

“THE TIMES OF REFRESHING”

It doesn't matter what you call it or how you package it; no matter where you look, it is everywhere. It is the newest fad and it is taking the church by storm. It emphasizes technology, passion and power applied to the programs. It emphasizes the act of witnessing while ignoring the need to become the witness. It emphasizes baptisms, conversions, numerical growth, and teaches that this will bring character growth while ignoring that the character transformation accompanied by the conviction of the Holy Spirit will far outnumber man-made numerical growth.

I am afraid that we are mirroring the decade of the 1890's where there was much emphasis on seeking the power of the Holy Spirit while at the same time ignoring the message that would have prepared us for the latter rain. However, having ignored the message we sought the power of the Spirit through our own means and ended up in “Holy Flesh” and “Pantheism,” or the alpha of apostasy. It seems to me that we must be on a full collision course for the omega of apostasy.

Many thoughtful, sincere people worldwide who reverence the Bible are convinced that the world has come to the “time of the end,” the “last days,” and that Jesus' promise to come again is overdue in timing. The world desperately needs Him to come as “King of kings and Lord of lords.” The anguish and pain worldwide are enormous, many suffer miserably while the wealthy revel in selfish pleasure. It's “the days of Noah” redivivus.

The Bible abounds in promises of heaven pouring out on earth a final revelation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that came initially at Pentecost. We are told to “pray for the latter rain” of the Spirit. A number of movements have arisen in which large masses of people have made this prayer their combined concern.

There is a desire in preparation for evangelism to spend all night in prayer vigils claiming the Holy Spirit for power. Does not the church need revival and reformation? The latest effort is in a conference nearby where a grassroots movement called “Operation Global Rain” is in full swing. It is hoped that by getting believers worldwide to stay up in long prayer vigils power will come.

In visiting the website of a prominent telecast ministry the message is the same: “The Power to Share” was the name of the article written by the lead evangelist. The key word was “power.” How very appealing to weak, beleaguered Christians to think that they could manipulate God into giving them power so that they could get noticed by non-Christians in their witnessing.

At recent youth congress there was also much emphasis on this subject—General Youth Conference. The evening speaker [David Asscherick] called for repentance; not repentance for sin, but repentance for lack of expectation of what God's power could do. It sure is hard to keep working ones' self up all the time to a feverish passionate pitch that the Holy Spirit can use. There is no emptying of the vessels, just building up self-esteem so that God can use us. The response to the appeals afterward was staggering.

There is a denominational youth prayer congress planned for North America, Feb. 28-Mar. 4. in Dallas. The theme is "Just Claim It: 2007. Experience the Power of Prayer—Claiming Communities for Christ," youth from all over the world will participate in this power packed experience to claim the power of God in their lives."¹

This seems a direct borrowing from The Word-Faith Movement of Kenneth Copeland, Robert Tilton, Benny Hinn, Paul Yonggi Cho, and Paul and Jan Crouch. They believe that faith is for the purpose of seeing and visualizing whatever you need: power, physical healing, financial success. Then just name it and claim it. God has to deliver. Christians are told that they are gods and must take back the dominion of this earth. This prosperity, health, and wealth gospel is very appealing to self and human nature. It is pantheism. Again we see how the church has turned to what is working in the evangelical world because it seems to be successful and is attracting large numbers, achieving success.²

But just how often can the shepherds cry, "Wolf," "the Holy Spirit is upon us," before the sheep are exhausted and disillusioned? You remember the story. There was a shepherd boy who tended his sheep at the foot of a mountain near a dark forest. It was lonely for him, so he devised a plan to get a little company. He rushed down towards the village calling out "Wolf, Wolf," and the villagers came out to meet him. This pleased the boy so much that a few days after he tried the same trick, and again the villagers came to his help. Shortly after this a Wolf actually did come out from the forest. The boy cried out "Wolf, Wolf," still louder than before. But this time the villagers, who had been fooled twice before, thought the boy was again lying, and nobody came to his aid. So the wolf made a good meal off the boy's flock.

A little history lesson will remind us of the "Victorious Life" revivals of the 1920's and 1930's. They were interdenominational. In particular, one church expected a period of 40 years' "wandering in the wilderness" to reach its end in 1928. The revivals extended into the 1930's and were snuffed out in the rise of Nazism and a cruel war greater than any history had recorded. The bloodbath was utterly horrible; may it never be repeated!

¹ <http://www.pathfindersonline.org>

² <http://www.rapidnet.com/~jbeard/bdm/Psychology/char/more/w-f.htm>

When the war was finally over; now came wonderful economic prosperity, and another movement to petition heaven for that long delayed gift of “the latter rain.”

Is the Lord reticent to grant the gift He has promised? No, it cannot be; Jesus told us that He is more willing to grant the outpouring of His Holy Spirit than parents are to give their children good gifts (Luke 11:13). But are they ready to recognize, and to receive His blessings, and are they ready and competent to distinguish between the genuine gift and the very clever counterfeits which the world’s great “false christ” will foist upon us? And are we sure that we have an *informed* understanding of what a genuine gift of the latter rain of the Holy Spirit really is?

During the last part of the nineteenth century, the Lord sent a message of righteousness to the Seventh-day Adventist Church through Elders E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones. This message was made prominent at the General Conference of 1888 held in Minneapolis as well as in succeeding General Conferences for the next decade. It was identified by Ellen White as the beginning of the loud cry of the third angel whose glory was to fill the whole earth. At the 1893 General Conference Session A. T. Jones reported:

“I received a letter a little while ago from Brother Starr in Australia. I will read two or three sentences because they come in well just at this place in our lessons: ‘Sister White says that we have been in the time of the latter rain since the Minneapolis meeting.’”³ God has been waiting for us to receive the latter rain ever since.

The servant of the Lord recognized the message as the beginning of the latter rain. “The Lord in His great mercy sent a most precious message to His people through Elders Waggoner and Jones. . . . It is the third angel’s message, which is to be proclaimed with a loud voice, and attended with the outpouring of His Spirit in a large measure.”⁴

Since 1844 we are living in the solemn antitypical day of atonement when we are to fasten our faith upon our High Priest in the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary. The reason this is not such a pleasant message to the human psyche is that it necessitates a humiliation of heart in repentance for personal sin of unbelief in God’s message which He has already bestowed upon His people in our history. This is the opposite of the self-pleasing “Just Name It 2007” campaign to uplift the self-esteem of young Christians.

³ A. T. Jones, *General Conference Bulletin*, 1893, p. 377.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 91, 92.

You would think that the lessons of Pentecost would be foremost in the minds of Adventists who desire preparation for evangelistic work, but it is not. What does Pentecost teach us? There is a correlation between Pentecost and this our antitypical day of atonement.

When the disciple began to speak in tongues at Pentecost in the hearing of all those nations assembled in Jerusalem each according to their own mother tongue, the astonished cry went up, "They are drunk with wine!" But Peter proclaimed this is a witness that Christ whom ye slew has been raised up on high and enthroned as priest on the throne of His Father (Acts 2:33). And the witness that all power has been delivered into His hand is this outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Peter quoted the prophet Joel as saying, "it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy." Acts 2:17, 18. This was partially fulfilled at Pentecost, but its larger fulfillment is yet to come in our day of atonement as we will soon note. The promise is "my Spirit upon all flesh." This means that God's glory and character is to be revealed to all nations, kindreds, tongues and people as the last revelation of His love and mercy for a fallen race. But God does not do this by the word-faith movement of name it and claim it. God is not at the beck and call of over-confident, demanding Christians.

We read that Peter proclaimed Christ and Him crucified. "God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." Acts 2:36. He led them to the cross. You have crucified Him. He died your "wages of sin" which is eternal death. Understand that you should not be alive but for His exchange of life for yours.

This is what led to their conviction of sin. "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart." Acts 2:37. The Holy Spirit convicted them of their individual sin in crucifying the Son of God.

Those who heard the preaching asked Peter and the apostles: "Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." The clear evidence is that Pentecost was an experience both individually and corporately of repenting from sin accompanied by "the gift of the Holy Ghost." It is "the goodness of God" that "leadeth thee to repentance" (Rom. 2:4). The Holy Ghost was in charge. He initiated the call. The people responded to the preaching of the cross seeking the forgiveness of their sins.

We further read, “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” Acts 2:39. The Lord calls everyone born into the world to repent of their sins. The Holy Spirit calls upon all to repent.

We do not use the Holy Spirit to get what we want. There is no “Name It, and Claim It” arrogance here. He does not show up at our bidding and choosing. Our gospel-hardened hearts need to awaken to the Holy Spirit’s presence in our church history and in our midst and repent for our neglect of His message. A genuine repentance from above demonstrates a hunger and thirst for righteousness. It will desire to know more of Jesus and His present work. This is the only kind of revival that God can bless. There should be a solemn avowal of God’s everlasting promise to accomplish His work of saving souls. This is true evangelistic work.

There is a connection between Pentecost and our antitypical Day of Atonement. Here it is. After the healing of the lame man at the Gate Beautiful in Jerusalem, Peter took no credit for the miracle. He explained how this mighty work had been done. It had been promised to the patriarchs and prophets. “God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled.” Again, Peter uplifted the cross of Christ.

Peter spoke prophetically. It is present truth for our time. He was talking about events just before God “shall send Jesus Christ” (Acts 3:20), which is an obvious reference to the second coming; and “the times of restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21),—the restoration of Eden and the lost dominion. Here is what God desires to give to His people in preparation for the grandest evangelistic work before Jesus’ coming.

Peter prophesied, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” Acts 3:19-21. All heaven is truly interested in those who repent of their sins in these times just before the coming of Jesus. It is a repentance not to be repented of. Their characters are transformed in conformity to the commandments of God. Their sins are blotted out.

“He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depth of the sea.” Micah 7:19. All their iniquities will be cast into oblivion. God has promised that He Himself, for His own sake, will remember their sins no more. “I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.” Isa. 43:25. Said Jesus, “He that overcometh, the same shall be

clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before His angels.” They will be accounted worthy of eternal life.

The Holy Spirit doesn’t come because of our repentance. The Holy Spirit indicts our repentance. We respond to His initiative. The Holy Spirit has always been operational in this world since He “moved upon the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:2). He worked throughout Old Testament times. At Pentecost He was sent by the enthroned Christ to signal to the disciples that all power had been given unto Him. They were His anointed representatives to make known the good news to all nations.

Peter is forecasting that at the time of the blotting out of sin during the great antitypical day of atonement there will be such a Spirit indicted repentance of the ages because of a new appreciation for the eternal death of the Son of God for personal sin; that at that time it can only be characterized as “the times of refreshing.” It will not be a different Holy Spirit than has worked through the ages, but an unparalleled manifestation of the Spirit never seen before, and the Spirit is the One who sparked it. Finally the bride of Christ responds to Him.

It will be as in the days of Elijah who announced before King Ahab that there would be “neither dew nor rain these years, but according to my word” (1 Kings 17:1). The three year long drought was not broken until the altar was erected and the covenant proclaimed by Elijah. Then hearts were turned by the message and the people repented of their sins. Then the times of refreshing came to the parched land with abundant rain.

Spare the Lord the all night prayer vigils for the Holy Spirit. Spare Him the pleas for power evangelism. Spare Him the numbers game of trying to get more on board to twist His arm and conjoin Him into giving the Spirit for more boldness and self-esteem. It is all an insult to God who has already revealed His most precious message accompanied by the beginnings of the latter rain.⁵

You see God is not like Baal who has to be awakened by our agitations. He is the God who has initiated the outpouring of the Spirit, but it was rejected in large part by His own people. It is not up to us to choose the time, the way, or the place for the latter rain. He is sovereign in that regard. We may not like it that God sent it to us through two young men Jones and Waggoner. We may not like it that God sent it to the 1888 Minneapolis General

⁵ “God gave me at that conference was disregarded by nearly all. Rebellion was popular. Their course was an insult to the Spirit of God.” 314. “When the Lord graciously sends to us the means of knowing the truth, and we turn from the precious privilege, and are indifferent to His message, we insult the spirit of God, and we shall walk in darkness and stumble in unbelief.” {1888 418.1}

Conference. We may not like it that it is over 120 years old. But that is God's method and choosing and what do we have to say about it?

God was insulted in 1888, and He continues to be insulted now as we beg Him to send what He already sent, like we are trying to "twist His arm" to give us something that He promised and has already delivered. What we as a church should be doing now is urging the people and leaders to seek His forgiveness for rejecting that which He so lovingly and mercifully sent. We should be urging them to pray to be humbly led and taught of Him from what is His loud cry, what is His latter rain, rather than waiting for Him to send a rain that suits our fancy.

God already sent the mercy drops of the latter rain, but if you will read Testimonies to Ministers, "Rejecting the Light", you will see that God was insulted when the leadership of the church rejected the light, the loud cry, the latter rain that God was trying to send to them. We have it, a wonderful message poured out in abundance through the writings of Ellen White, A. T. Jones, E. J. Waggoner, the message of the matchless charms of Jesus, the message that tells of our God who not only forgives sins but who empowers us through His grace to say no to temptation. We have it, but the leadership still continues to ignore and reject it. Do we think that God is going to send a different message than what He has already sent? We didn't like the way that rain came down, so we are asking for something else?

And so if we are going to have anything like successful evangelism this is the preparation for it. We can throw all the money and lay all the plans and methods we like at the problem of awakening our communities to God's message, but until we ourselves know the message we will continue to limp along as we always have now for years and years and wonder why God hasn't doing anything for us. Is it not a time to repent!