

The Role of the Church in the Community

How Shall We Wait?

Lesson #13 for September 24, 2016

Scriptures: Matthew 24:35-25:46; 2 Peter 3; James 2:14-26; John 4:35-38; 1 Corinthians 3:6-8; Revelation 21:1-4.

1. For several years preceding the [April 18,] 1906 San Francisco earthquake [with estimated magnitude 7.8], the Seventh-day Adventist churches in San Francisco and Oakland, California, were buzzing. Members were involved in visiting the sick and destitute. They found homes for orphans and work for the unemployed. They nursed the sick and taught the Bible from house to house. Members distributed Christian literature and gave classes on healthful living. The churches also conducted a school for the children in the basement of the Laguna Street meetinghouse. A workingmen's home and medical mission were maintained. They had a health-food store along with a vegetarian café. The members had started ship mission work at the local port, and their ministers conducted meetings in large halls in the city from time to time.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Sabbath, September 17, 2016. [Content in brackets are added.]
2. About 30 years earlier, Ellen White and her husband James were planning for the building of a house of worship in San Francisco. Some critics felt that their plans were much too ambitious. The church in Oakland and the Pacific Press were being constructed about the same time.

About thirty years ago, [1876] when my husband and I were planning for the building of a house of worship in San Francisco, some, when they saw the plan, said, "It is too large. The house will never be filled." At the same time, we were erecting the first building of the Pacific Press and the meeting-house in Oakland. How great was the anxiety felt, and how earnest the prayers offered to God that he would open the way for the advancement of these enterprises!

At that time, I dreamed that I saw two beehives, one in San Francisco and one in Oakland. In the hive in Oakland, the bees were diligently at work. Then I looked at the hive in San Francisco, and saw very little being done. The hive in Oakland seemed to be far the more promising. After a time my attention was again called to the hive in San Francisco, and I saw that an entire change had taken place. Great activity was seen among the bees. They were earnestly at work....

We prayed much in regard to the necessities of the cause and the meaning of the dream, and resolved to venture out in accordance with the light given. **My husband and I decided to sell our property in Battle Creek, that we might use the proceeds in this work. We wrote to our brethren, "Sell everything we have in Battle Creek, and send us the money at once." This was done, and we helped to build the churches in Oakland and San Francisco.** And the Lord revealed to us that although at first the work in San Francisco would move slowly, yet it would make steady advancement, and San Francisco would become a great center. The Lord would inspire men by his Holy Spirit to carry forward the work with faith and courage and perseverance....

Sabbath morning, Nov. 10, 1900, we entered the San Francisco church, and found it crowded to its utmost capacity. As I stood before the people, I thought of the dream and the instruction which had been given me so many years ago,

and I was much encouraged. Looking at the people assembled, I felt that I could indeed say, The Lord has fulfilled his word.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, July 5, 1906, par. 18-23. [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

3. Seventh-day Adventists have been waiting more than 150 years for the second coming of Jesus Christ. (Remember that the Seventh-day Adventist Church was not founded until 1863, although the Great Disappointment happened on October 22, 1844; “adventists” have been waiting over 170 years since then.) The crucial issue for us is: What are we supposed to be doing while we wait? Surely, the example of Ellen White and her support of the work in Oakland and San Francisco should give us some ideas.
4. Read Matthew 24:1-31. What should we learn from these verses? His four disciples—Peter, Andrew, James, and John—had raised a critical question to Jesus. Sitting on the Mount of Olives and looking across the valley at the beautiful temple, they could not believe that the day might come when that beautiful building would be destroyed. But, the real answer to their question is found in Matthew 24:14. Surely, reading Matthew 24 gives us some serious thoughts about what is facing us in the future.
5. Read Matthew 24:36-25:46. Scanning over those four stories told by Jesus, we are reminded that we must always be ready. The story of Noah and also the thief who came at night were Jesus’s illustrations for that. (Matthew 24:36-44) The next parable, the parable of the unfaithful chief steward recorded in Matthew 24:45-51, makes it very clear that we must faithfully carry on our duties during this period of waiting.
6. The parable of the ten virgins as described in Matthew 25:1-13 is very familiar to us. It is very obvious that the point of the story is that we must have the oil of the Holy Spirit in our lives if we are going to be prepared for the second coming. We must also be awake!
7. In Matthew 25:14-30, we are told of three servants; one was given 5 talents (5000 gold coins), the second 2 talents (2000 gold coins) and the third 1 talent (1000 gold coins). Each of them did something with those coins while the master was away. The first two doubled in value what had been given to them. They invested well! The third only buried his treasure and returned it to the master at the end of the time. His 1000 gold coins were taken from him and given to the man who had increased the value of his holdings to 10,000 gold coins.
8. In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus went straight to His final point, reviewing what happens in the final judgment. Is it really true that the final judgment will be determined by what we do, or what we do not do for the poor and needy?
9. Read 2 Peter 3. Second Peter is one of the most controversial books in the entire New Testament. There are several very clear prophecies about the future which we must take very seriously but with which critics are very uncomfortable because they do not believe that even God can predict the future. Peter—inspired by the Holy Spirit—warned us not to be deceived by people claiming that there was no flood and that nothing has changed over long periods of time and by inference that nothing big will change in the future. He told us that we must work to hasten the second coming by studying and obeying the Scriptures. He reminded us that God’s desire is that everyone will come to repentance so s/he can be saved.
10. In what ways do we work with the Holy Spirit? Can we use Him? Or, is He supposed to use us? And how does that relationship work? How do we find out what the Holy Spirit wants us to do?
11. Clearly, a time of revival and reformation is needed.

A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work. There must be earnest effort to obtain the blessing of the Lord, not because God is not willing to bestow

his blessing upon us, but because **we are unprepared to receive it**. Our Heavenly Father is more willing to give His Holy Spirit to them that ask him, than are earthly parents to give good gifts to their children. But it is our work, by confession, humiliation, repentance, and earnest prayer, to fulfill the conditions upon which God has promised to grant us his blessing. A revival need be expected only in answer to prayer.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, March 22, 1887, par. 1; *Selected Messages, book 1* 121.1; *LDE* 189.1. [Bold type is added.] How do we ask for the Holy Spirit?

12. What is the reason for the delay?

Had Adventists, after the great disappointment in 1844, held fast their faith and followed on unitedly in the opening providence of God, receiving the message of the third angel and in the power of the Holy Spirit proclaiming it to the world, they would have seen the salvation of God, the Lord would have wrought mightily with their efforts, the work would have been completed, and **Christ would have come ere this to receive His people to their reward**. But in the period of doubt and uncertainty that followed the disappointment, many of the advent believers yielded their faith.... Thus the work was hindered, and the world was left in darkness. Had the whole Adventist body united upon the commandments of [696] God and the faith of Jesus, how widely different would have been our history!

It was not the will of God that the coming of Christ should be thus delayed. God did not design that His people, Israel, should wander forty years in the wilderness. He promised to lead them directly to the land of Canaan, and establish them there a holy, healthy, happy people. But those to whom it was first preached, went not in “because of unbelief.” Their hearts were filled with murmuring, rebellion, and hatred, and He could not fulfill His covenant with them.

For forty years did unbelief, murmuring, and rebellion shut out ancient Israel from the land of Canaan. The same sins have delayed the entrance of modern Israel into the heavenly Canaan. In neither case were the promises of God at fault. **It is the unbelief, the worldliness, unconsecration, and strife among the Lord’s professed people that have kept us in this world of sin and sorrow so many years.**—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript 4*, 1883; *Evangelism* 695.3-696.2; *1SM* 68.1-3; *LDE* 38.1; Mar 61.4-6. [Bold type is added.] [Note that *1SM* 68.1 does not include some of the content above.]

13. Are we guilty of any of those sins? What problems in the church are preventing the second coming of Jesus Christ? Have we become complacent? Even lazy? Are we asleep like the ten virgins? Read 1 SM 233-235 to see what happened at the General Conference session in 1888.
14. Read James 2:14-26. James made a very clear point that like Abraham and even Rahab, our faith must be demonstrated by our actions. We cannot just claim to be Christians; we must act like Christians. The fact that the church exists is because there is a mission; not vice versa.

The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as expressed in the General Conference *Working Policy* (A 05) is “to make disciples of all people, communicating the everlasting gospel [gospel of the kingdom (*Matthew 24:14*)] in the context of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6-12, leading them to accept Jesus as personal Savior and unite with His remnant church, discipling them to serve Him as Lord, and preparing them for His soon return.” Preaching, teaching, and healing are the suggested methods to pursue this mission. Under

“Healing” the *Working Policy* says: “Affirming the biblical principles of the well-being of the whole person, we make the preservation of health and the healing of the sick a priority and through our ministry to the poor and oppressed, cooperate with the Creator in His compassionate work of restoration.”—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Tuesday, September 20. [Note that the brackets and the content in brackets are in the *Bible Study Guide*.]

15. God is eagerly seeking to reproduce His character in as many human beings as possible; in order to finish spreading/sharing the gospel, those human beings need to go forth in the spirit and power of Elijah.

The world needs today what it needed nineteen hundred years ago—a revelation of Christ. A great work of reform is demanded, and it is only through the grace of Christ that the work of restoration, physical, mental, and spiritual, can be accomplished.—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* 143.2.

16. After hearing a seminar about what needs to be done in our day, one church member made this statement:

In our part of the world, we are not very open to new ideas and new ways of doing things. What we have heard this week about following the ministry method of Jesus actually is not new. It's an old idea. We just forgot it.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Tuesday, September 20.

17. Jesus lived in an agrarian society. Much of Galilee was inhabited by farmers and fishermen. Read John 4:35-38. After that remarkable conversation with the woman at the well at Sychar in Samaria, Jesus saw an opportunity for some quick reaping. He knew that in many hearts the sowing process needed to come first; but, here were people ready to listen and accept what He had to say and become His followers. We must remember that in farming different things need to be done at different times. Some might be sowing one crop while others are reaping another. How many people in our areas are waiting to hear the gospel?
18. We must never make the mistake of thinking that we know what is in a person's heart. The Holy Spirit is the only one who has that information. We must sow everywhere we have opportunity to do so and leave the results to God. As we know, there is a great controversy in progress.
19. Read 1 Corinthians 3:6-8. Paul also used the language of farming in explaining what happened in the Corinthian church. He said that he was the one who sowed, Apollos watered, but it was only God who could make the seed grow.
20. There is a famous book written by the English author Charles Dickens entitled, “A Tale of Two Cities.” The two cities he was talking about were London and Paris. But, in the Bible and especially in the New Testament, the two cities that we need to talk about are Babylon and Jerusalem. *Babylon* is a symbol used in the Bible for the combination of civil and military enforcement of religion.
21. Read the story of Babylon in Revelation 14:8 and 18:1-24. By contrast, read the story of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 and 22. In these chapters we have a description of God's bride—His church, His people. At that time, they will have come through terrible times; but, they will then be enjoying heavenly bliss. They will have cared for the least of these; (Matthew 25:40) and then, they will be reaping the rewards.
22. Read Revelation 5. This is one of the most important chapters in the book of Revelation. In John's vision, a crisis had arisen in the very courts of heaven. No one seemed to be available who could open the seals and read the scroll. Then, the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ Himself, appeared and agreed to do it. By His life and His death, He answered the questions in the great

controversy and turned the consternation in the heavenly council into jubilant celebration. He knows that someday the great controversy will be over and:

From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* 678.3.

23. What Jesus told us about the final events of this world's history is really scary. The Devil and his angels, knowing that it is crunch time for them and that if they fail it will be all over for them—their doom is sealed—will be doing everything possible to prevent that outcome. Jesus has already won the critical battle; He did it almost 2000 years ago.

It cost something to engrave them [those nail prints in His hands] there. It cost untold agony. **If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one.** But, though professing to be converted, we carry around with us a bundle of self that we regard as altogether too precious to be given up. It is our privilege to lay this burden at [190] the feet of Christ and in its place take the character and similitude of Christ. The Saviour is waiting for us to do this.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, 189.4. [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.

It is the privilege of every Christian not only to look for but to hasten the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, (2 Peter 3:12, margin). Were all who profess His name bearing fruit to His glory, how quickly the whole world would be sown with the seed of the gospel. Quickly the last great harvest would be ripened, and Christ would come to gather the precious grain.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* 69.1-2.

24. Are we prepared to allow God to work in our lives to accomplish that goal? Are we ready to be used by the Holy Spirit instead of trying to use Him? The early disciples managed to “turn the world upside down” in one generation without any of the modern communication devices that we know. Considering all the advantages we have, shouldn't we be able to do it even quicker and better and sharing a more complete message.
25. Think about Babylon as described in Revelation. Then, compare that with the New Jerusalem described there also. Of which city do you want to be a part? What kind of people would you expect to find in each of those places?
26. So, what are we doing to hasten the second coming of Jesus Christ? Are we just relaxing and waiting? Are we just in the church, waiting for it to get us into the kingdom? Are we just “on the bus” as described by C. S. Lewis?
27. Read Mark 4:18-19. There are some serious obstacles to certain people becoming dedicated Christians. What are some of those obstacles? “The worries about this life, the love for riches, and all other kinds of desires.” God intends for our time of waiting to be a very busy time.
28. It is very important to understand the truth about God to the fullest extent possible. But, that by itself is not enough. If our beliefs do not change our actions and if our doctrines do not influence the way we live, they have failed.
29. There have been arguments among Christians for centuries about the relationship between faith and works in the Christian church. The same tensions have come up in the Adventist Church. We do not gain salvation by doing something; salvation is by faith alone. But, faith

impacts our lives because it describes a relationship with God as our best Friend. Thus, faith works. Our actions are not a/the cause of our salvation; but rather, our actions are a result of our faith.

The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian.—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* 470.1; AG 276.7; LDE 191.4.

French acrobat Jean François Gravelet, better known as Charles Blondin, achieved great fame in the mid-1800s for his spectacular tightrope crossings of Niagara Falls. Stories abound of his confident performances on the 1,300-foot-long tightrope, strung 160 feet above the falls, without a safety net. On one occasion he carried a small stove and utensils on his back, stopped halfway across, made an omelet, and then proceeded to lower the freshly cooked breakfast to passengers on a boat below. He also made the crossing on stilts, blindfolded, and in a sack. It's estimated that in his lifetime he made the crossing more than three hundred times.

On one occasion Blondin reportedly transported a sack of potatoes in a wheelbarrow that he pushed back and forth on the tightrope. He then bantered with the crowd, asking if they thought he could push a person to the other side in the wheelbarrow. Although the consensus seemed to be yes, when he asked for a volunteer, nobody was willing to take him up on the offer.

Although the truth of that particular story can't be verified, we do know that he carried his manager across on his back—a feat that he later, at age 65, performed with his son and with another volunteer.—*Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* 172.

30. Are we prepared to get into the “faith wheelbarrow”? Are we willing to trust our lives fully into the hands of God? Are we willing to commit our time, our talents, even our money into His hands?
31. What is the relationship between our understanding of the great controversy and God's challenge to us to witness? If one has a deeper knowledge of the major issues in the great controversy, does he have a responsibility first of all to share that with other Seventh-day Adventist believers? And then, with the rest of humanity?
32. The book of James, written by the older stepbrother of Jesus, is almost a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount. Both emphasize the fact that we are not just to sit around; we are to be lights, and we are to be yeast. Our actions are supposed to impact the world around us.
33. In Matthew 24, Jesus compared our time to the days of Noah. That is not a very comfortable comparison for us. What can we do to make sure that we get on the boat?
34. Are we willing to commit ourselves to doing something for God this week? It might be something simple that makes a friend smile. It might be a random act of kindness. It could be a conscious effort to share a bit of the gospel with a non-believing friend. After our series of lessons this quarter, could we do at least that much?

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