

Sermon Title: If We Keep Our Eyes On Jesus

Scripture Reading: Revelation 1:1–3

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to shew unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass; and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John: Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that He saw. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”

Introduction

Prisons around the world house many criminals who have committed serious offenses. Sometimes they try to escape. While planning their escape, they know that they can only attempt it when few people are watching. They usually wait until night when most of the prisoners and staff are asleep and there is little movement. But even if they were to try their escape at night, most prisons have guard towers, so the chances of being successful are quite low. Security guards serve as watchmen in these towers and they continually survey the grounds looking for anyone trying to escape. Huge floodlights shine from the towers to illumine all the premises of the prison. As long as the light shines brightly, a prisoner has little chance of making his way across the prison yard unnoticed. If a prisoner wanted to make a successful escape, his or her best chance would be to somehow put out the lights shining from the towers.

I. The revelation of Jesus comes through the testimony of Jesus

Just like the light shining from the guard tower, God gave us light that would expose the devil as he tries to make his move across the yard of planet earth. Jesus said, “I am the Light of the world.”¹ In the light of Jesus, the devil is exposed. When we look at the lovely and matchless character of Jesus, the devil stands in stark contrast to all that Jesus is. The devil tried to get rid

¹ John 8:12.

of Christ Jesus and thought he succeeded on Calvary's hill one Friday afternoon. But on Sunday morning, that Light shone brightly from the grave, brighter than it shined before the grave!

In Revelation 1:2 we read that the revelation of Jesus came through the word of God. The Psalmist David wrote: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."² At one point Satan tried to get rid of the Holy Scriptures. There was a time in the history of the church when only the learned clergy had access to the sacred oracles of God. Lay persons were left in darkness, ignorant of God's Word until reformers such as John Wycliffe and Martin Luther translated the Bible into the common language of the people. History records that the "papacy succeeded to a great extent in preventing the circulation of the Scriptures so that the light of Bible knowledge, with its elevating influences, was almost wholly excluded."³ Today, not only are printed-Bibles widely available in many parts of the world, but millions have electronic access to a variety of versions of it. Having a Bible currently is a privilege that many past Christians paid for with their lives!

That said, Revelation 1:2 states that the revelation of Jesus also comes through the testimony of Jesus Christ. Let's see what else the Bible tells us about the testimony of Jesus Christ. Revelation 12:17 records, "And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and he went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." According to the Greek, the "testimony of Jesus Christ" is not someone else's testimony of Jesus. It's not like when we leave church today we will have a testimony about Jesus. No, the testimony of Jesus is the testimony given by Jesus Himself. And the devil is mad about this testimony because it testifies against him. As we just read, Satan wars against those who have the testimony of Jesus Christ. The devil is trying to get rid of the testimony of Jesus Christ right now. But what is the testimony of Jesus Christ?

II. The Testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy

John the Revelator wrote in Revelation 19:10: "And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the

² Psalm 119:105.

³ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), 265.

testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” Now you may say, “I understand how Christ is the light for He said it Himself, ‘I am the light.’ I understand how the Word of God is the light for the Bible says ‘Thy word is a light unto my path.’” But how is prophecy a light?” The Apostle Peter wrote the following in 2 Peter 1:19, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a **light that shineth in a dark place**, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.” [Emphasis supplied]

III. The Spirit of Prophecy was Manifested in the Life and Ministry of Ellen White

On November 26, 1827, on a farm in Gorham, Maine, a farmer by the name of Robert Harmon and his wife Eunice welcomed the seventh and eight additions to their family—twin baby girls. One they named Elizabeth; the other they named Ellen. Robert Harmon was a hatmaker whose business financially supported the family. The twins were the youngest of the Harmon children; little Ellen particularly loved the animals on the farm and she also enjoyed nature walks with her twin sister. Sometimes Ellen had to help her sister, Elizabeth, who was rather chubby, over the logs that would at times block their path.

Ellen was a very caring child. When the Harmon children would walk in the forest to gather hickory nuts, “Ellen, always compassionate, took with her a little cloth bag of corn. When she found a cache of nuts in a hole in a hollow tree, she eagerly retrieved her find and then substituted the corn she had brought, hoping that the exchange would not be too disappointing to the provident squirrels.”⁴ Squirrels are known to collect and hide nuts for future dining.

Ellen’s life was by no means a charmed one. One afternoon while making her way home with Elizabeth and another friend, an incident changed her life forever. A girl who had become angry with them threw a rock that hit young Ellen in the face, just as she had turned to see how

⁴ Arthur Lacey White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years 1827 – 1862* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1985), 20.

close the girl was to them. This incident left Ellen's face quite deformed and she was in a coma for three weeks. Many thought she would not survive the incident.

During this time Ellen's father was away from home on a business trip to Atlanta, Georgia. When he returned he did not recognize little Ellen. When she had enough strength to get up, she approached a mirror to look at herself. One quick glance and she was horrified. Ellen wished that the incident had taken her life rather than leave her looking as she did. Who could blame her for feeling this way? She was only nine years old.

Ellen Harmon had to leave school due to complications from the accident. This injury damaged her eyesight and she experienced difficulty writing, as her hands would shake whenever she picked up something. Writing about this many years later, she noted: "This misfortune, which for a time seemed so bitter and was so hard to bear, has proved to be a blessing in disguise. The cruel blow which blighted the joys of earth, was the means of turning my eyes to heaven. I might never have known Jesus, had not the sorrow that clouded my early years led me to seek comfort in Him."⁵

As a teen Ellen gave her heart to the Lord and was baptized into the Methodist Church. During this same time a preacher by the name of William Miller came to Portland, Maine, and preached about the second coming of Jesus Christ, which Miller believed was imminent. All of these meetings left Ellen feeling unsure whether she was in a suitable condition to meet her Creator, so she continually prayed that God would help her be ready when Jesus returned. In studying the prophecies related to Daniel 8:14 concerning the cleansing of the sanctuary, the Millerites believed that Christ would return on October 22, 1844. As we know all too well, Jesus did not return on that day. Today this day is known as The Great Disappointment, but even though it was a disappointment to many believers, Ellen recalled that the year preceding the proposed return of Jesus was the happiest year of her life.⁶ Why? She, along with many other people around the world, were preparing to meet Jesus when He came riding on the clouds!

⁵ *Review and Herald*, November 25, 1884.

⁶ *Life Sketches*, 59.

When Jesus did not return, the fallout from the disappointment splintered Millerite Advent movement into several groups. One group gave up religion altogether. Another group of believers returned to the churches from which they had come. Still another group believed that Jesus had come, but that He had done so in secret. A fourth group believed that the date was right, but the event was wrong.

The next day, a man named Hiram Edson was on his way to visit a gathering of disappointed and discouraged Adventists. Discouraged that Jesus had not returned the previous day, they were meeting together to comfort one another and to further study the Bible to see if they could figure out where they had gone wrong in their understanding of prophecy. As Edson walked through a cornfield, rehearsing to himself the services of the earthly sanctuary service and its prophetic implications, he came to a new understanding that led the believers that day to search the Scriptures carefully. A close study of the earthly sanctuary service revealed to them where they had gone wrong in their previous understanding of the second coming of Jesus. On the Day of Atonement, the earthly High priest would move from the holy place to the most holy place. This would initiate a time of judgment as the high priest interceded with God on behalf of the people. The ministrations of the high priest in the most holy place would culminate in the cleansing of the sanctuary.

The Advent believers soon saw that rather than returning to the earth on October 22, 1844, Jesus, our heavenly High Priest, had moved from the holy place of the heavenly sanctuary to the most holy place, there to begin the work of the investigative judgment and the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary on the great anti-typical Day of Atonement. It was at the end of this cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary that Jesus would in fact return to earth to take the redeemed to heaven with Him.

Also in 1844, at the age of 17, God called Ellen Harmon to be His messenger to His fledgling remnant church. God had given similar visions to two other men. William Ellis Foy, a Black, Millerite preacher, shared as best he could the messages he had received from God, but the racial climate in the United States at the time impeded his progress. Hazen Foss, another person to whom God spoke, refused the opportunity to speak concerning the things that God had shown

him. Later he regretted bitterly when the messages were taken from him. Consequently, it was with great apprehension that young Ellen Harmon answered God's call to be His messenger.

The call of Ellen Harmon, later Ellen White after her marriage to James White, and the prophetic gift manifested in her life and ministry have informed the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The eighteenth Fundamental Belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church states:

The Scriptures testify that one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is the identifying mark of the remnant church and we believe it was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G White. Her writings speak with prophetic authority and provide comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction to the church. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.⁷

Note carefully that the Bible is the foundation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its beliefs. The writings of Ellen White, the fruit of the Holy Spirit's work in her life and ministry, do not replace nor supersede the Bible. In fact, Ellen White's writings are a means of pointing readers back to the Bible. Her inspired counsels are among the most Christocentric of any Christian writer in any age. A close reading of her writings reveals some 840-plus names, titles, and appellations by which she referred to Jesus. She calls Him the Prince of Peace, Rose of Sharon, Divine One, Son of God, Heaven Light/Beauty, Shepard, the Tender One, Signature of Heaven, Loving One, Redeemer, King, Savior, and much more.⁸

Seventh-day Adventists thank God for the ministry of Ellen White. They are not ashamed of her life or ministry! Her books are among their most prized possessions and for many they are within easy reach—always available to offer some window on God, some word of hope, some bit of encouragement or counsel. While other Christian writers have enriched the lives of believers the world over, imagine the impact on the lives of those who follow Christ if they

⁷ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Nampa: ID, Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2016), 168.

⁸ The Ellen White daily devotional book for 2021 features 365 of the more than 800 names Ellen White attributed to Jesus in her published books.

would spend some thoughtful hours with *Steps to Christ*, *The Desire of Ages*, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, or *The Great Controversy*.

Ellen White's writings are thoroughly biblical. One minister noted that Satan and his angels look for ways to destroy Ellen White's writings because they know that their craftiness won't fly unless they can dispose of the Spirit of Prophecy. Almost since the inception of Ellen White's call, Satan has raised up men who cast aspersions on her character and ministry, some even disparaging her as a plagiarist and a liar.⁹ Even today, some within the Adventist Church continue to attack the writings of Ellen White. It is amazing to faithful readers of her books that church members who have been taught the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and affirmed them publicly, and who also believe the gift of prophecy was manifested in the life and ministry of Ellen White, still end up denouncing Ellen White. This often happens when they, or others, visit anti-Ellen White sites on the Internet and social media. If we desire to be followers of Jesus, especially in these last days of earth's history, we must put our faith in Jesus Christ and not in the misinformation circulated by a few disgruntled people on the Internet or social media.

If the truth be told, many who despise the writings of Ellen G. White usually despise it because it has been misrepresented and misused by some of us. While some of us disregard the counsels altogether, others elevate them to the same level as the Bible or higher. Seventh-day Adventists should be excited that God has blessed the church with such a marvelous gift, and we should use it with sound principles of interpretation and great care. If we are not excited about and careful in our use of this special gift of truth, how can we expect others to be?

It is sadly the case that those in the church who despise and reject the writings of Ellen White often lack something in their spiritual lives and this deficit inevitably leads them to reject the Bible as well. Ellen White believed that a study of Scripture and a willingness to obey it were critical to retaining one's faith and trust in God. Ellen White once wrote: "If you had made God's word your study, with a desire to reach the Bible standard and attain to Christian perfection, you would not have needed the *Testimonies*. It is because you have neglected to acquaint yourselves

⁹ From a sermon preached by the late Dr. C. D. Brooks. The title of his sermon was, "I want my church back."

with God's inspired book that He has sought to reach you by simple, direct testimonies, calling your attention to the words of inspiration which you had neglected to obey, and urging you to fashion your lives in accordance with its pure and elevated teachings."¹⁰ Ellen White believed in the primacy of Scripture as the church's supreme rule of faith and practice.

Another hindrance to the acceptance of Ellen White's writings by some is the lack of "fruit" in the life of those who claim to read them. A minister once noted that people who choose not to accept the messages God sent through Ellen White is a global problem, but that those who will not accept it would be much more disposed to do so if they could see the fruits that the Spirit of Prophecy produces in the lives of those who accept it.

Satan wants us to discount these sacred counsels at the very time we need them most. If the devil cannot cause us to reject these writings, he'll simply cause us to be indifferent to them so that we are too busy to read and digest the truths therein. Second Chronicles 20:20 says, "Believe His prophets, and you will prosper." But in order to believe the prophets, we must first read them. As our Scripture for today makes clear, blessed are those who read, hear, and keep the words that are written.

In one of her earlier visions Ellen White saw how people would come into opposition with her writings and she wept bitterly. She pleaded with God to remove the gift from her because many would hate her. Remember she was only a teenager at the time, but she felt burdened to share with others what had been revealed to her. Before dispensing with the writings of Ellen White, anyone who doubts that Ellen White was a messenger of God should read her writings, perhaps beginning with *The Desire of Ages*, a book that will draw readers into a closer and deeper loving relationship with Jesus.

¹⁰ E.G. White. *Life Sketches*, 198.

Conclusion

As we close, let us focus for a moment on Ellen White's first vision.¹¹ In that vision she saw Adventist believers walking up a narrow path leading to the city of God. A bright light shone behind them illuminating their path. Ellen White was shown that this light represented the Midnight Cry of those looking to see Jesus. Ahead of the band of believers was Jesus, leading them to the city. Ellen White noted that as long as they kept their eyes on Jesus, they were safe on their journey. Whenever they took their eyes off of Jesus they would grow weary, become discouraged, and complain that the city was a great way off. She further noted that many fell off the path into the peril of darkness. If only they kept their eyes on Jesus, they would make it safely to the kingdom. This focus on Jesus became the foundation of Ellen White's 70-year ministry, and it is the recurring theme of the Bible as well.

Our focus on Jesus was prefigured in the desert when the Israelites being bitten by venomous snakes were instructed to look at the bronze serpent which Moses erected (Numbers 21:4-9). In John 1:29, John the Baptist picked up the refrain when he told hearers on the day of Jesus' baptism, "Behold,"—keep our eyes on—"the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." In John 3:14 Jesus Himself declared that just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, He was to be lifted up and all who would look to Him would be saved.

We must look to Jesus and focus on Jesus! When the billows of life are tossing all around us, our only safeguard is to look to Jesus! When Peter kept his eyes on Jesus, he walked on water. When he averted his gaze, he began to slip beneath the waves (Matthew 14:22-33)! When Christianity's first martyr faced certain death, he turned his eyes heavenward to focus on Jesus! As he did, he saw heaven open and Jesus standing there watching over Him in his great hour of trial (Acts 7:54). Because Stephen kept his eyes on Jesus, it did not matter what the world would do to him. His eyes were fixed on the Life-giver, the One who could call him back to life!

We must keep our eyes on Jesus because He is coming soon!

¹¹ You may read about Ellen White's first vision in *Early Writings*, chapter one.

It just takes one look at the Savior to change us! Some may think that a look is not enough, but it is a good start because as one minister enthused, “When I look I can’t take my eyes off of Him. When I look at Him, His loveliness entrances me. When I look at Jesus, I recognize who I am. Before looking at Jesus I might think that I am doing okay, but when I look at Jesus, and see myself in the X-ray vision of Jesus, I recognize that nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to the cross I cling!”¹²

Brothers and sisters, let’s keep our eyes fixed on Jesus! If you ever become discouraged along the way, if you ever grow weary, remember that if we only keep our eyes on Jesus we will make it home safely! One might ask, “Well, how do I keep my eyes on Jesus?” Jesus is revealed through His Word and His testimony. If we are to keep our eyes on Jesus, we must look for Him in our daily lives and see Him in His daily providences. We must read His Word and His testimony! We must also hear His Word and His testimony! Finally, we must obey His Word and His testimony!

Let us keep our eyes on Jesus. It’s the only way that we will make it home safely. Troubles, cares, and anxiety may come at us from all sides, but if our eyes are fixed on Jesus, we will make it home! Perhaps Ellen White summed it up best when she wrote:

Looking upon the crucified Redeemer, we more fully comprehend the magnitude and meaning of the sacrifice made by the Majesty of heaven. The plan of salvation is glorified before us, and the thought of Calvary awakens living and sacred emotions in our hearts. Praise to God and the Lamb will be in our hearts and on our lips; for pride and self-worship cannot flourish in the soul that keeps fresh in memory the scenes of Calvary. **He who beholds the Saviour’s matchless love** will be elevated in thought, purified in heart, transformed in character. He will go forth to be a light to the world, to reflect in some degree this mysterious love. The more we contemplate the cross of Christ, the more fully shall we adopt the language of the apostle when he said, "God forbid that I should glory, save in

¹² Dr. Walter Pearson in his sermon titled “Medicine and Magnetism.”

the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” Gal. 6:14.¹³

May God keep us until the day when our faith becomes sight, when we will be able to put our arms around the One for whom we have looked and longed!

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¹³ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1989), 661. Emphasis supplied.