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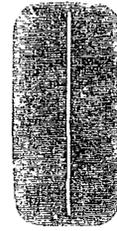
Recommended Citation

Maxwell, C. Mervyn, "Christ and Minneapolis 1888" (1974). *Faculty Publications*. 3941.
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Christ and Minneapolis 1888

By C. MERVYN MAXWELL



H, I LOVE Him. I love Him, for He is my love. I see in Him matchless charms, and oh, how I want that we shall enter in through the gates into the city. . . .

"I wish you would educate your hearts and lips to praise Him, to talk of His power and glory. . . . God helps us to praise

Him more and to be found faultless."—Quoted in *Through Crisis to Victory*, p. 256.

So spoke Ellen G. White to a hushed and crowded congregation at the close of a Sabbath afternoon sermon in the brand-new Minneapolis Adventist church in the autumn of 1888.

Minneapolis . . . 1888.

In Minneapolis, in 1888 Seventh-day Adventists held a General Conference session that proved to be one of the most vital in their history. It was not a large one. The number of delegates, representing a world membership of about 27,000, was fewer than 100. City evangelism, mission fields, and other topics were taken up, but what was said about these is largely forgotten.

What made the meeting memorable was the fact that there (as Ellen White reported it) "the Lord in His great mercy sent a most precious message to His people through Elders Waggoner and Jones. . . . It presented justification through faith in the Surety; it invited the people to receive the righteousness of Christ, which is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 91, 92.

Minneapolis 1888 is cherished by Adventists as the special occasion when our movement, for the first time since its very earliest days, came face to face with righteousness by faith and with the possibility of a rich personal relationship with Jesus. So marvelous were the fresh new emphases that some of the delegates present actually resisted them as too good to be true!

Let us introduce ourselves to the ministers who, in addition to Ellen White, made the greatest contribution to this General Conference.

Before his conversion A. T. Jones had served three years in the Army, some of the time at a camp near Walla Walla. In his



spare hours he had studied the Bible and world history, and had also examined carefully some pieces of Adventist literature that came his way. After his discharge from the military he was baptized and, in course of time, was called to unite with E. J. Waggoner as co-editor of *Signs of the Times*. Elder Jones was especially interested in church-state relations and in the fulfillment of prophecy, and in 1886 he became, with Elder Waggoner, a co-editor also of the *American Sentinel*, predecessor of *Liberty*.

E. J. Waggoner, the second of these outstanding men at Minneapolis, first served as a physician at the Battle Creek Sanitarium. Later he entered the ministry and, in course of time, became an editor of the *Signs*.

On an overcast day in 1882, at a camp meeting in California, Elder Waggoner enjoyed a noteworthy experience with Christ that affected all of his future ministry. "He was sitting rather apart from the congregation at the edge of the large tent. Suddenly, Christ in all His glory seemed to appear vividly before him, hanging in his stead on a brilliantly illuminated cross—brighter than the noonday sun—sacrificed for him, and his sins.

"Like an overwhelming flood it burst upon his consciousness, as never before, that Christ loved him, that Christ had died to save him."—*Movement of Destiny*, p. 240.

Different but Alike

Elders Waggoner and Jones were different men in rather conspicuous ways. Elder Jones was tall, angular, and emphatic; Dr. Waggoner was short, stocky, and gracious. The two became close friends, so close that they even thought alike. On one occasion, when scheduled to preach in the same church on two successive Sabbaths they were surprised later to learn that they had preached substantially the same sermon!

Early Adventist pioneers such as Joseph Bates and Hiram Edson had known Christ victoriously as a personal Saviour, and so also had many other Adventist ministers and laymen from the very beginning of the Movement. And when Adventists talked about salvation, they were careful to say the right things: We are saved by Christ alone, and no man can keep the law in his own strength.

But for some years prior to 1888, something was missing from many presentations of their message. Or rather, Someone was missing. All too often, in their papers and sermons Christ was a doctrine and not a personal Friend. "Many had lost sight of Jesus," Ellen White wrote later. "For years the church has been looking to man . . . but not looking to Jesus."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 92, 93.

The beautiful new thoughts presented by Ellen White and Elders Waggoner and Jones came to many at Minneapolis as a thrilling new experience. One delegate, for instance, returned to his church in Wisconsin so excited about righteousness by faith that a farmer in his congregation caught his enthusiasm, sold his property at once, gave a large donation to the church, and was accepted

into the ministry. A young delegate went into the woods near the Minneapolis church, spent an afternoon with God and the Bible, and then and there found Christ as his Saviour in a way that he never had before. At least one minister recognized that his relationship with Jesus was so different from what it had been that he asked to be rebaptized!

Elder Waggoner, Elder Jones, and Mrs. White spent much of the year following Minneapolis 1888 conducting revival services in churches and at camp meetings. On a Friday night at the end of a series in South Lancaster, Massachusetts, a testimony service began on its own accord and went on for several hours. Mrs. White commented in the *REVIEW* for March 5, 1889, "I have never seen a revival work go forward with such thoroughness, and yet remain so free from all undue excitement." In July, 1889, she could say, "In every meeting since the General Conference, souls have eagerly accepted the precious message of the righteousness of Christ."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 358.

So wonderful was the response that our membership grew at an average rate of 15 per cent a year in the 1890's. Many looked for the latter rain to fall and for the work to end in a short while. In fact, Mrs. White wrote that they were indeed living in the time of the latter rain (see *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 511, 512).

Elder Waggoner's messages in 1888 focused on Jesus Christ. Mrs. White gratefully summarized them as what she had been presenting for 45 years, "the matchless charms of Christ."—Quoted in *Through Crisis to Victory*, p. 48.

We do not today possess the actual sermons that he delivered. But we do have a little book he published shortly after the conference was over. Appropriately entitled *Christ and His Righteousness*, it probably contains the substance of the sermons he preached at Minneapolis.

The entire book talks about Jesus. Christ is our Saviour in the fullest sense of the word. There is no other name than His whereby men can be saved. Jesus is filled with all the fullness of the Godhead, and He desires to fill us with divine power as well.

This wonderful Jesus offers to forgive every sin and to clothe us with His righteousness. And the righteousness He wants to give us is not something make-believe. God does not forgive us while leaving us the same as we were before. God "does not furnish a cloak for sin, but takes the sin away. . . . Forgiveness of sins is something more than a mere form, something more than a mere entry in the books of record in heaven. . . . Forgiveness of sin is a reality; it is something tangible, something that vitally affects the individual."—E. J. WAGGONER, *Christ and His Righteousness*, p. 66. Forgiveness turns a sinner into a distinctly new creation.

It may be, however, Elder Waggoner suggested, that you regard yourself as too unworthy for God to accept you as His child.

The delegates came face to face with the possibility of a rich personal relationship with Jesus.

**God wants
to remove
sin
from
the life
and make
Christians
Christlike.**

If so, you should ask yourself the question, "Will a man receive that which he has bought?"

If a man goes into a store, Elder Waggoner argued, and asks for an item and pays for it, will he suddenly change his mind and leave the place without taking the thing with him? Of course he won't! If he pays for it, he is certain to take it; and the more he pays for it, the more certain it is that he will do so. Now Jesus has paid for us; He has paid the highest possible price for us, even "the precious blood of Christ." Indeed, He "gave himself for us" (1 Peter 1:18, 19; Titus 2:14). Thus, Elder Waggoner concluded, you can be absolutely assured that He will accept you.

But why would He pay so high a price for someone so utterly unworthy? He bought you *because* you are unworthy, Elder Waggoner replied—so that when He has transformed you and is able to present you faultless before the universe, He will be able to rejoice over the marvelous change He has made in you!

Victory Over Sin

Righteousness by faith is much more than forgiveness of sin; it is also victory over sin. In His human nature Christ lived a righteous life, and "You may have the same power that He had if you want it," Elder Waggoner said. "What wonderful possibilities there are for the Christian! . . . No matter how much Satan may war against him, assailing him where the flesh is weakest, he may abide under the shadow of the Almighty, and be filled with the fullness of God's strength."—*Ibid.*, pp. 30, 31. Christ, who is far stronger than Satan, may dwell continually in the Christian's heart; and so, "looking at Satan's assaults as from a strong fortress, he [the Christian] may say, 'I can do all things through Christ which strengthen me'" (Phil. 4:13).—*Ibid.*, p. 31.

Strange as it seems, many Christians find that praying for help to overcome their sins only leaves them more inclined to do wrong than if they hadn't prayed. What do they do wrong?

They make the mistake, Elder Waggoner explained, of telling God their problems before reminding Him of His promises. Praying about problems directs our attention to our weakness, and thus makes us weaker. To get real help we must direct our attention to God's power and to His promises. At the very least, Elder Waggoner said, a tempted Christian can remember the promise, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15). He can therefore begin his prayer by quoting this promise and fastening his attention on it; and as he does so, faith will come.

Elder Waggoner continued, "[then we remember that] if God gives a promise, it is as good as fulfilled already. And so . . . we count the victory as already ours, and begin to thank God for His 'exceeding great and precious promises.' As our faith grasps these promises and makes them real, we cannot help praising God for His wonderful love; and while we are doing this, *our minds are*

wholly taken from doing evil, and the victory is ours."—*Ibid.*, p. 84. (Italics supplied.)

Mrs. White spoke some twenty times at Minneapolis 1888. Like Elders Waggoner and Jones, she too spoke of Christ in appealing terms as One who both forgives and offers victory.

She reminded her listeners that righteousness by faith is righteousness *by faith*; that it springs from belief, from taking God at His word, from trusting Bible promises, from beholding Jesus, and from believing that by His grace we can become like Him.

Ellen White's sermon on Sabbath afternoon, October 13, was particularly practical in helping people understand how to make righteousness by faith work. Her text was 1 John 3:1, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us." Her message was that we should do just that; we should train our minds to "behold," or think about, God's love for us. It was the same point Elder Waggoner made, about thinking of God's promises instead of our troubles.

How is the water lily able to float so pure and white above the scum and dirt of the lake? she asked. Because it selects out of its environment only that which will make it a pure white lily! In the same way, she counseled the delegates, "do not talk of the iniquity and wickedness that are in the world, but elevate your minds and talk of your Saviour. . . . Talk of those things that will leave a good impression on the mind."—*Through Crisis to Victory*, p. 248.

If you are down in a basement of discouragement, she advised, do not complain about the darkness. Grumbling won't make the lights come on. Step up out of the basement! "Come out of the dark into the upper chamber where the light of God's countenance shines brightly."—*Ibid.*

Don't complain about the thorns and brambles of life; gather the flowers! "We want to have our minds on the encouraging things."—*Ibid.*, p. 249.

Ellen G. White often urged the believers to spend much time praising Christ for what He has done for us.

Elder Waggoner showed that righteousness by faith happens when Christians claim God's promises. Similarly, Ellen White said, "I want you to take the rich promises of God and hang memory's halls with them. . . . Oh, I want the promises of God to be the living pictures on memory's walls, that you can look at them. Then your heart can be filled with His grace and you may exalt Jesus."—*Ibid.*, p. 252.

With hushed rapture the congregation sat breathless as she closed this Sabbath afternoon sermon: "Oh, I love Him. I love Him, for He is my love. I see in Him matchless charms, and oh, how I want that we shall enter in through the gates into the city. . . .

"I wish you would educate your hearts and lips to praise Him, to talk of His power and glory. God help us to praise Him more and to be found faultless."—*Ibid.*, p. 256.

No wonder 1888 and the truth of righteousness by faith are inseparably linked in Adventist history! □