



The Message the World Still Needs

Our mission has not changed.

“Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.’ And another angel followed, saying, ‘Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.’ Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. 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 ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.’ Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:6-12).

Now, that’s what you should be preaching!” An organization had sent this man to evaluate Seventh-day Adventist evangelistic meetings. The evening he attended, I’d talked about the influences that popular culture can have on your moral outlook and how allowing consistent negative influences can make it harder to resist temptation.

I looked at him quietly. Sometimes, if you hesitate to reply, people fill the silence by telling you more of what they’re thinking. “Forget all that other stuff,” he continued. “I mean, I get it: The Sabbath is important to Adventists, but if you were to shift to more of *this* stuff, I think your ministry would really explode.”

A MESSAGE THAT CANNOT BE REPLACED

Dudley M. Canright suddenly came to mind. He once said that if it wasn't for our unique—and difficult—message, he'd be a great preacher. He was, of course, completely missing the point. It is not a talent for speaking that makes Adventist preachers great; it is our biblical message—a message that has the power to capture the hearts of sinners like nothing else. It's effective because it's securely anchored in the person of Christ.

The fact that this man was not a Seventh-day Adventist made it easy to understand why he didn't yet value the three angels' messages. He hadn't actually heard the rest of it and was responding from an understanding of Adventists that he'd heard from friends and online sources. He favored content that aligned more closely with his personal beliefs.

Tragically it is not only non-Adventists who feel this way. Sometimes you will hear well-meaning lifetime Adventists suggest that our message is a relic from the nineteenth century, that it's time to move on and become more like other Christian churches. Often you will discover that their distaste for our doctrines stems from the way they learned them as children: If their mentors were severe and judgmental, it's likely they were cheated of a Christ-centered and redemptive understanding. It's also tragically possible that they were simply never taught.

Recent converts to this movement will often tell you that the three angels' messages were the clearest, most powerful picture of Christ they'd ever seen—and those engaged in soul winning will testify to the power of the message to draw lost sinners home.

Watch a public evangelistic audience carefully. Pay attention to the faces. Every night, the evangelist casts a different doctrinal fishing lure over the ears of the crowd—and every night, you will see different “fish” rise to the surface to bite.

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Different aspects of our message appeal to different people. Sometimes it's the Sabbath that convinces someone to surrender his or her life to Christ. Other times it's the state of the dead, or even the health message. It's as if God has given us 28 lures to use as fishers of men. By the time all 28 fundamental beliefs have been faithfully taught, the net begins to fill.

Some are convinced that the effectiveness of our message is waning—that it is less relevant to postmodern crowds. Experienced evangelists will tell you that this is far from the truth: In recent years they've been watching its appeal grow. Audiences are not only as big as they've ever been—they're also more responsive. There are even cases in which people rose from their seats halfway through a presentation, spontaneously starting an altar call response more than 20 minutes before the presentation finished.

It's not human eloquence that causes that. Mediocre preachers, if they're faithful, will see results comparable to the eloquent ones, because it is the Spirit of God speaking to the audience through His Word.

FAITHFUL TO THE ASSIGNMENT

God did not make a mistake with the assignment He's given us. It's hard to imagine heaven gathering for an emergency meeting because it has occurred to them that they gave the Seventh-day Adventist Church the wrong message. “Someone get a pen,” Gabriel says, “because we've got to do a complete rewrite. We just didn't anticipate the postmodern world, and we need to adjust!”

It's a ridiculous thought; we instinctively know that it's not true. If the prophecies have been right for so many centuries—even millennia—we know that Revelation 14 is not wrong. Neither is Revelation 18, which promises that the world will soon be illuminated with the glory of Christ.

This movement is not destined to die in the dark; it is headed toward a grand climax, and we will be utterly surprised by the people flowing into the church. Sister White assures us, “Thousands in the eleventh hour will see and acknowledge the truth. . . . These conversions to truth will be made with a rapidity that will surprise the church, and God's name alone will be glorified.”*

The stunning truths in Revelation 14 are not losing their significance, no matter how far the world appears to be straying from God's ideal. They are gaining in potential as people witness the collapse of human systems and experience the disappointment that trusting in the kingdoms of this world brings. Disillusionment is at an all-time high, and while it's true that many people have despaired of the idea that there is objective truth to be found, it is a mistake to believe people are happy in that condition. The human heart has been wired for eternity (Eccl. 3:11), and the pull toward Christ will only grow stronger as this fallen planet continues to disintegrate.

But even if that weren't true, we'd still be required to preach. After all, Noah spoke for 120 years without the promise of large results, and we all know he would have been sinning had he refused to do it. There's a key difference, though: Even though the moral condition of our world *will* resemble that of Noah's day, Noah was told up front that there would be only eight people on the ark. But we've been shown a crowd of redeemed sinners that cannot be numbered—a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. **✠**

* Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958, 1980), book 2, p. 16.