

WELCOME, PRISCILA AND AQUILA

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Welcome, Priscila and Aquila

In Acts 18:24-25 we read that Apollos was "an eloquent man, powerful in the Scriptures... instructed in the way of the Lord and fervent in spirit," who "diligently taught the things of the Lord."

Would you like the sacred record to say that about you? If you are reading this article, I can be sure of it. It is like a foretaste of hearing the voice of Jesus say, 'Well done, good servant... enter into the joy of your Lord.' What joy we will have on that day! Where will the sad chapters of our past life be then? But just as with Apollos, God has ordained that we should first emerge victorious from a certain experience.

There is more

Let me ask you a question at this point. Imagine if God declared of you that you were "an eloquent man, mighty in the Scriptures... instructed in the way of the Lord; and fervent in spirit," that you "diligently teach the things of the Lord." After that, how would you feel if someone came along trying to instruct you "more particularly in the way of God"?

Apollos was a true man of God. There is no more positive description of his ministry: eloquent, learned, diligent, powerful, and fervent. But how will he react when God has to provide him with more light through Priscilla and Aquila (the equivalent of what we

would today consider as two simple laymen without a formal curriculum)? How would you react?

Perhaps you were an atheist before you were baptized. One day, someone showed you the prophecies of Daniel 2. Seeing their incredible fulfillment in history, the conviction that there was a God in heaven was awakened in you; your conscience began to awaken. And you did not go to consult your science or philosophy teacher to find out what you should do with that beginning of light that appeared in your heart under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Your decision was not well received by the majority, but you did not care about becoming unpopular. You saw Christ crucified for you, and that made you strong. You did not consult with "blood and flesh," and today you thank the Lord infinitely for having led you to the path of faith and salvation. Magnificent!

Perhaps you were Catholic or Evangelical. You discovered that it is not possible to pay for salvation, because according to the Bible, it is a free gift. You saw that the mediation of the saints is not necessary, because Jesus intercedes for you, allowing you to speak to God without intermediaries. You understood that Jesus would come very soon, and that popular doctrine and practice could never prepare you to meet your God. You saw that the law is not nailed to the cross. You saw this because the Bible says so, and because you understood that it is the expression of the character of God, the only one who has authority. You saw that no man has the right to direct your conscience or that of another. So you did not go to the priest or the pastor to ask what you had to do with the truth of the Sabbath, the

state of the dead, etc. The many and the wisest said the opposite. It had "always been" otherwise, but you preferred to take the side of God and his truth from the very moment you understood it. Not even ridicule and scorn could stifle the work of grace in you. You said yes to the Holy Spirit, and here you are today, thanking the Lord for the way He led you to the truth, and eager to continue serving Him as best you can. Wonderful!

That was some years ago. Since then you have made remarkable progress in maturity and experience, and your church has honored you by assigning you responsibilities. Yes, you have become an effective servant of God. I emphasize that you are a true servant of the Lord, and perhaps it is no exaggeration to apply to you the words of commendation that Apollos received.

But now Priscilla and Aquila come with precious biblical truth that goes beyond what you know. They declare to you "more particularly the way of God." What will you do now?

Do you still retain that freshness, that humility, that simplicity, that freedom, that independence, those spiritual reflexes, that integrity that you already demonstrated at that moment of your surrender to the Lord, and that you like to remember so much?

The inertia

Perhaps your case is more complicated than the two already mentioned; perhaps you were not an atheist, Catholic, or evangelical, but rather you were born into an Adventist family and environment, where you never had the need to demonstrate your fidelity to God at the price of earning the cruel opposition of the "world." In any case, the truth, which is continually expanding, will have to test you one day. Everything seemed to be going well for Joseph, until "he was sold into slavery. His feet were afflicted with fetters; his person was put in irons. Until the time that his word came, the word of the Lord tested him." (Ps 105:17-19)

God wants to know--and He wants you to know--whether you still have that healthy disposition that led you not to consult your priest, pastor, or teacher when the truth was presented to you, but to stand firm in your conscience in the face of the biblical evidence of truth. He wants to know whether you still have that wonderful disposition that led you to say "amen!" and that allowed you to receive the truth and Christ in it. He wants to know whether the questions, reservations, and arguments that now control your approach to truth would have allowed you to accept the Nazarene had you lived two thousand years ago, or whether they constitute the kind of mindset that would have led you to stick with "the law" of Moses according to the Sanhedrin and to despise the Dissenter as a good Israelite.

God knows that you need all the light He wants to give you, and not just the light you had. He also knows whether our faith is founded on the solid Rock, or whether it has gradually found its support in

man-made opinions. But sometimes we do not know. Have we put man where only God should be?

Of every word that comes out of the mouth of God

Indeed, God's word must still test us. Before we hear His words of approval--"Good servant"--we must be tested by His word. As God gives us greater light and a deeper understanding of truth, it becomes evident whether we are still resolutely on His side, or whether we have developed a facility for imagining evidence, gathering human opinions and support in order to justify our rejection of that which is unpopular and inconvenient to us, that which brings our pride down to the dust.

Unwittingly, the sad way in which Jesus' contemporaries acted comes to mind. It is painful to note that those who developed such a spirit were leaders and legitimate members of the true people of God, all of them devout believers, who studied the Scriptures, who did not cease to pray, who did missionary work (Matt. 23:15), who went to church every Sabbath, and who gave tithes and offerings. All of this, however, did not prevent them from uniting in shouting, "Crucify Him!"

Imagine how your Savior would feel if He wanted to give you more light, if He wanted to prepare you for a significant breakthrough in His work, and you who gladly accepted Him years ago, you who are His representative, you who are "eloquent, learned, diligent, powerful, and fervent," were to now choose to reject Him in that

light which He sends, and which is new to you, for reasons similar to those which led the Jews to reject Christ Himself. You who are perplexed when you present Bible truth to others, and instead of accepting it, they manifest indifference and rejection because their spiritual leader has warned them against people like you, and against truths like those you present!

The truth about the Sabbath, the state of the dead, baptism, the second coming of the Lord, you think, are so clear in the Bible, that you don't understand how it can be that that neighbor, coworker or relative with whom you have spoken several times, does not want to accept them. The Holy Spirit works in his heart. Jesus is drawing him. You do your part. However, he rejects the truth because others do. And of course, he thinks it cannot be that so many are wrong, and you are right... above all, considering that those who reject him are good men, spiritual leaders, respectable and educated, and above all, they are the majority.

I think you understand the situation. However, after having compared yourself to Apollos, I would not in any way liken you to the conclusion that the writer considers himself a kind of Priscilla and Aquila, a bearer of "new light." This is definitely not the case.

However, after having meditated on matters concerning your relationship with God, I would like to ask you to accompany me a little longer, and take our thoughts from the personal realm to the broader horizon of Christ's relationship with his church.

The other disappointment

Ellen White once said that "the disappointment of Jesus is indescribable." [1]

Jesus is an expert in disappointments. He is a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. Lucifer, his most exalted cherub, chose to respond with hatred, envy, and jealousy to that love he had known like no other. His beloved creatures in Eden, Adam and Eve, decided that Satan would be their friend and God their enemy. In the "days of his flesh," when he became a man and "came to his own," his own family did not understand him. He was not believed in his land. Judas betrayed him. Peter denied him. No disciple followed him in his hour of trial. His people rejected him and crucified him. The world cast him off the earth through murder. His own church apostatized to such an extent that in the Middle Ages it became the most tyrannical and oppressive power of the authentic remnant people of God.

After all that, what disappointment could have been so great that it was impossible to describe it?

He who is all love, all power, the Infinite, the One who lives and was slain, who shed His blood for the world and particularly for the Church, experiences another disappointment about a hundred years ago, a disappointment so great that Ellen White calls it "indescribable." His remnant people, who were once oppressed and rejected, who are called to receive Him in the clouds of heaven

when He comes the second time, a people who have the accumulated experience of all the generations of believers before Him, proceed in such a way that they disappoint Christ beyond words, to the astonishment of the entire universe.

It is not necessary to insist that this is a solemn event, which demands the reverent and humble consideration of every member of its people. How long will we continue as if nothing had happened?

Indeed, God had a precious light for our beloved church and for the world! And at a conference held in Minneapolis in 1888, the figures of Priscilla and Aquila were once again brought to light. How will Apollos react this time?

It was never God's will that His end-time remnant people should be preparing believers for death for generation after generation, but for the coming of Jesus in glory. Shortly after He had been at Sinai, God said to His people:

"You have been long enough on this mountain. Set out, go to the mountain of the Amorite... I am giving the land to you. Go in and possess the land." (Deut 1:6-8)

Priscilla and Aquila went there, Caleb and Joshua. But they were not heard; their faith-filled proposal to go up in the name of Jehovah to conquer the giants and possess the promised land almost cost them being stoned. Then followed forty sad years of wandering in the

desert during which the Lord was with them, but not in a scheme to conquer Canaan.

What happened in 1888?

"In His great mercy the Lord sent a most precious message to His people through Elders Waggoner and Jones. This message was to present more prominently before the world the sublime Saviour, the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It presented justification by faith in the Surety; it invited the people to receive the righteousness of Christ, as manifested in obedience to all the commandments of God. ... It is the third angel's message, to be proclaimed with a loud voice, and accompanied by an abundant outpouring of His Spirit." [2]

God was virtually telling us: 'You have been in this world too long. Come, possess the land!'

And before Christ appeared in his second coming, he wanted to come to his people in the form of a message, in the gentle voice of the Holy Spirit. A message that would result in victory over the giant of sin, and that would soon lead the Adventist people to live the glorious culmination of their evangelical commission.

According to Ellen White, this message of Christ and His righteousness was "the beginning of the light of the angel whose glory shall fill the whole earth," "the loud cry". [3] As with the "midnight cry" of 1844, in 1888 Ellen White heard the messengers

from Minneapolis, so joyful and excited was she that she found it difficult to sleep at night. Two months later, an amendment to the Constitution was on the table in the United States Senate that would have led to a national Sunday law (it was already in effect in several states). The signs in the sun, moon, and stars had previously been given. Apparently, everything was ready in the world. But...

Were his people prepared?

Did we react better than Israel did at the foot of Sinai? Is the earth illuminated by its glory today, more than a hundred years later?

"Unwillingness to give up preconceived opinions and accept this truth was the chief basis of the opposition manifested at Minneapolis to the Lord's message as expounded by Brethren E.J. Waggoner and A.T. Jones. By stirring up this opposition Satan succeeded in preventing the special power of the Holy Spirit which God longed to impart to our brethren from flowing to them in a great measure. The enemy prevented them from obtaining that efficacy which might have been theirs in carrying the truth to the world as the apostles proclaimed it after the day of Pentecost. The light that is to lighten the whole earth with its glory was resisted, and has been largely kept from the world by the course of our own brethren." [4]

E.J. Waggoner related that "many years ago" while he was in a tent listening to a servant of the Lord preach the word, he was suddenly enveloped in a great radiance and had a glimpse of Christ crucified for him; the fact that God loved him and that Christ gave Himself

for him personally was revealed to him in a special way. The light which shone upon him that day from the cross of Christ caused him to realize that the whole Bible, and particularly the third angel's message, had Christ as its center as a gift--God's message of love to every man. He determined to devote his life to searching the Bible more and more in the light of Calvary and to making it clear to others.

This time, Priscilla and Aquila were not mere laymen. E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones are probably among the Adventist theologians who have written the most articles and books. They were not, however, the revered, charismatic leaders whom God could not use. They have the unique honor of having received more than three hundred statements of approval in Ellen White's literature. She called them "deputized messengers of the Lord," possessing "heavenly credentials"; to reject them, she said, was to reject Christ, who should be recognized in His messengers.

Great unknowns

So why do we know so little today about the writings of the messengers the Lord chose? We have read:

"By stirring up this opposition, Satan succeeded in hindering the special power of the Holy Spirit which God longed to impart to our brethren from flowing to a great extent."

If Satan succeeded in having the message rejected in spite of the repeated warnings and entreaties of a living prophetess, what would he not accomplish later when the two messengers lost their way? And what would he not accomplish still later when the voice of Ellen White was no longer heard? Tremendous prejudice spread throughout the world church at the sad final path taken by these two men of God. That sad finale seems to be all that many today would want to know about "1888."

The harsh criticism, discredit and oblivion that the two messengers from Minneapolis have "enjoyed" in our official literature--for decades--has made me think more than once of the way my history book described Martin Luther: "Luther was a vicious and ambitious friar." What a difference it makes who writes history! But a thousand opinions and writings cannot change one iota the truth of what happened.

Surely, we should be interested today in what constituted the beginning of the latter rain and the loud cry , as well as the historical events that we are the protagonists of as a people, since, as Jorge Santayana said, "a nation that does not know its history is condemned to repeat it."

What did Ellen White write about this?

"If the Lord's messengers, after having stood for the truth for a time, should fall under temptation and dishonor Him who has appointed

their work, would that prove that the message was not true? No, for the Bible is true."[5]

Indeed, like every genuine revival and reform movement, the message of the 1888 messengers was solidly biblical. The message presented the forgiveness of God, the incomparable charms of a near Savior, the righteousness of Christ "in the likeness of sinful flesh," in a way that was parallel and consistent with the unique Adventist understanding of the cleansing of the sanctuary, thus constituting "the third angel's message, indeed."

"It is quite possible that Elder Jones or Elder Waggoner might be overcome by the temptations of the enemy; but if this were to happen, it would not prove that they had not had a message from God, or that the work they did was a mistake. If this were to happen, how many would not take that position, entering into fatal delusion because they were not under the control of the Spirit of God."[6]

Of course, a fatal deception is the last thing we need today. Truth, the truth as it is in Christ, is the only thing that can overcome lukewarmness, that can bring about the recovery of the first love, and the triumph of Laodicea.

"The message given to us by A.T. Jones and E.J. Waggoner is God's message to the church at Laodicea."[7]

But unlike what many today understand as the "message to Laodicea"--or "direct testimony"--the presentations and writings of

the "delegated messengers of God" did not consist of anything like a list of condemnatory accusations, but rather were a refreshing revelation of the gospel of Christ crucified, as the power of God for salvation to all who believe. When you go deeper into it, the Bible will be a new book for you. The things of the world will cease to be of value to you. What before seemed imperative to you will become wonderful evangelical habilitations. That is the humble testimony of the one who writes these lines.

Coinciding with the growing worldwide interest in the message of righteousness by faith as the Lord sent it to us at that conference in Minneapolis, many of the books and articles by Jones and Waggoner containing the message that made Ellen White exclaim: "Every fiber of my heart said, Amen!" are being translated and reissued. Hopefully, they will soon be in church bookstores. In the meantime, they are available on this website for free download.

I pray that your heart will also say Amen! Let us thank God that Priscilla and Aquila are still among us.

Notes:

1. RH, December 15, 1904.
2. Testimonies to Ministers, 91, 92.
3. TM 91-93; RH, November 22, 1892; Letter B2A, 1892; MS. 15, 1888, Special Testimonies, Series A, No. 6, p. 19, etc.
4. 1 Selected Messages, 276.
5. The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials, 1025.
6. The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials, 1045.
7. The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials, 1052.