

Decision Time for Planet Earth

A sermon by Larry Kirkpatrick
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Looking out at the present state of affairs in our world, one can only ask the question: How long can this go on? The list of problems and troubles seems endless. Is our world, our life, as presently constituted, sustainable? I'm not talking as much about energy use or environmental change as I am about sin. How long will sinning go on? Is sinning sustainable? And if sinning is not sustainable, then it has an end. Then that means that eventually there comes a time—a decision time for planet earth.

If God has a message that changes people, then when must such a message be given? Before God moves to bring final closure to the sin problem. Many in our world seem to have lost their way. They look neither to the Second Coming of Jesus nor to any judgment. But God has news for them and for us. We locate it at Acts 17:30, 31.

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead.

“In the beginning, God”—that is how the Bible starts. Its last lines, call: “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” (Revelation 22:20). Between these facts, past and future, there we are. For long millennia men have been warning of the end. Already only a few chapters into Genesis, at six, Noah was warning of God's global cataclysmic judgment (2 Peter 2:5).

Seventh-day Adventists do not stand in the shadows with crackpots. We stand down at the far, far end of thousands of years of urgent workers. Catcalls and smirks and giggles we may hear, but so did Noah, until the chatter of skeptics ended in the roar of rain torrents.

Since wickedness in the earth has increased manifold from then till now, and since many thousands of years have passed until our day, of all those who have warned of coming judgment, our warning is the most credible.

Yes, sin is temporary. God will put an end to it. He will render His universe secure from it. But He will do this in a way that recognizes and preserves the liberty He has given to everyone made in His divine image. Man will be free, but he will not use that freedom to sin.

Let us consider the Word of God, and its warnings.

Warnings From Heaven

Worshipping the Unknown God

In Acts 17, Paul points out that God did not hold men accountable for false worship when they had not been equipped to understand that it was false. But by his day that time had passed. He said that now, that is, then, God commanded all men, everywhere, to repent. Why? Because God had sent Jesus. Jesus had taught faithfully, now the world was accountable. Now He would judge the world.

His judgment would not be arbitrary, but a judgment in righteousness. In Paul's day, Jesus had already been slain and risen. He is the "Man whom He hath ordained." The resurrection of Jesus itself is a sign of the judgment of the world. His tomb was empty, yet full of significance. His judgment is as sure as His resurrection, which makes a point of interest. What Christian does not believe in the reality of the resurrection? And yet, but few Christians see any significance in the reality of Jesus' judgment.

Put simply, if Jesus' resurrection is real, then His judgment is real. There is a day fast approaching. It is decision time for planet earth.

Scoffers in the Last Days

All of this is prophesied. Hear 2 Peter 3:2-10.

Be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

The first thing that we are to expect in the last days is scoffers, those wrapped up in themselves, pursuing their own private agendas, and denying the Second Coming. Peter warned that these would hold that "all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."

More than this, these will deny the biblical creation account. They will deny the biblical flood account. No God. No past judgment by flood. No future judgment by fire.

Peter warns. “The day of the Lord will come.” It will take billions by surprise. And here is a difference; since the world will be entirely remade this time, no ark. No training wheels, no ship, no escape, just final, total, irrevocable judgment by fire: Decision time for planet earth.

Nebuchadnezzar’s Head of Gold

Another place of interest may seem very familiar: Daniel two. Nebuchadnezzar has a dream. The image has a head of gold representing Babylon. This is followed successively by a kingdom represented by silver, then bronze, next iron, and at the last, feet of mixed iron and clay. Finally, God sends just a big rock smashing into the feet of the image and topples it.

Does our view of life and the world really harmonize with this image and its God-given interpretation? Jacques Ellul points out that “there are four great collective sociological presuppositions in the modern world . . . that man’s aim in life is happiness, that man is naturally good, that history develops in endless progress, and that everything is matter” (*Propaganda*, p. 39).

We tend to see our world in terms of endless progress. Things are getting better all the time. Your latest computer is superior to the one before, and your new cell phone is better than the last one. A democracy is better than a monarchy, and so on. But look at the image. Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar that the kingdom that follows him will be “another kingdom inferior to thee” (2:39). And that is the picture here: deterioration.

Remember, the most devastating wars in human history have come in the last century, in a period of republics and democracies. In Revelation 13 it will be a republican democracy that imposes the death penalty on religious dissenters. The lamblike beast speaks as a dragon. What will the people do? It will be decision time for planet earth.

We understand that the holy Spirit is gradually being withdrawn from people (2 Thessalonians 2:3-12). As men become more and more morally degenerated, they become less and less willing to surrender self, ever more resistant to the promptings of conscience. God commands all men everywhere to repent. How does He do it? Part of how He does it is to use us. As Noah built an ark and by his works witnessed to the world that judgment was coming, so we by our works build Christian character and witness to the world that judgment is coming.

We need to live what Jesus is doing in us and tell what Jesus is doing for us. Do you notice in Daniel two that the rock does not hit the image in the head or shoulders or knees, but in the feet? It is at the last part of time that the series of human kingdoms is totally destroyed and replaced by God's kingdom.

See verse 44?

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

Notice here that God's kingdom is "set up" "in the days of these kings." It, God's kingdom, breaks in pieces and consumes these other kingdoms. There is nothing left of them. "The kingdom shall not be left to another people." That is, as Babylon gave way to Medo-Persia, and Medo-Persia to Greece, and Greece to Rome, and so forth, God's kingdom shall not give way or be replaced by another. There will be no more invaders, no more usurpers, subjection or tyranny.

What does all this mean? That there comes a decision time for planet earth.

Idol-making

In this light, it becomes interesting that one of the last New Testament books, 1 John closes with the exhortation, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21).

We think we are free from idolatry, but John says that in the New Testament period, idolatry will still be a problem. And what is the chief problem of idolatry? Psalm 115:4-8:

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.

These are false gods that are worshipped, but the problem is here at the end: “They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.” When we trust in false gods, we become like the false gods. But when we trust in the true God, we become like the true God. We are created an imitative race. We think that we are making things better and better. We exercise quite selective memory. We think that we know more than the ancients.

Actually, we are much like the unconverted Nebuchadnezzar, aren’t we? After the dream which God gave and showed him his mortality and limitation, he erects an image all of gold (Daniel 3). He defies the God of heaven. His kingdom will not be superceded by another, his kingdom will not be weak, of mixed iron and clay in its feet. But it is, and it will, unless the God of heaven transforms what he is.

God will bring the sequence to an end. Sin is temporary, not sustainable. It is alien to God’s kingdom. It is of Satan’s kingdom. God will bring it to termination. The rock hits the feet. The image goes down.

Since we are talking about making idols, we should understand the essence of it all. An idol is a false God. How is our sinning connected with false gods? When we sin we give homage to Satan, a false god. But it goes deeper.

Think about king David and Bathsheba. You recall the story. David, who already had hundreds of wives, commits adultery by taking Bathsheba. Then to cover it up he arranges for her husband, who is a faithful man, to die in a battle. David seeks to hide the sin but God brings it out into the open. His sin is immortalized in the Bible, a terrific stain upon David. Why did God deal so harshly with David over this sin? Of course adultery is evil. Here is one of the central tenets of the Ten Commandments: “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14). But something more is happening here.

David was king, and his example of immortality would affect the whole nation. That impacted matters. But we must not stop there, because that means we hold leaders to a different standard and that could lead us to grant ourselves license to sin. I am not a leader, one might say, therefore the highest standard of behavior is not required of me.

There is a deeper essence in David’s sin, one that helps us better understand why God treated the matter with such divine ferocity. David was setting himself above God’s law. He was making his own law, being a law to himself. He was not disagreeing with God’s law, but he was making his own law. He was becoming like God in that respect.

But every time we go against God’s law, we are agreeing with Satan that we don’t like that particular part of God’s character. We are standing up in witness against Him, making our opinions and preferences a competing law. We are choosing to become like God in legislating for ourselves. We are making God’s law of none-effect in order to do what we prefer. We are voting

alongside with Satan that we do not need God or His laws. We are choosing to become our own golden image. And He will not have it.

Idol-breaking

Among the warnings God makes to His people if they will disobey Him, is a warning about idols:

I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images, and cast your carcasses upon the carcasses of your idols, and my soul shall abhor you (Leviticus 26:30).

Were they obedient, they would have no idols. Being disobedient, they have them. God tells them that He will destroy their places for idol worship, cut down their idols, and at last in judgment cast their carcasses upon the carcasses of their idols. But “we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one” (1 Corinthians 8:4).

It is noteworthy that an idol cannot have a carcass. A carcass is what a living being that has died has. A corpse is a carcass. Here God uses irony. As they have chosen to become inhuman, as “they that make them” have chosen to become “like unto them,” they have indeed become alike; alike inhuman; alike altogether apart from God’s image. Joined in their inhumanity, joined together outside of the morality appropriate for beings made in God’s image, He casts them together into the reality they have chosen.

They at last become as unliving as the idols they have chosen and have become like. To them their idols had become altogether real, altogether all-consuming. So into their own language of life and death, he admits them. Their unreal carcasses join the unreal carcasses of the idols. By imitation they have become nothing. This is their end.

Conclusion

It is decision time for planet earth today. God has sent truth. God has sent warning. God has sent messengers. God has sent Jesus. And down here today, God has sent us. We are to warn the world. Sin is not sustainable. God will bring an end to it. Every idol that we erect He will cast down.

He would remake man in the divine image; we would remake God in our human image. And that situation of tension will not be allowed to continue. We are to keep ourselves from idols. We cannot make peace with them. If we do we will become like them and unlike God. Jesus is the express image of God (Hebrews 1:3); we must copy Him. We may be like Him or like Satan, living saints or dead carcasses. The message we bear to the world is life or death.

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead (Acts 17:30, 31).

Biographical Note: Pastor Larry Kirkpatrick is a convert to the Adventist faith. Since 1994 he has served in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He holds degrees from Southern Adventist University and the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. His work has included research assistant for the Ellen G. White Estate, pioneering Adventist internet ministry, involvement in GYC, and presenter at the 50th Anniversary *Questions on Doctrine* Conference. He is author of the books *Real Grace for Real People* and *Cleanse and Close*. For many years his sermons and papers have been published on the internet. Larry and wife Pamela have served churches in Nevada, Utah, and California. The Kirkpatrick's presently serve at the [Mentone church](#) near Loma Linda, California.