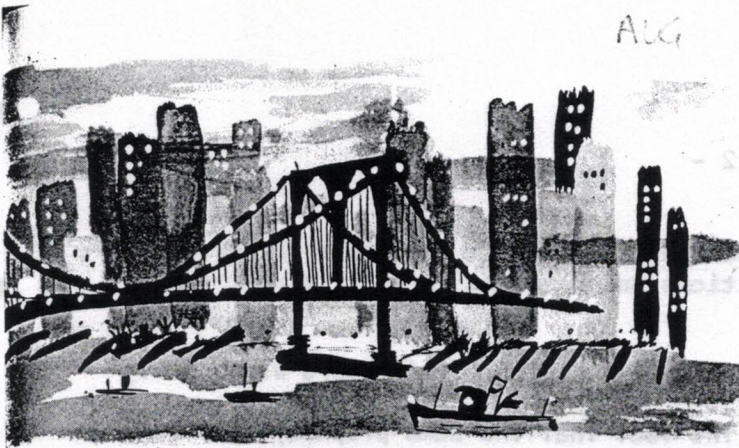


AUG '65



"Watchman, what of the night?"

The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come. Isaiah 21:11-12

"WHAT WENT YE OUT . . . TO SEE?"

ELIJAH

A deputation had come from John to inquire of Jesus, "Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?"¹ When this group departed, Jesus turned to the multitudes, and asked a simple question, but very penetrating - "What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken in the wind?"² The answer was clearly implied. John, the forerunner of Jesus, was not a man who governed his life or his pronouncements by first determining which way the wind was blowing.

In the announcement of his birth, the angel Gabriel clearly outlined for Zacharias the work that was to be accomplished by John. He was to precede Christ "in the spirit and power of Elias [Elijah]" and "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" in the midst of Israel.³ John recognized his own ministry as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. When a delegation from the chief religious leaders of Jerusalem asked him, "Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us", John replied, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord."⁴

John's task assigned to him by God was not easy. No one whose character was like a reed shaken in the wind could have accomplished the objective. It is stated:

The hearts of men around him were filled with every evil, with strife, envy, malice, and wickedness. They would not be impressed by a message of mercy and love. They were represented by John as a generation of vipers, and to them he gave scathing rebukes because of their self righteousness.⁵

Not only was John to rebuke, he was also to expose. Observe closely these words:

The work of John was to expose the character of the works of the Pharisees, to set their traditions and heresies in their true light before the people.⁶

We might dismiss the work of John as simply a historical record with no significance for this hour were it not for the fact that the same prophecy that John came and fulfilled has a specific application to this hour. Malachi foretold that God intended to send "Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord."⁷ Even though John dismissed the idea that he was a reincarnation of Elijah,⁸ Jesus plainly told the people, "If ye will receive it, this is Elias [Elijah], which was for to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."⁹ John's work only *amplified* for us, the significance of what it means, when before the Second Advent, there is to be prepared a people to stand in the day of the Lord. We read:

In this age, just prior to the second coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, such a work as that of John is to be done. God calls for men who will prepare a people to stand in the great day of the Lord. . . . Our message must be as direct as was the message of John.¹⁰

Even the modern Pharisees have been identified for us, so that there can be no doubt to whom the message of preparation is to be directed. In Desire of Ages the comparison is clearly marked:

As it was in the days of Christ, so it is now; the Pharisees do not know their spiritual destitution. To them comes the message, "Because 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 counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear." Faith and love are the gold tried in the fire. But with many the gold has become dim, and the rich treasure has been lost. The righteousness of Christ is to them as a robe unworn, a fountain untouched. To them it is said, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou has left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent."¹¹

Those who are in the Laodicean state, who do not understand the subject of

righteousness by faith in an experimental way, who have left their first love, are modern Pharisees. To reach them in the church will require the same insight and forthrightness that was exhibited by John the Baptist.

The message of John was not a smooth message. "He saw the people deceived, self-satisfied, and asleep in their sins. He longed to arouse them to a holier life. The message that God had given him to bear was designed to startle them from their lethargy, and cause them to tremble because of their great wickedness."¹² Neither is the message that is to be proclaimed in the church today a smooth message. Read carefully this testimony:

The testimony of the True Witness is not a smooth message. The Lord does not say to them, You are about right; you have borne chastisement and reproof that you never deserved; you have been unnecessarily discouraged by severity; you are not guilty of the wrongs and sins for which you have been reproved.

The True Witness declares that when you suppose you are really in a good condition of prosperity, you are in need of everything.¹³

The giving of this plain, straight testimony in the church today is strangely neglected. There are among the shepherds of Israel, those prophets of Baal who through deceptive guile seek to lead the people of God to believe that the preaching of the straight testimony is a negative gospel. This fatal deception needs to be exposed. The message of many of these prophets of Baal is a simple declaration that the mercy of God will cover sin, and that love is a sentimentalism that will overlook wrong doing. In reality the church of God stands in need of the strongest messages of rebuke that can possibly be given by human lips because of the lukewarm, wretched state that has come into the church. This state of affairs has destroyed spirituality, and left only a form of godliness without the power of the Holy Spirit.

How many of my fellow ministers will bestir themselves to give the churches the message demanded by God, and be willing to take the consequences for their

holy boldness, I know not. But this I do know:

In this fearful time, just before Christ is to come the second time, God's faithful preachers will have to bear a still more pointed testimony than was borne by John the Baptist. A responsible, important work is before them; and those who speak smooth things, God will not acknowledge as His shepherds. A fearful woe is upon them. ¹⁴

Now there are those who will enter the sacred desk and allude to the testimonies of the Spirit; but the people well know there will be no exercise of "pastoral authority" to put into action that cleansing necessary to rid the church of its sins. Those in responsible positions of church leadership must show the sinner that "he must either put away his sins or be separated from the church."¹⁵ To neglect the exercise of this responsibility "by reproof, by warning, by exercise of parental or pastoral authority" will transfer to the account of the ministers themselves, the very sins of which the congregation are guilty.¹⁶ It is a fearful thing to accept accountability as a messenger of God to His people. What an accounting many of us will have to give to the Chief Shepherd for the waste made of the sacred hour of worship each Sabbath!

What do you go to church each week to hear? What do you hear each week when you go to church? A reed shaken in the wind? What do you go to Camp Meeting each year to hear? Reeds shaken by the wind? And to my fellow ministers, I would say, Dare we be modern John the Baptists? Dare we not be? Which comes first, the glory of God, or our own position in the eyes of men? Who will give the crown of life - those sinners in the church who desire smooth things, or Him, Who was too much the friend of sinners "to remain silent while they pursued a course that would ruin their souls?" ¹⁷

May I plead with my brethren to read prayerfully this paragraph:

✓ God will not be trifled with. It is in the time of conflict that the true colors should be flung to the breeze. It is then that

the standard-bearers need to be firm, and let their true position be known. It is then that the skill of every true soldier for the right is tested. Shirks can never wear the laurels of victory. Those who are true and loyal will not conceal the fact, but will put heart and might into the work, and venture their all in the struggle, let the battle turn as it will. God is a sin-hating God. And those who encourage the sinner, saying, It is well with thee, God will curse. ¹⁸

¹Matthew 11:3

²Matthew 11:7

³Luke 1:17

⁴John 1:22-23

⁵Ellen G. White, "The Treasure of Truth Rejected" Review & Herald April 3, '94

⁶Ibid.

⁷Malachi 4:5

⁸John 1:21

⁹Matthew 11:14-15

¹⁰Ellen G. White, Testimonies to the Church, Vol. 8, pp. 332-333

¹¹Ellen G White, Desire of Ages, p. 280

¹²Ibid., p. 104

¹³White, op cit., Vol. 3, p 257

¹⁴Op cit., Vol. 1, p. 321

¹⁵Op cit., Vol. 5, p. 147

¹⁶Op cit., Vol. 4, p. 516

¹⁷Ellen G. White, Desire of Ages, p. 356

¹⁸White, op cit., Vol. 3, p. 272

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Note: - In the first three months of the Thought Papers, the requests and names received by the writer more than doubled the original mailing list, making it necessary to restrict the requests. We have now available more volunteer help to care for routine procedures in getting these papers ready for mailing. Because of this, we can now increase once more our mailing list. If you know of a friend that would like to receive these monthly Thought Papers, please send their name to the above address. Be sure to include a complete address with the zip code. Addresses outside of the United States and Canada will have to be considered on a separate basis.