

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society, 3/2 (1992):146-151.
Article copyright © 1992 by Leo R. Van Dolson.

THE FORERUNNER

By Leo R. Van Dolson

Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists

Hebrews 6:19, 20 points us to the tremendous hope that comes as a result of Jesus serving as our Advocate in the heavenly sanctuary: "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Hebrews 6:19, 20). A while ago I was thrilled to find an explanation of what the word *forerunner* means. In the classic volume, *The Cross and Its Shadow*, Elder S. N. Haskell explains: "The Saviour gave His life a sacrifice for sin here upon the earth; and as He entered the heavenly sanctuary as High Priest, He is called the 'Forerunner.' Under no circumstances, except as He enters 'within the veil' of the heavenly sanctuary, is that name applied to the Saviour."¹

Elder Haskell indicates that the forerunner is a familiar character in those countries which have monarchical forms of government. "In gorgeous uniform, with waving plumes, he rides before and announces the approach of the royal carriage. While he is always hailed with joy by the waiting crowds, yet he is not the center of attraction; their eyes do not follow him as he passes on, but are turned down the road whence he came to get the first glimpse of the royal personage of whom he is the forerunner."²

In Philippians 2, Paul outlines Christ's condescension in emptying Himself for us by coming to this world as a human being and dying a criminal's death on the cross. But here in Hebrews we find another step in Christ's emptying Himself for us:

"When He entered heaven a mighty Conqueror over death and

the grave, before the entire heavenly host and representatives of other worlds, He entered a forerunner for *us*. He presented the 'wave sheaf,' those brought forth from the graves at the time of His resurrection as a sample of the race He had died to redeem, thus directing the attention of the wonderful assemblage down the road whence He came to watch for royalty—for royalty!—yes, for royalty made so by His precious blood. It is only a company of poor frail mortals stumbling along and often falling by the way; but when they reach the heavenly gate, they will enter 'heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.'"³

What Christ is pictured doing as our forerunner not only describes what He will do for us in the future, but what He **ALREADY HAS DONE**. The last several paragraphs in the magnificent book, *The Desire of Ages*, describe the scene of Christ's joyous reentry into heaven. It would be helpful for you to read the entire selection on pages 833-835. We can only summarize it here.

Jesus entered heaven as a Conqueror over sin and death as all heaven was waiting to honor and welcome Him. But as they rush forward to pay homage to Him "He waves them back." He has to do the work of the Forerunner. "He cannot now receive the coronet of glory and the royal robe. He enters into the presence of His Father. He points to His wounded head, the pierced side, the marred feet; He lifts His hands bearing the prints of the nails. He points to the tokens of His triumph; He presents to God the wave-sheaf, those raised with Him as representatives of that great multitude who shall come forth from the grave at His second coming. . . . He declares, 'Father, it is finished. I have done Thy will, O My God. I have completed the work of redemption. If Thy justice is satisfied, "I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am.'"

"The voice of God is heard proclaiming that justice is satisfied. Satan is vanquished. Christ's toiling, struggling ones on earth are 'accepted in the beloved.' Before the heavenly angels and the representatives of unfallen worlds, they are declared justified. Where He is, there His church shall be."⁴

Having completed the work of the Forerunner, Jesus then was able to receive the homage, glory, and honor due to the God who for our sake became forever linked with the human race. But we should

not minimize what it meant for Him to be accepted and welcomed in heaven on the day He returned with the “wave sheaf” as our Representative.

After describing that amazing scene, Ellen White adds: “Songs of triumph mingle with music from angel harps, till heaven seems to overflow with joy and praise. Love has conquered. The lost is found. . . . From that scene of heavenly joy, there comes back to us on earth the echo of Christ’s wonderful words, ‘I ascend unto My Father, and Your Father; and to My God, and your God.’ John 20:17. The family of heaven and the family of earth are one. For us our Lord ascended, and for us He lives.”⁵

When the Father eagerly stepped down from the throne and, in the greatest exhibition of His love ever recorded, threw His arms around His returning Son—our Forerunner, He encircled each one of us with all the enthusiastic love with which He welcomed Jesus home. *We are* accepted in the Beloved. None of us need ever wonder again about God being willing to accept us. The only question that remains is Are we willing to be accepted?

The hope that Hebrews 6:19 describes as being like a sure and steadfast anchor to our souls “enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain” (NIV). This suggests that, by faith, we must enter with Jesus into the heavenly sanctuary. “It is those who by faith follow Jesus in the great work of the atonement who receive the benefits of His mediation in their behalf, while those who reject the light which brings to view this work of ministration are not benefitted thereby.”⁶

After making that statement, Ellen White points out that many of the Jews, because of their attachment to the services of the earthly sanctuary, had no knowledge of Christ as Mediator. Thus they could not receive the benefits of His ministry of atonement in the heavenly sanctuary. Their experience is illustrative of many Christians who “are willingly ignorant of the work of our merciful High Priest, even though it is more essential than ever that those of us living in this antitypical Day of Atonement . . . understand the work of our High Priest and know what duties are required of us.”⁷

What exactly is the work of Jesus as our Mediator or Advocate in the heavenly sanctuary? We turn to Ellen White for another description: “God did not deem the principle of salvation complete

while invested only with His own love. By His appointment He has placed at His altar an Advocate clothed with our nature. As our Intercessor, His office-work is to introduce us to God as His sons and daughters. Christ intercedes in behalf of those who have received Him. To them He gives power, by virtue of His own merits, to become members of the royal family, children of the heavenly King. . . . As Christ intercedes in our behalf, the Father lays open all the treasures of His grace for our appropriation, to be enjoyed and to be communicated to others.”⁸

Some view God as a sort of vengeful tyrant, just waiting to catch us doing something wrong so that He can destroy us. Here we find an entirely different picture. After doing all possible to provide salvation, the Father “by His appointment” provided our Advocate to intercede in our behalf. He is longing for us to be introduced to Him by Christ as His sons and daughters so that He can lay open to us “ALL THE TREASURES OF HIS GRACE for our appropriation.” Doesn’t this bring us a new understanding of how much our Father in heaven cares for us?

“Behold, the Bridegroom Cometh”

Ellen White ties together “The coming of Christ as our high priest to the most holy place, for the cleansing of the sanctuary, brought to view in Daniel 8:14; the coming of the Son of man to the Ancient of Days, as presented in Daniel 7:13; . . . the coming of the Lord to His temple, foretold by Malachi, . . . [and] the coming of the bridegroom to the marriage, described by Christ in the parable of the ten virgins.”⁹ She specifies that these are “descriptions of the same event.” Then she explains that: “At the appointed time the Bridegroom came, not to the earth, as the people expected, but to the Ancient of Days in heaven, to the marriage, the reception of His kingdom. ‘They that were ready went in with Him to the marriage: and the door was shut.’ They were not to be present in person at the marriage; for it takes place in heaven, while they are upon the earth. The followers of Christ are to ‘wait for their Lord, when He will *return* from the wedding. Luke 12:36. But they are to understand His work, and to follow Him by faith as He goes in before God. It is in this sense that they are said to go in to the marriage.”¹⁰

Do you catch the import of that statement? Talk about the

EVERLASTING GOOD NEWS—the gospel being preached under the three angels’ messages—this is it! Revelation 14:6 connects the gospel with additional good news—“The hour of God’s judgment has come.” Is that good news? For those who already have been accepted in the beloved (that’s you and me), those who ALREADY are sons and daughters of God, joint heirs with Christ, members of the royal family of the universe, there is nothing in the judgment hour message that should frighten us. It is GOOD NEWS! By faith we HAVE ENTERED in through the veil with Jesus and stand by His side before the judgment throne of God.

What IS happening to us as we stand before the judgment throne? We are there not as criminals, but as clients of the Great Advocate who has been placed there “by God’s appointment.” Do you grasp fully the significance of what we’re studying? Do you begin to sense that we have nothing to fear from the judgment because God ALREADY has accepted us in the Beloved as His sons and daughters?

As sons and daughters of God, members of the royal family of the universe, those who have been accepted in the Beloved, our challenge is to live as sons and daughters of God. When my family and I were serving as missionaries in Japan in the 1950’s, a lot of excitement was created when Crown Prince Akahito became engaged to Michiko Shoda. Their pictures were displayed in the main stores. Magazines, newspapers and television vied with each other to present the details of how this couple had met on a tennis court and fallen in love. For the first time a member of Japan’s royal family was marrying a commoner. We watched as her father was interviewed on television and were surprised that he did not seem happy about what was happening. Although he was wealthy, he felt his daughter’s upcoming marriage into the royal family and her future role as empress of Japan placed too much responsibility on his family. Even though she had been educated in some of the best schools in Japan, Michiko had to go to a special school for two years to learn how to properly represent her new family and serve as empress, which she now is. Every little thing she did was subjected to intense scrutiny to see if she would measure up to her new responsibility.

We, too, are challenged as adopted sons and daughters of the

heavenly King to live in a manner that befits our new royal status. It cost Christ everything to provide the crowns He earned for us. It will cost us something to wear them. We must be gratefully willing to live in such a way that we bring only honor and praise to Heaven’s royal family of which we NOW are a part.

Our new status is outlined in 1 John 3:2: “Beloved now are we the sons of God.” As God’s children we may be living on earth right now, but we belong in heaven as members of the royal family of the universe. This verse also promises, “We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” Verse 3 adds: “And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” The purpose of the atonement in heaven is to not only make us at-one with God as members of the royal family, but to make us at-one with Him in character. It is our privilege and responsibility to uphold and vindicate the name and character of God before the universe.

We have the assurance in this judgment-hour that not only has the Father accepted us in the Beloved, adopted us as His sons and daughters into the royal family of the universe, but also that our High Priest is able to cleanse and purify us, enabling us to live as representatives of the royal family, vindicating the character of God before the universe.

Endnotes

- 1 Stephen N. Haskell, *The Cross and Its Shadow* (South Lancaster, MA: The Bible Training School, 1914), p. 70.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 70.
- 3 *Ibid.*, pp. 70, 71.
- 4 *The Desire of Ages*, p. 834.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 835.
- 6 *The Great Controversy*, p. 430.
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 430, 431.
- 8 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 363, 364.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 426.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 427 (italics supplied).