

THE GREAT SHEPHERD OF THE EVERLASTING COVENANT

By Pastor Paul Penno

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The Apostle Paul in concluding his epistle to the Hebrews prays that “our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ. . .” Hebrews 13:20, 21. It is through the blood of the everlasting covenant that Jesus makes us perfect. His blood is His endless life. Jesus freely gave His blood at Calvary. He has been giving His life freely to all in every age past and present. Since His life-blood is perfect, without sin, He delights to do thy will, O God, it will complete God’s will in you. Do not put up any roadblocks to what His blood will finish in your life.

Since Jesus is the “great shepherd of the flock” I thought we might look at some conversations which Jesus had with people from all walks of life as He brought the blessings of the everlasting covenant to them during His earthly ministry. Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant. We shall see in His conversations with individuals that He emphasized some key elements of the 1888 message during His earthly walk.

Jesus revealed to Nicodemus some of the most profound truth, which to this day has not been grasped by the great systems of theology that Catholicism or Protestantism has produced. You see, Calvinism says that God’s grace is irresistible to those whom He has elected to save, therefore they are predestined for eternal life. Those elected for destruction are predetermined to go into perdition. Wesleyan Arminianism teaches that Jesus potentially died to save the whole human family and offers salvation to all, but only those who get it right by believing Jesus’ offer will be saved. In other words, God condemns them before they believe in His Son, but when they believe in the offer of Christ they are no longer condemned.

But Jesus taught the fullest rays of sunshine truth to Nicodemus, profound truth, which we as Seventh-day Adventists must understand. Why did Jesus teach the most beloved verse in all the Bible to Nicodemus? “For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved.” John 3:17. Because Nicodemus was the Calvinist of his day. He

believed only the covenant Israel was saved. His concept of God was a very narrow one. Consequently, his understanding of salvation was a very mechanistic one. He was totally oblivious to the necessity of a heart change for in his view if the covenant elect are ordained of God to be saved, then you're locked in. You see, most Christian preachers declare that God is sending the world to hell in a hand basket. He's going to fry them good and crisp.

To the contrary, Jesus' good news message is, "I am the Gospel. God sent me to be the Saviour of the world. I have saved the world. Therefore, the world is not condemned." Jesus' message is just the reverse of popular evangelicalism. It says the world is condemned and going to hell.

If that is the case, then that which is condemned should immediately be annihilated, so why isn't it? The reason is the Gospel does not condemn. It is just the opposite of popular preaching and notions based upon it.

Jesus developed this thought further: "He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." John 3:18. Jesus' Word to the world, to the sinner, is positive. God does not condemn because Jesus was condemned as representative sinner in our place. This gift of justification is given to each individual, for He tasted death for every man. Heb. 2:9. It is not just a corporate gift to the whole number, but it is an individual gift to every man, woman and child.

But if one exercises His God-given freedom of the right of refusal, then he rejects and despises the gift and so judges himself unworthy of forever-life with Christ, and brings the condemnation upon himself. Hence, condemnation is no arbitrary judgment on God's part. It is man's choice of destiny.

Jesus is the light of the world. He is the creative Word of God. "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." John 3:19. The light given every man, if rejected and hindered, gives place for the darkness to creep into the life with its ever-increasing shadows; thus producing evil deeds which are all that the fallen, sinful human heart can produce without Jesus, the light of the world.

The story is told of a prisoner who sat in his death cell awaiting execution. One day a clergyman bearing a message from the governor came to see the prisoner. As the clergyman entered the

prisoner's cell, the prisoner shouted, "I don't want to see you. I need none of your prayers."

"But," the minister insisted, "I have a message for you from the governor."

When he handed the prisoner an envelope, the convict shouted, "Take it away! I don't want to hear anything from him, either."

Greatly disappointed, the minister left with the message still in his pocket. Later the warden told the prisoner, "The message you refused from the governor contained your pardon!"

It is said that when he was executed, the prisoner's last words were: "I'm dying not because I murdered a man, but because I refused a pardon."

No one will be eternally lost because he is a sinner; he will be lost because he refused the pardon given him from heaven.

At high noon one day Jesus met a Samaritan woman at the well. "Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water." John 4:10. What a strange thing to say. Why did Jesus give her living water? Because she was searching for something that would fulfill her life which all her marriages failed to provide, she was a disaster when it came to relationships. She had been married seven times and was living with the eighth one.

Jesus suggests to her that knowing God's gift would in turn prompt her to ask of God living water. This would not just be water that you would have to hike for miles to get to way down in a well which was a holding cistern. This would be bubbling, sparkling water that would accompany the traveler wherever she might roam.

No one has ever seen a well of water springing up. Only the water in a spring springs up. The water in a well just lies there. Imagine that you have just purchased a piece of property upon which you are going to build a house. There is water on the property. If the water is in a well, the water will give you no trouble. If you are there with your bulldozers to clear the ground for the house, all you have to do is push some dirt into the hole and the well will be gone forever so far as you are concerned.

It is entirely different, however, if the source of the water on your property is a spring. Try to do the same as you did with the well. You push some dirt over a spring, and it seems to be gone. Five o'clock comes. The workmen go home. But the next morning, when the

workmen come back, the stream will be there again, having simply pushed its way through the ground. A well can be covered. A spring seeps through anything you may place over it.

This was the same water given to the Israelites by God when Moses struck the rock—Mount Horeb—and that was Christ (1 Cor. 10:3). That water of life flows from Christ who was smitten on the cross.

A rich young ruler came to Jesus and asked, “Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” (Matt. 19:16). Jesus’ conversation with him illustrates how much He loves Laodicean Christians. “Then Jesus beholding him loved him.” Mark 10:21. How can Jesus reach a fellow who believes himself to be rich, and increased with goods, and in need of nothing?

Our Lord told him to keep the commandments and he responded that he had kept all of them from his childhood. But he had broken the commandment “Thou shalt not covet” in that he had clung to his riches and in so doing he had made his money the chief god of his life over the Lord God. He had thus broken the first commandment. This was the Laodicean’s unknown sin. For this reason the Lord told him, “Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.” Matthew 19:21. You see, the man loved his riches.

This reminds me of a notorious miser who was called on by the chairman of the community charity. “Sir,” said the fund-raiser, “our records show that despite your wealth, you’ve never once given to our drive.”

“Do your records show that I have an elderly mother who was left penniless when my father died? fumed the tightwad. “Do your records show that I have a disabled brother who is unable to work? Do your records show I have a widowed sister with small children who can barely make ends meet?”

“No, sir,” replied the embarrassed volunteer. “Our records don’t show those things.”

“Well, I don’t give to any of them, so why should I give anything to you?”

The rich young ruler illustrates the 1888 message in that Christ is calling Laodiceans to repent of their unknown sin of refusing the message of righteousness in Christ which she resists to this day. Renouncing her own riches and understanding of righteousness by

faith and following Jesus Laodicea would have all the commandments in Him.

Faith is always tested. God always allows room for someone to choose doubt, to question. We could go on down through the list of patriarchs and prophets all the way from Abraham, the father of the faithful, to Daniel. Every last one of them was tested. And Jesus was no exception. He lived by faith and God tested Him.

Years ago, (true story!) a young mother was making her way across the hills of South Wales, carrying her tiny baby in her arms, when she was overtaken by a blinding blizzard. She never reached her destination. When the blizzard subsided, her body was found beneath a mound of snow. They discovered that before her death, she had taken off all her outer clothing and wrapped it around her baby.

When they unwrapped the child, to their great surprise, they found he was alive and well. She had mounded her body over his and given her life for her child, proving the depths of her mother love. That's God's kind of love—a determined, sacrificing love.

The conversation that Jesus had with the Syro-Phoenician woman illustrates the 1888 truth that faith is tested. God always allows for some hooks of doubt to exist upon which the skeptic may hang his hat in order that true faith might emerge.

“But He answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to dogs.” Matthew 15:26. The children were the house of Israel. The dogs were the Gentile heathen idol worshipers.

Now I happen to be a dog lover. I would feed a dog table scraps at the drop of a hat. In fact, I can remember times as a kid when the food served us children wasn't so appealing. So when no one was looking I would sneak it under the table with my hand and my dog Rip was always there to get me out of a jam.

There are very few for whom these words of Jesus would not have been enough. Even if they had persevered this far with Him, by now they would have turned away in anger or despair. But she is mighty in faith. She believes that their paths have crossed for a purpose. This is no chance encounter. And from these words of Jesus that she is a dog she draws with the ready wit of faith an argument in her own behalf. She entangles the Lord, Himself most willing to be so entangled, in his own speech. She takes the sword out of His own hand, with which to overcome Him.

“And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.” Matthew 15:27. Even the dogs get the

crumbs and she wants her portion! Wasn't that a master-stroke? She snares Christ in His own words.

We can learn from her how to wring a "Yes" from God's "No." Or, rather, we may learn how to hear the deep-hidden "Yes," which many times lurks under His seeming "No." Like her, we must give God the right of way in all He says against us, and yet we must not break off from praying, until we overcome as she overcame, until we have turned the very charges made against us into arguments and proofs of our great need, until we too have snared Christ in His own words.

She saw in His very declaration the granting of her petition. "Did you say dogs? That's fine. I accept the title and the place, for the dogs have a portion too. Maybe not the first portion, not the children's portion, but nevertheless a portion, yet even the crumbs which fall from the masters' table. Since you have put it this way, You bring us heathen, You bring me, within the circle of the blessings which God, the great Householder, is ever dispensing to His family. We also belong to His household, though we occupy but the lowest place therein. According to your own showing, I am not wholly an alien. So I will abide by this name 'dog' and will claim all which it is entitled to."

Jesus, the Great Shepherd, was preparing His little flock, the disciples, for the crisis of their lives which, if withstood in the power of the gospel would have glorified God. The conversation which Jesus had with Peter illustrates the 1888 truth that the principle of the cross will prepare the 144,000 to be translated when Jesus returns.

Jesus administered their final exam by asking them just one question, "But whom say ye that I am?" Matthew 16:15. Get it right and they get an A+. Get it wrong and they fail the course. Peter responded on behalf of them all correctly, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," (Matt. 16:16) he boldly confessed.

Peter could never have arrived at that conclusion without it being a revelation from God. That Jesus was the Messiah, despite appearances to the contrary,—the one sent from God,—and the Son of God, had to be a revelation from above.

But equally true is the fact that the principle of the cross must be divinely revealed to the beclouded human mind. He plainly, even bluntly, told them that He must be rejected and slain: "From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." Matthew 16:21.

A crucified Messiah in place of a glorified, crowned, world-ruling one? The more convinced the disciples were that Jesus was the Son of God, the more confused and confounded they were to be told that He must be put to death. And by the best people in the world, their own nation!

“Then Peter took Him aside, and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to you.’” Matthew 16:22. Crosses are for felons, not for anyone good, and especially not for One who is the Son of God!

Those who desire to be part of the 144,000 who stand at the close of probation when the world is without a mediator, those who go through the seven last plagues, cannot fail the test of the cross.

One young Waldensian lady of about fifteen is spoken of as having been buried alive. A hole was dug in the ground, she placed in it upright, and the dirt thrown around her and stamped down. The cross was offered her by the Papists, and she was asked if she would renounce her faith and embrace the faith of the church. She refused; more dirt was placed around her and stamped down. The cross was still offered, but still she refused. Then more dirt was placed around her; and thus they continued to throw dirt about her and stamp it down, and then offer her the privilege of renouncing her faith, until they reached her head. After the dirt had been stamped around her so that she could only speak and scarcely breathe, still she refused. She knew what awaited her. Then she was covered and the dirt stamped over her, and thus she perished.

For the 144,000 the test of the cross will be an alone experience. They will not have the close fellowship of others. It will appear as though they are martyred for a losing cause. By the faith of Jesus they will gain the victory over their own personal death to self. They will follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.

Dr. W. A. Criswell, Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas Texas, said on one occasion on an airplane flight he found himself seated beside a well-known theologian. He desperately wanted to start a conversation and they did get to talk. The man told Dr. Criswell about how he had recently lost his little boy through death. Dr. Criswell listened as he told his story: He said he had come home from school with a fever and we thought it was just one of those childhood things, but it was a very virulent form of meningitis. The doctor said we cannot save your little boy. He’ll die.

And so this seminary professor, loving his son as he did, sat by the bedside to watch this death vigil. It was the middle of the day and the little boy whose strength was going from him and whose vision and brain was getting clouded said, "Daddy, it's getting dark isn't it?" The professor said to his son, "Yes son it is getting dark, very dark." Of course it was very dark for him. He said, "Daddy, I guess it's time for me to go to sleep isn't it?"

He said, "Yes, son, it's time for you to go to sleep."

The professor said the little fellow had a way of fixing his pillow just so, and putting his head on his hands when he slept and he fixed his pillow like that and laid his head on his hands and said, "Good night Daddy. I will see you in the morning." He then closed his eyes in death.

Dr. Criswell said the professor didn't say anymore after that. He just looked out the window of that airplane for a long time. Then he turned back and he looked at Dr Criswell with the scalding tears coming down his cheeks and he said, "Dr. Criswell, I can hardly wait till the morning."

But when Jesus died He did not have the luxury of dying in His Father's arms of comfort. He was made to be sin for us. Thus He bore the full indignation against sin. He died the second death that we might never have to die that death. By faith you have begun to comprehend the breadth and length and depth and height of the love that led the Son of God to His cross to die the world's second death.

In the year 1873, a Christian lawyer from Chicago, named Horatio Spafford, placed his wife and four children on the luxury liner *Ville de Havre* sailing from New York to France. Spafford expected to join them in about three or four weeks after finishing up some business, but with the exception of his wife he never saw them again. The trip started out beautifully. But on the evening of November 21, 1873, as the *Ville de Havre* proceeded peacefully across the Atlantic, the ship was suddenly struck by another vessel, the *Lochearn*, and sank a mere thirty minutes later, with the loss of nearly all on board.

On being told that the ship was sinking Mrs. Spafford knelt with her children and prayed that they might be saved or be made willing to die, if such was God's will. A few minutes later, in the confusion, three of the children were swept away by the waves while she stood clutching the youngest. Suddenly the youngest child was swept from her arms. She reached out and caught the baby's gown. Then the baby, a little girl, was lost again. Mrs. Spafford became unconscious

and awoke later to find that she had been rescued by sailors from the *Lochearn*. But the four children were gone.

Back in the United States Horatio Spafford was waiting for news of his family, and at last, ten days later (after the rescue ship had reached Cardiff), it came. "Saved alone" was his wife's message. That night Spafford walked the floor of his room in anguish, as anyone would have done. But this was not all. For as he shared his loss with his Lord, a loss that could not be reversed in this life, he found, as many have, that peace that indeed passes all understanding. Toward morning he told a friend named Major Whittle, "I am glad to be able to trust my Lord when it costs me something." Then, sometime later, as he reflected on the disaster at sea, he wrote:

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea-billows roll;
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.