

Point of No Return

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The Pathway Vision

IN the very early days of the advent movement when the believers were few in number, the Lord gave a vision through His prophet which contains a message of great importance to every true believer since. It was, in fact, the first vision ever given to Sister White and is described in part as follows:

Early Writings, p. 14-15:

While I was praying at the family altar, the Holy Ghost fell upon me, and I seemed to be rising higher and higher, far above the dark world. I turned to look for the Advent people in the world, but could not find them, when a voice said to me, "Look again, and look a little higher."

At this I raised my eyes, and saw a straight and narrow path, cast up high above the world. On this path the Advent people were traveling to the city, which was at the farther end of the path. They had a bright light set up behind them at the beginning of the path, which an angel told me was the midnight cry. This light shone all along the path, and gave light for their feet so that they might not stumble. If they kept their eyes fixed on Jesus, who was just before them, leading them to the city, they were safe.

But soon some grew weary, and said the city was a great way off, and they expected to have entered it before. Then

Jesus would encourage them by raising His glorious right arm, and from His arm came a light which waved over the Advent band, and they shouted, "Alleluia!" Others rashly denied the light behind them, and said that it was not God that had led them out so far. The light behind them went out, leaving their feet in perfect darkness, and they stumbled and lost sight of the mark and of Jesus, and fell off the path down into the dark and wicked world below.

In *Selected Messages* is quoted a further statement which for some reason Sister White did not include in the *Early Writings* version. It follows right on from the end of the statement quoted above:

Selected Messages, vol. 1, p. 62:

It was just as impossible for them [those that gave up their faith in the 1844 movement] to get on the path again and go to the city, as all the wicked world which God had rejected. They fell all the way along the path one after another.

Through this vision, important information and warning are given to every one of those who seek to gain entrance to heaven. It is not a prophecy with an application limited to the time when it was given. It covers the entire span from the sounding of the midnight cry to the coming of Christ.

The period when the midnight cry was given, was the most glorious in the history of the second advent message. All the light previously seen, shone with added glory during the two and a half months when the midnight cry was carried to every mission station in the world. The expectations of the believers were at the highest pitch as they looked for the return of Christ on October 22, 1844.

Though they were bitterly disappointed, the light was not false. It was designed to lead the faith of the Adventists into the most holy place in heaven, where Christ had gone to conduct His final ministry for perishing souls. When this was accomplished, the role of that light was not finished. It was to

shine all the way along the pathway to the kingdom. All the way along, the believers were to walk in its light.

Herein is a solemn warning to all never to deviate from, or lose faith in, the message preached during that time. That was when, for instance, for the first time, the revelation was given of the exact end of the 2,300-year prophecy. The truth that this period ended on October 22, 1844, is part of that light which shines all the way along the pathway. In harmony with this it would be expected that the spirit of prophecy would consistently teach that date in all subsequent revelations and publications. So it is taught.

We are living in an era of Adventism when many of the old landmarks are being discarded. Such action is a declaration that the light given back there was false and needs revision, but those who do such things are making a terrible mistake. They are guilty of saying that “it was not God that had led them out so far.” Such a stand incurs fearful consequences:

The light behind them went out, leaving their feet in perfect darkness, and they stumbled and lost sight of the mark and of Jesus, and fell off the path down into the dark and wicked world below.

The light was still there. It shone as brightly and purely as ever but it was no help to them. They were in darkness as deep and intense as if the light was not shining at all. Tragic indeed are the circumstances of such. It is difficult to believe that people who begin with such faith and assurance that they have the living truth, and have experienced its transforming power, can then leave it. In doing so, they come to the place where they believe that the light is darkness and the darkness is light.

The word of God describes this as rashness. It says that they “rashly deny the light behind them.” The dictionary describes this action as one taken hastily without due care and

caution, responsible deliberation, and with undue regard for consequences. It is to imprudently incur risk.

In view of the fact that the light behind us is brilliantly clear and that God has given us wonderful and manifold evidences of His loving leadership in the advent movement, a person would have to act very rashly to deny the truth developed over this period of time. Once again, we are reminded that when trials thicken and difficulties multiply into perplexities, it is most important that a pause be taken during which the evidences of the past are carefully reflected upon. In this way, faith is strengthened and the soul is confirmed in the light.

A study of the lives of great men such as David, reveals that if, when brought into strait places, they recounted God's leadings in the past, they were then kept above the power of temptation, but if they failed to do this, they fell every time. Times of great temptation and stress are not the occasions for rash decisions. A person must stand still until clearer light is given.

No Return

The most serious aspect of the case is that the decisions taken by those who rashly deny the light behind them, saying that it was not God who had led them thus far, are irreversible. Once this point has been reached, they can never get back on the path again and go to the city. This is confirmed in these words:

Selected Messages, vol. 1, p. 62:

It was just as impossible for them [those that gave up their faith in the 1844 movement] to get on the path again and go to the city, as all the wicked world which God had rejected. They fell all the way along the path one after another.

These words mean exactly what they say. Care must be taken not to misread them. We humans are so prone to arrive

at erroneous conclusions derived because of previous ideas and theories.

In the first case, the class being referred to are those who were once on the pathway, were led by the Spirit of God, and whose way was illuminated by the light of truth shining from the midnight cry. These are they, who, when they get off the path, cannot return to it again.

In explaining the statement later, Sister White also included those who, while they had not actually gotten onto the path, had heard the advent message, had been convicted by it, and yet turned away from it. They, also, cannot get on the path once this denial of the message has taken place under these circumstances. Here is that explanation:

Selected Messages, vol. 1, p. 63:

I was shown in vision, and I still believe, that there was a shut door in 1844. All who saw the light of the first and second angels' messages and rejected that light were left in darkness. And those who accepted it and received the Holy Spirit which attended the proclamation of the message from heaven, and who afterward renounced their faith and pronounced their experience a delusion, thereby rejected the Spirit of God, and it no longer pleaded with them.

Thus there are two classes upon whom the door of mercy is forever closed, leaving them with no possibility of salvation.

Selected Messages, vol. 1, p. 64:

And this class included, as I have stated, both those who refused to accept the message when it was presented to them, and also those who, having received it, afterward renounced their faith.

Not included in these two classes are those who have never seen the light and been convicted by it. Their day of opportunity has not ceased. Likewise there are those who have become discouraged to the point where they even cease to att-

end the meetings and drift out into the world. They are backsliders. They never deny that the Lord led them in their advent experience, but they have lost the courage to continue in what they still know to be the truth. Such people certainly can and do come back to the truth.

Yet again there are those who fall into grievous sin, and in their deep sense of shame bow to the devil's lie that they are too sinful to return to the Saviour. For a time, such wander in darkness as did David after the sin with Bathsheba. But they can also return as did the king. The important factor is that there must be no denial of the truth that the Lord did lead them in their previous walk with Him.

It is when they come to call the work of God the work of Satan, and Satan's, the work of God, that the unpardonable sin is committed. It is not that the Lord will no longer save them. It is because He cannot. This is so, for the simple reason that the more the Lord tries to reach and help them, the more they reject Him because they believe it to be Satan who is approaching them. On the other hand, Satan's coming is welcomed as the presence of God. Under these circumstances there is nothing the Lord can do to deliver them.

It is a fearful thing to see a person come to the point where, after having stood in the light of truth, testified to its saving power, supported it with enthusiasm and led others to rejoice in it, he turns around and calls the leading of God the work of Satan. Helplessly, we stand by and witness the denial of the great truths which are forming a people for the final work and for heaven, until all that was once believed has been relinquished while what was once recognized as being error is acclaimed as precious light.

We have witnessed a reluctance on the part of some to accept the fact that once a person has taken such a stand it is pointless to pray for his return to the fold. There is such a love

for those who were once among us, such an earnest desire to see them saved, that we do not want to believe it, and for this reason, tend to reject the plain counsels of this statement.

But they are true and, reluctant though we may be, it is important that we accept the message contained therein. Never once, since I first accepted the advent message some forty years ago, have I seen a single exception to the rule. I know I never shall. If I were to, then I would have very real occasion to question the veracity of the Spirit of Prophecy.

Some will argue that it is not in our power to decide whether or not a person has come into the categories described above. Furthermore, it is suggested that we have no business to judge, anyway. In the first instance, there is no real difficulty in recognizing the class of people who have once walked in the light and now deny God's past leading, for they themselves tell us so. In the second case, it is not a matter of judging such people but only of believing the warnings contained in God's word in regard to them.

The Adventist Church No Longer God's People

There are at least two evidences in this passage which prove that the present Adventist Church organization is not the church of God. The vision establishes that it is impossible to return to the true church of God once you have denounced it as being in error and deny that God is the leader of it. But this is not true of those churches where the light of truth is not to be found. It is possible to leave them, with clear understandings of the fact that the truth is not there, and yet return to them again.

Therefore, there are two kinds of church organizations in the world:

1. There is the one which has the truth and to which it is impossible to return once you have left it.

2. The other kind, composed of every denomination which does not have the truth, can be returned to at any time.

Into which of these two categories falls the Seventh-day Adventist Church organization of today? Is it possible to leave that church, declaring that the Lord is not leading there, and then after a time repent of these views and go back to it again? Are people actually doing this? To both of these questions the answer is, Yes!

Here is one specific case history with which I am personally acquainted. It is typical of many others.

This family was in the Seventh-day Adventist Church organization when the stirrings of the decade between 1950 and 1960 began. Their minds were strongly agitated over the various questions, and they came to see the beauty and power of the 1888 message. The apostasy of the Adventist Church became apparent to them, and they left it. They openly and strongly declared that the Lord was no longer in that church and admonished others to come out and be separate. They testified to the power of the message in their own hearts and to the fact that the Lord had led them in their separation from the Adventist Church. They became strong elements in the fourth angel's movement to which we still belong.

Ten years later, they began to experience difficulties with the message of righteousness as taught by this movement. These problems increased until they doubted their experience and then questioned whether the Lord had led them in their separation from the Adventist Church. The problem developed further until they openly stated that they had been misled, left this movement, and returned to the Adventist Church.

In doing so, they testified very strongly that they had been deluded into joining this movement, that the Adventist Church was still the church of God, and that they had a mission to go to everyone whom they had previously influenced

to join this movement and encourage them to return to the Adventist Church. Now, five or more years later, they are still in the Adventist Church dedicated to winning back all they can from this movement.

If today, the Adventist Church is on the path and in the light, it would have been impossible for them to have rejoined it and re-accepted its teachings. If theirs was an isolated case, it would be one thing, but it is typical of many more like it.

Let the same test be applied to this movement. Has it been shown, over the years, that it is possible for a person to return to this movement after having left it under the circumstances prohibiting re-entry as discussed above?

The experiences of the past twenty-five or more years show that an unequivocal answer can be given to this question. It is not possible. Never once, since this movement was founded, has a person left, declaring the message to be a delusion, and then come back later. They cannot do it, for this is impossible. Therefore, as surely as they cannot return, we have another evidence that this is the true continuation of the 1844 movement.

It is true that there have been some who have left and returned. I think of one who was out for ten years and who then came back. But these are not in the category of those who went out denouncing the message as of Satan and declaring that the Lord had not led them into the movement.

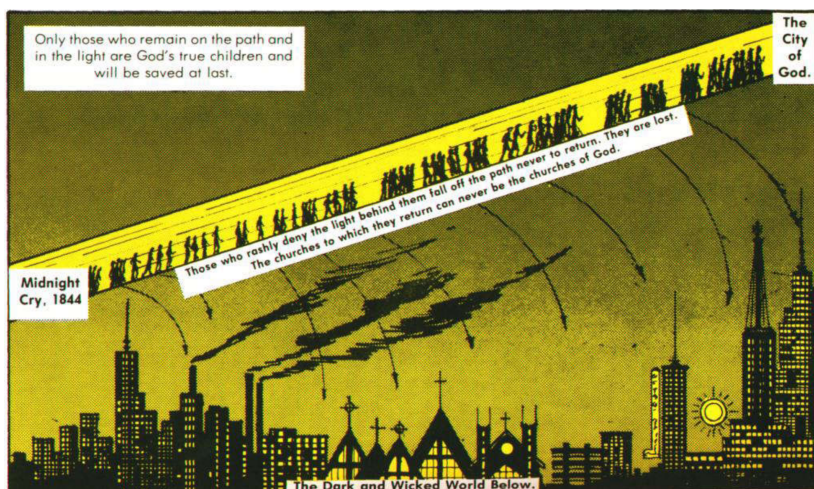
Because of my awareness of these principles and concern to see the word of God verified, I have personally questioned the one or two who have returned to find that they deny ever losing faith in the message. It was involvement with sin, or discouragement which took them out. They had feared to return because they wrongly expected to be shunned by the believers but were delighted to find only a spirit of forgiving love waiting for them when they come back. Theirs is the

story of the prodigal son, not of the apostate.

The Dark and Wicked World Below

A second evidence that the Adventist Church is no longer God's church is that it is here described as being the dark and wicked world below. In the vision there were only two positions. The people were either on the path or down in the dark and wicked world below.

We are apt to think that such a statement refers to the world of pleasure and godlessness where folk never go to church but live abandoned to immorality and vice. But it would be difficult to find one person who has left this movement for that kind of life. Almost invariably they return to the Adventist Church. There, they manifest a wonderful form of godliness and zeal for the church's programs. They certainly do not think of themselves as being in the dark and wicked world below, and we are not apt to think in these terms either.



But if the statement is understood to mean that those who fall off the path do fall back into the dark and wicked world below, then the Adventist Church and all other apostate

churches must be categorized as being the dark and wicked world below, together with the wicked world outside the churches.

In God's terms, there are only two groups—His true people, and the dark and wicked world. The latter may be further subdivided into two categories: the dark and wicked religious world, and the dark and wicked irreligious world.

The 1844 Movement

Those upon whom the door of mercy is forever shut are those who have given up their faith in the 1844 movement. If those who have left us and returned to the Adventist Church were asked whether they had given up their faith in the 1844 movement, they would deny it. But, even though they do not know it, they have done just that. They are supporting what they believe to be the 1844 movement but which is actually another movement.

To establish this, only a few simple evidences are necessary. The Adventist Church has passed through three phases. The first was the preaching of the everlasting gospel in the days of William Miller and the early Adventist pioneers. But this lasted only a short time after the great disappointment.

It was around 1856 that the next movement began. It was the Laodicean era as is proved by the following statement:

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 186:

I was shown that the testimony to the Laodiceans applies to God's people at the present time, and the reason it has not accomplished a greater work is because of the hardness of their hearts.

The Laodiceans are such because they do not have the gospel. Absent is the gold which is the faith working by love and purifying the soul. There is none of the white raiment of the righteousness of Christ, nor do they have the eyesalve of

spiritual perception.

But, when they lost the gospel, they did not cease to be religious, nor did they give up the theory of the third angel's message. This served to satisfy them that there had been no change, that they still retained faith in the 1844 movement. But this was not so, for the 1844 movement was the preaching of the gospel. Those folk did have and share the gold, the white raiment, and the eyesalve.

The new movement exalted the law as the way of salvation, until Sister White told them that they had "preached the law until we are as dry as the hills of Gilboa that had neither dew nor rain." *The Review and Herald*, March 11, 1890. This was not the preaching of the third angel's message, and therefore was not the 1844 movement.

In 1888, the Lord brought the 1844 movement back to them when Waggoner and Jones preached the third angel's message in verity. If the people at that time had truly been in the 1844 movement, they would have welcomed the light from heaven. But they did not recognize it as light and rejected it as error. It is not possible to possess what you have disdained. Therefore it could not be correct to say that those who rejected the 1888 message were in the 1844 movement. They continued in the movement where the law had taken the place of the gospel.

The third phase of Adventism is the present one in which there is neither law nor gospel. The advocates of this movement teach that the law cannot be kept and that no one should attempt the impossible. "Christ has kept the law for us thus alleviating us of the burden," so they proclaim.

There are strong objectors to this position although with many it is the popular religion of today. Those who do object assure themselves that they are defenders of the true and original Adventism, but here they are mistaken. They are

champions rather, of the Laodicean movement, not of the 1844 movement. Satan has thus effected a very clever work of deception by introducing the transition so skillfully that the Advent people did was the original.

Today, we in this movement who have embraced the message from 1888, are the true 1844 movement. Therefore, when folk leave our ranks, they are giving up their faith in the 1844 movement even though they do not know it. When they suppose that they are going back to the 1844 movement, they are deceived, for in reality they are only returning to the Laodicean movement which replaced the 1844 movement.

Danger For All

There is not one of us who is eternally secure as yet. We, too, can come to the point where the enemy of souls can rob us of our crown. The point of no return is reached when we denounce God's past leadings as being of the devil, categorizing the truth of God as being Satan's lie. This point has been reached by a great many and can be reached by us as well. Let a most careful guard be placed over our lives so that the enemy will find no entrance to exercise his subtle eroding power on the soul's defenses.

In the full realization that once that point of no return has been reached, we are doomed, let none of us rashly deny our experience. Instead, let all purpose to devote most careful, responsible, and sober consideration to any moves we might make. Above all, when the way is dark and perplexing, stand still until clearer light shall be given.