

The Second Coming and the Last Generation

A sermon by Larry Kirkpatrick

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Whispered in dark Loma Linda alleyways; spoken of in low tones in Silver Spring; pondered in puzzlement in La Sierra, and certainly, mentioned in Mentone—something special is astir. There is an energy. What is it? What is waking Seventh-day Adventists, young and old?

Next week another event sponsored by us—the Mentone Seventh-day Adventist church—will take place. I speak, of course, of General Youth Conference-Southwest, at Pine Springs Ranch, September 4-7. As a local church, you have developed a reputation as a special place for youth; the smallest, the youth in our sabbath schools, and the young adults.

We have a history of supporting youth events of high-spiritual energy. We sponsored the first General Youth Conference in 2002, and since then a variety of similar meetings. The interesting thing about them has been their character. They take a distinct shape. The music, seminar classes, presenters, the demeanor and style and quality, the excellence, seem strikingly akin to Ellen White's description of William Miller's meetings in the 1840s:

No wild excitement attended these meetings, but a deep solemnity pervaded the minds of those who heard his discourses (*Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 14).

Bear with me. My purpose is to remind us what we have done without boasting of what we have done. We have nothing of which to boast. In order to use us at all, God's Spirit first had to pierce through our hard hearts, and He keeps on having to.

Competing Paradigms

In any case, I anticipate just such meetings again in a few days. These are not rock and roll, pizza and movie party, pseudo-Christian events; they have been scenes where Adventist young people with a deep desire to follow Jesus go and descend upon bended knee. They follow

Jesus. They return to their churches in Southern California and elsewhere, and sometimes their energy causes alarm. Why so deeply interested, Mr. young-person Christian?

We prefer not to speak of it, but the reality is that a certain amount of division has risen within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Especially in certain parts of this world church, among some members, there is a certain mindset. Today we do not enter into a discussion of the root causes. But one aspect of this is that through the careful following of trends in churches that have never upheld the Sabbath or kindred truths, some have educated themselves in certain ways of “reaching” the youth. Entertain, give social opportunities, use the music of the world and of popular Christianity, put “radical” videos in the room, steer clear of anything that savors of the doctrinal, or so painfully anachronistic as the idea that God has called a remnant.

But, surprise. It turns out that thousands of Seventh-day Adventist youth *are* interested in the core mission that God has entrusted to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They *are* interested in learning how to give Bible studies, do evangelism, and they do respect and desire to understand the writings God sent to His people to guide them home to safe harbor.

That’s not supposed to happen.

What to do about it?

Adventist Youth as Deluded Fundamentalists?

Adventists who disagree have their two options. One, they can choose to revisit their own understanding. Maybe they themselves have been wrong about Adventism after all, and these youth are right? Or, two, they can smugly insist that they are right about Adventism and proceed to attack the experience of these young people.

Human nature is weak. All, liberals and conservatives alike, have a strong tendency to engage in self-justification. Because fallen human nature is conservative, it is always cheaper in psychic cost for the surface liberal to defend his current position, rather than to admit it flawed. Therefore, the fact that thousands of Seventh-day Adventist young people *actually believe in Jesus and in the message and mission of the Adventist church* is dangerous, and will be attacked.

One shape of this attack is beginning to be seen. It goes something like this.

There is an unfortunate resurgence of that dreaded scourge, fundamentalism, in the church. Our young people are taking the Bible too literally. In consequence, they are deluded and are setting themselves on a destructive, even cultic, pathway that is destructive to relationships. What's more, they are in opposition to the denomination itself. Some are even attacking Adventist universities.

As we all know, one way to attack a belief is to package it in a straw man and then knock all its stuffing out. Make your attack against a counterfeit target, a misrepresentation. Some are calling our very conventional Seventh-day Adventist interest in the Second Coming “fundamentalism.”

“Fundamentalism” is a swear-word in the liberal vocabulary. Interestingly, Ellen White (1827-1915), who during many years lived contemporaneous with the fundamentalist movement (1878-1910), seems never to have mentioned it. A search of her writings fails to return even one hit for “fundamentalist” or “fundamentalism.” It is interesting that she chose toward it neither a stance of condemnation nor promotion. This may be because the fundamentalist movement upheld the inspiration of the Bible, the reality of the virgin birth, Christ's death as atonement for

sin, His resurrection, and the historical reality of Jesus' miracles, but at the same time insisted on biblical inerrancy. Adventists have preferred rather to speak of the Bible's "infallibility."

But some who identify themselves today as Adventists entertain deep doubts concerning certain of these points. There is a particular skepticism about the Bible and inspired writings, an intellectual approach that leads its proponents to endorse teachings that seem to directly contradict the Bible but which, these say, are developments of Scripture "trends." But the world church presents its teaching about the Bible as follows:

The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history (2 Peter 1:20, 21; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 4:12.) (Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Belief #1).

This statement in itself is enough to make some of them uncomfortable. They can, of course, marinate in their private doubts. But when a generation of Seventh-day Adventist young people choose to reject such marination for themselves, others grow nervous. And here is their problem. When they attack as "fundamentalists" fellow believers who merely agree with Fundamental Belief #1, they attack also the millions of Christians and Adventists who hold the same views. There is probably no view quite as "mainstream" within the Seventh-day Adventist Church as Fundamental Belief #1. It is utterly basic. Those who attack upholders of this belief actually demonstrate that they themselves have slipped to the margins. *Their view* is the suspect one.

144,000 Perfect to Initiate the Second Coming?

Unfortunately, the straw-man makers go further. They actually manufacture a false belief. Some are claiming that these on-fire Adventists teach—and these are the words of the naysayers—that “there will be a final generation on earth numbering 144,000 that must achieve moral perfection in order to initiate the final apocalypse followed by the Second Coming of Christ.”

Let’s be fair. Who teaches this? I can’t think anyone who teaches *this*. I have not seen any noteworthy spike in Adventist youth making a big deal out of the question of the 144,000, or going out of their way to teach that it is a literal number. Most conventional Adventists, even perhaps most non-Adventist Christians, would easily agree that there will—at some point—be a final generation. At some point, Jesus does return. We call it the Second Coming.

Then there is this idea that the last generation must reach moral perfection. What is the definition of moral perfection? Is this actual language being used? I run in this set (“last generation” thinking) and I do not hear this language.

What’s more, no one I know of teaches that our actions “initiate” the apocalypse. They do *not* initiate the apocalypse. God initiated the apocalypse with the first words of the Bible: “In the beginning.” Remember, the Great Controversy War between good and evil already had been under way for thousands of years before Moses laid down one word of the Bible, let alone before God gave apocalyptic prophecies like Daniel and Revelation.

Some scholars suggest that the oldest book of the Bible is not Genesis but the book of Job. The first two chapters of Job outline the Great Controversy War theme: Is God good or bad? Fair or unfair? Open or closed to dialogue? Can a fallen man like Job obey? What happens if

Job's material incentives are removed? Isn't it true in the end that selfish purposes will be revealed? That the bottom line is "All that a man has he will give for his life" (Job 2:4 ESV)?

Satan says Yes.

God says No.

Friends, the apocalypse has already been "initiated." We are not waiting for it to start, or hoping that somehow we can provoke God to start the endgame. Endgame is already here, the pieces already in play. The conflict has been raging for thousands of years. But there is a day coming, not of draw or stalemate, but checkmate.

As for "moral perfection," usually it is wiser to use the language of the Bible itself. There are a people who are being prepared, whether a literal number or not, whom God says will "follow the Lamb [Jesus] wherever He goes" (Revelation 14:4 ESV). Pretty sinister. To use Bible language again, these will be those who "had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name" (Revelation 15:2).

As for the victory, whether it is of the real or let's-make-believe variety, the same Bible tells us that in the end there will be a death decree (Revelation 13). People will be prohibited from buying or selling food unless they have the mark of the beast. God's remnant will resist; they refuse to receive the mark. That is, in genuine real-world acts, they choose not to comply with the demand of the ecclesiastically-influenced state. It is the same situation as in Job, isn't it? Daniel chapter three, or Revelation chapter 13, either way, it boils down again to the question of Job 2:4: "All that a man has he will give for his life." But in the end there are a people who actually, literally, genuinely, by demonstration, "keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12).

And so, we must ask, What is the origin place of the hostility? Does it really rise out of misplaced zeal in these Adventist youth? Or is it rooted in something else? Is it because some institutional Adventists have lost their interest, if not actual belief in, the Second Coming itself?

To Hasten or Delay Has Everything to Do With the Second Coming

The Bible tells us that God's purposes can be hindered or advanced by the actions of men. For example, 2 Peter 3:11, 12 in the English Standard Version says,

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn.

The New Testament directly connects the life of the believer with "hastening the coming of the day of God." Nor is the Old Testament silent. It says that although God preferred to bring Israel into the promised land in what would have been a matter of weeks, their behavior prevented it. A lack of faith kept them out of Canaan for four decades (Numbers 13-14)! The Bible says that men may advance or retard God's timetable. He permits this, and even insists upon it.

In 1973, God led the General Conference Annual Council to present to the world church membership an extraordinary Appeal which included the following:

We believe that the return of Jesus has been long delayed, that the reasons for the delay are not wrapped in mysteries, and that the primary consideration before the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to reorder its priorities individually and corporately so that our Lord's return may be hastened
(<http://www.lastgenerationtheology.org/lgt/doc/mis/19731974/19731974.php>).

Similar statements appeared in 1974, including

We solemnly appeal to our church leaders and members everywhere, to think carefully as to whether they are hindering or hastening the return of Jesus. Our Lord is waiting to intervene in behalf of His church in ways beyond human comprehension, to open doors that will remain closed to human effort—both in the personal lives of dedicated church members and in the breakthrough of public evangelism that will one day startle the world with its clearness and power.

The question Why do we keep Him waiting? should hover over every Adventist home, over every church meeting, large or small. We believe that God is willing to do through this generation what He has wanted to do for many decades. We believe that He ought to be given the opportunity to show through His people today that His grace is sufficient to keep men from falling (See Jude 24), that men and women living amidst temptation and sin can conquer even as Jesus conquered (see Revelation 3:21), and that His way of life produces the happiest, kindest, most trustworthy people on earth (<http://www.lastgenerationtheology.org/lgt/doc/mis/19731974/19731974.php>).

The youth are attacking their church? No; try *obeying* their church. Consider these Appeals the church sent forth. The larger response is just coming in one generation removed. And praise be to God who is giving the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

My Bible tells me that Jesus is coming again, and that, “every eye shall see Him” (Revelation 1:7). The Second Coming definitely holds a prominent place in God’s apocalyptic Day Planner. Unfortunately, for some, it seems that the entire theme has been lost out of their reckoning.

Do not be discouraged, dear hearts, by the roar that rattles against Present Truth. We are doing a mighty work and cannot come down (Nehemiah 6:3). Keep to your task. If there is division in the denomination, it is not because the Mentone church stands for what the world church stands for. Don’t be afraid to be some of the salt. Jesus calls us to be salt and light in the world and in His church. Be afraid, rather, that you could fail, strike out on your own, and take your presence and help from this church so that it withers. Gather round Christ and His Word

carry forward the work in which you have recently been engaged. Be a praying, evangelistic church, understanding Present Truth. This is your safety. God has prospered it and will prosper it. Endure trials and gather together, encouraging each other as you see the day approaching (Hebrews 10:24, 25). Don't wander around visiting other churches, but redouble your energies here in this local church. Your membership is here. Make Mentone's future all that God wants it to be.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to say to you that I regard it as one of the preeminent privileges of my life, to have been here when the Spirit of God moved. He still intervenes in history. It has been a special blessing for this local church to sustain the moving of His Holy Spirit among Seventh-day Adventist youth. If there is one thing I especially pray that this local church will in years to come remember, it is how God has used you to encourage others, and how, in our own very small way, Heaven used us to crack the door, and give a glimpse of the final brightness.

Mentone church, do not forget from whence you have come, or where you are going. My last word as your pastor, is to remind you that if Jesus is lifted up, as sacrifice on the cross and high priest in His heavenly sanctuary, He will draw all men to Himself. God is making history and Jesus is coming again! Maranatha.

Biographical Note: Pastor Larry Kirkpatrick is a convert to the Adventist faith. Since 1994 he has served in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He holds degrees from Southern Adventist University and the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. His work has included research assistant for the Ellen G. White Estate, pioneering Adventist internet ministry, involvement in GYC, and presenter at the 50th Anniversary *Questions on Doctrine* Conference. He is author of the books *Real Grace for Real People* and *Cleanse and Close*. For many years his sermons and papers have been published on the internet. Larry and wife Pamela have served churches in Nevada, Utah, and California. The above was Pr. Kirkpatrick's last sermon while serving at the [Mentone church](#) near Loma Linda, California.