

The Remnant and Its Mission

A sermon by Larry Kirkpatrick

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In times of old, Israel often went adrift. They fell to seeking the ways of the nations around them, forgetting who they were and what was their high calling by God. The same later happened in the church. In order to come more closely into harmony with the society in which they lived, they compromised their faith but gained the emperor. Further on, God worked to arouse His people from sleep, and the Great Advent Movement came into being. Out of the fading fealty of mid-19th century Christianity, the Seventh-day Adventist Church burst into flame.

Nothing stands still, does it? Recent decades have seen the rise of the phenomenon of the “church growth industry.” Experts conduct studies and—for the right price—will come to your church and teach you how to “grow” it, too.

In that light, it is well for us to revisit our own reason for being. Why, precisely why, did God bring *this* church into being? And, while doubtless we can learn much from those who have specialized in church growth methodology, ought we not always put first our own unique, God-given Christian identity? Certainly! With this in mind, today let us review a teaching that millions of Seventh-day Adventists are committed to living and giving. Here, then, is Fundamental Belief #13, The Remnant and Its Mission:

The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness. (Rev. 12:17; 14:6-12; 18:1-4; 2 Cor. 5:10; Jude 3, 14; 1 Peter 1:16-19; 2 Peter 3:10-14; Rev. 21:1-14.)

Our Relationship to the Universal Church

Let's take these ideas in their turn. First, we are not triumphalist, i.e., we do not teach that we are the only Christians out there, or that we are the only group of people who are sincerely seeking and following. We believe that Jesus was telling the truth when He said

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd (John 10:14-16 ESV).

See, all who truly believe in Christ are Christ's. They know each other just as we know each other. Jesus is their very close friend too. Jesus died for them just as He died for us. Now, process this. "I have other sheep that are not of this fold." We are His sheep, and they are His sheep. At present, they are not part of this fold. What fold is Jesus speaking of? A sheep fold was an enclosed, protected place. The shepherd led his sheep to it and within its walls the sheep were protected from harsh weather and predatory animals. Sometimes the shepherd himself would lay or sit at the door, blocking it with his own flesh. He was the defense of the sheep, their protector and their overseer.

Of these "other sheep," Jesus says, "I must bring them also." He says that they too will listen to, i.e., obey His voice, and that ultimately, "there will be one flock and one shepherd." This tells us that there are others who are sincere, and therefore, living up to all the light they have, truly are followers of Jesus, the light of the world. But there are other voices besides the voice of Jesus. When He says that they will hear and follow His voice, He is telling us that there are confused sheep, who are listening to other voices, who think that those voices are the voice of Jesus when they are not. Jesus' voice will come to them, and when they hear it, they will

recognize and follow it to safety. There are sheep who are not in the place of closeness with Jesus where they ought to be, but these will come, and just as there is one Shepherd, Jesus, there will be one flock with Him.

We might leap to the conclusion that the sheepfold is the church, but really, the sheepfold is a situation of safety where one is led and protected by Jesus. There is overlap between sheepfold and church, but a more careful comparison would show that they cannot be considered identical.

A Time of Widespread Apostasy

Apostasy, standing away from the truth, is nothing new on planet earth. There have been times of lesser and greater apostasy. But the Seventh-day Adventist Church exists in the very end of the end-times. We find ourselves on battlefield earth in the most dangerous time humanity will ever face, just before, *just before*, the Second Coming of Jesus. Satan's sciences for and theories of deception are developed to the full, and man's nature is degenerated to its lowest, most morally weakened place. Then God brings us onto the scene.

Here, we come to an unpopular truth. Considering the general attitude in the church, one would think that, with the exception of a few scattered, mostly unimportant details, we (Seventh-day Adventists) believe the same things as other Christians do. However, the difference between what we are called to believe and to live, and between what is popularly and commonly accepted as being Christianity, is vast. We recognize that we live in a time of not intermittent or slight apostasy, but very widespread apostasy. The vast majority of those who claim to believe in Jesus and to represent Him, actually teach that His law or at least portions of His law, His Ten Commandment law, are unimportant or even done away! They teach the unimportance of the day

He made for man, which He calls “my holy day” (Mark 2:27, 28; Isaiah 58:13, 14). God says it is holy; they say it is unholy.

This is apostasy.

The truth was known, the truth was lived by the church. But the truth was sacrificed to gain an emperor and an empire. Jesus was traded for Caesar Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus (Emperor Constantine I), and he gifted the church with a replacement for God’s law, the first Sunday observance law, in A.D. 321.

A Remnant Propheted, Called Out

At time’s end, a movement is propheted by John. He is shown three angels flying in the midst of heaven (Revelation 14:6, 8, 9), with a fourth coming down at the climax (Revelation 18:1-4). Each represents a message, an emphasis fitting for its time. All these messages are presented by one people called into being for the purpose of living and giving these messages at the arrival of earth’s judgment hour. God calls out a people with a particular mission. While other of His followers are confused, turning their backs on His truth, here are a people who are aggressively seeking His guidance, searching the Scriptures, discovering to the full the transformation available through His power and His gospel, living out the result.

Because of the time prophecies of the Bible, we know when this movement must arise. Because of the 1260 day/year prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, we know that this people cannot come into being until after 1798, and the 2300 day/year prophecy of Daniel 8:13, 14 shows that the judgment begins in 1844. So, the rise of the movement especially begins between 1798 and 1844, and continues even through the Satanic attempt to force people to receive the

mark of the beast—the very impress of antichrist, the creation, in the end, of an antichrist character in every satanic follower.

But how can we identify the work of this remnant by its manifestation in our world? There are two places to look: (1) What is the message that these Christians witness into the world, and (2) what is the result of this witness in their own midst—in the church?

The Horizontal Work of the Remnant

First, ponder the message that this group of Christian believers collectively witnesses into the world.

Message of the First Angel

The first angel announces the arrival of the judgment hour. What group does that? No other group, none, zip. Only one. Look again at the angel message:

And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters (Revelation 14:6, 7 KJV).

It is the gospel, that is, the message of Jesus. But it is presented in the very last days of earth. It is presented after a time of recovery of truth. Whatever God wants to do to bring clarification of His truth, if it is to have an effect, it has to come before the end. Here are the people who live just before the end.

Their message is to fear God, and that the hour of His judgment is come. Did Jesus ever say anything like this?

And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind (John 9:39 ESV).

And

Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me (John 12:31, 32 ESV).

If the last generation of Christians, because of their placement in time, more than any other, is called to walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6; 3:3), are we not also come into this world for its judgment? It would not be the first time. Noah could say that too if called upon. His obedience in building the ark condemned the world to judgment (Hebrews 11:7). Our lives must come up to the message.

Then there is the truth that Jesus was lifted up on the cross. He, an innocent, was condemned for our sins. We are not, as He was, lifted up to be sacrificed on the cross. But we are to testify to His sacrifice and its power to renew the believer. Then there is the emphasis on worship the Creator. Jesus referred repeatedly to the creation. He, fully knowing that the sabbath memorializes Creator, declared that He, Jesus was Lord of the Sabbath day (Mark 2:27, 28). Beside all this, we outline the time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, and show that the judgment prophesied in Daniel 8:14 begins in 1844.

Message of the Second Angel

Then there is the Second Angel's Message:

And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication (Revelation 14:8 KJV).

Anything like this from Jesus? Yes. In Matthew 15:8, 9, He warns that men are worshipping Him in vain, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. That's exactly what Babylon does, isn't it?

Message of the Third Angel

Then comes the third angel:

And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus (Revelation 14:9-12 KJV).

Don't worship the beast, don't receive its mark, but worship God. The third reprises the first angel message, but puts in clear terms the issue concerning the beast and its mark, contrasting it with the keeping of God's commandments. We come full circle back to the core: Living by the fear of God or living by the fear of man. To whom will we bow down, creature or Creator?

Jesus faced this very question several times. We immediately recall the wilderness test of Jesus. In the third temptation as presented by Matthew, Satan says that all the kingdoms of the world are under his authority, and tells Jesus He can have all He seeks, with only one change—the replacement of the sacrifice on the cross by bowing down to Satan.

Let's realize that this temptation was presented to Jesus many times—most persuasively by His own followers! For example, Mark 8:31-33. When Jesus tells them that He will suffer and

die on the cross, Peter urges otherwise. Jesus' reaction is very strong. This is because He sees it as a recapitulation of the third temptation in Matthew. And so, He repeats, in strongest language, His rejection of it.

On another occasion, "When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone" (John 6:15). The people were ready to make Him king, but this was only Satan's shortcut around the cross cropping up again. In Revelation, the last generation of Christians is faced with a choice: Join the current religious movement of that time, which is of Satan, or, hold fast and keep the commandments of God and be subject to the final death decree. Therefore, it makes sense that the message of the third angel comes to us so strongly in Revelation 14:9-12.

The remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, emphasizes the keeping of God's commandments, heralds the approach of the Second Coming, and in all these things presents salvation through Christ. Some have seen our understanding of God's message in these things to be man-centered, but the message that we proclaim is closely paralleled to actual situations from the gospel accounts of Jesus' life and ministry.

The Vertical Work of the Remnant

There is another work of the remnant that is not commonly thought of. In combination with the proclamation, the remnant engages in "a work of repentance and reform on earth." We must not confuse ourselves with the notion that all is done, all is laid out for us, that all that we have to do is read it off the page and hand it to others. We hold that God has called the remnant in the last days to an extraordinary life and proclamation, the very fullness of the gospel. We cannot be content. The Reformation was never finished. We therefore enter into a work that has

not been completed. We exist because others did not carry this work to the place where the everlasting gospel would be lived out during a time when probation closes and men stand before God in a manner that has never before happened. Since the first sin, in Christ men have always had a Mediator. But there comes a time when His mediation is complete and He returns to claim us for Himself. Jesus waits with great desire for the manifestation of Himself in His people in His church. When His character is perfectly reproduced in them, then He will come to claim them as His own.

But how do we get to that? First, we recognize defects in ourselves. We see our movement as particularly subject to the warning to the Laodicean church of Revelation 3:14-22. That description outlines problems that are not consistent with a people in whom the character of Christ is being effectively reproduced. Lukewarmness, wretchedness, blindness, nakedness, etc., do not sound like the fullness of Christ in the life that we must have if we would live when men must cease from sinning. From this we gather that there is a deep work of repentance and of reformation for us even in these last few years before the Second Coming.

Which brings us to one last point that we have not mentioned until now. The remnant is especially characterized by what we see at Revelation 12:17:

And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ (KJV).

The remnant keeps the commandments of God. I point out also that the remnant has another identifying mark: They have the testimony of Jesus. One aspect of the testimony of Jesus is that it is the Spirit of Prophecy (Revelation 19:10). Although not our primary topic here, and time fails us to go into it in detail, still, it is our understanding that God sends inspired insight to

us as His remnant people. We believe that the biblical gift of prophecy was manifest in the life and teachings of Ellen G. White.

Think about this idea. Throughout the history of the church, not since the time of apostles Paul and John has the church been granted benefit of the living prophetic voice. But we understand that God spoke through prophecy in the 1800s and that this movement has seen the benefit of divine guidance through a prophet. That is big. Very big. If it is not true, then we have made a blunder as few have. If it is actually true, then everyone on planet earth should know it.

Think of this. How can we best clarify to them that the prophetic voice has been operative in the remnant—in the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Very simply: By following His counsel and living Christlike lives. Then we will be known as a moral people, upstanding, obedient to God, a credit to His kingdom. This will help the non-Adventist and the confused Adventist. Our lives will show that there is something to God's claim that His remnant has the testimony of Jesus.

Think about it: There has to be something in the lives of the last day Jesus-followers that causes Satan's extreme anger. He loathes us. Why? Why does he war so relentlessly against the remnant? Because we have the commandments of God, and because we have the testimony of Jesus, and because our lives are shaped by them. He cares little if we hear of these things, or read of these things, but our lives are unfruitful in them. But the remnant will live fruitful lives. They will live out all that it means to have God's commandments and His counsels through His prophets. That enrages Satan. That is what we are to be. This means that of all believers in God there have ever been on earth, we are the group that most especially has the bright red circular target painted right on us.

Conclusion

It is said that extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. God has a remnant. Its work is plainly outlined in the Bible. We may thank Jesus that His grace will be sufficient for us. But we must be about our Father's work. We must redeem the time. Jesus is coming soon, and we all are called to have a part in this work of witness to the world on the brink of destruction.

The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness.

Jesus will help!

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