

Sabbath School Today **With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

Making Friends for God: The Joy of Sharing in His Mission

Lesson 2: Winsome Witness: The Power of Personal Testimony

“For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20, *New King James Version*). The *New American Standard Bible* renders this, “for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard.” And probably the best comes from *The New English Bible*: “We cannot possibly give up speaking ...”

If we haven’t “seen and heard,” no amount of study will interest people in spiritual things. This is why it is so essential that we actually have an experience with God before we presume to share something about the Gospel.

One of the most compelling testimonies was that of E. J. Waggoner. While I believe God gave him this vision, I do not believe this elevates him to the same level of responsibility as Ellen White. I believe God was preparing Waggoner to collaborate with A. T. Jones and Ellen White to proclaim the “most precious message” that she said was given to Elders Jones and Waggoner.” [1] When God calls His prophets, He makes it clear to them that He is calling them, but frequently, the world around the prophet does not perceive anything supernatural. Those whom God uses as His messengers are expected to simply report what they have “seen and heard.”

Ron Duffield relates Waggoner’s experience:

“As he sat under a campmeeting tent listening to the gospel presented, suddenly a light shone about him, and the tent seemed illumined, as though the sun were shining. He describes the incident thus:

“I saw Christ crucified for me, and to me was revealed for the first time in my life the fact that God loved me, and that Christ gave Himself for me personally. It was all for me.’ The light that shone upon him that day from the cross of Christ became the guide in all his Bible study. He resolved that the rest of his life would be devoted to discovering the message of God’s love for individual sinners found in the pages of Scripture, and making that message plain to others.

“After nearly twenty years of study Waggoner could write: ‘I have found Christ set forth as the power of God to the salvation of individuals, and I have never found anything else. The Bible was written for no other purpose than to show the way of life. It contains history and biography, but these are parts of the Gospel Message. Not one line is written except to reveal Christ; whoever reads it for any other purpose than to find in it

the way of salvation from sin, reads it in vain; studied in the light of Calvary, it is a delight, and things that would otherwise be obscure are made clear as the noonday. ... One line runs through the entire Bible, God's everlasting covenant. Standing at the Cross, one can see the working of God's eternal purpose, which He purposed 'in Christ before the world began.' The history from Paradise lost till Paradise restored, is set forth as in a panorama." [2]

It is instructive to notice a few points about the situation of this vision. Waggoner was sitting in a meeting where the Gospel was being presented. This doesn't mean that everyone who attends Gospel meetings will be given a vision, but it is clear that Waggoner was seeking to know God before this occurred. From his knowledge of the Bible, Waggoner was able to recognize that "the light that shone upon him that day from the cross of Christ became the guide in all his Bible study." He also knew that the Bible would reveal more about the message of God's love for individual sinners. This prompted a resolve that he would devote the rest of his life to studying God's word and telling others.

This is the model for all who wish to witness for God. Even a "vision" from God cannot replace diligent study of God's word throughout the rest of a person's life.

Our lesson uses the example of Mary at the tomb of Jesus. She was given a vision of something that Peter and John did not see. Yet, she must have reported it to John before he recorded it in the 20th chapter of his gospel. The description begins with what Peter saw in the tomb which was the linen wrappings and, separately, the face cloth. John looked into the tomb but doesn't describe what he saw. Mary lingered after the two men rushed home to tell others. She saw something they did not see which was two angels sitting at either end of the stone where Jesus' body had lain. Did she understand this was a vision of the culmination of the sacrificial system the Jews had observed for thousands of years? Maybe not, but she reported what she "saw and heard" so others could make the connection.

Paul and the other disciples were so impressed with what God had revealed to them they lost any hesitancy caused by threats of persecution by authorities. Becoming bold for Jesus and His Gospel will seem natural once we experience that the Gospel applies to each of us. We will feel an urgency to get the word out in spite of obstacles.

"The message will be carried not so much by argument as by the deep convictions of the Spirit of God. The arguments have been presented. The seed has been sown, and now it will spring up and bear fruit. ... Now the rays of light penetrate everywhere, the truth is seen in its clearness, and the honest children of God sever the bands which have held them. Family connections, church relations, are powerless to stay them now. Truth is more precious than all besides. Notwithstanding the agencies combined against the truth, a large number take their stand upon the Lord's side' (Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 612).

"Over a hundred times the Lord's servant was forced to declare that 'our' reaction to this gift was 'just like the Jews' reaction to Jesus when He came!

“What do we need to do?”

“Recover what we lost is the simple answer. The Lord loves us too much to want to humiliate us; repentance will never do that to the repentant sinner. We will humble ourselves, yes; but our Savior puts His arms around us warmly. ...

“To resolve our quandary is easy; just give to the world church the message which ‘we’ ‘in a great degree’ rejected, according to the Lord’s messenger. The problem is simple: the world needs that special Good News that God wanted to give them. How can we dare withhold it, century after century?”

“Give it to them!” [3]

—Arlene Hill

Endnotes:

[1] Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 91.

[2] Ron Duffield, *History of E. J. Waggoner’s The Everlasting Covenant* (2002).

[3] Robert J. Wieland, *“1888” for Almost Dummies*, pp. 20, 21 (2007).

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno’s video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQ479YeK10w>

Many of Pastor Penno’s sermons are on YouTube in Spanish. Just type **pastor paul penno en español** in the search bar.

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