

Such Were Some Of You

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church
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**This Sermon is available for listening or downloading on our Audio Sermons web page*

Last Sabbath evening I attended a Maranatha International meeting, which was truly wonderful and inspiring. Laura Noble, wife of Don Noble who heads up Maranatha, related this incident, which took place when she was returning from a mission trip. While in a far-off overseas airport awaiting travel connections, someone who appeared to be a fellow American approached her. It's always nice to greet someone from your own country when you're far from home! With a quizzical smile, he looked at her then asked, "Are you a Seventh-day Adventist?"

Surprised, Sue said, "Yes! How did you know that?" "Well," the gentleman explained, "There are only three things that I've observed to be world-wide. Shell Oil, Coca-cola and Seventh-day Adventists. You don't look like Shell Oil or Coca-cola, therefore you must be a Seventh-day Adventist."

What a wonderful comment! We listened that evening to encouraging reports of the progress of our church throughout the world. The work of God is going forward! We heard about the need to build churches in countries like Mozambique, India and Ecuador. We were informed of the advance of the "one-day-church" program that is providing modest but utilitarian structures in which believers can worship, structures that can be erected in one day and give identity to our church. You can learn more about this program by clicking on the following link. http://www.maranatha.org/Template_Load.aspx?PageID=316

Pastor Ron Watts, who had just returned from India last week, told of how the Adventist church, after about 100 years of mission work, in the year 2000 had about 250,000 members in India. Through the blessing of the Lord, in the last 10 years an additional million members have been added to our church in India!

The church in Africa is making large strides. Pastor Watts shared with us that about 4 out every 10 Seventh-day Adventists in the world live in Africa. The leadership in Africa has requested 100,000 of these one-day churches to be built to accommodate the new believers there. Just because it may seem that the Gospel is not making much of a dent in our country, doesn't mean that the Spirit isn't at

work. Pray that His Spirit will continue this work in the world and in our hearts to prepare us for Jesus' return.

Today we study one of the most meaningful and encouraging passages in the Bible. You have to read the passage in its entirety to get the full measure of the Gospel blessing. Paul wrote, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." I Corinthians 6:9-11.

Corinth had a reputation as being a rough and profligate city. Situated on the narrow Isthmus of Corinth, it became prosperous, controlling the stone-paved road which connected the upper mainland of Greece with the lower section, the Peloponnese. This road, built in the sixth century B.C. and called the diolkos ("haul-across") made it possible to avoid the difficult and time-consuming trip around the southern extremity of the Peloponnese.

While on his first missionary trip, Luke reports that Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half sharing "Christ and Him crucified" (I Corinthians 2:2) with the people of the city, supporting himself by his trade of tent making. Later, upon hearing of some difficulties within the church, Paul sent a letter of encouragement and correction to them.

In this letter he reminds them of the things he taught them, that the "unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom." We noted last week that the "righteous nation which keeps the truth" (Isaiah 26:2) will be admitted through the lovely and lustrous gates of pearl. Jesus related through John that the ones who "do His commandments" (Revelation 22:14) will gain the right to enter through the gates into the city. The apostle Paul is speaking to this same issue of forsaking the ways and practices of the world in his letter to the believers in Corinth.

Incidentally, this very passage has been in the news of late. It became the subject of a recent lawsuit. Bradley Fowler, a homosexual from Michigan, in July of 2008 filed suits totaling \$70 million against Zondervan Publishing Company and Thomas Nelson Publishing, printers of the New King James Bible claiming that the publishers have "violated his rights by distributing Bibles that use the word 'homosexuals' in I Corinthians 6:9." He claims that he and other homosexuals

have suffered “verbal abuse, discrimination, episodes of hate, and physical violence...including murder” due to the words in this passage.

Fowler’s lawsuit seeks to place homosexuality in a category that is “sacrosanct” and above criticism. Other countries, as we’ve noted before, have passed laws which categorize as “hate speech” any negative reference to homosexuality as a sin, placing those who preach the Bible in jeopardy of committing a “crime” for declaring the truth of God as revealed in Scripture. Right now, our country is on a path to do the very same thing. The “Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009” has been passed by the House and awaits a vote in the Senate, perhaps to come even this week. If passed, it will give encouragement to those like Bradley Fowler who find uncomfortable the clear teaching of God’s Word.

In this part of his letter, Paul mentions some of the sins that would keep one out of the kingdom. But his list is not exhaustive. Maybe the sin Satan is using against you isn’t on this list. Maybe it’s one of the more subtle, sophisticated but nonetheless lethal sins like pride, selfishness, gossiping or appetite abuse. It doesn’t matter. Jesus can save us from all sin. As Pastor Morris Vendon used to preach, “God doesn’t know a sin He doesn’t hate; a sinner He doesn’t love; a life He can’t change and a better time than now.”

The thrust of what Paul is saying is contained in that phrase “such were some of you.” I invite you to savor the import of that phrase. Let the positive impact of what Paul is talking about brighten your soul. Allow Jesus’ admonition, “Let these words sink down into your ears” (Luke 9:44) apply to this phrase. I hope this week and beyond this phrase comes back to your mind and you reflect on its meaning in your life.

See in this phrase the forgiving, restoring and loving power of Jesus. “Such were some of you.” The word “were” is in the past tense. Some of the people in the church at Corinth used to be people who practiced the things Paul talked about. They weren’t those people anymore. That life was in the past. Christ had changed them. He had taken from their lives the polluting influence of those sins and washed them clean through His saving blood. They were changed people. They weren’t the same as they used to be. Such is the power of God at work in the lives of those who give Him their hearts! Praise God!

His enemies thought they had stigmatized Him with a discrediting label when they sneered, “This Man receives sinners.” How thankful we should be that what they said, though in disgust, was factually true! He came for “sick” people, not for those

who are “well.” The moment anyone comes to the way of thinking that he or she is “okay” and no longer in need of God’s saving grace, that person should be wary and cautious! That person is in trouble! The time when we are not in need of God’s grace will never be. “Such were some of you” is a phrase that should apply to each one of us. If God hasn’t changed us; if we’re the “same” as we’ve always been, then we had better give serious attention to our spiritual condition. As Christians, we should anticipate change. We should celebrate the fact that we’re different than we used to be.

I remember taking vacation trips as a youngster to Yosemite National Park here in California. We weren’t rich, but mom and dad usually packed the kids in the car for a summer vacation once a year. Among the places we traveled, I enjoyed Yosemite very much. The old Coleman tent would have ridden on top of the car and then set up in one of the campsites in Tuolumne Meadows in the eastern part of Yosemite. Dad would take a watermelon and find a secluded place in the Tuolumne River near our camp site and secure it underwater beneath the icy river to give it just the right chill at dinnertime.

We always went up old Highway 395 to get there, going through Big Pine and Bishop, then turning off to Highway 120 west at Lee Vining, where we once had to fill up the gas tank at the (then) outrageous price of \$.49 per gallon. This town, established in 1852 as a mining camp by someone named Leroy Vining, was first called “Lakeview” because it overlooks Mono Lake, but when the post office discovered that there was already another town in California with that name, it was given the unique name of Lee Vining, after its founder.

Once on Highway 120 we’d wind up the serpentine road which quickly rose more than 3,000 feet, from an elevation of 6,781 feet at Lee Vining to 9,943 feet at Tioga pass on a road less than 13 miles in length. What I remember, as we neared the top of the ascent and my ears were “popping” to adjust for the change in pressure, is looking out the car window with a mixture of fear and wonderment at steepness of the road toward the valley below. Were we really down there just a few minutes before? It seemed so far below! Have you ever been on that road?

The Christian pathway is similar to this. As Jesus leads us forward and upward, once in a while we slip a glance backward. It’s not a good idea to spend a lot of time doing this; we’d get discouraged. You can’t live life in the rearview mirror. But once in a while we can’t help but look back, just for a brief moment. It surprises us to think that at one time we were “down there.” Paul is alluding to this when he reminded his Corinthian friends, “Such were some of you.”

I would not be able to tell you what that means to you personally, but I can tell you that sometimes I'm shocked when I glance backward on the road of my life, just as I did when approaching Tioga Pass at the east entrance to Yosemite. It causes me shock and dismay when I reflect on the "down there" of my former life and think that I used to watch "that" or go "there" or listen to "that" or think about "that." The habits that pleased the flesh had a grip on all of us, in one form or another. "Such were some of you." The beauty of what Paul is saying is that we don't need to stay "down there." Jesus has the capability of changing us and lifting us to a higher level of living. We can climb to the Tioga Pass of Christian living. "Such were some of you." Different patterns of thinking and doing He brings into our lives, in preparing us to live with holy angels in heaven. The reformation of our characters through the grace of Christ is the purpose of life.

As part of the Sabbath evening vespers program I attended last week, I heard the inspiring testimony of Bruce Fjarli, of Medford, Oregon. He told of how he had been raised in a Christian home, but left for another life. He became involved in many of the habits Satan brings to harass us, including alcohol and tobacco.

Then, thanks to many godly prayers, Bruce turned his life over to God and began a new way of living. The taste for alcohol was taken away immediately. The victory over smoking took a little longer, about two years, but the day came when Bruce smoked his last cigarette. One day while Bruce was sitting in an easy chair watching a religious program on television, he saw the need for mission work in India and wondered what he might be able to do about it. While that question was ringing in his mind, a telephone call came from his father, Merlin, with the suggestion, "I think we should consider building schools and churches in India."

Collaborating with Maranatha International, the Fjarli family began a series of mission projects to bless and benefit souls in India. I think they've sponsored 15 such projects now, including the building of a 1,200 capacity boarding school and children's home near Cuddapah, a project in which I was privileged to participate. Who would have thought one trapped in a world of alcohol would become a builder of Christian schools and churches? Who would have thought that one who spent his time and money collecting rock and roll albums would find joy in writing Christian music? "Such were some of you."

Think about the biography of the writer of that passage himself, the apostle Paul. Once a persecutor and murderer of Christians, a hater of "the Way," God changed him and he became an evangelist for Christ. When he wrote to the Corinthians,

“Such were some of you,” he probably couldn’t help thinking of how God had given new direction to his own life.

Think about a young woman who lived in a home that knew about God, but who felt the tug of another way of life. She fell into prostitution, selling her body for the wages of iniquity. Uncomfortable with that type of living in her small village where everyone knew her, she took up residence in the northern town of Magdala. Christ rebuked the demons of passion in her heart and she was changed. Read the gospels, and you will see that the Mary who was sister of Martha and Lazarus, the Mary who anointed the feet of Jesus with the fragrant ointment days before His crucifixion, is doubtless the one also called Mary of Magdala, or Mary Magdalene. “Such were some of you.” What a glorious promise is in that phrase!

Many times what is true in the physical realm is also true in the spiritual realm. We can learn about the invisible by what we can see in the visible world. When the Lord created the earth, He established order among the species. There’s a certain phrase that the Lord employed six times in Genesis 1, when He made living things, that expresses that principle. It is the phrase “according to its kind” as found in the first chapter of the Bible. That phrase means that cats beget cats, dogs beget dogs, and so on. Did you know that that phrase is also a Gospel promise?

Let’s think first of all how this phrase, “according to its kind,” applies in the natural world. In the natural world, while there might be slight variations (“micro-evolution”) within the species, there are clear boundaries established which are not crossed. We read, “Then God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself on the earth, and it was so.’” Genesis 1:11. You will find that phrase, “according to its kind” in verse 12, verse 21 (“according to their kind”), verse 24 (twice) and verse 25.

Then in verse 26 we read, “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.’” Given the context of chapter one of Genesis, with the frequent repetition of the phrase “according to its kind” as it refers to plant and animal life, it’s almost as if the 26th verse could read, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in Our image, according to Our kind.’” Mankind was made in the likeness and image of his Creator. David wrote, “What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels.” Psalm 8:4, 5. Your Bible, if it is like mine, may have an explanatory note next to the word “angels,” indicating that in Hebrew the word is actually Elohim, or God. David wrote, “You have made him a little lower than Elohim,” a word in Hebrew which means “mighty ones,” and frequently applies to

the Godhead. It is the word for “God” in Genesis 1. We were made in God’s image and likeness.

Of course, sin entered the picture, and that image and likeness of God has become marred. But then God through His gracious gift stepped in and made provision for our salvation, making it possible for humans to be re-created, or born again. “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” John 1:12, 13.

Do you see how the principle of “according to its kind,” as demonstrated in the first chapter of Genesis, applies also in the spiritual realm? Like begets like. The principle of generation within the species is clearly announced by God in the first chapter of the Bible. This of course, flies in the face of Darwinian evolution, which contends that cross-species generation exists and explains the origin of life from slime to splendor. This theory has no basis in fact: no competent scientific exhibits have been adduced to substantiate the transition from one species to another. No “link” has ever been produced that clearly establishes a conversion between the human race and the rest of the animal kingdom. Satan, who personally witnessed the creation of this earth by God, fiercely desires that the knowledge of the Creator be hidden, corrupted or denied by man, knowing that if he is successful in shielding a person from a knowledge of the Creator, he will have won that person’s allegiance.

But a correct understanding of Genesis 1 is important not only to understand and appreciate the “God of generation,” the God of the first creation, but also the “God of re-generation,” the God of our re-creation. The “according to its kind” principle that governs the orderly propagation of the species in the physical realm is also a potent promise in the spiritual realm! When one is “born of God,” that must mean that godly traits and characteristics will be embedded in the (new) nature of that child. “According to its kind” not only applies to cats and dogs, but to those who are born of the Spirit, who experience the new birth and are now children of God.

The apostle John understood this truth and wrote, “Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him.” I John 3:7-9.

How did John say this process begins? “As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God.” That’s our part; to receive Him into our hearts. The Bible pictures Jesus standing, knocking at the door of our hearts. The God of the universe, the Creator Omnipotent, requesting entrance into our hearts? Yes, that’s how the Bible describes it. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” Revelation 3:20. Have you received Christ into your life, my friend? You’ve heard Him knocking, haven’t you? Have you opened the door and said, “Please come in.” You may have many questions, but don’t let your fears or uncertainties prevent you from the greatest experience of your life. In due time He’ll answer all your questions. Some He’ll answer here; others in the world to come. But let Him come in! It’s not hard; just say, “Come into my life, Lord Jesus,” and He will.

“As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God.” The word “right” in that verse is the word *exousia*, which means, “right, authority or power.” It is true that when Jesus died on the cross He benefited all mankind, including those who would never accept Him, but the relationship which results in our being saved for eternal life becomes a reality when we receive Him and become born again as children of God. When our permission is given, His Spirit begins a work in our life that conforms us to His likeness. Being born of God, we become like Him. We are created “according to His kind,” following the model of Genesis 1, in which “like begets like.”

Things begin to change. Old habits begin to drop off. Old things lose their attraction. Old practices lose their appeal. We become new people in Christ. The day comes when we look behind us, down the path of life from “Tioga Pass” toward “Lee Vining,” with wonderment and say, “Was I really down there?” “Such were some of you.” Oh, the power and benevolence of our gracious God!