

EATING WITH THE DOGS

By Pastor Paul E. Penno

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There are two kinds of prayer. There is *self*-centered prayer and there is *agape*-motivated prayer. For the most part, all that Jesus hears day in and day out for century after century are self-centered prayers. “Lord, I need some food to eat.” “Lord, my mother is sick, please heal her.” “Lord, I need a car. My old one is costing too much to operate.” “Lord, please give me good grades so I can get into that career school.” “Lord, I’ve gotten myself into a mess now, if you get me out of this one, I’ll consecrate my life to your service.”¹

We are mildly amused and gratified when our children are so dependent upon us that they constantly ask for money, or emotional support, or handouts. It makes them dependent upon us and so we feel like we’re in control. But constantly giving our children things only causes them to be more selfish and they never learn how to give to others.

Has God given us prayer in order for us to constantly be using it as a tool for getting what we want? Is God just some kind of giant Santa Claus in the sky who has a North Pole full of goodies that are showered upon us on demand?

Since we are Seventh-day Adventists, we ought to ask the question: What should prayer look like for a people who are preparing for the Lord’s return in view of the sanctuary truth? If Christians for centuries have prayed self-centered prayers, and the Lord has not yet returned, how are we to grow up in a more clear, and mature way in our prayers in order to hasten our Lord’s return? Certainly, since *agape* comes from Jesus’ holiest of all ministry, we should follow Him there into all truth as He has taught us by example. After all, the remnant should have learned something from six thousand years of Israel’s failures of the past. Jesus wants to teach us from our history the secret of overcoming self-centeredness by means of seeing His love radiating from the cross so that it becomes our glory.

The Hero of Our Story Is Jesus

The foil to Jesus’ purpose in our story is the disciples who are lukewarm in their devotion. They want to frustrate and hinder Jesus from going into the home of the Canaanite. The praying Syro-phœnician woman is the world whom Jesus saved.

¹ “But to claim that prayer will always be answered in the very way and for the particular thing that we desire, is presumption” (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 96).

Jesus took His disciples on a side trip into enemy territory to the north of Israel. He went on an excursion outside the boundaries of the church in order to teach His disciples a lesson in *agape*-oriented mission service. His divine foresight was focused on one woman whose need compelled her to be drawn to Jesus.

She was a pagan pure and simple. “The woman was a Greek, a Syro-phœnician by nation; and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter” (Mark 7:26). She was a Greek, a Syro-phœnician, and a Canaanite. As such, she was a Baal worshipper, which is the religion *self* disguised as the religion of the true God. Satan had convinced the pagans that all things living and dead were gods. This is how he gained entrance into this woman’s home and possessed her daughter. Imagine the epileptic-type fits she must have been subjected to on-going. Throwing herself onto the floor. Cutting her wrists. Spitting at her mother. Hissing and cooing! What a horror for a mother to behold.

Why in the world would Jesus even go to such a place? Women of the Seventh-day Adventist church, look at Jesus. Jesus presented Himself to John the Baptist as a candidate for the baptism of repentance for sins. This is why John forbade Him because he recognized in Jesus the sinless One.

But Jesus bade John, “Suffer [let] it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15). Ellen White observes: “After Christ had taken the necessary steps in repentance, conversion, and faith in behalf of the human race, he went to John to be baptized of him in Jordan.”² Christ in actuality repented for the sins of you and me and the whole world. Whatever Christ did was never an acting job. You may be sure that He did this with tears and genuineness of heart.

At His baptism God “made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). The Infinite Son of God took upon Himself every soul, pagans included. He repented for the sins of everyone and then as the Sinless One submitted Himself to the baptism of repentance. This is why He “needed not that any should testify of man: for He knew what was in man” (John 2:25).

Jesus—The Perfect Soul-Winner

Hence Jesus was the perfect soul-winner. In the sentence preceding the one just quoted from Ellen White, she says: “The Lord can take every one of us in His embrace; for His arm encircles the race.”³ He had every sinner written upon His heart. He is the example of *agape*-oriented corporate repentance. He repented on their behalf in actuality. He repented for the sins of others which He did not

² Ellen G. White, “Our Supply in Christ,” (*General Conference Bulletin*, April 4, 1901, par. 14).

³ *Ibid.*

commit Himself. He repented of your sins of addictions. He repented of your illicit desires. He repented of your egocentric motivations. He did this because of His great love for you. Is it not time that He receive His reward and you in turn give Him a corporate repentance for the self which you have indulged?

He took a “self” which required constant subjection to the cross throughout His lifetime. If He had not denied Himself, He would have pleased Himself. Paul writes: “Christ pleased not Himself” (Romans 15:3). We are written on every fiber of His being. He bears our humanity to this very day. This is why He went outside of the boundaries of the church in order to reach the Syro-Phœnecian woman.

What IS Corporate Repentance?

Analyze what individual repentance is. Is it egocentric or Christ-centered? You will have to admit that it is egocentric. I do not say that anything egocentric is evil necessarily; but let’s honestly face the fact that individual repentance is based on fear and a desire for personal security in God’s kingdom. That, of course, is the usual appeal in modern “evangelism.”

Corporate repentance is genuinely Christ-centered. It is not based on fear or concern for reward or security. By sensing a concern for the guilt of the sins of the world, corporate repentance makes an offering to God that is acceptable because it is not selfish. It is a genuine abhorrence for sin and a genuine concern for His vindication.

Individual repentance is a vain hope for finishing the work in this generation. Our brethren have been calling for this for many decades. Earnest, sincere appeals for individual repentance are frequent in the sermons preached for over a century. The latter rain has not come. As long as we are concerned for our own forgiveness, our own justification, our own security, the power for finishing the work is absent. Such a concern is *eros*-dominated, and does not provide the constraint that will move human beings to the kind of consecration needed to finish the work. As long as self remains our center, we will continue to be lukewarm. Only a Christ-centered motive can possibly deliver us.

Corporate repentance is *agape*-related. It provides the love which will love others as Christ has loved us. Just as Christ identified Himself with every sinner on earth, taking the steps the sinner must take including repentance “in behalf of the human race” (*General Conference Bulletin*, 1901, p. 36), so in corporate repentance we identify ourselves with every sinner on earth, excepting none. I sense how another’s sin is in reality mine, how that I have nothing of myself, no righteousness of my own, *none*.

As long as I confine my “repentance” to individual repentance, I do not feel any guilt for another’s sin. I repent only for my own personal acts of sin. If I haven’t committed murder; *I need no repentance for murder*. I’ve got my own

righteousness so far as that is concerned, and I can't possibly repent in behalf of my neighbor's murder. To that extent I do not need the righteousness of Christ! I've got my own. Individual repentance is only for my own individual acts of sin; corporate repentance is what Christ experienced, and is for the world's sin, all sin. In corporate repentance I feel how I too am guilty of murder; all I need is the opportunity, the circumstances, the background, the provocation that my brother had, and lo, I am involved with him.

True "Depth Repentance"

Therefore, corporate repentance is true "depth repentance", and is the only true kind that will enable me to "grow up" into Christ. If Christ experienced corporate repentance "in behalf of the human race," are we so much better than He that we don't need it?

How delighted the Father was with Christ when He experienced corporate repentance "in behalf of the sins of the world"! He proclaimed from Heaven, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." As long as each of us is beating his breast in anguished concern for his own personal security, the Father can never say that of us.

It may be objected, "It's OK for Christ to experience corporate repentance, but we've no need for the experience. All we need to get into the Kingdom is concern for ourselves." I would answer in the words of Scripture, "Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus." He will have a people who will "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth," and who will grow up into maturity in Him. Corporate repentance will become love in action and will transform the entire church into a dynamo of Christ-like love.

"Denominational repentance" is merely acceptance by the denomination of the Scriptural truth of repentance as exemplified in Christ's incarnation.

So Jesus took His disciples through all the hassles of a border-crossing from the church out into the world "and, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto Him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and besought Him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us" (Matthew 15:22, 23). Jesus treated her just like any typical Jew, or even as His own disciples would treat a pagan. He ignored her. And while Jesus was trying to show His disciples their typical attitude toward Gentiles, they fell right into the trap and appealed to Him to get rid of her. They had no sympathy whatsoever for her prayer. They could not identify with her. They had never been "vexed" by the devil either personally or with kith and kin. They didn't realize how much they had been protected by divine mercy.

It seems that the situation is compounded by Jesus' words of follow-up: "But He answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). The disciples thought He was speaking of true Israel. But therein lay a ray of hope for this Gentile woman whose faith was being tested. She viewed herself as one of "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." An Israelite transcends ethnic boundaries. In fact, a genetic descendant of Abraham who frustrates the grace of God is not an Israelite indeed. Those who are of faith in Christ are true Israel. And an Israelite by definition is an overcomer in Christ.

A Prayer Totally Emptied of Self

So she persists in prayer. "Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me" (Matthew 15:25). Superficially you might conclude this is an egocentric prayer, "Lord, help *me*." In reality, this is a prayer that is totally emptied of self. She is expressing a heart-condition of complete and utter self-crucifixion. She is prostrate before Him.

But, again, He tests what manner of faith she has for if there is selfishness in it, it will certainly be awakened by what He has to say now! "He answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to dogs" (Matthew 15:26). Most would take offense at this. Who could stand the apparent insult of being called a dog? If there were any "self" left in this woman, pride would rise to the occasion in its defense. "Who does He think He is calling me a "witch" with a "b"? It appears as though Jesus is not very complimentary to women on their special day! I say, "appears" because Jesus did not really call her a dog. Jesus was merely expressing the clichéd viewpoint of the Jewish' attitude toward Gentiles. It's like calling an Italian a *wop*—a person who flaunts an overbearing cocky and swaggering attitude.

Now I happen to be a dog lover. I would feed a dog table scraps at the drop of a hat. In fact, I can remember times as a kid when the food served us children wasn't so appealing. So when no one was looking I would sneak it under the table with my hand, and my dog Rip was always there to get me out of a jam. And mother always gave the dogs the table scraps because they were part of the family, too.

And so the woman gloms on Jesus' own words and takes the sword from His hand and thrusts the argument right back at Him. He has opened the door just a crack for the dog to come in and she is going to kick the door open all the way. So she prays Him: "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table" (Matthew 15:27). I'm part of the family, even though I'm a dog. Dogs get the crumbs, too. And if all I can get is a crumb from your hand, Lord, that's sufficient for my need. It will be an infinite supply over the nothingness I have now.

This was sufficient for Jesus to show the disciples what true faith is. “Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour” (Matthew 15:28). Faith is an appreciation of the *agape* of Christ. There was no “self” left in her. Therefore she could appreciate the love of Jesus.

For this Gentile woman to come to the point where there was no “self” left in her means that she saw in Christ the principle of the cross. She was a follower of Christ in self-denial. She was experiencing with Him the principle of corporate repentance. In order for “self” to be denied, the Holy Spirit reveals everything there is whether out in the open or hidden beneath the surface. It is to see the sins of others as my own sins. This is our Day of Atonement repentance—the deeper meaning of our sanctuary truth—to which Jesus our priestly healer is leading us as a remnant people.

A Repentance Not to Be Repented Of

Thus far modern Israel has not heeded Christ’s words to Laodicea, “Be zealous therefore, and repent” (Revelation 3:19). But the Lord is not really dependent upon the “many,” but a “remnant.” If the Seventh-day Adventist women really wish to demonstrate leadership, let them give their Saviour what He is due in this Day of Atonement—a repentance not to be repented of.

If you really want an example to follow “the Lamb whithersoever He goeth,” then give Jesus what He wants, just as did the Syro-phœnician woman. A woman knows what a man needs and Jesus is still 100% a man as well as %100 Divine. The Syro-phœnician woman gave Him a heart that was emptied of all self, thus she had the privilege of dwelling with “the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy” who proclaimed, “I dwell in the high and holy place, with him/her also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isaiah 57:15).

Why don’t the women do something unique in all of Christian history? The men aren’t taking the lead in this. The church isn’t taking the lead in this. The women’s divisional leadership isn’t taking the lead in this. Why not do what Christ prophesied in Zechariah. “And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the *spirit* of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced” (ch. 12:10). Lead us by your example. You’ll notice that the message of the cross and repentance are accompanied by the Holy “Spirit of grace.”

You can say that you have a perfect repentance if by faith you see what it cost the dear Saviour to die for you. If you love the *sinner* for whom Jesus repented, then you can say you have faith. If you love the *misogynist*, but not his sin, then you can say you have faith. If you love the *bigot*, but not his sin, then you can say you have faith. If you love the *abuser*, but not his sin, then you can say you have

faith. If you love the *Marxist*, but not his sin, then you can say you have faith. If you love the *pro-choice* advocate, but not his sin, then you can say you have faith. If you love the *adulterer*, but not his sin, then you can say you have faith, etc. Such a repentant soul will have recognized that all these potential sins exist in herself, but for the compelling love of God and His restraining power.

Christ does not need another students' rights movement; another feminists' rights movement, another male-dominated hierarchy. What Jesus deserves and what will honor Him most is a truly born again remnant people, born of the *agape* of God—a cross-centered people. A people who are experiencing a deepening repentance and drawing closer and closer to Christ, as their only boast is in the cross of Christ.

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