CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
JULY 04 2026

Scripture Story: Matthew 24; 2 Timothy 3:12.
Commentary: *The Great Controversy* (or *Love Under Fire*), chapters 1, 2.

a high price for faith



Photo by Terrill Thomas

flashlight

"The mysterious providence which permits the righteous to suffer persecution at the hand of the wicked has been a cause of great perplexity to many who are weak in faith. Some are even ready to cast away their confidence in God. . . . God has given us sufficient evidence of His love, and we are not to doubt His goodness because we cannot understand the workings of His providence. . . . Jesus suffered for us more than any of His followers can be made to suffer through the cruelty of wicked men" (*The Great Controversy,* p. 47).

key text

"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns."

(Matthew 24:45, 46, NIV)

what do you think?

Look at the list below and put each item in order of what is most important to you. Which would you be willing to die for?

____ Theological doctrines
____ Your personal faith
____ Your family
____ Your friends
____ Your civil rights
____ Your country
____ Someone else's rights
____ Stopping the suffering of another person

Which things top your personal list and why? Which things would you not be willing to die for?

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did you know?

Persecution as it was known to the early Christians does not exist in North America today. We oftentimes think of ourselves as persecuted when someone disagrees with us or declines to give us a job if we aren't able to work on Sabbath. (That's more accurately described as religious discrimination.) But the kind of persecution that the early believers endured was different. They faced death—horrible, brutal deaths.

In other parts of the world Christians still face persecution in its truest sense. They risk their lives and the lives of their families in order to worship God. They are willing to die in order to follow the law of God. Now, *that* is devotion!

(To see what the Adventist Church is doing to fight religious discrimination and persecution, visit http://parl.gc.adventist.org.)

INTO THE STORY

"As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. 'Tell us,' they said, 'when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?'

"Jesus answered: 'Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, "I am the Messiah," and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.

"'Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. . . .

"'Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

"'Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

"'But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; 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.'"

(Matthew 24:3-14, 30-39, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Why do you think Jesus gave the disciples the information that He did?

What does this tell us about the kind of relationship they shared with Jesus? How did they achieve this kind of communication? How can we?

How was this information important to the people in Jesus' day? How is it important for us today?

How do you think it would be possible for someone to deceive God's people?

The text tells us that no one except the Father knows when Jesus will return. Why do you think people try to figure out the exact time of His return?

How are things today like "in the days of Noah"?

As you read this passage, do you find it frightening to think about the end times and the hard times described? Why or why not?

punch lines

"Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me" **(Psalm 50:15, NIV).**

"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me" **(Psalm 23:4, NIV).**

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful servants" **(Psalm 116:15, NIV).**

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?" **(Romans 8:35, NIV).**

"Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown" **(Revelation 2:10, NIV).**

further insight

"The sufferings which they endured brought Christians nearer to one another and to their Redeemer."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy,* p. 42

Sabbath

Read Revelation 2:10.

This text says that those who are "faithful, even to the point of death" will receive a heavenly reward. What things in life are you willing to die for? Why would you be willing to die for them? Look at the list in the *What Do You Think?* section and be honest with yourself—would you be willing to die for any of these things?

There are many jobs in our society that have a very high risk factor. List three occupations in which people risk their lives. Beside each occupation, write how you feel about their sacrifice.

Sunday

Read Matthew 24.

Jesus' disciples asked Him what the signs of the last days would be. What Jesus told them was a double prophecy. On one level Jesus was warning them of the impending destruction of Jerusalem to happen in A.D. 70. It would be horrific, and Jesus wanted His people to be able to escape. Ellen White tells us that none of the Christians died in that siege because they had been watching for the signs Jesus gave. On another level Jesus was telling them a brief outline of Christianity and what events would happen before His coming—the actual question His disciples had been asking. Why do you think Jesus gave them information in this way? Do you think they could have handled Jesus' torture and death, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the last days all at once? What do you think this tells us about how God communicates with us?

Monday

Read Matthew 24:45, 46.

When we think about Jesus coming again, we wonder if we are ready. At the end of Matthew 24 Jesus tells a parable about a master who goes away and leaves a servant in charge of feeding the other servants. When the master returns, it will be good for the servant who is found doing just as he was told to do.

Identify three things that you believe God wants you to be doing right now in your life. They don't have to be anything monumental. The servant in the parable was left in charge of the menu plan! Now look at those three things. What is important about them? How dedicated are you to doing those things, even if it gets difficult?

Tuesday

Read Revelation 2:10.

Look through a newspaper or an online news source today and note all the stories about suffering. What sorts of stories do you see? Why good people suffer is a question people have wrestled with since the beginning of time. For each story of suffering you find, think about how God might be working in the lives of the people experiencing such hard times. Refer back to yesterday's *Key Text.* What might God be asking you to do to care for the people around you?

Wednesday

Read Romans 8:35.

Thinking about what the early Christians endured is pretty unsettling. It isn't typical human nature to face death on principle. Look at each of the *Punch Lines* texts. Beside each one write down the hope that it offers. Where do you think the early Christians got their strength to face death for their faith? What could God's presence with them have done to turn a horrific nightmare into a heroic stand?

Thursday

Read Psalm 116:15.

We might not have to face death for our faith in Jesus, but we do face opposition. In what ways can you find courage from the experience of the early Christians to stand for what you believe in?

Pray today that God will not only show you what He wants you to do for Him, but also give you the courage to do it!

Friday

Read Psalm 23:4.

God is real! Do you think that the early Christians would have been willing to face death if they did not feel His presence with them in a very real way? What is your experience with God like? Is God an idea? an ideal? a set of rules? If you don't experience God in your life in a very real way, you are missing out on something exciting and empowering!

How real is God to you? How real do you want Him to be?

this week's reading*

The Great Controversy (or *Love Under Fire),* chapters 1, 2.

**Love Under Fire* is a special adaptation of *The Great Controversy*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.