

Too late!

I would like to tell you about the great day when the good and bad shall be divided, and I will not talk to you in cunningly devised fables, for I was an eyewitness of these things. God gave me a preview of that day, and I know how the good and the bad are separated. I was there! I know the joy that belongs to those on the right hand of God. I have seen the weeping and the wailing and the gnashing of teeth of those who have waited until it was too late.

I was in Rangoon, Burma when the merchants closed their shops and dismissed their tired clerks. I saw them fleeing for their lives. I saw the banks close their doors, and the bankers flee for their lives. I saw the Post Office close, and the Post Office workers flee for their lives. I was in Rangoon when the doctors and nurses in the general hospital put their weak, sick patients out on the sidewalks, and then fled for their lives. The Japanese army was within 75 miles of the city, and our last supply line had been cut. At the zoo, the keepers of the animals shot the lions and tigers to keep them from starving to death, then they fled for their lives. At the leper and insane asylums, the wardens opened the doors and let these unfortunate people come into town, while they, too, fled for their lives. And at the jail, just three miles from our mission station, the prison doors were opened, and three thousand criminals came walking into town, while the keepers of the jail and the policemen fled for their lives. I was there; I saw it. I saw the last boat leave for India; I saw the last train leave the depot. I saw the government headquarters move out of the city. I saw the military headquarters move out, and I saw what happened then.

And I am going to tell you what happened, for in Rangoon God gave me a preview of the end of the world and the day of judgment.

Too late to help

Just two days before we escaped, I was packing away some of our most valuable articles in the closet under the staircase, when a well-to-do woman came into the mission headquarters and asked for Mr. Meleen, the mission superintendent. Mr. Meleen came out, and though I didn't mean to eavesdrop, I couldn't help overhearing the conversation.

"Oh, Mr. Meleen, I have to go, and I can't take anything with me except a little suitcase and a rug for the journey," the woman said. "You may not know me, but I know you. I live in that grand home just a few blocks away where the coconut palms and the big mango trees are, and now I have to leave my lovely home behind. I hate to think of the thieves breaking in to steal and loot and plunder. Won't you take all my lovely furniture? Take my beds and my tables and my chairs and my beautiful rugs. I will feel so much happier if I know you mission people can use them."

And I heard Mr. Meleen say, “It is too late now. We are all packed up. We will be leaving any moment ourselves. We have been waiting to evacuate our church members, and when they are out we will be going too, with only a suitcase each. If we could have had some of those things three months ago when we were outfitting our clinic, we could have used every bed and chair and table. But now it is too late—too late!”

I saw the tears come to that poor woman’s eyes. “Too late?” she groaned, as if she couldn’t believe it. “You are going, too?” As she turned to leave, she threw her shawl over her face to hide her grief, and from her lips came the heartbreaking cry, “Oh, how I wish—” Then emotion choked her words and she left us to fill in the blanks, but I knew what she wished. Yes, I knew.

I tried to remember if that well-to-do woman, who lived just two blocks away, had ever helped out in the clinic program or the Ingathering program. I couldn’t think of a single occasion. Now it was too late and she had to leave everything behind, and oh, how she wished!

Too late for baptism

Some days later, as we were leaving the little town of Pakokku, just after crossing the Irrawaddy River in our escape into India, Pastor W. W. Christensen waved for us to stop at the side of the road. We pulled up behind him, got out of our cars, and walked up to see what was the matter. He was talking to a wealthy Indian woman.

“Oh Pastor Christensen,” she was saying, “this is just like the end of the world. Oh, I wish I could get baptized now. Isn’t there time to go back to the river and baptize me? I don’t know what will happen tomorrow. If only I were baptized, I would feel it was all right with my soul.”

And I heard Pastor Christensen say, “It is too late now. Six weeks ago I knelt in your home with you and your children, pleading that the Spirit of God would help you to make a decision then. We are fleeing for our lives now, and we must be on our way. We pray that God will bring you safely into India so that we can study together and get ready for baptism then.”

And then I saw that wealthy, well-dressed Indian woman sink to the ground and cover her face with her sari as she sobbed, “Too late! Too late! Oh, why didn’t I get baptized six weeks ago? There was time then, but now it is too late. Too late!” It is impossible to forget things like that.

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