



Chapter 1

The Great and Terrible Last Day

*For the great day of their wrath has come, and
who can withstand it?*

—Revelation 6:17

One Friday morning in early December 2004, a Lutheran pastor's name came up in conversation while my husband, Paul, was attending a businessman's breakfast in New Canaan, Connecticut. He was told the pastor lived in Finland and was dying of lymphoma, which is a horrific cancer. On the drive home, he felt he should contact the pastor and ask if he wanted us to come and pray for him. He found the ministry of the Finnish clergyman on the Internet and also found one small button in the far bottom right of the homepage of the website. It instructed the reader to "Push here for English." Within a month, an invitation was extended for us to travel to the small European nation to pray and anoint this stricken man for

healing. He agreed to see us as soon as we could make travel arrangements, which our church board heartily approved of. It just so happened to be the dead of winter in the land of Finland.

As I peered out the window of our giant Boeing 747 as it landed at the Helsinki airport, it felt almost surreal. I was still pondering the ambitious thought that we would want to fly into one of the most northern countries on planet earth in the frigid winter. We certainly were not on any sight-seeing or vacation tour for this trip; instead, we were on a mission for God. A desperate Finnish pastor was in dire need of a touch from God, and we were praying to be used in any way we could.

You do not know my husband, but he takes life seriously as an ordained Lutheran pastor, and for forty-two years, he has kept an attentive ear to hear what God needs him to do, see the people he needs to minister to, and go to the places he needs to be when requested. As his partner in life and ministry, I stopped asking questions after so many years with him. One of my personal mottos (there are a few I adhere to) is to just “vacuum with my hat on” (meaning, to be ready for anything at the drop of a hat when the green light is signaled to go). It is an excellent motto, if you are adventurous and love life like he does. Thankfully, we are compatible in that sense.

Paul Teske also taught me through the years to trust that God is always right and knows what He is doing; when He asks us to be someplace or minister to someone in need, He loves our yes. I have admittedly learned a good

lesson through many trials and, of course, many errors: that our God always wins, so it takes a lot of pressure off of any grumbling about the places I am traveling to, like observing this eerie landing in Finland through the small porthole of the plane. I could barely see the shape of the sun through the shrouded and hazy gray sky. Odd that it would be so dark in midmorning, I thought. I had read about these winters close to the North Pole but had never experienced one.

I decided on the spot that I was no Norsewoman and remembered to silently say a short prayer of thanksgiving that God thought it best that I hail from the great state of warmer and sunnier Texas (although I was displaced in Connecticut at the moment). I shivered a little and pulled the red blanket issued by the airline a little tighter around my shoulders.

Lost in thought for a few moments while the ground crew hustled the luggage out of the enormous aircraft, I let out a heavy sigh. Like we all try to do, I had been letting go of a few life issues that seemed to have plagued me for years with my family and with the spiritual community in parish ministry. It had been a hard-fought battle for my heart to let go and let God. Ugh, it means surrender. Those five simple words might just be the hardest to work through in life, but after seeing a sign from God in 2003, which you will read about in chapter 5, I had never been happier and more confident in working with Jesus on my personal healing journey. Not only had I fallen deeper in love with God, but I had also found a daily dialogue

and scripture study that took me from the mundane of existing to a crazy wild ride with the godhead.

Truthfully, I could not get enough during this initial season He and I were settling into. Maybe it was a reawakening or a reformation of the soul, which was taking me to higher mountaintops in the spiritual sense. It felt fabulous to be connected. Someone had recently prayed over me for a spine of steel. I had never heard of such a thing like praying steel into a spine, and at the moment, I thought it a little on the dramatic side of the prayer partner doing this.

On a lighter note, at least it sounded durable and indestructible. Currently, I needed that durability for ministry and life, and prayed that it was working. As eerie as the weather was outside, I sat back in my seat, feeling something had definitely changed inside of me. It is hard to explain in writing, but I felt lighter as we walked into the queue for foreign visitors. The sun never appeared again that day, but my heart was smiling. How odd to have a quick vision of a smiling heart, I thought. We were on a mission from God, and little did I know the mission would initially begin with my life being turned utterly upside down in a shattering time travel with God this very night.

A dear Finnish pastor who spoke very limited English met us at the airport. Our luggage barely fit into his tiny European Fiat, which also included me sitting in the back seat. Adjusting quickly to our new surroundings and the unbelievably frigid cold, I was captivated with the wintry

sights as we made our way, winding slowly through snow and ice to get to the highway. We were driven to a very modest hotel in the commuter town of Jarvenpaa, just north of Helsinki.

As we passed the small Nordic towns along the way, I was curious about every detail of cultural life these tough people endured during the winter months. There were bundled shoppers actually pulling babies in sleds behind them, with long ropes attached to their waists. No visitor would find a proper English pram here in the marketplace. A maze of pathways cutting through mounds of snow also revealed cross-country skiers winding their way through the village streets on errands. I was fascinated to see a wall of skis lined up outside of the bakeries, cheese shops, and pubs, all standing like wooden toy soldiers awaiting their marching orders. How did each local resident know which pair might be theirs?

The young pastor mentioned how the Finns loved the ancient tradition of taking saunas and ice bath plunges. This nonsexual, invigorating health custom is where one takes a warm sauna and then plunges into a hole cut into a small ice area in a lake, then back to the sauna for hot drinks and more conversation. I was thankful there were no frozen lakes or ponds in the back of the small hotel. I might have been too shy to take the ice custom seriously.

We were invited to visit a Finnish high school that afternoon in the neighboring village and met the chaplain of the school, who was, of course, Lutheran. As you might already know, the state church of Finland is Lutheran;

how refreshing it was to see a chaplain in a school where the Catechism was taught, daily prayers were offered in classes, and Crosses hung along hallway walls. I also observed in detail that the students appeared to be extremely peaceful, happy, and healthy.

My first assumption could have attributed their disposition to the rugged outdoors and fresh air they breathed from the northern skies, but I learned that Finnish public schools were ranked as one of the top educational successes of the world, while her students held some of the highest overall test scores. Believe what you may, could it be that they succeeded mostly because God had not been taken out of their schools, classrooms, or hearts? The impact was refreshing to note, and I believe, wholeheartedly, the latter to be the actual truth. My prayer is that they will continue these core traditions and not allow the new political winds of the European Union to change their culture or moral laws.

Surprisingly, we were also entertained at the school by a traveling team of Christian college students from Switzerland, who gave a most remarkable interpretation of the Easter story, including the Cross. I once again had to reflect, compare, and offer my own opinion of our mediocre American educational system, where God had been declared dead in our schools since the 1970s. I am saddened to report that America has been ranked twenty-sixth in math and nineteenth in science in the industrialized world. Do I need to say more about this dismal report on America's schools? I should also mention