

*AASS 2 (1999): 69-76*  
*Devotional talk given during the*  
*1999 AIIAS Theological Forum: Millennium and Prophecy*  
*August 4-7, 1999*

## LEST WE FORGET

G. T. NG  
Dean, Theological Seminary  
AIIAS

Forgetfulness is a problem for some people. Sometimes you find yourself in the middle of the stairway, and you can't remember if you are downstairs going up or upstairs going down.

An old man met an old lady, and they fell in love. One day, the old man gathered up all his courage and asked the old lady to marry him. She said "Yes."

When the old man got home, he remembered asking the old lady to marry him, but he couldn't remember whether she had said "Yes" or "No." Rather embarrassed that he had forgotten, he decided not to mention marriage to her again.

After a few weeks, it bothered the old man so much that he gathered up enough courage to ask the old lady what the answer was that she gave when he asked her to marry him. The old lady shouted with glee and said, "I'm so glad you asked! Some man asked me to marry him a few weeks ago, and I said "Yes," but I couldn't remember who it was that asked me!"

Someone once said that the most effective way to remember your wife's birthday is to forget it once. I am glad the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles did not forget. They were in focus. Their eyes were on the coming Kingdom.

### **Patriarchs and Prophets**

#### **Enoch**

Enoch did not forget. Enoch had the courage back then to preach the Lord's return. He lived seven generations this side of Adam. Enoch prophesied, "Behold,

the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints” (Jude 14).<sup>1</sup> Enoch had the courage to preach the second coming about five thousand years ago.

### **Job**

Job did not forget either. Job is one of the very early Bible characters. He affirmed positively, “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God” (Job 19:25-26).

### **David**

David did not forget. He proclaimed vigorously, “Our God shall come, and shall not keep silent; a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous all around Him” (Ps 50:3). David apparently saw in vision the glory of the coming of the Lord. He said that God will come and will not keep quiet.

### **Joel**

Joel did not forget. Joel said that the voice of God will come from above, and will shake the heavens as the whole earth trembles at His coming: “The LORD will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake; but the LORD will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel” (Joel 3:16).

### **Isaiah**

Isaiah did not forget. Referring to the day when Jesus comes, he said, “He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces” (Isa 25:8). I’ll be so glad when God will finally wipe away all the tears, won’t you? I find a lot of sorrow in this world: many heartaches, many homes that are going on the rocks. I am glad that the day is coming when the Lord will take away all sorrow, wipe away all tears. It shall be said in that day, “Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation” (Isa 25:9).

The patriarchs and prophets did not forget. They were in focus. Their eyes were on the coming Kingdom.

<sup>1</sup>Except as noted, Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.

## Apostles

### Paul

In the NT, we find that the Second Advent is the focus of the apostles' writings. Paul did not forget. The Second Advent was central to Paul's teaching and preaching. Paul considered Christ's return "the blessed hope" (Titus 2:13; cf. Heb 9:28). Seven times Paul referred to the advent of Christ by means of the term *parousia*, which gives the twin meanings of presence and arrival. The word also connotes power and victory. *Parousia* implies the complete and final victory of Christ over sin and death. "The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thess 4:16).

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" (1 Cor 15:51-55)

### Peter

Peter did not forget. He said affirmatively that "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up" (2 Pet 3:10).

### James

James did not forget. James liked to deal with practical ethics, but he never lost sight of the Second Advent.

Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. (James 5:7-8)

### John

John the Revelator did not forget. He portrays Christ as riding on a white horse accompanied by innumerable armies of heaven (Rev 19:11-16). He also announces, "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even

they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him” (Rev 1:7).

### Modern Movements

#### Harvard University

Like the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles of old, the Puritans did not forget their faith in Jesus as the coming King. Because of persecution, they fled England. Some sought refuge in Holland, while others found a home in the New World. To them, liberty of conscience was more important than safety and livelihood.

One of the pilgrims, a minister by the name of John Harvard, had a burden for the education of the clergy. He donated his books and half of his estate in order to establish a seminary.<sup>1</sup> The original charter states,

After God had carried us safe to New England and we had builded our houses, provided necessaries for our livelihood, rear'd convenient places for God's worship, and settled the civil government: One of the next things we longed for and looked after was to advance learning and perpetuate it to posterity; dreading to leave an illiterate ministry to the churches, when our present ministers shall lie in the dust.<sup>2</sup>

The year was 1637, sixteen years after the arrival of the pilgrims at Plymouth. The seminary grew into a university and later became known as Harvard University, the oldest institution of higher learning in the United States. It is also one of the most prestigious universities in the world. Today it boasts an enrollment of more than eighteen thousand students. It has two undergraduate schools and ten graduate and professional schools in arts and sciences, design, divinity, education, law, government, business administration, dental medicine, medicine, and public health. In addition, thirteen thousand students are enrolled in one or more courses in the Harvard Extension School.

Despite its prominence, Harvard University had a humble beginning. The university actually started out as a ministerial training school. The purpose for establishing Harvard was to educate pastors and religious leaders.

The seminary followed the Puritan philosophy of the first colonists.<sup>3</sup> The curriculum included the Scriptures, Syriac, Greek, Latin, mathematics, physics, astronomy, politics, ethics, and logic. Each student was required to read the Old

<sup>1</sup>F. O. Vaille and H. A. Clark, *Harvard Book: A Series of Historical, Biographical, and Descriptive Sketches* (Cambridge, MA: University Press, 1875), 1:25.

<sup>2</sup>“The Harvard Guide,” available from <http://www.news.harvard.edu/guide/intro/index.html>; Internet; accessed 4 July 1999.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

and New Testaments in the original languages. Many early graduates became ministers in Puritan congregations throughout New England.

Today, the Harvard Divinity School has one of the lowest enrollments (about five hundred) among the schools. Have they forgotten something important?

### **Yale University**

Another university in the Ivy League is Yale University, also established by pastors and begun as a seminary. To found Yale in 1701, ten Connecticut clergymen donated their books to establish the new college. Yale was intended to be a place “wherein youth, through the blessing of Almighty God, may be fitted for public employment both in church and civil state.”<sup>1</sup>

Today, out of the total enrollment of eleven thousand, Yale University has less than three hundred enrolled in the Divinity School. Has Yale forgotten something?

### **Princeton University**

Princeton University has a similar history. In the 1700s a widespread religious revival swept America, called the Great Awakening. The revival challenged the established churches and their theologies, and swelled the ranks of new groups such as the Baptists and Presbyterians. The Great Awakening also provided impetus for the founding of a new generation of colleges to train ministers. One of them was Princeton University founded in 1746 by revivalist Presbyterians.

Princeton University celebrated 250 years of existence in 1996. Reverend Aaron Burr, pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Newark, New Jersey, became the first president. The third president, Presbyterian luminary Jonathan Edwards, had led the Great Awakening movement in the 1730s and 1740s. This movement emphasized the importance of individual decision and conversion and also encouraged education. That is how Princeton University was born.

Harvard, Yale, and Princeton Universities were all established by the clergy—Harvard by the Puritans and Princeton by the Presbyterians. They started as seminaries. Today, are they still the keepers of the flame of their original mandates? Are they still true and loyal to the charters for which the seminaries were founded? Is the same vigor and vision still being maintained? Or have they forgotten?

### **Seventh-day Adventists**

How about us Seventh-day Adventists as a people? Do we remember our roots? Are we still keepers of the flame which our pioneers treasured so much?

<sup>1</sup>“Yale Divinity School,” available from <http://www.yale.edu/divinity/ayds/index.htm>; Internet; accessed 5 July 1999.

William Miller and the other early Adventists never intended to create a new church. In fact, the Adventist pioneers were not sure if they should organize themselves. Many were against formal ecclesiastical organization, fearing that a church would become Babylon the moment it was organized.<sup>1</sup> Yet, having no legal body was not an ideal situation either. In the absence of a formal organization, some local congregations incorporated the properties either in the name of the believer providing the site or in the name of the local congregation. Some called themselves the "Church of Christ's Second Advent," others "The Church of the Living God." As it turned out, the believers were "compelled" to organize themselves because of the need for legal ownership of properties.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, a committee of three was appointed to give further study to the matter and propose a name for the church.<sup>3</sup> The committee reported at the next session that they were not able to resolve the issue on the name, but proposed that a legal association be set up. Not until the fifth session was the issue of a name settled. The believers had called themselves "the Brethren," "the Little Flock," "the Remnant People," "Sabbathkeepers," "Believers in the Second Advent," and "the Church of God."<sup>4</sup> The last name aroused quite a bit of discussion among the believers. Some thought the name was too arrogant; others brought up the fact that the name had already been used by other groups; still others said a more distinctive name should be chosen and proposed the name "Seventh-day Adventist." Ellen White supported the latter name saying,

<sup>1</sup>See Arthur Spalding, *Origin and History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1961), 291. See also Anne Devereaux Jordan, *The Seventh-day Adventists: A History* (New York: Hippocrene, 1988), 59.

<sup>2</sup>R. W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1979), 93.

<sup>3</sup>Schwarz believes the meeting on 29 September 1860 was probably the most significant meeting sabbatarian Adventists had ever held. Joseph Bates served as the chairman and Uriah Smith as secretary. *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>4</sup>Spalding, 302. J. N. Loughborough opposed the name "The Church of God" and sided with "Seventh-day Adventist." "I think the name 'Seventh-day Adventists' is the most natural and appropriate name we could take. In Hillsdale I came across a handbill that was used there some four years ago when our brethren were going to have a conference there. It reads, 'There will be a conference of the *Seventh-day Advent* people held in Waldron's Hall.' &c. This name I suppose was used in the handbill because everybody would know at once who it meant. Again, it had been proposed that we should be called 'The Church of God.' While we were at Gilboa a friend attended the meeting from Findlay, and became much interested. . . . Bro. W[aggoner] asked him what church he belonged to. Church of God was the reply. What, Winnebrenarians? 'No; Church of God.' Dunkers? 'No; Church of God.' Here was a poser; a man that belonged to the Church of God, but we had to find out who he belonged to, of somebody else; for the name 'Church of God' was not enough to tell us who he was. Neither would the name Church of God alone tell others who we are." J. N. Loughborough, "Eastern Tour," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald (ARSH)*, 13 November 1860, 204.

The name Seventh-day Adventist carries the true features of our faith in front, and will convict the inquiring mind. Like an arrow from the Lord's quiver, it will wound the transgressors of God's law, and will lead to repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

With affirmation from Ellen White, the name "Seventh-day Adventist" was finally adopted on 1 October 1860.<sup>2</sup> From that humble inception, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has become a worldwide movement. The pioneers had always felt a sense of mission. They were always mindful of their roots in prophecy, "Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings" (Rev 10:11 AV). Today the church has grown. We have schools, hospitals, publishing houses, and food factories. We have come of age. But have we also become forgetful? Have we forgotten our roots?

### Conclusion

A man stopped at a rural gas station, and after filling his tank, he paid the bill and bought a soft drink. As he stood by his car, drinking his soda, he noticed a couple of men working along the roadside. One man would dig a hole two or three feet deep and then move on. The other man came along behind and filled in the hole. While one was digging a new hole, the other was about ten meters behind filling in the dug holes. Unable to contain his curiosity, the man with the soda walked over to where the two men were working. "Hold it, hold it!" he exclaimed. "Can you tell me what's going on here with this digging?"

"Well, we work for the government," one of the men said.

"But one of you is digging a hole and the other fills it up. You are not accomplishing anything. Aren't you wasting the government's money?"

"You don't understand, mister," one of the men said, leaning on his shovel and wiping his brow. "Normally there are three of us—me, Rodney, and Mike. I dig the hole, Rodney sticks in the tree, and Mike here puts the soil back. Now just because Rodney's sick, that doesn't mean that Mike and me can't work."

All too often our work for the Lord falls into the latter category. We have good intentions and think we are doing something important for the advancement of the cause of Christ. In reality, we busy ourselves with peripherals. The Great Commission sometimes becomes the 'great commotion' or even the 'great omission'! We tend to forget the reasons for our existence. We easily lose sight of

<sup>1</sup>Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948) 1:224.

<sup>2</sup>Other discussions of the denominational name or reference to a proposed name may be found in "Making Us a Name" and "Meetings in Parkville, Michigan," *ARSH*, 29 May 1860, 8-9; "I Want the *Review* Discontinued," *ARSH*, 25 September 1860, 148; "Constitution," *ARSH*, 23 October 1860, 178-79; "The Action of the Conference," *ARSH*, 30 October 1860, 189; "Western Tour," *ARSH*, 6 November 1860, 196; "Meeting in Northern Iowa," *ARSH*, 11 June 1861, 22.

the central purpose of the Adventist Church, which is to fulfil the gospel commission. God forbid that we should forget!

A little boy who lived far out in the country in the late 1800s had reached the age of twelve without ever seeing a circus. You can imagine his excitement when, one day, a poster went up at school announcing that on the next Sunday a traveling circus would be coming to the nearby town. He ran home with the glad news and the question, "Daddy, can I go?"

Although the family was poor, the father sensed how important this was to the child. "If you do your Sunday chores ahead of time," he said, "I'll see to it that you have the money to go."

Come Sunday morning, the chores were done and the little boy stood by the breakfast table dressed in his best clothes. His father reached down into his pocket and pulled out a dollar bill—the most money the little boy had possessed at one time in all his life. The father cautioned him to be careful, then sent him on his way to town.

The boy was so excited, his feet hardly seemed to touch the ground all the way. As he neared the outskirts of the village, he noticed people lining the streets. He worked his way through the crowd until he could see what was happening. It was the approaching spectacle of a circus parade!

The parade was the grandest thing this child had ever seen. Caged animals snarled as they passed, bands played shiny horns to the rhythm of beating drums, midgets performed acrobatics, while flags and ribbons swirled overhead. Finally, after everything had passed where he was standing, the traditional circus clown with floppy shoes, baggy pants, and a brightly painted face brought up the rear. As the clown passed by, the little boy reached into his pocket and took out that precious dollar bill. Handing the money to the clown, the boy turned around and went home. That innocent, unfortunate, provincial boy had thought that he had seen the circus when he had only seen the parade!

Theological education is only a means to an end, not an end in itself. Organizations, too, must function as means. Activities and projects are means, not ends in themselves. The church must have a concrete mission by which it directs its activities. The Adventist mission as an end-time movement must become a part of our prophetic consciousness.

Enoch remembered. So did David, Joel, Isaiah, Paul, Peter, James, and John. So did the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. God forbid that we should suffer from historical amnesia. We too must remember. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22:20).