

# "Watchman, what of the night?"



"The hour has come, the hour is striking, and striking at you, the hour and the end!" Ezekiel 7:6 (Moffatt)

## "THE CRUX OF THE 1888 MESSAGE"

### *Editor's Preface*

We begin this new year of 2022 with a topic that has and continues to be highly controversial within the Seventh-day Adventist Community - the 1888 message. While doing some preliminary research, this editor came across an essay in WWN (XXX - June 1997) <sup>1</sup> written by Elder William Grotheer that pinpoints the very 'heart' of this message. We are therefore reprinting it in this current issue of WWN with minor textual corrections and editing.

### **A Biblical Analysis Of The 1888 Message**

Over arching the ancillary messages of the Three Angels of Revelation 14 is "the everlasting gospel." ... This "gospel" proclaimed with new emphasis just prior to the coming of Christ is the criterion by which obedience is judged. For when Christ comes, He comes "In flaming fire taking vengeance on them ... that obey not the gospel" (2 Thessalonians 1: 8). Little consideration has been given to this obedience, yet those who respond to "the everlasting gospel" not only keep the commandments of God, but also keep "the faith of Jesus." (Revelation 14: 12). It is righteousness through faith not "of works, lest any man should boast." (Ephesians 2: 9) ...

The apostle Paul told the Philippian jailer - "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16: 31). Here, Paul announces one aspect of the verb "saved" (Gr. - σωθήση), the passive voice. However, it is also future, a promise of what is to come. "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6: 23). The future reality is grasped by faith, the same as



the present forgiveness of, and cleansing from, sin because of belief in the promise of God. All is the gift of God. There will be no boasting in Heaven even as there should be none on earth. In every facet of the redemptive process we are recipients of God's mercy in and through Jesus Christ.

This fact applies equally to the group known in prophetic revelation as the 144,000. It must not be marginalized that the setting of the "everlasting gospel" is in this context. The worship demanded for "the image of the beast" (Revelation 13: 15) is challenged by the third angel as he joins his voice with the sounding of the everlasting gospel. Any one who chooses to so worship faces the "wrath of God" (Ibid. 14: 9-10). Interjected between these two "revelations" is a second description given of the 144,000. (Ibid. 14: 1-5). The first description of this group follows the notation of the coming wrath of the Lamb with the question - "who shall be able to stand?" (Ibid. 6: 16-17; 7: 4). The question arises - Does this group stand because of some attainment they have reached superior to the sanctification experienced by any previous generation? This is no idle question. In reality, whether recognized or not, it is the basic issue which plagues the present controversy over the whole 1888 agitation.

We might address the question from another angle. Why was the 1888 message given? Why did Ellen White declare this message to be "the third angel's message in verity" when the message as given says nothing about the gospel? (Revelation 14: 9-11). The fact is, as revealed in the prophecy, that when the third angel's message sounds, the first angel, with the everlasting gospel, is still sounding. It does not cease.

It should be also obvious that the "everlasting gospel" is distinct from the "gospel" of the "beast." Translated from sym-

bols it means that the "everlasting gospel" is a complete antithesis of the Tridentine gospel of Rome. Further, it should be noted that the adjunct messages of the first two angels as stated use the Greek past tense (aorist), while the third angel's message is given in the Greek present tense. It is the time of the action which involves the final controversy as brought to view in Revelation 13: 14-17. The results are also noted - a people, who are steadfast, "[keeping] (not trying to keep) the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." (Ibid. 14: 12). Does this then support the position that this group of people will achieve a "perfection" unknown except by Jesus Christ? Again the question: What was the purpose of God in sending to His people, to whom had been committed the trust of the everlasting gospel, the 1888 message?

From the viewpoint of heaven, the church had "preached the law until [they were] as dry as the hills of Gilboa that had neither dew nor rain." (*R&H*, March 11, 1890).<sup>2</sup> "Many had lost sight of Jesus. They needed to have their eyes directed to His divine person, His merits, and His changeless love for the human family. All power is given into His hands, that He may dispense rich *gifts* unto men, imparting the priceless *gift* of His *own righteousness* to the helpless human agent. ... The uplifted Saviour is to appear in His efficacious work as the Lamb slain, sitting upon the throne to dispense the *priceless covenant blessings*, the *benefits* He died to purchase for every soul who should *believe* on Him." (*TM*, pg. 92; emphasis supplied).<sup>3</sup>

If we can not understand that one is justified by faith *alone* without the deeds of the Law, then we cannot comprehend the meaning of the typical Day of Atonement, when the mediation of the high priest alone accomplished the cleansing from sin. We need to understand that we can no more bring a clean

thing out of an unclean thing than we can provide a propitiation for the forgiveness of our sins. If, however, we conclude that we are justified by grace plus our works, then we can deduct that somehow we can, by our endeavors, cleanse ourselves.

The final atonement, what it means, and how it will be realized has been a troubling question in Adventism since the 1888 message. In all honesty, the Holy Flesh Movement was an attempt to answer this question. The Brinsmead Awakening was also a sincere attempt to grapple with this same question. The "new theology," which has engulfed a large segment of Adventism, seeks to solve the problem by jettisoning the concept that "sinless" living will be realized prior to the close of human probation and that instead we will continue to sin till Jesus comes. Another group seeking to identify themselves as "historic" Adventists hold that through works one must reach perfection prior to the close of probation. It is true that on this point they are "historic" because in perception they are actually pre-1888 Adventists.

Before seeking a solution to the question, the answer of which has so far eluded us, let us see if the conclusion of perfection prior to the close of probation is biblically based. If there is no biblical basis, then there is justification for the conclusion of the "new theology."

The book of Revelation pictures a time when "the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened," and "no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled." (Ibid. 15: 5, 8). The "man" who had been there is the "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2: 5). The conclusion is obvious, intercession has ceased. Then sins must also cease to be committed by the living who will be saved. Yet

these still will be possessed by a "vile" body because not until Jesus comes will there be any different body in which to live. (see Philippians 3: 20-21). Something has to happen which as yet has not been seen, except in that one Man who remains in the presence of God for us till the close of probationary time - a sinless life in sinful flesh. The answer to this "impossible possibility" is the number one priority of all questions faced today in Adventism. The movement was raised up to provide and proclaim the answer. The message of 1888 was to call the Church back to its purpose for existence - the proclamation of the "everlasting gospel." We still at this late hour have not found the answer, and are still unwilling to acknowledge what 1888 was basically all about.

We need to face the reality that God is not looking for 144,000 perfect people, but rather 144,000 sinners who are willing that He work His will in them. When these can be found, the mediation in the heavenly sanctuary can cease because the will of God is that we sin not. This also means that we in our vain attempts to be perfect, cease our strivings, recognizing ourselves to be what we really are, and let the Holy Spirit accomplish what we cannot achieve. At the cross, we will cry out "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, ... [give] up" (see Luke 23: 46).

The *how* of what will take place at that time in the divine purposes and plans of God remains as mysterious as the *how* of the incarnation. If the premise is correct that an understanding of justification by faith was the intent of the 1888 message so that a people might be prepared to understand the cleansing and justification resultant from the final atonement, then in the illustration used by Paul to set forth the concept of justification by faith is a valid illustration likewise by

which we may understand the working of God in the final atonement.

In Romans 4, Paul illustrates his conclusion "that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." (Romans 3: 28). He chooses the experience of Abraham as his key example. Quoting Genesis 15: 6, Paul wrote - "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." (Romans 4: 3). The promised inheritance of the land of Canaan remained allusive to Abram since he had no child. He suggested to God that Eliezer, one born in his house could be his heir. God said, no one but whom you father will be the heir. Time continued, and Sarah reached the age when there was no way for her to have a child. At that time, being somewhere between 70 and 75 years of age, she suggested to Abraham that Hagar her handmaid could conceive the promised heir. Ishmael was born. Time continued. Sarah reached ninety. Visiting Abraham on the plains of Mamre, the Lord told him, "Sarah thy wife shall have a son." Sarah laughed. In response, God asked, "Is any thing too hard for the LORD?" (Genesis 18: 10, 14).

Some twenty years passed between the promise of God confirmed by oath and the realization of that promise. During that time a "works" program of human devising was tried. It produced a conflict that has not ceased to this day. The fulfilment of the promise was to be in God's way and by His power. The promised seed of Abraham was to be a progenitor of the Seed promised to Eve. The type reflected the Antitype. God acted, and restored faculties to Sarah so she could bare. God acted and Mary conceived not knowing a man. Paul, noting the impossibility of the human observed that Abraham "being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform." (Romans 4: 21). It was by faith so that the glory would be

God's. (Ibid. 4: 20).

Paul indicates that the experience of Abraham "was not written for his sake alone, ... But for us also" (Ibid. 4: 23-24). While it is clearly stated by Paul that he is writing about the initial experience of justification, nevertheless the same divine initiative is required in the final work of God as is envisioned in Revelation. The first experience of justification must be understood and accepted as outlined in the gospel - by faith alone - or else the final one will be missed in a "works" program even as marked the time of waiting in the experience of Abraham. The waiting period has been long across the centuries of time. The justified ones have "died in faith, not having received the promises" (Hebrews 11: 13).

In our study of Romans, we often miss this future factor of the Gospel. After noting that there is "no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" who by the Spirit of Christ's life have been freed from "the law of sin and death," Paul sets forth the opportunity given to such to be "the sons of God" - those who are willing to be "led by the Spirit of God" (Romans 8: 1, 2, 14). But then, and note carefully the future factor, he wrote - "For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God." (Ibid. 8: 19, KJV). Two other translations amplify the force of this verse: Weymouth reads - "For all creation, gazing eagerly as if with outstretched neck, is waiting and longing to see the manifestation of the sons of God." <sup>4</sup> Phillips reads - "The whole creation is on tiptoe to see the wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own." <sup>5</sup> If those following the Spirit "are the sons of God" then what does it mean: the manifestation of the sons of God "coming into their own"?

Paul indicates that the whole creation has been "subjected ... in hope" (Romans 8: 20).

Even though we may have "the first fruits of the Spirit" there is a "waiting for the adoption, ... the redemption of [the] body." Because of this condition, "we are saved by hope" and "if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." (Ibid. 8: 23-25). This involves the whole question of righteousness by faith, for Paul wrote to the Galatians - "For we through the Spirit *wait* for the hope of righteousness by faith." (Ibid. 5: 5, *emph. added*).

What is the status of those who "wait" in "hope"? First they have "the first fruits of the Spirit." Paul has described their attitude of mind in contrast to the body. He said of himself - "So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." (Romans 7: 25). Those who walk after the Spirit are no longer "carnally minded" that is "the minding of the flesh" but are rather "spiritually minded," that is, focusing on "the minding of the Spirit." (Ibid. 8: 5-6, *margin, Gr.*). These "justified ones" have the mind of Christ because they have followed Him to the Cross and have been crucified in Him. Having responded to His call God has a plan for them. Those who are justified are to be glorified. It has been pointed out that the verbs - "justified" and "glorified" - are in the Greek past (aorist) tense. We ask how can that be for in no way have we been glorified?

In his letter "to the faithful in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 1: 1), Paul explains "the hope of [God's] calling" and "the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe" (Ibid. 1: 18-19). God raised up Jesus and set Him "at his own right hand in the heavenly places" (Ibid. 1: 20). Then he explains:

"God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath

raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ibid. 2: 4-6).

Where Jesus is, the justified ones will be. The reality is in Christ; it is accomplished. It is theirs to have by faith and to hold in hope through "patient continuance in well doing" (Romans 2: 7). But there is a future aspect. Paul continues:

"That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2: 7).

This is the "blessed hope" (Titus 2: 13). The hope of the present and this hope of the future will all blend into one at the appearing of Christ "the second time" (Hebrews 9: 28).

This covers those who die in the Lord - justified, then glorified. What of those who will be alive when probation closes? When the Man Christ Jesus leaves "the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven" (Revelation 15: 5), sin, which excludes from heaven, will have to have ceased in the lives of the living faithful. This is the picture in Revelation. There is described a group of people in whose mouth there is found no guile. The everlasting gospel will produce "saints" who "keep" not only "the commandments of God," but also "the faith of Jesus." How is this to be? A systematic program of works which produces perfection? If God's grace can span the distance between a justified person, though a sinner, who sees "corruption" and the day of the resurrection when He puts on that person "incorruption," then God's grace has a plan for the "mortal" who shall put on "immortality." This is the message of the everlasting gospel. To answer this question both by preaching that gospel and experiencing its reality was the purpose of the Advent Movement. The long delay in time indicates that we have not proved true

to our trust. There dare not be any further delay for God has indicated that the last aspects of the typical Day of Atonement are now in progress.

There is an answer in Revelation. He who said: "Behold I come quickly," had just given a dictum:

"He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still." (Revelation 22: 11).

This verse, in the third person Greek imperative, consists of two pair of couplets in contrast - the "unjust" to the "righteous" and the "filthy" to the "holy." The use of the imperative was "normal in royal edicts," such as this is. (*A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, pg. 947).<sup>6</sup> In English we have no equivalent for the third person imperative, and must add the helping verb, "let." There is also a contrast between the two couplets in the use of the voice of the Greek verb. The first couplet is in the active voice, while the last is in the passive voice. Herein is the force of what this dictum said, and a suggestive answer to the question posed in the above discussion.

*The S.D.A. Bible Commentary* suggests as a literal translation of this verse the reading –

"The one doing unrighteousness, let him do unrighteousness still; and the filthy one, let him be made filthy still; and the righteous one, let him do righteousness still; and the holy one, let him be made holy still." (7BC, pg. 896).<sup>7</sup>

This literal translation follows the 2nd edition Greek text of the United Bible Societies. In this text, they opted for the longer wording of the first member of the second couplet - δικαιοσύνην ποιησάτω (let him do righteousness) - rather than δικαιοθήτω of the Received Text. In this the editors violated

their own guideline - "In general the shorter reading is to be preferred, except ...," and their exceptions do not apply to this verse. (*A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, pg. xxvii).<sup>8</sup>

The Received Text places both members of the first couplet in the active voice, and both members of the second couplet in the passive voice. Thus "he who is unjust" continues acting unjustly, and "he who is filthy" continues in his filthiness. However, "the justified one" is "made righteous," and "the holy one" is made "holy." In other words, as a result of the dictum of heaven, they are acted upon.

Now we need to ask ourselves, do the first members of each couplet represent the dead, while the second members represent the living at the Second Coming; even as in 1 Corinthians 15: 51-54, the dead are designated by the term, "corruptible" while the living are defined by the term, "mortal"? If this differentiation holds for Revelation 22: 11, the first member of the second couplet is saying that the one justified, declared righteous by believing in Jesus, is at the resurrection made righteous by the word that calls him forth from the grave. The decision, that he who dies in faith should be raised incorruptible and righteous, was made in the judgment. Those who died unjustified remain unjustified by their own decision. This leaves us now with ὁ ἅγιος ἁγιασθήτω ἔτι (the holy one let him be made holy) The word, ἅγιος, in its plural form is translated "saints" in Revelation 14: 12. Any connection is open for further study.

In the Gospels many of the healing acts of Jesus note the recipient as being saved. One illustration is found in Luke 8: 49-55. To Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, when he heard that his daughter was dead, Jesus said - "Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole." (Gr. - σωζω - saved). She was; Jesus

but said - "Maid, arise. And her spirit came again." It was the "word" that rejuvenated the womb of Sarah. Cannot that same "word" make holy the living? "Is there anything too hard for the Lord?"

The preparation which could designate one - ὁ ἅγιος ("he that is holy") - might be found in the vision given to Zechariah. As Joshua "clothed with filthy garments ... stood before the angel" of the LORD (Zechariah 3: 3), a command was given:

"Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment." (Ibid. 3: 4).

It was then that Joshua and those with him became "men of wonder." (Ibid. 3: 8, margin). This experience involves the willingness to have our garments removed - letting "the shame of our nakedness" appear, so as to desire to be clothed. No longer dare we run from God so as to hide ourselves. We must in our inmost souls be honest, then in our mouths will be found no guile, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. We will be without fault before the throne, ready to be made holy at His word - to have

our iniquity pass from us. All of this is embraced in the everlasting gospel. "Thanks be to God, which *giveth* us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15: 57, *emph. added*). ❖ WHG (GLP)

1. William H. Grotheer, "Watchman, what of the night?" (Ozone, AR: Adventist Laymen's Foundation of Mississippi, Inc., XXX - June 1997, "The Everlasting Gospel, Part 6."), 2-6. [https://www.adventistlaymen.com/WWN%20Text%20Versions/wwn6\(97\).html](https://www.adventistlaymen.com/WWN%20Text%20Versions/wwn6(97).html)
2. Ellen G. White, *Present Truth and Review and Herald Articles, vol. 2, 1886-1892* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, March 11, 1890), 375-376, par. 13.
3. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1962), 92.
4. Richard Francis Weymouth, *The New Testament in Modern Speech (WNT)* (London, EN: James Clarke and Co., 1903), 368.
5. John Bertram Phillips, *The New Testament in Modern English (Phi-NT)* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1972), 324.
6. Archibald Thomas Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (London, EN: Hodder & Stoughton, third edition, 1919), 947.
7. (Various Contributors), *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 7* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1957), 896.
8. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London, EN / New York, NY: United Bible Societies, third edition, 1971), xxvii

\*All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

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