

Evangelism (Part 2)

Happy Sabbath to all. This week, we will be continuing our study of the book “Evangelism” by Ellen White. As we go through this book, there are some things to keep in mind. For example, the organization to which Mrs. White was addressing her statements was much larger than we currently are, and so not every particular will apply perfectly. Despite that, every principle continues to be true... and we must also recall that it is closer to the end now than it was when this book was written.

We concluded last time with a statement that Evangelism would become more and more central to the operation of the Church as time draws to a close. While Evangelism has always been a strong focus of our movement, we are entering a phase – and recent providence seems to be bearing this out – in which even the newest of our members must learn by doing. The more we confront the Enemy through the policies of evil men, and the hardness in the hearts of those who reject Yahshua’s love, the more we become prepared for the time of trouble.

But of course it is not all darkness. The more we see these things, the more highly we will value those who DO listen, and come to believe. The more earnest our love for one another becomes, and the more eagerly we wish to see others sharing in this Gospel. Evangelism is how this is accomplished, and therefore it is both our delight and our duty to learn all we can of it.

We will continue where we left off, then. As I mentioned last week, I may skip some of the less-relevant portions of the book as we go on, but this first part speaks of general principles, and challenges, and is therefore all relevant. We are, for those following along with a printed version, on page 16.

[quote]

“As a people we greatly need to humble our hearts before God, pleading His forgiveness for our neglect to fulfill the gospel commission. We have made large centers in a few places, leaving unworked many important cities. Let us now take up the work appointed us, and proclaim the message that is to arouse men and women to a sense of their danger. If every Seventh-day Adventist had done the work laid upon him, the number of believers would now be much larger than it is.” [Testimonies for The Church 9:25]

[endquote]

So, as I stated, we have to read for principle, and take what we can from this work. In our current state, we can hardly have made “large centers” in too many places, not to mention across the world. It may seem, if one looks merely at the human factors, that the work of taking the Gospel to the world is “impossible” for a movement so small, and so endangered by the Beast. I recall, after a discussion with a Jehovah’s Witness who visited me, he said the CSDA Church could not possibly be “the Church,” because our numbers were too small to effectively do what needs to be done in the last days.

And yet, if it is TRUE that we can do all things through Christ, and if it is TRUE that “nothing is too hard” for our Father, then any statement – at all – that applies “impossible” to the work of faith is automatically known to be false. Of course, we always pray for more workers, and more resources, but as pastor was saying during our discussion last New Moon, let us not entertain, for a moment, any doubt that we are here, on earth at this time, for a purpose. Let us not consider anything to be sufficient to shake us from our contentment as we do the work; for truly, it is our Father’s work, and not our own.

But also, let us not disregard inspired testimony. As it is said, “Let us now take up the work appointed us.” However small we may be... if the size of our congregations is not an excuse for not accomplishing great works, it is not an excuse for failing to accomplish small ones either. To put that another way, just as faith can do great things, how much more can it also do the daily things that are required of us as followers of Yahshua?

We who are redeemed will not be found guilty of neglect, certainly not with regard to the Gospel message. Is Yah requiring a duty of us? Let us embrace it with vigor, not letting anything of the world – not fears, or opinions of others, or the expectations of family, or obligations we put upon ourselves – keep us from that duty. Souls, and not only our own, are depending upon this work that we do.

[quote]

If our ministers realized how soon the inhabitants of the world are to be arraigned before the judgment seat of God, to answer for the deeds done in the body, how earnestly they would work together with God to present the truth! How earnestly they would strive to lead men to accept the truth. How untiringly they would labor to advance God’s cause in the world, proclaiming in word and deed, “The end of all things is at hand.” [Letter 43]

The words of Jesus Christ are spoken to us living down here in the close of this earth’s history. “When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.” The nations are in unrest. Times of perplexity are upon us. The waves of the sea are roaring; men’s hearts are failing them for fear and for expectation of those things that are coming upon the earth; but those who believe on the Son of God will hear His voice amid the storm, saying, “It is I; be not afraid.” ...

We see the world lying in wickedness and apostasy. Rebellion to the commandments of God seems almost universal. Amid the tumult of excitement with confusion in every place, there is a work to be done in the world. [Manuscript 44, 1900]

[endquote]

From that first statement, I am reminded of our recent discussions, where we saw that every member of Yahshua’s Body, particularly in this age, belongs to the group “our ministers.” If Ellen White proclaimed that her day was a time of darkness and perplexity, what would she say of this generation? And what of our reaction? Our reaction is, in many respects, a unique one. No other factor in the world but the Adventist faith could produce this blend of thoughts and feelings in those who believe it: Joy in a soon-to-come redemption, and deep urgency and concern for those who are drowning in wickedness and apostasy. I do not want to say there is a “balance” between joy and concern. Balance, in this case, implies that one lessens the impact of the other... and that is not the case here. Our joy for the prospect of our Savior’s soon return actually contributes to the urgency we must feel for others.

[quote]

Satan’s armies are many, and God’s people must spread over all the world, planting the standard of truth in the dark places of the earth and doing their utmost to destroy Satan’s kingdom. [Letter 91, 1900]

[endquote]

I think that anyone who loves this message would smile at the idea of workers in various countries, setting up little meetings, and generating interest in the truth. I certainly like the idea, and I am hopeful that, at least at the very end, we will be surprised to see lights sparkling in the darkness in different parts of the world. But, what I believe is that we are currently sowing the seeds of that harvest. It is a truth, and a sad one, that whenever there is apostasy, the cause is set back significantly. I think that we will not know, until the Millennium, just how much damage was done to the human race by the actions of the mainstream Adventist Church. They will join ranks with the Roman Catholic leadership and the Sanhedrin before the Throne of Yah to answer for the millions – I make no exaggeration – who would have inherited everlasting life, had it not been for their selfish actions.

If any think that it is not so great a matter, remember that for the sins of one man, all have suffered, and for the Sacrifice of one Man, all may be saved.

But now, I like the way that Mrs. White worded the end of that statement, “doing their utmost to destroy Satan’s kingdom.” It is certainly a part of the message to “stand fast” and to resist the advances of the enemy. But the work of evangelism actually serves to roll back the darkness that is consuming the world. It disarms the best laid plans of the demons and their human agents... a single messenger of Christ may undo the work of many years, if they are willing to do their duty for the Kingdom.

[quote]

The Lord designs that the presentation of this message shall be the highest, greatest work carried on in the world at this time. [Testimonies For The Church 6:11]

In this country and in foreign countries the cause of present truth is to make more rapid advancement than it has yet made. If our people will go forth in faith, doing whatever they can to make a beginning, and laboring in Christ’s lines, the way will be opened before them. If they will show the energy that is necessary in order to gain success, and the faith that goes forward unquestioningly in obedience to God’s command, rich returns will be theirs. They must go as far and as fast as possible, with a determination to do the very things that the Lord has said should be done. They must have push and earnest, unwavering faith.... The world must hear the warning message. [Manuscript 162, 1905]

[endquote]

These two statements bring to mind the origin of the work in Africa. Yah uses some very unusual methods at times to get something started. We first considered sending workers to Africa based upon the statements of a woman who was studying with us for a while. She said, if I recall correctly, that she had an acquaintance in Africa who wished to receive a visit from us, or to make contact with us. Well, nothing ever came of that, but the trip that was initially made revealed that there was an open door there for establishing something more enduring.

I think that anyone outside of this message, who would look in at what has been done so far on that continent, would be amazed that so much could be done with so little. Truly, the faith that went into the beginning of that work has been rewarded, and we expect to see souls there saved as a result.

The next section of the book is called, “Ever-Widening Influence of the Gospel.”

The first quote from that section is:

[quote]

Everywhere the light of truth is to shine forth, that hearts now in the sleep of ignorance may be awakened and converted. In all countries and cities the gospel is to be proclaimed.... Churches are to be organized and plans laid for work to be done by the members of the newly organized churches. This gospel missionary work is to keep reaching out and annexing new territory, enlarging the cultivated portions of the vineyard. The circle is to extend until it belts the world. [Letter 86, 1902]

[endquote]

I have mentioned that we have been criticized, I should say slandered in some cases, because the workers are few. The same was done to the Church in the first days, and so this is hardly a surprise. And yet, we have tools, and we have opportunities, that Yahshua's original disciples did not have. It might sound amusing, but it is certainly true, that we have the "blessing of email." Think about how often we speak to each other across countries and continents. It would be impossible for us to do the things we are doing now without current communication technology.

This Gospel is already benefitting from a world-wide witness. Our work is largely to draw attention to the voice crying in the wilderness, even in this new medium. Yahshua said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." (Matthew 5:6) Surely we must realize, it is easier now, than ever before, for this to be fulfilled. We are called, and blessed, to facilitate this fulfillment. Why then, it might be asked, are there not more converts? It is because the ease with which this promise can be fulfilled has been offset by the fact that there are fewer and fewer "which do hunger and thirst after righteousness." Imagine if we had provided this coverage: our websites, our articles, the news reports about the arrests, a hundred years ago. Can you imagine the outrage? Can you envision the protest? Interest would have been sparked instantly in those who would be put behind bars for the things that they believe in a country that prides itself on being a land of "liberty."

We have gotten some interest, certainly, but nothing like there would have been, had the world not been so terribly sleepy, spiritually speaking. There are still hearts in the world that are not so corrupted by these times that they do not care. Our work is to find them, and in this way the vineyard grows.

[quote]

From town to town, from city to city, from country to country, the warning message is to be proclaimed, not with outward display, but in the power of the Spirit, by men of faith.

And it is necessary that the best kind of labor be given. The time has come, the important time, when, through God's messengers, the scroll is being unrolled to the world. The truth comprised in the first, second, and third angels' messages must go to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people; it must lighten the darkness of every continent and extend to the islands of the sea....

Let there be the wisest planning for the success of the work. Decided efforts should be made to open new fields in the north, the south, the east, and the west.... The fact that the presentation of the truth has been

so long neglected should appeal to our ministers and workers to enter these fields and not give up the work until they have clearly given the message. [Manuscript 11, 1908]

[endquote]

There is no contradiction between Yah taking the reins of the work into His own hands, and “wise planning for the success of the work.” Yah will inspire us with ideas, but it is rare that He will lay out for us a step-by-step plan. Human beings were made in Yah’s image, to be responsible, and free, and creative. He is pleased to have us employ our talents in determining exactly how to accomplish His aims, and He will bless sincere efforts to accomplish His will.

This is a wonderful example of humanity and divinity co-laboring for the salvation of souls. And toward these ends we are given many powerful promises. The next quote is an example of this:

[quote]

Truth, passing by those who despise and reject it, will triumph. Although at times apparently retarded, its progress had never been checked. When the message of God meets with opposition, He gives it additional force, that it may exert greater influence. Endowed with divine energy, it will cut its way through the strongest barriers, and triumph over every obstacle. [The Acts of the Apostles, 601]

[endquote]

This is an amazing truth: when souls are saved, genuine progress is made. When apostasy causes souls to be lost, the defeat is only temporary. Of course, the souls lost are truly lost... there is no illusion to the wages of rebellion. Real suffering occurs whenever Yah’s law is disregarded, nevertheless the ultimate the triumph of truth is assured. If wheat is not being gathered, tares are being bound, and the judgment – which, for us means only the nearness of Yahshua’s return – continues forward.

I find it to be inspiring that opposition to Yah’s message causes Him to respond, specifically, to meet the needs of the messengers. But if the message is given greater force, for the specific purpose of it having greater influence, then those who persist in rejecting it are truly to be pitied. They are unable to hear even the strengthened warnings of the Spirit, and those who active oppose it reveal – to those who might be in a position to overhear – where the character of Christ is truly residing.

Again and again we are given assurances that the work will produce a glorious result:

[quote]

The work that the gospel embraces as missionary work is a straightforward, substantial work which will shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day. [Letter 215b, 1899]

The influence of these messages has been deepening and widening, setting in motion the springs of action in thousands of hearts, bringing into existence institutions of learning, publishing houses, and health institutions; all these are the instrumentalities of God to co-operate in the grand work represented by the first, second, and third angels flying in the midst of heaven to warn the inhabitants of the world that Christ is coming again with power and great glory. [The Review and Herald, December 6, 1892]

[endquote]

So there are the assurances, but on the other hand, this is said immediately afterwards:

[quote]

We have a most solemn, testing message to give to the world. But too much time has been given to those who already know the truth. In the place of spending time on those who have been given many opportunities to learn the truth, go to the people who have never heard your message. Hold your camp meetings [there is a note in the text that in her day this indicated evangelistic meetings, not meetings like our feasts] in cities where the truth has not been proclaimed. Some will attend the meetings and receive the message. [Letter 87, 1896]

The places in which the truth has never been proclaimed are the best places in which to work. The truth is to take possession of the will of those who have never before heard it. They will see the sinfulness of sin, and their repentance will be thorough and sincere. The Lord will work upon hearts that in the past have not often been appealed to, hearts that heretofore have not seen the enormity of sin. [Letter 106, 1903]

[endquote]

So, what I get from these last few statements, and really from everything I have quoted tonight, is a twofold message. First, there is to be no doubt that the work we do is glorious, for the glory of our Father, and the salvation of souls, and that it will advance despite any obstacles or challenges that arise. The work will succeed, and Yahshua will return for a perfected, holy people.

Second, despite the confidence we have, and the joy that is ours in the knowledge that our labors will be effective, this is not an understanding that should promote any ease or slackness in the quality or energy placed into the work. In fact, the work is sure to succeed BECAUSE, and only because, we labor more and more diligently for the salvation of those who are lost in sin and darkness. There are new fields to work, and new ears to hear the message, who have never heard anything but the evangelical, saved-in-sin version of the good news. The prophecy, which we claim by faith, is that we will, and do, put away all that restrains us from giving fully of ourselves to the proclamation of this, pure message, and as a natural result of this, the harvest will be great.

The last quote of this section of the book, which I believe is an appropriate place to end, sums this up well:

[quote]

There was spread out before me city after city in need of evangelistic labors. If diligent effort had been given to the work of making known the truth for this time in the cities that are unwarned, they would not now be as impenitent as they are. From the light that has been given me I know that we might have had today thousands more rejoicing in the truth if the work had been carried forward as the situation demands, in many aggressive lines. [Letter 94a, 1909]

[endquote]

Let us draw confidence from what we know to be the result of our labors. And let us also, simultaneously, realize that the challenges are greater than before, the hearts harder, and Satan's efforts through humanistic policies and direct opposition are more fervent as well. But as we labor, we find renewed strength in the promises of our Father, that nothing escapes His watchful eye, and that His hand is open, ready to provide us with sufficient grace and power to meet, and to overcome, all that would stand in the way of the advancement of the truth.

Are there any questions on tonight's study?