knocked them both against the wall.

For several moments, the two simply welcomed and comforted one another by holding tight. Ben's sobbing was the only sound in the otherwise curiously quiet room.

“Where's your mom?” Pastor Fairchild asked, still holding his son, who sobbed even louder upon hearing the query.

“Where’s your mom?” he said again, fearful of hearing what he already somehow knew.

Shelley Fairchild, a modest woman who was deeply in love with her Lord, had for months been asking her husband to go to Morgan Wickham and ask for his forgiveness, not just for the power takeover of the church, of which her husband was a part; but for allowing all the disparaging comments that eventually destroyed the man’s reputation in the eyes of many who once held their former pastor in high esteem. He knew of the character and integrity of Pastor Wickham and could’ve easily stopped all the rumors and innuendos, but he didn’t.

Never taking the time to search his own heart, the newly seated pastor even used the turmoil to further his own agenda, and bring people to accept his way of thinking. He needed to be in charge, to “own” the congregation, so everything that came his way was used to that end. To those blinded by his charisma, he appeared to be a peacemaker, because he never dealt with any of the conflict during the transition. In reality, his silence allowed satanic strongholds to have predominance. Perceptions were his ally and he did little to attempt to modify them as long as they were favorable concerning his personal ministry agenda.

He continually refused Shelley’s exhortations to make amends, stating that there was no animosity between them. He further insisted that the only reason he and Morgan had gone their separate ways stemmed from the fallout encountered with a typical church split. In actuality, his own guilt and gnawing sense of what he purposefully allowed to happen hindered him from moving toward reconciliation.

Finally, when she was no longer allowed to talk to Walter about it, Shelley defied his orders and went to see their former close friend. She and her five year old daughter, Sara, ventured across town to Train’s church, in faith, unknowingly protected on both legs of their journey by giant heavenly warriors. Curiously arriving at a time when Pastor Wickham, Train, Crystal, Mic, Steely, and a few others were having a time of prayer, Shelley Fairchild was given the opportunity to embrace the end-time Holy Spirit’s fire of adoption and subsequently submitted to bridal heart transformation.

She, like the others, cultivated the heart of Jesus in her quiet times with the Lord; and having done so, no longer held anything in the world close. Having responded to God’s call to holiness by allowing the crucified/resurrected life of Christ in her to determine everything she said and did, she no longer took part in anything that was not geared toward an earnest bridal preparation and the return of her Groom, or for the salvation of those who would hopefully wholeheartedly accept Him before He came back for his bride.

In time, she came to love only the things that Jesus loved and embrace only what brought her nearer to Him. Her life was truly no longer her own, but joyously her Lord and Master’s, much to the dismay of her husband, at times.

Pastor Fairchild sat down on their threadbare maroon and cream-colored couch, which also served as Ben’s bed. He beckoned his son to join him and then held him near. “You must’ve been incredibly frightened by something to lock yourself in like this,” he said. His son just looked off in the distance, as if in shock.

“I thought you both left me,” Ben responded, still staring ahead.

“When Mom and Sara left, and then...” he reached for a roll of toilet paper that was sitting on a nearby end table and took the time to blow his nose, hoping it would help him to think clearly as well as allow him to breathe properly. He continued, “Then when I saw all those people on TV disappear, I began to panic. That’s when I blocked the door.”

He sat up and blew his nose even harder, gathering strength to keep talking. “Dad,” Ben stared straight into his father’s face. “Dad, they just left.”

The young man paused in awe. “Mom was walking to the couch to watch what was happening on TV with those Christians at the hospital, and all of a sudden she just disappeared. She had a glass of water in her hand and had just told me that she wished I would give my life fully to Jesus, when she got this...”

Ben stopped for a moment to choke back the tears. Gaining his composure somewhat, he continued to piece together what had happened.

“She ...” he hesitated. “Dad, her face lit up with a glow like I’d never seen before, and she smiled at something or someone standing in front of her.”

Ben slowed his pace, as he tried to grasp what he was telling his father. He looked directly into his eyes. “But Dad ...” he looked pleadingly, and even though he was making a statement, he was really asking a question. “Dad, there was no one there. I tried to see what she was seeing. I couldn’t see anything. She dropped the glass and reached out to whoever or whatever and... and,” Ben stopped again.

Both he and his father turned to look at the glass which still lay on the wooden floor near the couch. The water had evaporated a little, but there was still some evidence of the spill. The frightened duo stared at the water, which seemed unusually full of iridescent colors even in the early morning light that glimmered through the cracked, dirty window above the heat register.

“It all happened so fast. She was all bright, almost as if she was lit up, and then she was gone.” Ben became very agitated, as he replayed the terrifying moment in his mind. “At first, I didn’t know what to do. I kept staring at the spot where Mom disappeared, thinking maybe she’d come back. Then I remembered Sara and I ran to her room to tell her what happened to Mom, but...” his voice broke and he began to cry, holding his stomach, while he gave a small moan to release some of the pain. “But she was gone, too!”

Ben got up from the corner of the couch and began purposefully pacing back and forth, trying to collect his thoughts and see if he’d left anything out so far. He stopped near his father, ready to continue his narration. His need for comfort became visibly evident as he unconsciously rocked back and forth on his feet.

He took a deep breath and picked up where he’d left off. “Then a little while later, I saw on TV that a lot of other people had disappeared, too!” That was all he got out before he broke down again. After dropping to his knees in helplessness in front of his father, he quickly jumped up, positioned himself next to Pastor Fairchild, and laid his head on his father’s shoulder. “I thought I’d never see you again, either,” he said boyishly.

Finally the fear, anxiousness, and tension that had laid hold of the young man for so many hours was released in a downpour of tears. Pastor Fairchild could only hold tight to Ben’s hand, too shaken and fearful himself to say anything.

For almost an hour, the two remaining members of the now incomplete Fairchild family held on to one another, alternating between crying and expressing thoughts, questions, fears, regrets, and remembrances of what once was. Never had a room felt so cold and empty. Despite their newfound closeness and intimacy of heart, both still bore the inhuman weight of intense, overpowering loss, piercing loneliness, and overwhelming fear. When there were no more tears left, and the initial numbness and shock over the disappearance of Shelley and Sara began to wane, a horrible reality arose in their place. Innumerable questions about the future plagued both of them, as they sat on edge in their seemingly cold, impersonal apartment unit.

Neither of them had any immediate answers, and they were too tired to try to remedy anything. Their words spent, father and son fell into an exhausted sleep. Walter remained on the couch and Ben slept with a pillow and blanket on the floor nearby. They both could’ve found a

more restful and comfortable place to sleep in the small apartment; but their actual physical closeness brought them comfort and some semblance of peace, so they stayed where they were. After a few hours' sleep, maybe they'd awaken with a bit of hope in their hearts.

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