

# **Elijah's End Time Message**

## **The Joy of Repentance**

**Elijah's message.** (1 Kings 18) Viewing Israel's apostasy from his mountain retreat, Elijah wept over Israel's departure from God and her confused worship of Yahweh and Baal. In anguish he pled with God to arrest the downward spiral of the nation and her corrupt leaders, Ahab and Jezebel. He longed to see them all led to repentance lest God should give them completely over to their evil ways and destruction by their enemies.

God was his only strength and hope. But how could one lone man stem the tide of wicked unbelief that threatened like a Tsunami to sweep his beloved people to ruin. What could he do, a lone voice crying in the wilderness, with no response but the echo of his words from the hills? He had no position or influence. He was a country boy.

Apostate Israel looked to the powers of nature and nature's god, Baal, as the source of sun, rain, and abundant harvest rather than Yahweh their Creator Redeemer. Elijah's anger was aroused. While he came with a message of reproof and repentance, he portrayed God as merciful and long suffering, a physician of the soul willing to accept in mercy the repentant.

But now the time had come for God to speak through his judgments. Elijah was commissioned to be God's voice in one last appeal to Israel. He didn't seek this work, it was thrust upon him. God chooses whom He will. Elijah knew that familiar voice from hours of intimate fellowship. Elijah knew his God and God knew Elijah.

Fearlessly Elijah entered Ahab's palace and brushed past the armed guards. Making no apology, he spoke God's words "that there would be neither dew nor rain for three years" but according to Elijah's word.

Historically, Seventh-day Adventists have considered themselves to be the fulfillment of Malachi 4: 5, 6 "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, and he will turn the hearts of the Fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse." These are the closing words of Malachi to Israel, the last

prophet of the Old Testament. Did God for see that the end time church would resemble Israel in Malachi's time.

As Elder Ted Wilson confessed his repentance to world church leaders at church headquarter, I thought, "Praise God!" His appeal for revival and reformation has since been a continuing theme in sermons, books, and magazine articles, but the subject of repentance as essential to this experience has been muted.

When my wife Doloris and I were in Russia with the Health Expo and the Calvin Rock crusade in Novosibirsk, Siberia, 1992, our Moscow University translator, Vadeem asked, "Why don't Adventists preach repentance like some other churches?" That question has haunted me ever since.

Are calls for repentance to the church and the world an option? Then Jesus "said to them, Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and *that repentance and remission of sins* should be preached in His name to all nations beginning in Jerusalem." (Luke 24, 46, 47) "Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. (Acts 5:31) To the end time church of Laodicea the faithful and true witness invites, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore and repent." (Revelation 3:19)

God confronted Adam, "Where are you? Adam answered, "I was afraid." To Cain He challenged, "Where is Abel your brother? Cain's reply, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 3:9; 4:9) These responses reflect the discomfort we experience in confronting sin in ourselves or the church. Could this reluctance be reflected in the words of the hymn, "At the Cross", "Would He devote that sacred head, For *someone such as I*" words which now replace "*for such a worm as I.*" (SDA Hymnal 163)

Psalms 22 describes Jesus' mental anguish on the cross as he experienced the excruciating agony of guilt, shame, and separation from His Father in bearing our sins. "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" He knew what sin is and what it does. He prayed, "But you are holy enthroned in the praises of Israel...*But I am a worm* and no man, a reproach of men." Is it imperative that we pray for repentance in order to experience revival and reformation?

Calls to repentance are not considered gracious. "Cry aloud, spare not. Lift up

your voice like a trumpet. Tell my people their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sins.” (Isaiah 58:1-14) Isaiah confronted the continuum of churchly sins and superficial worship. It was a call for loving service to the needy and oppressed, as well as delightful Sabbath worship. But was it “politically correct”?

One of the evidences for the Holy Spirit’s inspiration of the Bible is its plain spoken revelations of the missteps, weaknesses, and sins of kings and other prominent leaders. There was no sweeping under the Oriental rug the failures of Abraham, Moses, David, Peter, Ahab, Manasseh, and countless others. “As it is written, there is none righteous, no not one.” (Romans 3:10)

The prophet was as clear and specific to leaders and institutions in the early days of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, Ellen White maintained a Godly balance of calls for repentance and Godlike concern for the erring like J. H. Kellogg, George Butler, and Uriah Smith. She ever sought to protect the reputation of the church so as not to give aid or comfort to her enemies, but was relentless in appeals for repentance and Christian integrity in members and leaders, personal and corporate.

The original Hebrew and Greek words for repentance define “repentance” as Godly sorrow for sin and self and a turning away from it. The scripture defines sin as “lawlessness” or, “sin is the transgression of the law.” (I John 3:4 KJV) All aspects of sin are included in this definition. The essence of sin is selfishness.

According to Jesus, John the Baptist was the Elijah preparing the way for the Messiah, and like Elijah, was a voice crying in the wilderness calling for repentance, revival, and transformation. (John 3:1-3; Matthew 3:1-3; Mark 9:11-13)

The message of Jesus was likewise a call to repentance. “Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee. And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea...From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” (Matthew 4:12, 13, 17)

Repentance results from a personal experience in knowing God, His Holiness wisdom, and omnipotence, (John 17:3), and a recognition of the weakness and corruption of our fallen nature, “For all have sinned (past tense), (and all) fall short of the glory of God, (and all are) being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in

Christ Jesus.” (Romans 3:24, 25) Praise God for that good news. Paul directs us to consider the purpose of this amazing grace, “Whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith...,to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just, and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (vs. 26)

Few know how or of what to repent. It is imperative that those who do know must not only teach but model repentance in their own experience and repent on behalf of others as did our Savior. (GC Bulletin,1901, page 36; BC vol. 7, page 960) That is why Paul confessed his need of continual and deepening repentance, “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief. (1 Timothy 1:15) “As it is written, ‘There is none righteous, no not one’”. (Romans 3:10)

Our repentance and confessions impact others. Every one of us has an influence that reveals self righteousness or evident humility. Leaders at every level of the church have an influence for good or ill far surpassing the individual member. That awareness has led leaders of all ages to openly confess their repentance, identifying with the sins of the people in corporate repentance, showing the people how to repent and praying for their revival and reformation. (Dan. 9:3-19)

When Job, whom God declared to be perfect, defended himself against the accusations of his friends, God challenged Job by contrasting His own holiness, wisdom, and creative power with Job’s ignorance and weakness. That revelation moved Job to lament, “Therefore, I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. ‘Listen, please let me speak’; You said, ‘I will question you, and you shall answer Me.’ I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You. Therefore, I repent, in dust and ashes.’

God then called upon Job’s friends to repent of their false accusations and misrepresentations of His character. At that, Job did what every true believer does, he prayed for the repentance for his “friends”. (Job 42)

Sometimes public or corporate repentance and confession results in revival and reformation. Ezra confronted the returned exiles for their intermarriage with pagan women, and lack of commitment in rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple. He tore his

garments demonstrating repentance before the people. Praying, he confessed the peoples sins as his own, seeking forgiveness and mercy from God.

“O my God, I am so ashamed and humiliated to lift up my voice to you my God, for our iniquities have been higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens. Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been very guilty, we, our kings and our priests....and now for a little while grace has been shown from the Lord, our God....that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage....We have broken your commandments....O, Lord God of Israel, You are righteous, for we are left as a remnant, as it is this day. Here we are before you, in our guilt, though no one can stand before you because of this. ” This repentance, this public confession from the grieving prophet before the people wrought a miracle of revival and transformation in the lives of the people

At times public calls for repentance do not lead a church to repentance. The ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus did not result in repentance, revival, and reformation in the nation of Israel by her spiritual leaders. With sorrow Jesus wept for her, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often have I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. See! Your house is left unto you desolate.” (Matthew 23:27, 28)

But, Praise God, a some were willing, And from an unlikely group of twelve whose earthly ambitions had been shattered at the death of their expected Messiah, God raised up the church to fulfill Israel’s mission. The Holy Spirit was poured out in early rain, Holy Spirit, Pentecostal Power. (Acts 2:1-38) Their message, like that of John and Jesus, was a call to repentance. Three thousand responded resulting in a mighty revival and reformation destined to sweep the world.

The 1901 General conference session has sometimes been portrayed as a great victory demonstrating the church’s positive response to the message God sent to His people in the late 1800s. However, Ellen White wrote, that that conference was “the greatest sorrow of my life.” (Ellen White letter to Judge Jesse Arthur, Elmshaven, January 14, 1903) Yes, a reorganization into unions and divisions was achieved which shifted decision making from a few men in the General Conference to men in the field.

However, the hearts of responsible men were unchanged. Ellen White had a dream in which she saw leading brethren weeping on each others shoulders confessing their pride, hardness of heart, and evil surmising. Upon awaking she realized it was only a dream. It was “what might have been.” (Testimonies, vol.8, pp. 104-106)

Paul in I Corinthians 13 (my paraphrase) shouts it with deafening tones. “*Agape* is all. All else is just noise.. Love is more than great preaching, faith, or tax deductible gifts. It is always compassionate, long suffering, kind. It is never proud, opinionated, rude, selfish or irritated. It imputes the best motives to others. Love doesn’t gossip, or enjoy it when others get what they deserve. It shows faith in the weakest, and never gives up. It prays for other’s success. Love endures when all else fails. *Agape* is greater than hope and faith”

The faithful and true witness pleads, “I know your works” (great preaching, plans and programs without number, universities, seminaries, and medical centers, TV Channels, and growing numbers), “that you are neither cold nor hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold or hot I will vomit you out of my mouth (you make me so sick I feel like vomiting). Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing – and do not know, that you are wretched, miserable, blind and naked – I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire,, that you may be rich, and white garments that you might be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed. And anoint your eyes with eye salve that you may see.” (Revelation 3:14-18)

The good news is that this appeal springs from a heart of unrequited love for His church, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.” (vs 19) What is my response to a love like that? “For the *Agape* of Christ compels us, because we judge thus; that if One died for all, then all died; and he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” Of what shall we repent? The following are suggestive as a beginning.

First of all, we repent because of our sinful lifestyle, careless sins, superficiality, and inhumanity as it bring intense suffering to our Savior.. “Whoever abides in Him does not (continue in) sin.” (1 John 3:6) “Those who think of the result of hastening or hindering the gospel think of it in relation to themselves and the world. Few think of its relation to God...The cross is a revelation to our dull senses of the pain that

from its very inception, sin has brought to the heart of God. Every departure from the right, every deed of cruelty, every failure of humanity to reach His ideal, brings grief to Him.” ED p. 263

Second, as true believers, we repent for our sinful natures, including our pride and self-importance. “We are sinful by nature, and so are commanded to be zealous and repent.” (ST, August 21, 1884 par. 4) According to the apostle Paul, “Jesus Christ came to save sinners, of whom I am chief. (1 Timothy 1:15) John says, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” (1 John 1:8) We sin because we are sinners

Third, we repent for not exercising the faith of Jesus. “Whatever is not from faith is sin.” (Romans 14:23) Unbelief is transgression of God’s law. Many of the five thousand, besides women and children, whom Jesus fed, asked, “What shall we do that we may work the works of God?” Jesus responded, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.”(John 6:28) Our thoughts, words, and actions reveal what we really believe, not necessarily what we profess

Fourth, we repent for sins of commission (whether aware of them or not) in thought, word or action. Paul wrote to the Romans, “All have sinned (past tense) and come short present continuous) of the Glory of God” (Romans 3:24) John emphasized, “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin.” A sense of human sinfulness led John to write, “And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father. (1 John 2:1)

Fifth, we repent for our sins of omission. Do we as members or pastors plead lack of time or talent to aggressively serve the hurting or disadvantaged, or invite sinners to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord? After speaking of the believer’s neglect of practical godliness James nails us, “Therefore, to him who knows to do good, and does not do it, to Him it is sin. We lament the blindness and insubordination of Israel that led them to wander in the wilderness for only 40 years. Were they more repentant than we?

And last, We repent for our unchristlike attitudes and prejudices. “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.” (James 3:17)

True heartfelt repentance always results in revival and transformation. “Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation.” (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15, 18, 19)

What joy is ours in Christ! What freedom! “Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all with open face, beholding as in a mirror (Jesus) the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 3:17, 18)

Repentance is not an event, but a way of life that deepens as we behold in Jesus the one altogether loving and lovely, and behold in ourselves the ones altogether unworthy, chiefs of sinners. Will a worldwide church of nearly 17,000,000 members repent? Will Godly leaders today model such a repentance, revival, and transformation on behalf of the church as did Elijah and Ezra on behalf of Israel and Judah.

Will Laodicea repent? Will revival and transformation sweep the international church? Yes! The promise is sure. There will be a return of the latter rain that was aborted in the 1888 period (see *Return of the Latter Rain* by Ron Duffield). As it does, the church will “lighten the earth with His glory,” proclaiming by life and voice a “loud cry” to the world, “Repent!” (Revelation 18:1)

The Spirit empowered end time Elijah will proclaim the everlasting gospel, of Revelation 14:6 that will go “like fire in the stubble” to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. Jesus awaits with longing desire. He wants to come. The question is, “Will revival and transformation ever happen without the gift of repentance?”