

# **BURIED TREASURE<sup>1</sup>**

**By Paul Penno Jr.**

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Juma appeared to be a man who had lost his mind. His wife, children, neighbors, and relatives could not fathom the reason for his strange behavior.

He had always been a hard-working father, saving what he could of his meager earnings, trying to provide for his family. He treasured what few possessions he had. When he was able to buy his wife some fancy new clothes, his face lit up like a light shining in an alabaster bowl as he watched her display them. His smile was like a sunrise as he watched his children enjoy some new toy or perhaps a special sweet he was able to buy for them.

But what has come into him now? Is he demented?

First, he has sold his tractor, on which he depends for his daily livelihood, and his truck as well. Now he has gathered up all his own clothes and rushed them to second-hand store, and has disposed of the lot. And while his astonished wife weeps and raves, he has swept all her precious dresses into a bundle and trudged off with them to get the best price possible at the auction.

Almost hysterical, she tries to warn the children to hide their things, when here comes Juma again with that mysterious look in his clever eyes. He grabs their things and rushes off to sell them too. The

cow, the goats, the sheep, what few they have, he drives off to the market. His relatives come with a perplexed look on their faces. Never have they known Juma to act in such a strange way. His poor wife wrings her hands in desperation, and all she or the neighbors can do is to shake their heads in wonder.

Juma returns with a furniture dealer who enters the house and appraises the value of the beds, the chairs, the table, even the empty cupboards. They agree on a price, and in a few moments the humble home is emptied of everything. Not a saleable item remains of Juma's and his family's possessions!

The only smiling face visible anywhere among the family and relatives is his. With a happy glint in his eyes he counts the cash he has realized from these sudden, frenzied sales, and with a barely audible mutter, "I'll be back," he dashes off.

"What has gotten into him?" his brother asks Juma's wife.

"I can't image," she replies.

"When did this strange behavior begin?" asks a neighbor.

"Well," she muses, "it began last night when he came home from plowing in the rented field where he is trying to make a garden. He was different. I have never seen him act this way before—he hardly spoke, he only tasted the delicious supper I had prepared; he barely noticed the children. And once I awoke during the night to hear him muttering in his sleep, "The box! The box! I caught it with my plough!" But I don't know what he meant. He

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 119:99, 100. 565, 191.

seemed delirious, so I punched him to get him out of his dream.

“He groaned, then turned over and went back to sleep. Soon he was talking in his sleep again. This time I heard him say, “I must buy the field! Even if it takes every coin I have!” She adds, “I just don’t know what to make of it all.”

While the perplexed family and neighbors were still whispering among themselves outside the empty home, Juma came striding down the street with a look of triumph on his face as if he had conquered an empire. He was waving a sheet of paper in his hands. “Look,” he cried, “the title-deed! It’s ours!” He swept his wife up in his arms, delirious with joy, then caught and hugged each of his bewildered children.

“My dear wife and children,” he announced, “you think I’ve gone berserk, but I haven’t. I knew what I did. Don’t cry for your ragged clothes I have sold, or for your cracked dishes and beat-up pots and pans I have hauled off to the market, dear wife and children. And don’t mourn for the loss of our donkey and cart by which I have earned a pitiful income, or for the patched up furniture that is gone. As of this moment, we are wealthy beyond our wildest dreams . . . I have bought the field!”

“What field? What do you mean?” demanded his still perplexed wife.

Then Juma gathered the little group around him to tell the story. Yesterday he had been plowing in the sunshine, his weary body bathed with sweat. “Must I always toil like this,” he asked himself, “and earn so little?” Then, as his faithful donkey pulled on the

plough he felt it strike something solid buried in the ground and it wasn’t a stone. You can feel the difference as you grip the plough if it strikes a buried stone or a buried box. It was wood!

Why should there be a box buried in the landlord’s field? Juma didn’t know. As a child he had heard tales of occasional lucky people who had discovered buried boxes of treasure in various parts of the Middle East. Some unfortunate rich man of ancient times had buried his gold, silver, and jewels when he heard of alien armies marching to conquer the land; he would return after the war was over, and recover his wealth, for only he could know where it was hidden. But sometimes he did not return, for the rich man would be lost in the war, and his box would remain where he hid it.

Juma looked this way and that to be sure no one was watching, and getting down on his hands and knees, he scraped the earth away until the old treasure chest lay exposed. Carefully he opened the rotting lid, and stared in astonishment at the abundance of gold, silver, and precious stones glinting in the afternoon sunlight.

What to do? The only legal way to possess this fabulous wealth would be to own the land in which it is buried. He replaced the cover and packed the earth over his discovery, and resumed plowing, his mind racing in a search for some way to buy the field. The landlord had once offered to sell it to him, but Juma realized that the price demanded would take the sum total of *all* his possessions.

He didn't dare to tell anyone of his find, not even his wife. Hence his strange behavior when the sun rose the next morning.

This true story has thrilled untold millions of people for 2,000 years. It illustrates the value of finding the truth about life, God's revelation of the future, the path to peace and true well-being. The treasure hidden in the field represents a knowledge of God's way to the "more . . . abundant life" that we ought to enjoy.

The Bible in your hand can give you a knowledge to live by. King Solomon, who was known for his great wisdom, for a time lost his truth in God. Of this time he said:

"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher, "utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless. What does a man gain from his labor at which he toils under the sun?" (Eccl. 1:2, 3, N. I. V.).

Fortunately King Solomon recovered God's true treasure and found lasting happiness and the real meaning of life. Yet most people today spend their lives searching for treasure where it cannot be found. Their lives end in desperation and sorrow.

It is not that God has secreted his "wealth," hoping we won't find it. On the contrary, it is He who is guiding the plough of our lives to strike the treasure box itself. He *wants* us to possess it.

God sent a message through an ancient prophet, Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiyah. These beautiful words describe the value of priceless spiritual treasure:

"Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom  
Or the strong man boast of his strength,  
Or the rich man boast of his riches,

But let him who boasts boast about this:  
That he understands and knows Me,  
That I am the Lord, who exercises kindness,  
Justice and righteousness on earth." (Jer. 9:23, 24).

Truth is more important than everything else. "Buy the truth, and don't ever sell it!" (Prov. 23:23). The Lord Jesus promises, "You will know the truth" (John 8:32; better than inheriting billions). And more, "The truth will make you free"—keep you and save you from stumbling, and from selling your precious "birthright" when the inevitable test of the "mark of the beast" comes.

To put the issue in plain, awkward language: shall this church be the Seventh-day Adventist Church, or must it be changed (imperceptibly) into a Seventh Day Baptist Church?<sup>2</sup>

What is a "Seventh Day Baptist"? A former Seventh-day Adventist from whom the 1844 cleansing of the sanctuary idea has been subtracted (the one truth that has made us the unique people that we are). Seventh Day Baptists are fine people, that's not the issue; but generally speaking, confused, having lost the reason why we exist.

"The correct understanding of the ministration in the heavenly sanctuary is the foundation of our faith," "our faith" being the unique teachings of Seventh-day Adventists that make us different from the Roman Catholic or Evangelical Protestant churches."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This is what Elder Louis R. Conradi wanted.

<sup>3</sup> *Evangelism*, p. 221.

“[It’s] the central pillar that sustains the structure of our position.”<sup>4</sup>

She was right! If “the sanctuary in heaven is the very center of Christ’s work in behalf of men,”<sup>5</sup> then what Christ is ministering there (to those who will receive it) is the *experience* of justification by faith. That’s the business He is doing in His “office.” Our concern is—how does the sanctuary message relate to that special truth?

The basic problem: “What Is the Meaning of the Judgment Today?” What has been misunderstood as the sanctuary message has always been only a cold theological doctrine. It has never become a heart-gripping, heart-melting truth. They never learned to love the message. It left them cold, and probably in many cases, worse than that—it left them dominated by nightmarish fear.

They saw Christ’s ministry in the Most Holy Apartment as a court trial where our very existence is jeopardized. A rejection slip in the investigative judgment was a consignment to hell. So this distorted view of the doctrine was not mere theological trivia; its side effect to them was spiritual terror.

But the issue could not be more important to understand. The most disturbing statement Ellen White ever made makes simple common sense. It is a brief passage<sup>6</sup> where she says that if we reject a change in Christ’s sanctuary ministry in 1844, we

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<sup>4</sup> Letter 126, 1897.

<sup>5</sup> *Evangelism*, p. 222.

<sup>6</sup> *Early Writings*, pp. 55, 56. It is developed further on pages 260, 261.

lay ourselves open to a deception of the false christ posing in place of the True One, putting on a show that is complete with miracles. By now, the counterfeit has become extremely sophisticated.

It’s not a fear-inducing divine order, “Get perfect or be lost!” This idea of divine imperiousness has discouraged youth and fueled this widespread confusion. God is not trying to filter people out of His kingdom; He’s making them ready to get in and live happily there forever after.

The heavenly sanctuary can never be “cleansed” until first of all the hearts of God’s people are cleansed. That’s simple! And it’s far more than a legalistic accounting trick whereby God looks the other way while we continue sinning. The missing factor is supplied by a new and clearer grasp of justification by faith, which Ellen White saw makes the [1888] message become “the third angel’s message in verity.”<sup>7</sup>

“Faith” believes when some women tell you on Sunday morning that Jesus is risen from the dead, and you haven’t seen Him. Faith doesn’t wait to put your fingers in the holes in His hands or in His side, as Thomas insisted. According to 1 John 4:16, truth requires a greater commitment than mere intellectual conviction: “We have known *and* believed.” That’s how we follow the true Christ in His ministry in the Most Holy Apartment—convincing objective evidence plus a heart appreciation of it.

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<sup>7</sup> *Review and Herald*, (April 1, 1890).

It's simply letting the Holy Spirit do what He wants—forgive us all our sins and reconcile our alienated hearts to the One who is our Savior. It is not our job to make ourselves “perfect,” and it never has been. It's the Savior's! But it's our job to stop hindering Him and let Him do it through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit who is continually dredging up buried sins we never dreamed were still inside. You can say “Yes! Thank You!” or you can say, “Go Away! Let me alone! I don't want to overcome.” Thus the “Judgment” is ongoing, 24/7.

The ancient little “day of atonement” once a year taught precious good news: “On that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the Lord” (including previously unknown ones, Lev 16:30). Who did the actual work? The priest—a symbol of our Lord and Savior, Jesus. The people cooperated with the priest. They kept the little day of atonement sacred. Thus we are to observe the great original Day of Atonement, which has been “now” ever since 1844, the end of the 2300 year prophecy.

Look at #191 in the hymnal, “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling.” John and Charles Wesley sensed the need for something not yet clearly understood in 1747. Look at stanza 4: “Finish, then, Thy new creation; /pure and spotless let us be; /let us see Thy great salvation /perfectly restored in Thee.” There's how the sanctuary is to be “cleansed”!

The Wesleys were trying to get their fingertips on the special truth that informed the 1888 message—that message of Christ's righteousness. It will yet

lighten the earth with glory. In the 1888 message the Wesleys could have realized what they were looking for, but they were too early.

The cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary makes a difference in practical day-by-day living. If it's impossible for the sanctuary in heaven to be “cleansed” or “justified” or “made right” (different meanings of the Hebrew verb translated “cleansed” in Daniel 8:14) until the hearts of God's people on earth first are cleansed, then that has an important conclusion: Christ as our High Priest is specializing now in convicting His people of previously unknown sin. As each is seen and forsaken for His sake day by day, the special work of cleansing goes on. The High Priest plans for it to become complete. And He wants it to be soon. He'll do it if His people don't resist Him.

This is not merely a legal “assumption” on God's part, something He knows well is not yet reality. When Revelation 14:12 declares, “Here are they that keep the commandments of God”—it has to be true. These people have “overcome, even as [Christ] overcame” (Rev. 3:21). They have not merely been legally accounted so, contrary to reality. The objective gospel has at last become totally subjectively demonstrated. Don't ridicule this solemn truth as so many do, for if you do you'll be like “the lord on whose hand the king leaned” who ridiculed Elisha's prophecy of a miracle “tomorrow about this time.” He got to see it, but never participated in the blessing.<sup>8,9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> 2 Kings 6:32-7:20.

<sup>9</sup> See Luke 20:35.

When Ellen White speaks of the “eighteen hundred years” of Christ’s ministry in the First Apartment, at no time did He have a *corporate body* of believers on earth whose faith had thus matured. No one was translated during those long centuries. But now comes a change in His ministry; He’s in the *Second* Apartment. It’s the cosmic Day of Atonement. The heavenly sanctuary is at last “cleansed” in that now He has a body of people whose hearts have been healed of every root of alienation from God. The “atonement” becomes a reconciliation with Himself, complete on the antitypical Day of Atonement.

When John and Charles Wesley were trying to get a grip on this, they were bitterly opposed, even by Augustus Toplady, author of our lovely hymn, “Rock of Ages.” The very idea of overcoming fully “even as [Christ] overcame” was considered fanatical, and labeled “perfectionism.” Even today there are devout people (even as Toplady) who see the [1888] idea of the cleansing of the sanctuary as an impossible “perfectionism,” discouraging to think of. The reason is that there’s a missing link in their understanding.

The [1888] idea of the cleansing of the sanctuary is not that God’s people do the work. The High Priest does it; and His people stop resisting Him “in His office work” (to borrow Ellen White’s expression). They *let* Him do it. They take away the roadblocks in His way. Never does the Bible say that the ancient Israelites had to cleanse the sanctuary. Their high priest always did it.

Prominent in the message is this idea of ceasing to resist our Lord. Ellen White stated it clearly: “The sinner may resist this love, may refuse to be drawn to Christ; but if he does not resist he will be drawn to Jesus . . . in repentance for his sins.”<sup>10</sup> To stop resisting Jesus—that’s the essence of this cleansing of the sanctuary idea.

Serious distortion of this good news has caused some to think this is “perfectionism,” which is a heresy. But add to that twisting of the truth the universal conviction of how imperfect we all are, and like cooking a terrible stew you come up with the idea of doleful SDA hermits only a step short of self-flagellation. Who wants such a sad life, is youths’ idea.

To correct this distortion and create the happiest Christ-like people ever on earth was God’s purpose in sending “us” the “most precious message” [of 1888]—the grand antitype of the kindergarten type that came every “tenth day of the seventh month.” That day ended with an entire nation walking on air! They were so happy once again to be at-one-with God and with one another. Day of Atonement “most precious” truth is powerful!

The difference between Christ’s ministry in the First Apartment and in the Second is what He *does* in His believers. Up until 1844, it was totally in preparing believers to die, so they could be “accounted worthy” to come up in the first resurrection. And that is a great work for our High

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<sup>10</sup> *Steps to Christ*, p. 27 (1892).

Priest to do. If any of us are called to die, may we be prepared!

But when looked at in context, His ministry in the *Second Apartment* is intended especially to prepare a people to be translated without tasting death. While they are still in the flesh, they must see Jesus, must meet Him face to face, which only “the pure in heart” can endure. These must be “alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord. . . . and shall be caught up together with [the resurrected saints of all ages] to meet the Lord in the air.”<sup>11</sup>

The Seventh-day Adventist sanctuary message makes special sense in the light of Christ’s Matthew 24 sermon. It was heaven’s purpose that the second coming be within the “generation” of those who saw the last of the celestial “signs” of His near return—the falling of the stars. That’s how the pioneers understood it, and that’s what the words of Jesus actually say. The otherwise inexplicable delay is the result of “resisting our Lord in His office work.” The gospel commission in the light of Revelation 18:1-4 could have been accomplished within a few years of 1888.<sup>12</sup> The delay in finishing the work of cleansing the heavenly sanctuary is not due to computer backlogs in the heavenly offices, or to any angelic inefficiency. The problem lies with “us.”

The good news [1888] idea also relieves minds of perplexity about what Christ is doing now. Is He vacationing? Or absorbed in some other corner of

His great universe? What He does is obviously “work,” for the great controversy with Satan is still going on, and the great enemy is working very hard. There is no time for Jesus to take a vacation. Battles more real than any fought with weapons are going on. It’s only right that God’s people sympathize with Christ in these contests. That’s what Ellen White means about following Christ into the Most Holy Apartment.<sup>13</sup>

The Good News [1888] idea of the cleansing of the sanctuary also imparts to those who understand it a new motivation for following Christ. Fear of the Investigative Judgment is “cast out.” This again is part of the cosmic Day of Atonement—a time for at-last-realized oneness with Christ. It delivers from fear as much as He Himself was delivered from fear in His life on earth. Our natural self-centered concerns for salvation are sublimated in a higher concern for the triumph of Christ. This again is a result of the Day of Atonement oneness with Him.

The Sanctuary truth leads directly to the Bride of Christ making herself ready. That “oneness” is something that has never happened in all past history—“the marriage of the Lamb is come, for His wife hath made herself ready.” Something special is ready for those who are invited to “the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:6-9). As individuals, all (including those of the last days) are “guests at the wedding.” But as a corporate body, the church

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Thess. 4:15-18.

<sup>12</sup> *General Conference Bulletin*, 1893, p. 419; *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, p. 1130.

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<sup>13</sup> Ellen G. White, “Need of Earnestness in the Cause of God,” *The Advent Review And Sabbath Herald* 67, 8 (February 25, 1890), pp. 113-114.

of the great Day of Atonement becomes the Bride of Christ.

Our first natural reaction is, “it’s too good to be true.” Anticipating our temptation to doubt, the angel told John, “Write: for these words are true and faithful” (Rev. 21:5).

The message of the True Witness to the “angel of the church of the Laodiceans” turns out to be the Sanctuary truth itself. This message has not become a museum piece in our denominational attic; it grips hearts worldwide today wherever it is presented. The Holy Spirit impresses souls who seek to follow Christ of His much more abounding grace for overcoming.

On that ancient one day quarrels were gone, alienations healed; husbands/wives recovered the love that once brought them together; the most alluring idolatry (it constantly ensnared them!) was abhorred because something better had been tasted on this great day—the gospel. It’s “Elijah’s” “turned hearts”! It was God’s plan that our “Day of Atonement” should end with the reception (not rejection!) of the “most precious” message [of 1888], which should blossom and “lighten the earth with glory” in “rapid” “final movements,” now long overdue. A people wholly reconciled to God and to one another—that is “The Meaning of the Judgment Today.”

But it’s time for a paradigm shift in thinking: the issue is not egocentric fear for our own salvation, but a new concern that Christ receive His reward—not that “we shall wear a crown in our Father’s house,” but that at last He receive His Bride.

The sale of Juma’s total possessions represents the sacrifice that you and I will make once we discover this precious treasure. Juma’s delirious joy at possessing the field represents the happiness that forever fills our hearts as we begin to enjoy the true riches.

The astonishment of Juma’s family and friends represents the wonderment of our family and friends at the change in us that a knowledge of the truth produces.

This oft-told tale by Jesus brings good news to every human being on earth. Your plough has already unearthed a treasure worth more than any prince’s gold. And you can buy the field where the treasure is. Every man and woman is like the lucky Juma. All he or she needs for the appreciation of the treasure is a realization of its value. Nothing that Juma did was worthy in itself; he simply knew a good thing when he saw it!

The truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ is more valuable to you than actually finding a box of gold in your garden some midnight.

The sanctuary message that “the Lord in His great mercy sent” to us must yet lighten the earth with glory. Thank God, it will. And that, soon.