



PREPARING TO STAND

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“In this age, just prior to the second coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, God calls for men who will prepare a people to stand in the great day of the Lord.” SW 3-21-1905

HEADING TOWARD “ABJECT POVERTY”

by Jim Buller

There is a major warning for us in the fifth paragraph of “An Impressive Dream.” In this dream Ellen White was shown God’s people traveling up a path which grows narrower and steeper as they progress. (See *Testimonies for the Church Vol. 2*, pages 594-597.) Starting out with heavily loaded wagons, they have to leave more and more behind in order to keep going up the path. The fifth paragraph reads as follows:

We then thought of those who had not accustomed themselves to privations and hardships. Where were such now? They were not in the company. At every change some were left behind, and those only remained who had accustomed themselves to endure hardships. The privations of the way only made these more eager to press on to the end.

This paragraph point out that just because one begins the Christian walk, they will not necessarily keep going until the end of the journey. It also cautions us, that the reason they quit traveling up the narrow path to heaven is because of one of the chief values of our modern culture —the pursuit of comfort and convenience. Living in our culture, many of us undoubtedly find ourselves unaccustomed to “privation and hardship.” Although there may not be anything wrong with being comfortable, it would be foolish to allow our desire for comfort and convenience to keep us from continuing on up the path to heaven.

In this context let’s also note that, “Jesus did not seek to attract the people to Him by gratifying the desire for luxury. ... The Saviour has not promised His followers the luxuries of the world.” And, “When Christ called His disciples to follow Him, He offered them no flattering prospects in this life.” (*The Desire of Ages*, page 367, *The Ministry of Healing*, page 479.) Therefore, it would be foolish for us to spend our lives pursuing comfort and convenience, as Jesus has not promised us these things. In fact, based on the paragraph quoted above, it seems that we would be wise to prepare ourselves for a *lack* of comfort and convenience. Expanding on this idea, notice the condition of God’s people during the Time of Trouble described in the following passage from *Selected Messages Book 3*, pages 427-428.

The time of trouble was upon us. I saw our people in great distress, weeping and praying, pleading the sure promises of God, while the wicked were all around us mocking us and threatening to destroy us. They ridiculed our feebleness, they mocked at the smallness of our numbers, and taunted us with words calculated to cut deep. They charged us with taking an independent position from all the rest of the world. They had cut off our resources so that we could not buy or sell, and they referred to our abject poverty and stricken condition. They could not see how we could live without the world. We were dependent on the world, and we must concede to the customs, practices, and laws of the world, or go out of it. If we were the only people in the world whom the Lord favored, the appearances were awfully against us.

The reason this paragraph caught my attention, was because a short time before running across it, I had read another passage which also used the term “abject poverty.” It was from an article in the December 19, 1899 issue of *The Review & Herald*, in which Ellen White was talking about the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:20-21. In this parable, Lazarus was essentially a poor, homeless person begging at the door of the rich man. She described Lazarus’ condition as being one of “abject poverty.” These references let us know that if we continue on the narrow path, before we reach the end, we too will be homeless, “strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” (Hebrews 11:13.)

By looking at Jesus’ example, we find the reason for this poverty. Although He spent most of His life in a home in Nazareth, working in the carpenter shop, during His ministry He told one person, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” (Luke 9:58.) Rather than working to maintain a home and business, Jesus minimized His personal needs and responsibilities to be able to minister more freely. In order to have more time to help others, He became a homeless person. Notice the following from *The Review and Herald*, December 27, 1906.

Shall we follow Christ as our pattern? In His life of self-sacrifice was seen not one jot or tittle of selfishness. He who had been rich in the heavenly courts, left all his wealth and power, and came to this world, clothed in the humble garb of humanity. For our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich. Like Him, His followers are by lives of self-denial to be a blessing to the world. If in the lives of all God's people the character of Christ were revealed, we should see thousands more converted to the truth.

The reason we will be homeless people in the end, is because working for others requires self-sacrifice, and we will have used all our resources to reach as many people as possible before probation closes. Note also the following paragraph from *Evangelism*, page 631-632.

We are nearing the end of this earth's history, and the different departments of God's work are to be carried forward with much more

self-sacrifice than has yet been practiced. The work for these last days is a missionary work. Present truth, from the first to the last letter of its alphabet, means missionary effort. The work to be done calls for sacrifice at every step of advance. The workers are to come forth from trial, purified and refined, as gold tried in the fire.

Just as those traveling up the narrow path in the dream mentioned earlier had to leave more and more behind, we will have to “sacrifice at every step of advance.” *Selected Messages Book 2*, page 206 echoes the first sentence of this last quotation by stating that, “In the future, our work is to be carried forward in self-denial and self-sacrifice even beyond that which we have seen in past years.” To help us put this into perspective, let me share an example of the sacrifices made by James and Ellen White in the early years of the work. This story has been recorded for us in the book, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years Volume 1 - 1827-1862*, page 136. (Another reference, which includes more details of this experience, is found on pages 82-85 of *Testimonies for the Church Vol. 1.*, which will be quoted following this article.) Notice that they used most of their earnings for missionary work, and even with a seven-month old baby, all of their earthly possessions fitted into half of a trunk!

They soon received an earnest invitation to attend a conference of the Sabbathkeeping Adventists in Connecticut. They would go, taking their 7-month-old Henry with them in their arms. James White had received \$10 in settlement for his work in cutting wood. They used half of the money in preparation for the trip south and kept the other half for transportation. With all their earthly possessions half filling a trunk, they went to Boston, where they stayed with the Nichols family. They did not make known their penniless plight to the family, but as they left, Mrs. Nichols handed James \$5. With all but 50 cents of this they purchased tickets to Middletown, Connecticut, the closest rail point to Rocky Hill and the Albert Belden home, where the conference was to begin on Thursday night, April 20.

Brothers and sisters, what is God calling you to give up so that you may serve others more effectively? Remember that Jesus *never* said, “Sit back, make yourself comfortable, and wait for Me to come back.” Instead He said, “Get to work!” We have wasted far too much time pursuing things which will only soon pass away. Instead of chasing after comfort and convenience let’s work to reach others with the end-time message. Keep in mind that it has also been prophesied that, “The work which the church has failed to do in a time of peace and prosperity she will have to do in a terrible crisis under most discouraging, forbidding circumstances.” (*Testimonies for the Church Vol. 5*, page 463.) Let’s go to work now, and not make things harder on ourselves then.

The above ideas also have some interesting implications in view of the current economic situation, and for those of us preparing to live in the country, so we can raise our own provisions during the first part of the Time of Trouble. Notice that the picture the above references describe is *not* a spacious country home with alternate energy sources which would make it possible for us to live off the grid with all the comforts and

conveniences of the city life style. Please don't misunderstand me here, as I'm *not* saying this type of set-up would be wrong. What I *am* saying, is that this should not be our *expectation*. Neither should we be struggling to maintain this standard of living, as it will only end up being wasted effort as we head toward "abject poverty." It is very likely that in all this we are being tested, to see if we really believe Jesus is coming soon and if we are serious about being ready and helping others to get ready, or if our affections are still on this earth as we try to hold onto a comfortable life style because we plan to be here for many years.

This may also be the reason why many of us have not been able to get a place in the country yet. God knows that if He were to provide us with a place, we would essentially cease to work for others as we spend our time and resources trying to get ourselves set up for something that is not going to last. He wants to strengthen our faith, and teach us to rely on Him and His promises, instead of us trusting in something we have set up to provide for our needs.

So, let's not put our comfort and convenience before the work we have been given to do. Rather than pursuing any particular standard of living, let's spend our time and energy working to help others along the narrow path, while, like Jesus, we content ourselves with a simpler existence. "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life." "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you." (John 6:27, Matthew 6:33.)

Testimonies for the Church Volume One, page 82-85

At Gorham, Maine, August 26, 1847, our eldest son, Henry Nichols White, was born. In October, Brother and Sister Howland of Topsham kindly offered us a part of their dwelling, which we gladly accepted, and commenced housekeeping with borrowed furniture. We were poor, and saw close times. We had resolved not to be dependent, but to support ourselves, and have something with which to help others. But we were not prospered. My husband worked very hard hauling stone on the railroad, but could not get what was due him for his labor. Brother and Sister H. freely divided with us whenever they could; but they were in close circumstances. They fully believed the first and second messages, and had generously imparted of their substance to forward the work, until they were dependent on their daily labor.

My husband left the railroad, and with his ax went into the woods to chop cordwood. With a continual pain in his side, he worked from early morning till dark to earn about fifty cents a day. He was prevented from sleeping nights by severe pain. We endeavored to keep up good courage, and trust in the Lord. I did not murmur. In the morning I felt grateful to God that He had preserved us through another night, and at night I was thankful that He had kept us through another day. One day when our provisions were gone, my husband went to his employer to get money or provisions. It was a stormy day, and he walked three miles and back in the rain. He brought home on his back a bag of provisions tied in different compartments, having in this manner passed through the village of Brunswick, where he had often lectured. As he entered the house, very weary, my heart sank within me. My first feelings were that God had forsaken us. I said to my husband: "Have we come to this? Has the Lord left us?" I could not restrain my tears, and wept aloud for hours, until I fainted. Prayer was offered in my behalf. When I breathed again, I felt the cheering influence of the Spirit of God,

and regretted that I had sunk under discouragement. We desire to follow Christ and to be like Him; but we sometimes faint beneath trials, and remain at a distance from Him. Sufferings and trials bring us near to Jesus. The furnace consumes the dross and brightens the gold.

At this time I was shown that the Lord had been trying us for our good, and to prepare us to labor for others; that He had been stirring up our nest, lest we should settle down at ease. Our work was to labor for souls; if we had been prospered, home would be so pleasant that we would be unwilling to leave it; trials had been permitted to come upon us to prepare us for the still greater conflicts that we would meet in our travels. We soon received letters from brethren in different states inviting us to visit them; but we had no means to take us out of the state. Our reply was that the way was not open before us. I thought that it would be impossible for me to travel with my child. We did not wish to be dependent, and were careful to live within our means. We were resolved to suffer rather than get in debt. I allowed myself and child one pint of milk each day. One morning before my husband went to his work, he left me nine cents to buy milk for three mornings. It was a study with me whether to buy the milk for myself and babe or get an apron for him. I gave up the milk, and purchased the cloth for an apron to cover the bare arms of my child.

Little Henry was soon taken very sick, and grew worse so fast that we were much alarmed. He lay in a stupid state; his breathing was quick and heavy. We gave remedies with no success. We then called in a person of experience in sickness, who said that his recovery was doubtful. We had prayed for him, but there was no change. We had made the child an excuse for not traveling and laboring for the good of others, and we feared the Lord was about to remove him. Once more we went before the Lord, praying that He would have compassion upon us, and spare the life of the child, and solemnly pledging ourselves to go forth, trusting in God, wherever He might send us.

Our petitions were fervent and agonizing. By faith we claimed the promises of God, and we believed that He listened to our cries. Light from heaven was breaking through the clouds and shining upon us. Our prayers were graciously answered. From that hour the child began to recover.

While at Topsham we received a letter from Brother Chamberlain of Connecticut, urging us to attend a Conference in that state in April, 1848. We decided to go if we could obtain means. My husband settled with his employer, and found that there was ten dollars due him. With five of this I purchased articles of clothing which we much needed, and then patched my husband's overcoat, even piecing the patches, making it difficult to tell the original cloth in the sleeves. We had five dollars left to take us to Dorchester, Massachusetts. Our trunk contained nearly everything we possessed on earth; but we enjoyed peace of mind and a clear conscience, and this we prized above earthly comforts. In Dorchester we called at the house of Brother Nichols, and as we left, Sister N. handed my husband five dollars, which paid our fare to Middletown, Connecticut. We were strangers in that city, and had never seen one of the brethren in the state. We had but fifty cents left. My husband did not dare to use that to hire a carriage, so he threw the trunk up on a pile of boards, and we walked on in search of someone of like faith. We soon found Brother C., who took us to his house.