

In harmony with that experience, this recent ATS weekend in Lincoln brought me new confidence in the Word of God and a new assurance in the salvation made possible through the blood of Jesus.

My joy in Lincoln was intensified by the fact that these days it's not uncommon to meet so-called Christians who measure their scholarship by the depth of their doubts about the plain teachings of the Bible. Many of our young people leave Africa to take "higher studies" in the West, only to return with their faith diminished. Some return doubting even if there is a heaven.

But I was pleasantly surprised in Lincoln to find top scholars and teachers from several Adventist institutions of higher learning expressing confidence in the Word of God and in the blood of Christ. I was delighted, too, to see the wide spectrum of people present, from North America and overseas. Although different nationalities and races were present, there was an impressive spirit of unity and love.

I was glad that in its quest to encourage sound conservative Bible scholarship and interpretation, the ATS does not limit membership to scholars. Too often, scholars isolate themselves as though they alone had the answers. What we need rather is harmonious interaction and involvement of every talent in order to carry out the global mission God has assigned this church.

We "older Adventists" sometimes miss the refreshing spirit of earlier years. In West Africa our people constantly remind us that this or that "is not what happened during the time of Gibson, Clemonds, or Hyde." In North America I have learned that some of our older brethren shed tears of joy after hearing a plain-truth message.

The "old-time religion," with its trust in the Bible as the Word of God and in Jesus Christ as our Saviour, is what God's people most need today. Let's have more of it.

God bless the ATS.

## THE POWER OF THE WORD

### The Keynote Message

By Francis Wernick

Former Vice President of the General Conference

"There is nothing so powerful as an idea whose time has come."

I believe that this Adventist Theological Society is an idea whose time has come. If guided aright, it may become a powerful force and voice for good as it upholds our leaders and the great truths of Scripture that were instrumental in bringing this Seventh-day Adventist movement into being.

We have formed this society to support, to uphold, and to proclaim the truths of Scripture that are so essential to the world at this time in its history. The mission and message of the Seventh-day Adventist church are outlined in Revelation 14, and our reason for existence is based on the same prophetic passage.

More than 48 years ago, I heard Elder W. A. Spicer speak in the Union College chapel. He began his sermon this way: "It's true, it's true! This Adventist movement was born out of the prophecy of Revelation 14." Elder Spicer went on to describe how God had called Adventists to go into all the world with a special message to prepare a people for the soon appearing of Christ. His sermon had a profound effect upon us then, and this truth-filled message still moves God's people today. It is the foundation of our beliefs. And what we believe is critically important.

No organization can long exist or make an impact on the world unless it knows what it believes and is passionately committed to its beliefs. In a recent telecast, a specialist in philosophy was asked

why philosophy is important. He answered by saying that ideas underlie all that we do. Because ideas influence what we do, we Seventh-day Adventists need to be certain that what we believe is firmly founded in Scripture, and we need to hold to it with very deep commitment.

Ideas have power to guide nations as well as individuals. And what is true of individuals and nations is also true of churches. Churches live and move on their beliefs. Seventh-day Adventists are no exception. Any uncertainty about our basic beliefs and mission would soon halt our growth and result in loss of power. This is why pluralism of beliefs upon substantive issues would soon rob us of our purpose for existence and weaken the will of our people, as it has in other churches.

An Orthodox Catholic bishop, who prefers the title of chaplain, recently became a Seventh-day Adventist in New York City. Here is the definition of the Seventh-day Adventist church that he put in writing:

The Seventh-day Adventist church is the organized expression of the prophetic end-time remnant people, called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Its mission is to announce the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaim salvation through Christ, and herald the nearness of His second Advent, while being a living demonstration of His love.

Each of us might state the matter a little differently; but however we state it, we need to renew our clarity of vision as to who we are and why we are here. Remember that beliefs based upon the Scriptures so captured the hearts of people like William Miller that they were moved to give their lives to a cause that swept over the eastern half of the United States. That movement was founded on a firm belief in Bible truth. The same commitment to Bible truth brought the fledgling Adventist movement into existence, a movement that has now grown to worldwide proportions. However, the continuation of this movement depends upon a continuing commitment to Bible truth.

#### Finding Truth

But how do we find truth? Jesus prayed for His disciples, "Sanctify them through thy truth. Thy Word is truth" (Jn 17:17).

He also stated, "I have given them thy Word" (verse 14). Christ, the *Logos*, was the embodiment of the Word. He was the "expression of the thought of God." He was the God of power and truth come to life in humanity. "In Him was life" (Jn 1:4). His Word, which created the worlds, now gives life and power to those who receive Him. And to receive Christ involves the reception of His Word. Through its study, the life is changed as the Holy Spirit enables us to put its words into practice. "The Life of Christ that gives life to the world is in His word" (Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, June 25, 1902).

To neglect the study of the Bible is to neglect the only source of power that can change our lives for the better. Could this be the cause of lifelessness among so many Christians?

How the Bible is studied also is important. It should not be approached as we study a secular book, but as the Word of God. Even though it was written by human beings, it must be studied with an implicit faith that it comes from God and is the Word of life. It should be approached with awe and reverence. Of course, we need to bring to bear all of the discipline and skill of scholarship as we seek to understand its language, its backgrounds, and its writers, but we must do so always keeping in mind that it is the Word of life given us by God.

#### Beliefs Came First

By the earliest Adventists, the Bible was received as the Word of life given us by God! Our pioneers uncovered our fundamental beliefs through diligent Bible study. Especially during the foundational years, 1844-1850 or so, James and Ellen White, Joseph Bates, and others, were granted the great privilege of discovering and establishing truths that have stood the test of years. These basic truths, rooted as they are in the Scriptures, have not been challenged successfully or altered fundamentally by the most intense scrutiny given them since that time. The doctrines of creation, the heavenly sanctuary, the Sabbath, the law of God, the nature of man, the three angels' messages, and the coming of Christ, among others, are eternal, changeless truths given us by Christ Himself. And they are centered in Him, the living Word.

These truths, and all of the other basic teachings of salvation found in the Bible, have made Seventh-day Adventists what we are.

It is worth noting that the beliefs came first, then came organizational structure and the mission of the church. The standards and practices of the early Adventists that set them apart from other Christians and often at variance with the world, grew out of biblical principles. A loss of faith in the Scriptures as the authority for all of life would weaken and change the Seventh-day Adventist church and its standards until it would become indistinguishable from the world in which it lives and works. John spoke to the point in his earnest appeal:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world [1 Jn 2:15, 16].

What will be the final end of the love of the world that threatens the church in our generation? "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 Jn 2:17). The only protection that the Adventist church has in its battle against the constant encroachments of a hostile and evil world is to make the Bible the sole authority for all of our beliefs and practices.

Quite a number of years ago, a church I was pastoring rented its facilities to another Protestant church. On one occasion, the pastor of that church asked me to explain to his congregation who Adventists were and what we believed. I did so to the best of my ability. After the service, the pastor made this significant observation: "I believe that I understand now the basic difference between you Adventists and our church. You take the Bible as your authority, while we give that authority to the church." I believe he summed it up quite well. It is true that Christ gave authority to the church, but not the supreme authority. The supreme authority has been reserved for the Scriptures as the Word of God. They are the test of every other authority.

Even the authority of the Spirit of Prophecy, which we fully believe and accept as given to the church through Ellen White, rests upon the Holy Scriptures. We test the validity of Ellen White's writings by the Bible.

But, someone asks, "Isn't the Holy Spirit the ultimate authority and guide for us today?" The question isn't a new one. It

is true that the Holy Scriptures came to us by the Holy Spirit (see 2 Peter 1:21), but the Holy Spirit will not speak to us today in contradiction to what He gave through the prophets. When Ellen White faced this issue she wrote, "It is impossible that the teaching of the Spirit should ever be contrary to that of the Word" (*The Great Controversy*, p. vii).

In the same passage Ellen White wrote, "The Spirit was not given—nor can it ever be bestowed—to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested." With this in mind, she could write,

Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain "Thus saith the Lord" in its support [ibid., p. 595].

If our teachings and practices are to express the will of God and the Holy Spirit, they must be undergirded by a plain "thus saith the Lord." The Apostle John was given a prophetic picture of a movement that would expand in power and influence through all the world, lighting the earth with the glory of the Lord (see Rev 18:1). The continued vitality of the church depends upon a commitment to the Word of the Lord, both in expression and in deed. Jesus, the Word, must be uplifted before the world as Saviour and Lord. For this to be done, His Word of life must reign supreme in the lives of His followers.

When this happens, great changes will be seen as sinners come to Christ in increased numbers and become transformed into sons and daughters of God. "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name" (Jn 1:12). To receive Christ is to eat and drink the Words of life. For, as Jesus said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (Jn 6:63).

#### The Bread of Life Brings Power to the Church

One of the greatest needs we Christians have today is that of renewing our acquaintance with the Bible as God's Holy Word. Not only must we learn again the beauty of the truths it contains, but we must also study in such a way that we will hear God speaking to us as His children. Then life and power will come to us as we study.

When Jesus said, "I am that bread of life" (Jn 6:48), many turned away from Him because they realized that He was speaking of spiritual life, and not of their material, physical desires. They were so wrapped up in the demands of their daily toil and ambitions that they resented having Christ attempt to focus their attention on the spiritual life that was their greatest need.

When Jesus saw the crowd melting away, He asked His disciples, "Will ye also go away?" (Jn 6:67). Peter answered, "To whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (Jn 6:68). Peter could have given many other answers to this questions, but he caught the most significant aspect of the ministry and mission of Christ, namely, to give the world the words of eternal life. What other mission could Jesus carry out that would lift human beings out of the mire of sin in which they have sunk so helplessly? Do we answer today as Peter did, "Thou hast the words of eternal life"? If this is our answer, we are well along the path of power for the church.

The power of the Holy Spirit, so vital to the renewal of energy in the church body, is accompanied by the Word of God. Jesus announced that the Spirit would be given to us to guide us. "Howbeit," He said, "when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself: but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come" (Jn 16:13). Again, Jesus exalted the words of truth, which are to be found in the Holy Scriptures.

#### Adventists to Be Tested on the Question of Authority

In her comments on the closing scenes of the great controversy, Ellen White describes the efforts of Satan to confuse, deceive, and destroy the people of God.

In seeking to cast contempt upon the divine statutes, Satan has perverted the doctrines of the Bible, and errors have thus become incorporated into the faith of thousands who profess to believe the Scriptures. The last great conflict between truth and error is but the final struggle of the long-standing controversy concerning the law of God. Upon this battle we are now entering—a battle between the laws of men and the precepts of Jehovah, between the religion of the Bible and the religion of fable and tradition [*Great Controversy*, p. 582].

"But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines, and the basis of all reforms (ibid., p. 595).

While upholding the Bible as the standard of all that we believe, Ellen White issues this caution concerning its study:

Scriptural difficulties can never be mastered by the same methods that are employed in grappling with philosophical problems. We should not engage in the study of the Bible with that self-reliance with which so many enter the domain of science [ibid., p. 599].

A test of great magnitude is surely coming to the church and most certainly to each of us individually. This test will be focused on the issue of whether the Bible is to be the authority for all we believe and practice. Ellen White had something to say about this, too:

When the testing time shall come, those who have made God's Word their rule of life will be revealed [ibid., p. 602].

The last great delusion is soon to open before us. . . . So closely will the counterfeit resemble the true that it will be impossible to distinguish between them except by the Holy Scriptures. By their testimony, every statement and every miracle must be tested [ibid., p. 593].

The authority of the Holy Scriptures will settle the issue for some but will prove to be a stumbling block for others. It has always been so. For those who accept the Bible as authority, this counsel of the Spirit of Prophecy has meaning:

The Bible is God's voice speaking to us, just as surely as if we could hear it with our ears. If we realized this, with what awe we would open God's Word and with what earnestness we would search its precepts [Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, April 4, 1906, p. 416].

Those who have made the Scriptures their defense have seen the Bible through the eyes of Paul, who said, "Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth" (1 Cor 2:13). He later added, "The things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor 14:37).

Jesus often appealed to the Scriptures to validate His teachings and His Messiahship. He would ask, "Have ye not read?" or,

“What saith the Scriptures?” On behalf of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, He reviewed all the Scriptures concerning Himself. Some time before this He had explained, “They are they which testify of me” (Jn 5:39). Why this emphasis by Christ, the prophets, and Paul on the Holy Scriptures as their authority? Paul answers the question: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim 3:16).

### Our Source of Authority

The Scriptures come to us “God-breathed,” through the power of the Holy Spirit. No church council, no human authority can nullify or alter the authority of the Bible. It will stand fast until Jesus comes. It will guide us aright when we follow it; and it will judge us when we do not walk in its counsel. Isaiah points to its authority this way:

To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them [Isa. 8:20].

To assemble a mass of texts to support a preconceived human conclusion is not an adequate method of study. The Bible must be allowed to be its own expositor, speaking its own truth to us.

Perhaps the worst possible deception is brought about by a profession of adherence to the Scriptures when there is no intention to put that profession into practice. The danger was revealed to Israel in these words: “That he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live” (Deut 8:3). This truth was reinforced daily by the falling of the manna—a type of Christ as our daily spiritual food.

Today, Christ has sent the Holy Spirit to teach us the truths of the Bible. Jesus said, “He shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you” (Jn 16:15). “For whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak” (Jn 16:13).

Our source of authority for what we believe and practice is a sacred one. Zedekiah, King of Judah, once asked Jeremiah, “Is there any word from the Lord?” (Jer 37:17). No more important question has ever been asked. The king was torn between the princes, who encouraged him to believe he could defeat the Chaldeans, and Jeremiah, whose counsel from the Lord was that he could not defeat

them. Zedekiah wavered between the princes and the prophet and finally rejected the Word of the Lord—and paid a severe penalty for his choice of authority.

To God’s remnant people, King Zedekiah’s question is still being asked, “Is there any word from the Lord?” Our answer is, “Yes indeed, there is counsel in abundance. And those who walk in it will be victorious through Christ.”

Revelation 19 presents a spectacular prophetic view of Christ, the Word, in final conflict with Satan, the master deceiver. Christ is the embodiment of truth and righteousness, and He has placed about His people His perfect robe of righteousness and purity. So committed are His people to Him, that they have come to reflect His character in obedience to His Word. By His grace, they obey His commandments and are ready for the marriage feast. Christ goes forth to take possession of the kingdom He has purchased with His blood. And as He goes forth, He leads the armies of Heaven as well as the saints who follow Him on earth. He is called Faithful and True. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. The saints who follow Him have asked, “Is there any word from the Lord?” and, unlike Zedekiah, have chosen to be molded by the His Word of truth (see Rev 19:13). the Word that is victorious over all its enemies.

Soon Jesus will rise up to shake terribly the earth—and to bring victory to His faithful followers. Soon Christ will be vindicated in the lives of His people. Soon the Word of God will light up the earth with the glory of Christ and His righteous character.

But before these things can happen, the beauty and glory of Christ must be seen in us. His Word must become our sole authority for all we believe and appreciate. Then, we shall be able to march throughout the world carrying the truth everywhere. This, indeed, is our mission.

Our challenge today is to exalt the name of our Lord and Saviour through our biblical preaching and teaching, and through the way we put His blessed Word into daily practice.