

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic

The Least of These:
Ministering to Those in Need
Lesson 9: Ministry in the New Testament Church

Can the Good News be too good? This is a serious question! Conventional wisdom for thousands of years will tend to say yes. The masses have always considered the Good News to be impossible. This is evident in the fact that they generally take the broad way that leads to destruction and avoid the strait and narrow way (the way of faith) that leads to eternal life (Matt. 7:13, 14).

Jesus makes a fantastic promise, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. ... And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues [languages, Greek]; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover” (Mark 16:15, 17, 18).

The disciples were given authority, power, and a mandate to heal disease, bring life, offer restoration, overcome evil, and serve generously. The difference the disciples were called to make was practical, responding to the real, physical needs of the people to whom they would proclaim the kingdom of God. Theirs was a direct extension of the ministry of Jesus, responding to His compassion for people in need and His prayer that more would join in the work He had begun (Matt. 9:35, 36, 38).

Social action as a partner of evangelism—an equal element in the mission of God, were to be partners—the two belonging to each other and yet independent of each other. Neither is a means to the other, or even a manifestation of the other. For each is an end in itself. Both are expressions of unfeigned *agape*. Evangelism and compassionate service belong together in the mission of God.

Matthew gives another version of what Jesus said: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. ... And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19, 20). And John adds what he remembers hearing the Lord say, which is even more astounding: “He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father” (John 14:12).

Are these promises too good to be true? The good news is that they will be fulfilled, without fanaticism and without extremism, in the glorious final message proclaimed by the fourth angel of Revelation 18:1-4. If the Bible is true, the whole world is to be “illuminated” with the glory of a powerful message. It would not be fair for Christ to

return unless everyone has had a fair opportunity to hear it and to prepare for His coming.

The key to the fulfillment of these promises is in two significant phrases: a people must “preach the *gospel*,” not legalism and not human philosophy; and, the fulfillment will come to him “who *believes* in Me.” “The gospel of Christ ... is the power of God to salvation for everyone who *believes*” (Rom. 1:16). “He who believes in Me” means “he who has true faith,” the kind that *works* in transforming the life. In other words, there is tremendous power in true righteousness by faith.

God’s people must not be powerless in the face of the moral and spiritual plagues that afflict society today. The world faces no end of human disorders now known as addictions—drug abuse, alcoholism, marital infidelity, sexual immorality, corruption, compulsive eating disorders, and widespread psychological depression. A steady and increasing deterioration of the human spirit is bringing millions close to the place where they may be mentally unable even to comprehend the everlasting gospel.

The Bible promises adequate power to cope with these tragic needs. That power is in the gospel. The Holy Spirit has promised to bless with His presence its true proclamation; but if the message is adulterated with legalism or spiritualism so that in any way it is a distortion of the true gospel, to that extent the Holy Spirit’s blessing is negated.

Meanwhile the Lord has instructed “four angels” to “hold” the “four winds” of human passion “till we have sealed the servants of our God” (Rev 7:1-4). The sealing described in Revelation is the final work to be accomplished by the gospel.

The loosing of those “four winds” is a very sad thing, the complete breakdown of social order, decency, morality, fidelity, economic and political security. The Bible says it will be “Babylon” dropping into the sea like a millstone, the end of weddings, Christmases, shopping, sports, materialists’ orgies, vacations, sensuality (see Rev. 18). Already we see around us the beginning of this final break-up of order and morality. Criminal gangs are terrorizing large cities, and police are increasingly frustrated in their efforts to maintain even a minimum of security for law-abiding citizens.

Meanwhile, what we define as the 1888 message is the special message which the three angels of Revelation 14 proclaim is “the everlasting gospel” in the setting of the cosmic Day of Atonement and the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. Christ and all heaven is concerned about very serious business—getting ready for the end and Jesus’ coming.

If God’s people will faithfully proclaim that pure gospel message, the Lord has promised that He will do His part to restrain the exploding evil in the world. But if they do not faithfully proclaim the message that alone can prepare a people for the return of Christ, He cannot hold in check those near-exploding global forces of evil. Merely to proclaim a message that prepares people for death is not good enough. That has been done in all

past ages. The time must come when there is a message that prepares a people for His second coming.

God's plan is that His people will make a great impact on the world by proclaiming a unique message that Heaven can fully endorse. They must be like little David with five smooth stones facing Goliath, and they will be as successful. The gospel power to prevent those storms of human and national passion is to be in the message itself.

—*Paul E. Penno*

Notes:

Bible quotations are from the *New King James Version*.

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZhEFJF8wTH8>

You may subscribe to the e-mail version of *Sabbath School Today* by sending a request to sabbathschooltoday@1888message.org