

# I'm Right

A sermon by Larry Kirkpatrick

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Presenter: Larry Kirkpatrick  
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Let us begin today with three different texts, in three different books of the Bible. First, from the prophet in Jeremiah 17:9:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9).

Next, a statement from Ecclesiastes 9:3:

Madness is in their [the sons of men] heart while they live.

And finally, one from a third Bible book, the Proverbs:

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise (Proverbs 12:15).

Christian witness is blunted by the uncertainties some have about beliefs. We are called to rightly divide the Word, and, with trumpet volume and crystal clarity, to present the Word. We should and we do. There is an important place for caution, not only in interpreting the Bible, but, as we especially approach today, in interpreting the motives of others, and, in assessing the rightness of our own opinions. God calls us to Christian humility.

### **Certainty and Surprise**

You may say, I'm right. I am sure. I know this is the way to go. I know brother A well enough after all these years, I know sister B from many conversations, and I know this is what she is thinking. It is a sure thing. I'm right.

Not so fast. God's method is often counter-intuitive—not what we expect.

## Moses and the Egyptian

Remember Moses?

And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds. And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not (Acts 7:22-25).

You know the rest of the story. Moses fled into the wilderness. The change Moses expected would not come for a whole generation. In the school of God, forty years would pass before he would return to Egypt.

Now think on this. Moses was sure that he was right. He was learned in the wisdom of the Egyptians, expert in Egyptian politics and war-making. He had had access to the premium seminars and the best education that Egypt could offer. So capable, so well educated, he had knowledge, he may have felt, in advance of every other Hebrew person in his day. Who better to lead a revolt and save his kinsmen? Of course he was right! God hates oppression, cannot stand coercion; God had preserved him, Moses, through the water, through the genocide of the male Hebrew children. Surely he was the man and this was the hour!

He was so sure that he was right, that he was ready to initiate the uprising. So sure that he was right, he was ready to kill for God. And he did. He slew the Egyptian.

Now this is interesting. We think he was forty years ahead of God. But could it be that God was ready at that very time to bring deliverance? Could it be that Moses was so sure that he was right but that he used a wrong method? Did God permit him to do the wrong thing and

actually put His preferred plan on hold for forty years—because a believer was sure that "I'm right!" Could it be?

### Gideon's Army

Consider another case. There was a man named Gideon. We recall his story. God called him to deliver Israel from the Midianites. So he raised up a vast army. They assembled for battle, more than 32,000 Hebrews strong. Then, in Judges 7:2, God gave Gideon this remarkable word:

And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against Me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.

And so, God initiates a paring down process. It results ultimately in a reduction in the size of Gideon's force from 32,000 to 300. *Then* He could work with them. And He delivered Israel by the 300.

Counter-intuitive? Yes. And yet, God knew what He was doing. More was less and less was more. Surely Gideon had felt some satisfaction when he stood looking at his army of 32,000 men. What vast resources he must have assembled in order to feed and house such a group. What logistics must have been involved. And then, to send almost everyone home?

Gideon must have lost his marbles! But He had been wrong to assemble such an army. God had a different plan. He would deliver so that it would be seen that His own hand had saved Israel, and not Israel on its own apart from God.

### David Building the Temple

Then there was the extraordinary reign of king David of Israel. After all his wars he embarked on a vast project to build a temple for God. An enormous draft was drawn upon the

wealth of Israel. Plans were developed, materials prepared, things began to be organized. Then this shocking word from God to David:

Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto My name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in My sight. Behold, a son shall be born to thee . . . he shall build an house for My name (1 Chronicles 22:8, 10).

David had been sure that he should build such a house, and had begun to marshal the resources of the nation. What could be more right than to build a magnificent temple for God?! But David was mistaken, and God had to tell him so.

### Judas

In the New Testament, another example: Judas. This man, who was so sure he was right, goes down in history as having betrayed His Lord. Judas was a person of learning. He was a man who was capable, who knew how to get things done. But Jesus moved too slowly for him. He saw Jesus as being inefficient, wasteful of funds, not aggressive enough. So thought Judas.

When opportunity arose to advance the too-slowly-ticking clock of *Jesus'* timetable, Judas took it. He agreed to betray Jesus to the authorities. Of course, Judas had seen the miracles in Jesus' ministry. He had seen divine answers to Jesus' prayers. He knew that Jesus commanded the power to free Himself from anything the Pharisees—or the Romans—could manage.

Jesus was seen as being too tentative. Judas would betray Him to the authorities, and then to escape Jesus would demonstrate the power at His command (Luke 22:3-6). In a quantum leap the revolution would be advanced, and Jesus would take the throne. It would be seen in the end that Judas' consummate timing had opened the way for Jesus to assume the throne. Judas,

apparently a traitor, would be seen to have engineered the decisive moment in the revolution. He would be rewarded. (See also Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 718ff.)

I'm right. Judas thought, I'm right, I am ahead of Jesus and by shrewd work I will initiate the revolution. Just one problem. God does not call us to initiate the revolution. Jesus was not engaged in revolution. God's purposes were much different. The end result of all this for Judas? He went out into the potter's field and hung himself.

### The Laodicean Church

We are probably beginning to get it by now, but here's another example for good measure; one that should hit very close to home: The Laodicean church.

God entrusts His last day church with Present Truth. What a temptation to think we are right! And in the description of the seventh church period, that is exactly the trap it falls into. See Revelation 3:17:

Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

I am rich. I have many possessions. I don't need anything.

I'm right.

In reality, these are actually naked, without vision, in poverty, a most pitiful mess. Sure of themselves, so many are utterly wrong.

### **Cardiac Specialists?**

Where do we often go wrong? In Revelation three the church is wrong about where it is spiritually. But they are not alone. In the time of Christ, the Pharisees were wrong about their

goals, and the Sadducees about theirs. The Zealots were wrong about trying to overthrow Rome and the Herodians were wrong in wishing to preserve the kingdom of Herod. History lists a seemingly endless stream of causes and goals, many for which people willingly fought, even died—and that, after the fact, one can see, were wrong. Where do members of the church go so wrong?

One place is in judging of the motives of others. We are not mind readers. We are not heart readers. In his prayer to God, Solomon reminds us of an important truth:

Thou [God] only knowest the hearts of the children of men (2 Chronicles 6:30).

Only God knows the heart. We may see outward acts but we do not know motives or even for certain what happened. God does not call us to judge the motives of our brethren. That is God's business and His alone.

Friends, even the angels, so much more intelligent than we are, undamaged by sin as we are, clear-minded, and knowing so much more about the actual facts of specific cases, perhaps having perfect memories, total recall—even these holy beings cannot read the heart. And we think that we can?

Sometimes we just have very definite opinions about this or that. We may be right and we may be wrong but we are obliged to work with our brethren. We cannot proceed indefinitely. We fall back into a position of independence from our brethren. The natural heart returns to an unsubdued condition. For those who do, Heaven gives warning:

If we desire to maintain the independence of the natural heart, and refuse the correction of God, we shall, as did the Jews, stubbornly carry out our purposes and our ideas in the face of the plainest evidence, and shall be in danger of as great deception as came upon them; and in our blind infatuation we may go to as great lengths as they did, and yet flatter ourselves that we are doing work for God (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 230).

Ultimately, we must be willing to surrender our agenda for God's. His is always larger than our own. We should be occupied in fulfilling His agenda more than in defending ourselves or in attacking others. The Bible is very careful. Very, very rarely does God call His people to defend themselves. Rather, they are to suffer wrong. Jesus is our pattern. Jesus offered very little in the way of defense.

As for attacking or undermining others, we should remember Jesus' warning,

Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me (Matthew 25:40).

Are there not larger veggie-fish to fry than the infighting that Christians sometimes engage in? Sometimes God asks His people, What are you doing here, Elijah? (1 Kings 19:9, 13). Jesus said that the hills were already white to harvest (John 4:35). He pled with God to send laborers into the work. He calls us to the work most urgent. Dare we neglect it?

### **Conclusion**

There are some who feel, and with a certainty, that they are right. But

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9).

Madness is in their [the sons of men] heart while they live (Ecclesiastes 9:3).

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise (Proverbs 12:15).

God calls each of us to Christian humility. How savvy are you? You think you are right? The Bible says that your heart is deceitful above all things. We are often the poorest judge of the one in the mirror. Even the best of us has madness in our heart while we live. That is good to

remember, wherever you fit into the scheme of things. The fool consults his own views, but the wise counsels with others. He not only talks but listens. He seeks the counsel of his brothers and sisters in Christ. When the church speaks, he listens, and submits to the consensus.

It is natural for us to want to fight. That is exactly why it should be so uncommon in our midst. Today each of us has an opportunity. It is Sabbath. We can take some time, alone time with God, and seek Him and ask Him to search our hearts, and show us that sometimes we are not right.

And ask Him to heal.

**Biographical note:** Larry Kirkpatrick has served in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church since 1994. He is a pastor of the American West, having led churches in Nevada, Utah, California, and Idaho. His writings include the books *Real Grace for Real People*, and *Cleanse and Close*. Larry and wife Pamela presently serve in the Upper Columbia Conference, ministering to the Bonners Ferry and Clark Fork churches in the incomparable beauty of Northern Idaho.