

Planet in Rebellion

God's last call to men.

God is calling out a people. He is calling honest hearts everywhere. He is calling you, in the circle of your friends. He calls you to be a witness to those friends. He calls you to be one of those who will have the courage, in a day like this, to "keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus."

You may say, "But the crowds! How can I do it?"

The crowds have seldom decided in favor of truth. It was the crowds that crucified Jesus. Only a very few, like the dying thief, had the courage that day to say, "I'll crown Him Lord of all." Truth can never be measured by the number who are willing to follow it. The question is not, "What is convenient?" but, "What is right?" It is not, "What is the crowd doing?" but, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

Shall we watch the crowds for a moment? It is here that we see the majority. We see those who have questioned God's holy law. We see the multitudes who walk where their forefathers have walked, scarcely dreaming there is any question about the day of rest.

But away from the crowds, standing firm for the commandments of God, I find the patriarchs, the prophets, and every one of the apostles. I find a valiant line of faithful witnesses all down through the ages, for the light of truth has never gone out. I see here the noble group of truth seekers today-down in the end of time-who follow the Savior whatever the cost, who place His will above that of the crowd. And who is this who towers head and shoulders above the rest? Yes, it is the carpenter's Son-Jesus of Nazareth!

I hear a shout from the crowds, "Come, join us!" But I turn and see Jesus standing with outstretched hands as He says, "If you love me, keep my commandments." Flags make a difference. Is there any other choice for you-for me-except to say, "You may take the world, but give me Jesus. I'll close my carpenter shop. I'll adjust my business. I'll make my plans to follow Him?"

It is His appeal-not mine. It is the appeal of the Carpenter of Nazareth. And how can any man reject it?

26. My Confession of Faith

THERE CAME a day when in the quiet seclusion of an ancient German library a godly young man, soon to become a monk, discovered a Latin Bible. Reverently he laid his hands upon it. Fearfully he opened its pages. Never before had he seen such a volume. He had not known such a book existed. He had heard small portions of Scripture read at public worship, and supposed that this was all. Now for the first time he looked upon the whole of God's Word. With quickened pulse he turned the sacred pages, exclaiming, "Oh, that God would give me such a book for myself!"

That prayer began to be answered when he found a Bible chained to the monastery wall. Those medieval centuries that we call the Dark Ages were dark, filled with superstition and ignorance, largely because this Book was suppressed. The Dark Ages were dark because the light of God's Word was chained to monastery walls, or hidden as choice, rare treasure in the palaces of the wealthy and the courts of kings. The reading of the Bible, for the common people, was looked upon with suspicion and distrust. No wonder that during this time, without the safeguard of the Scriptures, there crept into the church, doctrines, rites, ceremonies, and forms of worship about which Paul or Peter never heard.

Imagine if you can the surging emotions within the breast of young Martin Luther as again and again he repaired to the Book on the monastery wall. In that historic search, to his profound surprise, he saw nothing of relics, images, worship of the saints. But he did see much of Jesus, His righteousness, His character, His love and power. He saw little emphasis on rites and forms and ceremonies, but an amazing revelation of how God looks upon the inner life. It was there that the young monk prayerfully gathered his message and vigorously turned to the world with some breathtaking questions that were to rock the thinking of that day to its foundations.

Protestantism was taking root. It urged the open return to the Word of God. It meant a clean break with the traditions of the past. It marked the beginning of a new epoch in our civilization. For with the searching, inquisitive spirit of the Reformation the old world died, the modern world began.

What brought about the Reformation? Thoughtful men will agree that it was the Word of God that did it, as it unshackled the minds of men to discover in its pages the long-hidden light of gospel liberty. And it was none too soon. For the hands of God's clock were fast approaching the final hours of history when divine revelation of it-would be desperately needed. And God saw fit to use a fearless young monk who gathered his message and his courage from a Bible chained to a wall. Thank God for Martin Luther!

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But you ask, “If the Scriptures shed such light, how do you account for the hopelessly disunited state of Protestantism today?”

Is there not but one cause for the separate segments of Christianity, the diverging denominations that we know so well? Is it not the failure of Protestantism to live up to its own call to return to the Scriptures? Has the cry of the Reformation grown strangely dim because it all but died on the lips of each reformer in turn?

You see, when the followers of Martin Luther, after his death, discovered advanced truth in their study of the Word, there was a tendency to ask, “Did Martin Luther teach it?” Evidently it did not occur to them that had not the great leader died unexpectedly on that last trip, thus cutting short his work, his search for truth would have continued. They failed to realize that even a full lifetime was far too short to uncover all that centuries of tradition had buried. And so they set their stakes and wrote a creed, satisfied with the truth they had received from their revered founder.

Then, as further light dawned, other reformers moved out of established organizations, as had Luther. They could do nothing else, for dissenting voices were discouraged.

It was years later that two young men, deeply convicted that there ought to be something more methodical and personal in the practice of religion, came upon the scene. They had experienced the inner flame of new life, and they arose at 6:30 each morning for prayer. They organized a prayer meeting to meet every Wednesday night. It was because of their methodical, organized plan of Christian living that they were first derisively called “Methodists.” But what a mighty work God did through that early revival we know as Methodism! Thank God for John and Charles Wesley!

Luther, the Wesleys, Calvin, Zwingli, Knox, and other great reformers—all were wise and good men unmistakably led by the Spirit of God. But I ask you, Can we safely conclude that all truth dawned upon their minds? They were only then emerging from the Dark Ages. Truth, in its hazardous journey through the treacherous centuries that followed the days of the apostles, had been buried deep. Can we assume that these early reformers rescued all the gems of truth from the darkness? Or were there more where they discovered the first? Evidently. For listen to this: “But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day.” Proverbs 4:18.

Yes, the Reformation was to be progressive, until the entire world should be warned in a blaze of light and glory that would burst into climax as the Lord Jesus appears in the skies. That is God’s plan. And it will succeed. There is a message for His people in this generation, a message which gathers all the gems of truth into the framework of the everlasting gospel for this last critical hour. And God uses an interesting term to describe it. He calls it “present truth.” I read about it in 2 Peter 1:12: “Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though you know them, and be established in the present truth.”

What is present truth? Is there a specific message for this specific hour? Truth, of course, is permanent, abiding, unchanging. Its fundamentals do not change. But for every major crisis in the history of mankind God has given a special message to meet the emergency, a message fitted to the needs of a particular generation. This is what God means by present truth.

Take Adam, for example. He might well have taught that someday a universal flood would cover the earth. And it would have been true. He might well have predicted the Savior’s ministry on earth. He might have predicted that the second coming of our Lord would bring an end to the reign of sin and sorrow. All would have been true. But none of these were present truth for his generation. They did not directly concern his day. No great emphasis on these truths was needed at that time.

However, when Noah came upon the scene of action, he proclaimed a specific message for a specific generation. It was a message vital to every man living in that day. Who could say that it was not present truth? Those who heard his message, who heeded it, were saved. Those who rejected it were lost.

John the Baptist is another perfect example. His appeal was to prepare men and women for Christ’s first coming. “Repent you: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Those who accepted his message were prepared to accept Christ when He appeared. Those who rejected John’s message were prepared to reject the Savior.

But what about us? Has God sent present truth into this critical time? If ever we needed a message from God to meet specific needs, it is now. If we are approaching history’s greatest crisis—and most thinking men declare that we are—is not God bound by His own promise to forewarn us? “Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he reveals his secret unto his servants the prophets.” Amos 3:7.

Has God left this generation unwarned? No. In brief, bold strokes He has described the particular

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emphasis that He intends this final generation to hear. And, appropriately, it is found in the book of last things, the Book of Revelation.

Nosy I understand full well that when the Book of Revelation is mentioned, some will say that it was never intended to be understood, that it is a closed book, a book of mystery. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Its very name means “that which has been revealed.” Its first words indicate that it is a revelation from Jesus to show His people things that would shortly come to pass. Evidently it is possible to understand it. It is therefore with eager expectancy that we read from the fourteenth chapter, beginning with verse 6:

“And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters. And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen. And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God. Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.”

Thoughtfully reading these potent words, seeing how they package into one the message of Scripture, convinced me-as I believe it will convince any sincere man or woman-that here is a message of supreme importance. Could it be that these words describe God’s last call to humanity, God’s last appeal to the human heart, God’s specific message for this generation? Could it be that here is a sound basis for my confession of faith? Or any man’s?

I discover here the ring of urgency. It is a message that is to go to “Every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.” Every man is to hear it. Not a man dare he missed!

I find here the ring of the second coming. It is a message to prepare men for that event. It is timed for it. Verse 14 says, “And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.” Evidently the message we have read immediately precedes that climactic event.

I discover here the ring of the everlasting gospel. That phrase catches my eye and heart. It is not something new or strange, not something some man has invented, not a queer, radical diversion from truth. It is the everlasting gospel. The same gospel Noah preached, the same gospel John the Baptist preached, the same gospel Jesus demonstrated before men, the same gospel the apostles taught-but in its current setting for our day. The everlasting gospel! I could stand upon no safer platform of truth. I am perfectly safe in making the everlasting gospel my confession of faith.

I find in these verses the ring of accountability. Daniel Webster, when asked what was the most serious thought that ever crossed his mind, replied, “My personal accountability to God.” Therefore, in my confession of faith, judgment-hour thinking must make that accountability very, very real. For I read in verse 7, “The hour of his judgment is come.”

I find here the ring of loyalty. For I discover that this everlasting gospel prepares a people who will “keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.” And who of us will not agree that this generation’s most tragic need is to return to the saving formula of the faith of Jesus and the commandments of God?

Unfortunately, some have thought that the faith of Jesus releases men from obligation to His commandments. But how could this be? Does an examination of the commandments one by one reveal any conflict with saving grace? How is it, then, that one of them-I refer to the Sabbath commandment-is almost universally neglected?

“But,” someone is saying, “are we not more and more enforcing a day of rest by legislation across the land?” Ah, yes, friend, but that is just the point. Are moral issues a matter for legislation? And even if they were, are you sure that the day being enforced is the Sabbath? Or is it only a manmade substitute? Just a question. But someday you may find that you have never been asked a more important one. An issue is involved here that touches every man’s loyalty to His God. Yes, in God’s last message to men will be heard the unmistakable ring of loyalty.

And finally, I discover in this message of Revelation 14 the ring of warning. For in these verses are packed the most important issues of our day. Here is a warning against deception and counterfeits that are destined to ruin the beliefs of millions. Counterfeits that touch the great fundamental issues over which the last battles in the great controversy will be fought. Counterfeits that touch the sacred personal liberties

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of every man.

My friend, there are no more serious words in all of Scripture than those of Revelation 13 and 14. Certain things are taking place before our eyes today that this Book said would take place. In fact, when we place today's trend toward conformity beside the words of Revelation 13:16, 17, the impact of divine prediction is staggering. Can it be that the man who dares to be different may yet face the threat of boycott and worse?

Yes, here in Revelation 14 I find a sound basis for my confession of faith. As I probed deeply into these foundations of truth, I felt that certain vital questions had remained unanswered in the historic creeds-creeds generally right and sound, but which somehow have not kept pace with unfolding truth to meet man's present need.

As I explored the creeds and the traditions, I failed to find a consistent picture of the hereafter. The resurrection of Jesus intrigued me. What would I do without it-without its promise of my own resurrection and that of my loved ones in the last day? But I reasoned, My would there need to be a resurrection if, as is popularly taught, I go immediately to my reward at death? Would I, at some later date, need to leave heavenly bliss to crawl into this body again? Something was wrong here?

I watched the growth of the psychic cults down the centuries, culminating in a great surge of revival of interest in supernatural phenomena in our day. I felt that to meet the almost overmastering appeal of spiritualistic forces, this modern masquerade of the psychic, there must be a far more sound and reasonable explanation of the hereafter than is found in the creeds. And thank God, there is!

In the creeds of the centuries I looked in vain for a satisfying teaching of the second coming. I found it taught as a possibility, even a probability, but almost always in the far-distant future-far too distant to heal the wounds of this generation. The rapidly fulfilling prophecies of Scripture convinced me that His coming is "even at the doors." And I longed to hear the clear ring of a promise about to be fulfilled: I will come again."

I heard no voice in the creeds proclaiming, "The hour of his judgment is come." Were men to be left to step unwittingly into judgment day? Were men to be left unwarned?

The message of Revelation 14 exposed to view great fundamental questions of loyalty, great questions regarding soul liberty that have haunted the human spirit for centuries. Has there been a clear understanding of these vital issues? Evidently not, for I found that Europe's sod has been soaked with the blood of martyrs. And in the guarded, sometimes muted voices of prejudice and intolerance today there is an ominous echo of the voices that howled their hate around the martyr's stakes.

It could happen again. And Scripture indicates that it will. But when it does happen, Americans are going to be stunned. For it will come about in such seemingly innocent ways, and be concerned with such seemingly insignificant issues, that thousands will exclaim in surprise, I didn't know what was at stake!"

Is it possible that multitudes of sincere men and women are thoughtlessly bypassing a vital issue because it appears to involve only the personal choice of a day of rest? It could be. But more than a twenty-four-hour day is here involved. It is a matter of loyalty. Whom will you obey? Whom will I obey? Would it not be an unfortunate paradox if honest men, thinking to promote commandment-keeping, should be led unwittingly to legislate against commandment-keeping-and feel satisfied that they have helped the kingdom of God?

Yes, as I saw the conflicting, clashing loyalties pictured in Revelation 14, I was led to the deepening conviction that the compelling issues of our day will center in certain great doctrines that have been changed, warped, and their meaning lost. Surprising as it may seem, there is evidence that long-neglected teachings of Scripture regarding a day of rest may become the basic issue in the intolerance so soon to burst into flame. You can see that if ever we needed to be clear in our thinking, it is now!

Tell me honestly. Could I safely build my confession of faith upon anything less than the Scriptures-all the Scriptures? Where else could I find a platform of truth solid enough that I could confidently say, as did Martin Luther, "Here I stand, I can do no other"?

Where do you stand, friend? What is your confession of faith? However inadequate illustrations may be, I shall never forget the surge of loyal dedication that rose up in my heart for the Lord Jesus Christ as I first heard of an experience that took place during one of the most decisive battles in the history of the British Empire.

The Duke of Wellington had planned an operation to take a dangerous hill. That famous general knew that when he gave the command for his men to charge, very few would come back alive. Even his

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stout military heart wavered at the thought. He told his regiments, I will turn about, and every man that is willing at daybreak to make the charge on that hill, let him take two paces forward.”

The general turned and waited. In a few moments an officer asked him to turn again. A look of disappointment momentarily crossed his face, for there was not a break in the lines. Yes, a look of disappointment momentarily-until the officer explained, “Every man has taken two paces forward!”

What else can a man do when he faces the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ? Mat else can he do but step forward? It is a matter of loyalty!

27. Wilderness Survival

“YOU MUST carry on!” Those words, spoken in the dim light of a campfire in one of the Piedmont valleys of northern Italy have haunted me ever since I first heard of them. In those words I caught the heartbeat of prophecy. In those words the Book of Revelation came to life. In those words I felt a challenge for the future that every man must meet.

It happened near the little Waldensian village of Torre Pellice. Here in these valleys the Waldensian people had lived for centuries. Here, this night, a group of Christian youth had gathered around their campfire to sing gospel songs and to tell mission stories. Visitors from the surrounding valleys and mountains had drifted into the village, and now they approached the campfire with curiosity. Who were these young people? They heard them praying. They heard them singing about the second coming of Jesus, in which their own fathers had once so ardently believed. They heard them telling mission stories, and it brought a strange nostalgia for their own past. Never had there been a people so missionary-minded as the Waldenses. One of the mottoes in their museum said simply, “you are not a missionary, you are nothing at all in this world.” That, for centuries, had been the spirit of the Waldenses.

This night, after the singing and the stories were over, one of the Waldensian elders stepped from the shadows into the light of the campfire and spoke thoughtfully to the minister, “You must carry on!” He continued, ‘We, the Waldensian people, have a great heritage behind us. We are proud of the history of our people as they have fought to preserve the light of truth high upon these mountain tops and up and down these valleys. This is our home. Here we have e great monuments of our faith. Here we have the Chiesa de la Tanna. Here we have a monument to the Holy Word of God on which these words are carved in marble: ‘Ta parole est la verite [Thy word is truth].’ Of all this we are proud.

“We are especially proud of the school of the Barbes. That is where we trained our young people for the service of God. It is the oldest seminary of Europe, where the teaching of theological doctrine took place and where the truths of God’s Holy Word were preserved. Inside this stone hut is a large stone slab that served as the table where the students worked translating the Bible into French. Upon the wall are the names of some of those who took their training here. From this place went out the Waldensian colporteurs, the sellers of silk, missionaries of the Word of God. After almost every name there is a little cross engraved in the granite slab, meaning that this man gave his life for the cause he loved most dearly.”

Then this Waldensian elder, a layman in the church, said with conviction, “This is our great heritage of the past, but we really do not have any future. We have given up the teachings in which we once believed. We no longer believe that Jesus will soon come in the clouds of heaven. This belief we have abandoned. From all that I can observe, from what I have heard about your people, you must now carry on.”

He pointed to a nearby mountain. “If you look up here on the mountainside, you will see one of our Waldensian chapels. You will notice on this chapel, as on all our chapels, these words: ‘La lumiere luit dans les tenebres [And the light shines in darkness].’”

No more appropriate passage could have been inscribed on these chapels where light shone out through the dark centuries of the past. But he added, “During the past years in these valleys so filled with sacred history, we have no longer the vision we once had. We have tried vainly to hold our young people in the church. Beside these chapels where it is written, ‘The light shines in darkness,’ we have built dance halls, thinking that in this way we might be able to hold our young people. But now they seem to have no more interest in, or love for, the church. Their interest now is down in the bright lights of the big cities. No longer do they want to remain here. Mat a miracle it is that your church still has young people who are interested in coming up here to our valley and in studying the history we love so much. But that is all in the