



My Bible School Lessons

Exploring the Word of God

Lesson #30: "The Remnant of her Seed"

Caught Between a Fire and the Deep Blue Sea

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The story has been told of a thrilling rescue by sea of thousands of people from the burning city of Smyrna. They were refugees, chased there from their homes by the fleeing Greek army.

The year was 1922. The world was still racked with pain from the wars that had ripped apart homes and lands. The Turkish city of Smyrna had been given to the Greeks as a reward for their participation in the war. The Greek army had moved into Smyrna and pushed inland. Feelings ran high. Turkish citizens were not interested in having the Greeks run their government. Unwilling to submit to the new occupation, they rallied under the leadership of Ataturk in a daring drive for independence.

The Greeks were confident of victory. They pushed steadily toward the heart of the country when suddenly they retreated before Ataturk. They burned and pillaged their way back to Smyrna.

In their wild retreat, they forced their own countrymen as well as the Armenians to abandon their homes and flee to the coast. Every road to the sea was choked with refugees. As the Greek soldiers reached the coast, in their haste to reach safety, they simply took ship and sailed away leaving their own people as refugees, defenseless, to make out as best they could.

Suddenly Smyrna was a burning inferno. The great mass of refugees pushed toward the sea to escape the flames.

A young American, Asa Jennings, and his family were among those seeking to escape the flames. He had been sent a few weeks earlier by the YMCA to that troubled city to study what might be done to smooth relations between the Turks, Armenians, Greeks, and Jews living there.

Asa Jennings put his little family aboard an American destroyer and went back to see what he could do for the refugees. Somehow, he arranged for food to be sent in. But this suffering mass of humanity, caught between the fire and the sea, needed more than food. They needed ships!

As Asa Jennings pondered over how to get ships for these desperate people he learned that the twenty Greek ships that had carried the Greek soldiers away to safety were anchored at Mytilene, an island not far away. What a providence! Immediately he went to Mytilene certain that here was the answer. Surely Greek ships would be willing to save Greek people. To his amazement, General Frankos, in charge of transports, responded with an indifferent caution and indecision.

Undaunted, Jennings would not give up. Seeing an American ship the U.S.S. Mississippi at anchor he rowed out through the early morning mist to board her. He was determined to go over the head of General Frankos and make contact directly with the Greek government in Athens.

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Telling the captain of the ship of the plight of the stranded Greek refugees on the shores of burning Smyrna, he asked that a code message be sent to Athens, requesting that all ships in the waters about Smyrna be placed at his disposal. It was four o'clock in the morning.

A message came back, "Who are you?"

A natural question. Jennings had been in that part of the world only about a month, and no one had ever heard of him.

He sent word back, "I am in charge of American relief at Mytilene." He didn't bother to explain that he was in charge only by virtue of being the only American there!

Athens outdid General Frankos in caution. The cabinet would have to decide. The Cabinet was not in session. The Cabinet would meet in the morning. What protection would be given the ships? Would American destroyers accompany them? Did that mean that American destroyers would protect the ships if the Turks should try to take them? And so it went.

Finally, at four in the afternoon, Jennings's patience was exhausted. Boldly he wired an ultimatum to the Greek government. If he did not receive a favorable reply by six o'clock, he would wire openly, without code—letting all the world know that the Greek government had refused to rescue its own people from certain death.

It worked. Shortly before six o'clock a message came through: ALL SHIPS IN AEGEAN PLACED YOUR COMMAND. REMOVE REFUGEES SMYRNA.

Those ten words meant life for many thousands. They also meant that a young, unknown American had just been made an Admiral of the Greek navy!

Assuming command, he asked the captains of the twenty ships to be ready to leave for Smyrna by midnight. At that hour the ships were in place. Asa Jennings aboard the lead ship, ordered the Greek flag run down, an American flag flown in its place, with a signal that meant "Follow me." He mounted the bridge and ordered full steam ahead.

Try to picture that scene. As the stately ships moved forward, on the horizon could be seen the smoke arising from the burning city. Then the charred remains came into view. Imagine the feelings as Jennings and those Greek sailors gazed at the blackened skeletons of those once prestigious buildings. The skyline looked haunted, deserted, depressing. Now the shoreline can be seen, a black border of human beings in sharp contrast against the waters. No sign that they are still living can be seen, but Jennings knew that it was a border of 300,000 sufferers waiting, hoping, praying—as they had done every moment for days—for ships, ships, ships!

As the ships moved closer, and the shore spread out before him, it seemed as if every face was turned toward them, and every arm outstretched to, bring them in. It seemed that the whole shore moved out to grasp them. The air was filled with the cries of those thousands—cries of such joy that the sound pierced to the very marrow of his bones. No need to tell them what those ships were for. They had scanned the watery horizon for days longing, hoping, looking wistfully for ships. No one need explain that here was help, that here was life and safety'

Never before had he been so thankful, so truly happy, as on that early morning when he realized that at last—and thank God in time—he had been able to bring hope, and a new life, to those despairing thousands.

What a thrilling rescue! An answer to their desperate hope, saving thousands from certain doom. Friends, we too are waiting for a rescue. A rescue from I convulsing, troubled, planet. A planet where

fear rules, a planet where death reigns. A planet where frantic, frightened, frustrated men will soon cry, "Stop the world! I want to get off!"

Does anyone see the suffering billions on this earth? Does anyone hear the silent cry for help? Does anyone feel the desperate hope for rescue? Does anyone care? Is help on the way?

Good news, friends, God has an answer! He has scheduled a great rescue—not from the sea, but from the sky. Paul describes it this way. "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with Him in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17.

Not everyone however will be taking that rescue trip. Another story, another attempt at rescue over the waters comes to my mind.

GRANDPA'S WARNING

An elderly gentleman lived alone in his home. He had lived there all of his life. That home was dear to him. There was nothing special, or fancy about it, except that it was his. Each room, each wall, each window carried memories that were precious to him.

From that old homestead he had watched the seasons come and go year after year. It was a secure place. Wind storms had swept through the town, but his home was safe. Tornadoes had touched nearby farms, but somehow his house escaped. Drought had dried up water supplies at times through the years, but still, with his well, he had always managed. He had become familiar with the quirks of nature and was not afraid of her. Floods had come and gone, but through the decades none had ever reached to the top of the first doorstep.

One spring, the rains were heavier than usual. The river rose. Grandpa kept an eye on it wondering where it would peak this year. He had watched this scene many times through the years. As it deepened, he may have worried a little over the crops in the lower field hoping, he wouldn't lose them.

As he looked out over the fields and across the river, he could see neighbors leaving their homes. Too bad he thought. It's too bad that people build so low that their homes get ruined with every little flood. Turning on his radio, he heard the warnings for all people living in his area to evacuate. Unconcerned he turned it off and went on with his chores.

A knock came at the door. Opening it he found his granddaughter. "Grandpa," she said excitedly, "There's going to be a big flood, and we came to get you! Come, get in the car with us, hurry."

Grandpa chuckled as he looked into the big eyes full of wonder. "Listen sweetheart," he said, "Don't you worry about your old Gramps, he's going to be just fine. No flood ever bothered this old house, and it ain't going to this time either."

The little girl hesitated then turned and left. "Mommy, he doesn't want to come," she reported. "I was afraid of that," Mother sighed.

"Well, I'll go see if I can change his mind."

Soon she was back at the car. "It's no use, he just won't come. He's sure nothing will ever happen to the old home place." With an anxious heart she drove away. The river continued to rise. Warnings by radio to evacuate increased in intensity, but Grandpa was sure the water would never get deep enough to endanger him.

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Mother reported Grandpa's decision to the officials asking them to help if the water got too deep. Soberly shaking their heads they said, "We'll see what we can do Ma'am, but with an angry river like that, we can't promise anything."

As the water deepened, a small boat was dispatched to search for stranded people. Valiantly, the men struggled against the wind, and rain. The angry water sucked and swirled and threatened to toss them out and wash them downstream with the logs and debris they were tensely dodging.

Finally, they reached the tiny island on which Grandpa's house now stood. Instead of the grateful thanks they expected, an irritated voice answered their knock. "Can't you leave me alone?" he challenged. "I'll stay here as long as I wish. Haven't you ever seen a flood before? This river's been like this before, and I'm perfectly safe. Now, be gone." The bewildered men finally left. Grandpa had just refused his last chance at rescue.

That night brought a record breaking flood. The morning light revealed the tragedy of Grandpa's decision. The house was gone. Only the foundations remained after the waters went down.

Friend, do you want to be rescued? Do you see the danger and feel the need? Today, every person is going to be rescued or destroyed-but it is not up to chance as it was for the people of Smyrna. Like Grandpa, each of us have been warned in time and have been provided a chance to escape.

Four thousand years ago, millions of people were in need of a rescue. Again a ship was needed to take them safely. God provided the ship through the hard work of Noah and his family, but a strange thing happened, No one would board the ship! What was the problem? They didn't know they were in danger! Like Grandpa they refused to believe that they needed to be rescued. Warning after warning came, but the warnings were scoffed at. Thus only eight people board that ship and were saved. Genesis six through nine tells of that sad account.

Jesus said, "As the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be" Matthew 24:37. Today's lesson is about the greatest rescue of all ages. Are you ready for it? Am I? You can be, but first, you must go to Calvary and receive a cleansed heart, a changed heart. A heart that daily surrenders to Jesus so that the word *pardon* can be written in the blood of the Lord Jesus by your name. May God bless you as you seek to be one of those who accepts this last glorious rescue.