

KEEPERS OF THE SPRINGS

Summary of a Sermon

by Cyril Miller

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Peter Marshall tells the story of a hermit who was the "keeper of the springs" for a little mountain village nestled in a peaceful valley below the towering heights. When mud and muck got into these mountain springs, sickness and sorrow developed in the small village below. But when the hermit cleansed the springs of silt and slime, then clean, clear water gushed from the rocks, flowing downward in crystal cascades to refresh and gladden the people in the village and keep them in health.

So it is with those of us who serve as "keepers of the springs" for the Seventh-day Adventist church.

I believe we should be optimistic about the future of our church. Both history and prophecy affirm that there will be ups and downs, victories and defeats; yet, in the end, Christ's church will prevail.

In view of this, I have two questions: (1) Is there anything to be concerned about? And conversely, (2) Is there anything to be optimistic about? The answer to both questions is "Yes!"

I am optimistic about the occasion of this meeting. I feel good about the formation of the Adventist Theological Society. You, among all the educators and editors, pastors and presidents, are our foremost "keepers of the springs." The ecological environment surrounding the sources of Christ's living water must be kept from contamination. Yours is a never-ending responsibility. The church

is counting on you to meticulously maintain our theological springs so that we all may drink safely.

Your task as "keepers of the springs" is to protect the townspeople of our villages from those who would sabotage our Scriptural springs, thus keeping us from completing our mission.

Our Theology is Positive and Pragmatic

Seventh-day Adventist theology is both positive and pragmatic. Do we cover up or abandon old springs when we find new ones? No! Instead we unite the waters from both past and present to form a surging stream that is logistically linked to Revelation's River of Life that flows from the throne of God.

Are there new springs to discover? Obviously, there are!

Truth is like an underground stream waiting to surface as a spring of joy and life for all who desire to drink. So "keepers of the springs" will search carefully for new crystal clear currents cascading from God's great white throne.

A Church at Odds with Itself

Today the Seventh-day Adventist church faces a dilemma. It is at odds with itself. The church is constantly being challenged by attacks against its appointed leadership, governance structure, doctrinal positions, prophetic guidance, evangelistic mission, and system of finance. It is under attack from both the liberal left and the radical right.

Unfortunately, the "middle of the road" mainstream majority of the church stands directly in the path of the cross fire coming from both directions. And casualties are mounting. Today our conferences and educational institutions suffer from a loss of confidence and constituency support, much of which derives from this theological tug of war.

It appears that the extremists on the right want to reform the church (and it needs some reformation) while the extremists on the left seek to liberate the church (and it needs some liberation).

Unfortunately, the liberals on the left look at the extremists on the right and judge the main body of the church to be legalistic, tradition-bound, and lacking in progressive faith. On the other hand, the radicals on the right, observing the extremists on the far

left, judge the main body to be compromising, worldly, and departing from the faith.

"Keepers of the springs" must clarify these, as well as other, distorted and divisive situations.

True, you can be a Seventh-day Adventist and still lean a little to the left or recline a little to the right. Perhaps most of us do so in one way or another. However, when you go too far in either direction, you cross a line where you cease to be a Seventh-day Adventist. Many who do this, end up in total opposition to the church and wonder why.

Will We Splinter as Other Churches Have?

In times past, we as Bible-believing Christians united to fight the "good fight of faith" against all evil. We fought together against everything from alcohol to Sunday laws, from slavery to evolution. But now we are disappointingly divided over everything from gay ministries to women's ordination, from consolidation of campuses to righteousness by faith. Today we are even separated over the interpretation of the Bible itself. As a consequence, our "keepers of the springs" face a formidable challenge.

In past times we observed theological disruption in mainline Protestant denominations and thought it could never happen to us. Now it is happening to us! But will we splinter and separate as other churches have? I think not. I am optimistic about the future of the Seventh-day Adventist church. And one reason I am is that we have a growing group of conservative Adventist scholars who are uniting in a common cause in the Adventist Theological Society.

I believe God will use this growing community of Bible and science scholars to help preserve the unity of our belief and purpose. Why do I speak with such confidence? I believe we are in the early stages of the shaking and sifting time which we have long expected. And it is not all bad. Although painful, it is for our good. Those with untoward attitudes are mistakenly moving away from the church. We knew it would happen, but we were unprepared for the upheaval.

Somehow, we always thought the shaking involved only worldly attractions or sensual pursuits that, like a giant magnet, would pull some of our weaker members away from the church. But we

were unprepared for and are surprised at the vigor of some of the challenges that have developed against our doctrinal beliefs and church structure. And most of these attacks are superficially supported by theological assumptions.

Today the church faces more than theological confrontation. We also are being challenged by controversial social issues that have tangential roots in theology. Ellen White indicates that there is reason for concern when the prevailing mood of the world becomes the prevailing mood of the church. I believe that this warning includes an obsessive interest in ordinary social issues.

Presently, our church seems to be more issue oriented than mission oriented. This is a subtle symptom of contamination seeping into the cultural springs of the church. Secularism is invading our Adventist culture. That which we thought was unchangeable is now changing.

A decade after the advent of television we witnessed Adventist families beginning to deviate from church standards. Our cohesive Adventist culture began to experience a sobering change.

Many are hiding behind liberal theology as a justification for their worldly attitudes and conduct. As a denomination we appear to be experiencing a secularizing metamorphosis. Is there no turning back? I believe there is, and will be.

I admire and applaud the Nazarene General Assembly that met recently in Indianapolis. It reaffirmed Christian standards of social conduct. It agreed that no member who participates in stated social activities may hold office in the Nazarene Church.

Today we tend to tolerate double standards. Why? Most of the Left-Right extremists are second- and third-generation Seventh-day Adventists—our children! They are not new converts to the church. They can be identified as cultural Christians. They tend to look upon the church more as a social organization or a business corporation and less as a divinely-directed body of believers standing immovable on the Rock Jesus Christ.

This is one reason why they become absorbed in secular social issues and the budget/business affairs of the church but not in the church's main mission of soul-winning.

Where Are We Going?

In spite of the problems, I repeat that I am very optimistic about the Seventh-day Adventist church. Whereas other denominations may shrink in consequence of their schisms, we will experience expansion. The church will go forth "conquering and to conquer." While others divide, we *will* unite.

Although many of our youth and young adults do not seem to know what Adventists believe and appear uninterested in our evangelistic mission, I am still optimistic. I believe that most of them really do believe and care. They will return to the Lord and to His church. I believe that they will rally with us and with the many, many others whom God will call, and will unite for a finished work in all the world.

"Keepers of the springs, arise!"

Still let the Spirit cry,

Till Christ the Lord

Who reigns on high,

Shall take His conquerors home.

—Adapted from Charles Wesley's "Soldiers of Christ, Arise."

HIS WORKMANSHIP

Summary of a Sermon

By Joel Tompkins

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In Ephesians 2:1-3 Paul describes the "course of this world." In the passage he shows that sin is not only self-destructive but also something reaches out to destroy everything within its influence.

In verse 3 Paul says we all walked according to the course of the world B.C. (that is, before Christ).

Verse 4, however, begins with the words, "*But God.*" God, it says, who is rich in mercy, has intervened in our behalf in a marvelous, miraculous way.

Then verses 6 to 10 describe the way things ought to be for God's people A.C. (after Christ). Verse 10 tells us that "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." It reminds us that God's plan has always been that we should *do* good works.

But notice that the good works are A.C., not B.C. They are the fruitage, the results. Paul puts them in the right place. Just the same, they are there, and in abundance.

Good works come as the result of *His workmanship*. What we do does not contribute to His workmanship. We become what He makes us. But what He makes us is revealed in good works. We should never disparage good works.

Many of our laymen are asking, "Where are the standards of the church?" It seems to them that many of our standards have been abandoned. And they don't have much trouble documenting the evidence. Isn't it ironic that nowadays, when so many Evan-