

HOW A RUNAWAY BRIDE “MAKES HERSELF READY” FOR HER HUSBAND

**By Paul Penno Jr.
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So what could she possibly have been thinking? Bride-to-be Jennifer Wilbanks hopped on a Greyhound bus. She certainly would not have been the first young woman to get cold feet on her way to the altar. But she disappeared without a trace. And the search that followed gripped the nation.

Undergoing psychiatric treatment Jennifer Wilbanks is confronting the issues she says turned her into the “Runaway Bride”. An avid marathon runner, she now admits she’s been running from her problems most of her life.

The last conflict of the people of God, just before Christ’s second coming, has been compared to Jacob’s experience. In the audience chamber of the Most High he became a victor. His confrontation was with himself. His ego was laid bare and his guilt was swallowed up before the One against whom he had sinned so grievously.

God was not wrestling with Jacob but Jacob was fighting God. Jacob perceived God as his enemy because in the light of His presence Jacob’s guilt and sin became illuminated and he was virtually undone. Through humiliation, repentance, and self-surrender, this sinful erring mortal prevailed with the Majesty of heaven and the supplanter became a prince with God.

This has been the sad history of God’s endeavor to draw nigh to man. It began in the garden of Eden. As God approaches, man flees and hides. When will a group of people without fear hold their ground and face their sin, fully unveiled in God’s presence and then fully embrace their Creator God instead of in suspicion wrestling with Him?

But for now the time of trouble is still future and we are content with head knowledge. This has enabled us to fashion replicas of the priest’s robes tailored to the finest detail and to build marvelous miniatures of the sanctuary building. We know exactly how many cubits long and how many cubits wide the structure was. We know the color of the curtains, the height of the walls, the glory of the ceiling, the splendor of the ark overlaid with gold. But the question is, do we understand God’s purpose in giving the tabernacle service to His people? Does the remnant comprehend the irreconcilable conflict between sin and righteousness which is displayed in the sanctuary service?

The service God gave was concerned with the “blotting out” of sin and this remains the heart problem of Adventists “for out of the heart proceed evil” (Matthew 15:19). When the grand trust of “the atonement, which is going on in the sanctuary above. . . is seen and understood,” God’s people “will work in harmony with Christ to prepare a people to stand in the great day of God, and their efforts will be successful.”

When sin came into this world Adam lost the image of God which consisted of divine agape love.

This selfless unconditional love for God and others was replaced with love of self. He was convinced that God had become his enemy and he had no desire to see Him, for self had sought to take the Creator's place.

Adam passed on to us this egocentric nature. Basically we desire to "be like God" and take His place especially in our own lives. God's problem is to get us to see the hatred against Him that absorbs us. When we truly see ourselves as we really are, we will know that our own righteousness leaves us naked and in need of the clothing from heaven's storehouse—white raiment, the righteousness of Christ.

When we understand and appreciate that "real sin" is the will to kill God, then we will know that the sin of man was indeed laid upon Christ. He took our sin. Without a murmur the Saviour accepted the supreme evidence of hatred. He not only bore the sins of mankind, but He bore mankind's sin of the murder of God displayed before the universe. As a lamb He came to the slaughter and we slew Him. When we come to see and understand that sin, we can truly repent. When we sense that it is in this way that the sanctuary was defiled, we will understand the work facing the church.

Our act of hatred against the Lamb has been recorded in a book. The redeemed will freely and frankly admit their sin against God and the Lamb and confess the mark of the nails as being the result of their enmity. With deep humility and repentance they admit their sin, having driven the nails because of their hatred. The final atonement

will include an internal conviction reaching the unconscious mind so deep and absolutely sincere that the full weight of this truth will bring complete reconciliation of the redeemed to God.

This whole experience will make the true people of God, the remnant understand and confess that it is their sin which has defiled the sanctuary.

The daily service in the earthly sanctuary was for the recording of sin, a kind of continual intercession. The once-in-a-year Day of Atonement was for the blotting out of sins and for banishing them to the wilderness. It remained for the sin of man to be recorded at the cross and the true Lamb to being His continual intercession. A way was provided for every known sin to be confessed and put right. The mind of man was to be freed and his conscious guilt washed away. But at the close of the 2300 days, after 1844, a different and much larger work was to be accomplished. Now the atonement would remove not just conscious guilt and allow man to function in spite of sin but he would be granted the ultimate revelation of this heavenly work which would illuminate the deepest recesses of the unconscious heart or mind to the complete overcoming of sin. Thus there was to be gathered out a unique group of people never before seen in the universe. This group was to be a body of 144,000 souls made ready to be the Bride of Christ. They would stand before the throne without fault.

The three angels' messages are to call out a people from every nation who know that Christ stands ready to do more than simply grant pardon for sin. For a people to sin, confess and repent, sin,

confess and repent in a continual round of futility is to belittle the gospel and count it as of none effect. We may be grateful for God's patience but after 1844 a new thing was to happen. We have been told.

"The eyes of the mind need to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit, that they may discern between good and evil. . . . Repentance for this or that particular act is not sufficient. The heart must be cleansed. Wrong-doing is the outflowing of the fountain of an unclean, unconverted heart." E. G. White, *Special Testimonies, Series B, No. 7*, p. 22.

"The forgiveness of sins is not the sole result of the death of Jesus. He made the infinite sacrifice, not only that sin might be removed, but that human nature might be restored, rebeautified, reconstructed from its ruins, and made fit for the presence of God." 5T 537.

When boy meets girl they start getting acquainted with each other. Gradually they discover delightful things about each other that draws them closer and closer. A trust and bond of love develops. They realize that their relationship is becoming exclusive of all others. But she must examine her heart to make sure that it is wholly devoted to one and only one. Should there be any doubt it could be the undoing of the relationship. There is a time of preparation.

Finally, when she has been tested and desires no others, a marriage is proposed. Now there have been times when a bride has had second thoughts about marriage and runaway from the altar leaving her groom desolate. But for the most part, a bride

doesn't do that. She is eager to pronounce her vows of loyalty till death do us part and pursue the consummation of the marriage.

And so the remnant is the bride of Christ. A wedding has been proposed by our Beloved. But we have a reluctant bride who is fearful of facing her Lover. The reason she is fearful is because of sin within. This is what is causing her to runaway from the altar. Deep down inside there is this unconscious hatred for her Groom. Why is this?

We are told in Jeremiah 17:9 that the "heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Christ's words on this are "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." Matthew 15:19. Here is a grim catalog of horrible crimes that never actually take place except that they exist in the mind. This tells us that the cleansing of the sanctuary must deal with far more than meets the eye.

"The books of heaven," Ellen White tells us, "record the sins that would have been committed had there been opportunity." E. G. White, *ST July 31, 1901*.

Therefore sin is much more than an act; it is a condition of the mind. This means that the 144,000 are spiritually mature and understand that the root of sin must be eradicated. Not only the conscious mind will be restored and rebeautified, but the inner sanctuary of the soul, the deepest recesses of the human heart, the very unconscious mind of this remnant must be purged. This select group will stand in the same relation to sin as Christ stood

when He said, “The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me” (John 14:30).

We cannot continue to consider the sanctuary truth as merely a doctrine to be paraded around as something that makes us unique among the Christians of the world. We have a desperate need to experience it in our lives.

From the cross to 1844, for over 1800 years, Christ ministered His blood in the Holy Place and each day there was confession of known sins. The human family through faith had access to their High Priest and salvation. The gospel provided for every known sin, when confessed, to be forgiven. There was a work done for the conscious mind of sinners. The blood of Christ provided this.

However from 1844 onward a new and different work was to be done, just as surely as the ancient Day of Atonement was different from the daily service. On the yearly Day of Atonement these sins were to be blotted out. This service was to cure the disease. This was the grand prelude to the end-time work to be completed at the close of the 2300 years. “Then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.”

After 1844 “the sins that would have been committed had there been an opportunity” were to be understood and the unconscious hatred against God was to be revealed. It is because Laodicea does not know this that it remains in its wretched condition. When we come to know, there will take place the repentance of the ages and sin will be blotted out.

So the work of Christ in the holy and in the most holy involves a work that deals with the conscious

mind and a deeper work of cleansing the unconscious mind. When the work on the Day of Atonement is completed, God’s people will be prepared to see Jesus without fear or guilt when He shall appear, for we shall be like Him.

But at present we have a runaway bride that refuses to go to the altar and meet her Groom. If Christ were to appear right now in the midst of His church as He did two thousand years ago, His bride would crucify Him. Our loyalties, our love is for self. Our carnal natures have not been crucified with Christ. We are not dead with Him on the cross so that we can be raised up to experience His new life.

We are unconvinced of His love. We have kept Him at arm’s length. We do not completely trust our Suitor. Our desire is lukewarm. And the worst thing about it is we are not even aware of the problem. We deny it. We say that we love Him, but we keep Him far from us.

Do we truly love Jesus? If this is the case, why isn’t He our all-consuming passion? Is our life rivetted on the cross of Christ? If this were true we would be willing to enter into the sufferings of our Lover.

It is easy to be saved. God in Christ has offered us unconditional salvation? We do not have to work for it. We do not even have to activate the plan by our faith first. God so loved us that He gave His Son. How do you respond? Say, Yes. If you do not refuse, if you do not fight God, if you do not resist the constraints of His Spirit you will be drawn to Him. You will experience His power of love.

“Buy of me gold tried in the fire,” says Jesus. The only thing we have to sell in exchange for Christ’s righteousness is our self-righteousness. And when you crucify “self” you will suffer. That old nature with which you are in spiritual conflict inside will suffer when you choose to offer it to Christ in exchange for His righteousness. But unless you give Him your self you will ultimately choose to kill your Lover.

This has got to be the most reluctant Bride Christ has ever dealt with. We say why hasn’t Jesus come back? Why the delay? And God’s people charge Him with the reluctance to return to His people and save us. On no, dear friends. Let us not charge God with our sin. He is eager to consummate the marriage. He has been ready ever since 1844. There are no further time prophecies to be fulfilled in the Bible. As far as God is concerned He is ready, but He’s waiting for His reluctant Bride to prepare to come to the altar and take her vows.

The Bride, a chosen people, must have an understanding which appreciates the experience of the Son of Man. When Jesus went to Gethesemane he took our sin. He struggled mightily with the self that didn’t want to do what His Father wanted Him to do. He had no mediator between Himself and the Father. He experienced the eternal separation that sin brings—an enormous gulf. His sense of self-preservation cried out for deliverance. And He could have recalled His omnipotence and sprung free from the conflict. But He crucified that nature. However, it was not without much tears and anguish even unto death. He suffered. And He

would have died right there on the spot had not the Father sent an angel to revive Him.

And so we too must experience what the Son of Man went through. This is the experience of Jacob’s time of trouble. This is our sealing experience. Where we wrestle with God in mortal conflict. Yes, we are seeking to kill our God and we do not realize Who we are wrestling with. And then suddenly it dawns on us Who this Titan is for we cannot win the match. We are growing weaker and weaker. We have been mortally wounded. The Self has been slain. And so we cling to our Assailant and will not let Him go until He bless us.

And the blessing is deliverance from all our self-righteousness which is a stink in the ointment. We suddenly truly know who we are and where we have come from. All our righteousnesses are like filthy rags—a menstrual rag. And we exchange that for His love. We are now irreversibly, completely devoted to our Beloved. Nothing can change that for we have seen the light.

Oh yes, Satan will accuse us. He will throw up every last sin in the book that we have committed. He will remind us continually of our wretched nature of self. And we will be in anguish search our souls for any wrong-doing, but we will not find a thing that hasn’t not been truly confessed and repented of and so we shall stand in the integrity of Christ and His righteousness alone. This is the experience of Jacob’s trouble.

When Christ ceases His ministrations in the Most Holy Place, the sealed of God will stand without a mediator. “Those who are living upon the earth

when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above, are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort, they must be conquerors in the battle with evil. While the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of the penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God's people upon earth." GC 425.

The Bride will have an experience complementary to that of the Groom in His hour of trial. In each case there is no mediator; in each case there is no sin. The Lord's messenger makes the following comparison: "He had kept His Father's commandments, and there was no sin in Him that Satan could use to advantage. Tis the condition in which those must be found who will stand in the time of trouble." GC 623.

Some may question why such an exalted standard is set before the remnant? Why should people have characters purified, spotless, with no sin, holy as God is holy, having the Father's name written in their foreheads?

This work could not be undertaken until the great day of the final atonement and that had to be after 1844. No previous generation had the three angels' messages and these messages are bound up with the sanctuary cleansing. The three angels' messages are the culmination of all information at the end of the ages concerning salvation, and this is

mankind's graduation day. The more light and experience given a people the greater the responsibility. Circumstances demand end-time proof of the gospel as all mankind plunges into moral bankruptcy. As evil intensifies in the culture around us, as Satan's assaults become more extreme, this demands a living proof that God's truth must prevail. We are the living letters upon which God wishes to inscribe His message of love to a sin-sick world. And, of course, we are the witness for God, that Satan's accusations that the law cannot be kept by sinful man, that through God's power of love, the commandments can be obeyed with complete selflessness.

The second coming of Christ has been imminent ever since the year 1844. The end has been near since the 2300 years were fulfilled because this prophecy is the last before the second advent. The end could have come years ago had the church truly desired such and fathomed the terrible ongoing struggle there is against the government of Heaven and the significance of the final atonement now in progress. It will come now when the church truly desires it and awakens to the truth of the situation.

The end is near. The ultimate fulfillment rests in the hands of the church. The end will come at any moment when human minds grasp the issues portrayed in the truths revealed since 1844.

There are those who would strongly object to the idea that the end is a matter dependent upon the church, or that time can continue indefinitely. They consider that God has set the time. If that's the

case then well over 150 years has past since 1844 and it is the Groomsman who is reluctant to come to the altar. Jesus can't make the commitment to get married! Does that sound right?

Such a viewpoint carried to its logical conclusion is tantamount to saying, "My Lord delayeth His coming," and ultimately charging sin back upon God. Our sovereign God will not override His love and respect for His Bride and her freedom to choose. Our Groom is a gentleman who will not force our love. He will not force us to get ready for the marriage.

Jesus must have an inexpressible longing to have His Bride with Him. God has no interest whatsoever in prolonging the sin problem. It is sin that is plaguing His heart and crucifying Him afresh every time it happens. Is our God some kind of sadist who enjoys pain? No. He wants to end it as quickly as possible. God gave His Son because He loved the world and wished to free His children from sin. It is only reasonable to believe that He has a profound interest in seeing the end come. But the end cannot come until the church truly desires it.

This is completely in harmony with the statement of Christ, "That day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (Mark 13:32). One knows when the end will come. Therefore we may take courage that the present confusion and dismal uncertainty will not continue indefinitely. The sanctuary shall be cleansed. The human heart of God's people will be cleansed. The gospel will prove that it is the power of God. The question is

whether it will be our generation or some future generation.

But the Adventist conscience is troubled. It searches for an answer—when will this work be completed? We have been told, "the work of judgment which began in 1844, must continue until the cases of all are decided, both of the living and the dead; hence it will extend to the close of probation." But when will probation close and how can all cases be decided? There is an answer.

For many decades the athletic world wondered if any man would ever run a mile in four minutes. Numerous outstanding runners had come close to breaking the record but always there was a failure of a few tenths of a second. However, in 1954 an Englishman by the name of Roger Bannister did the impossible and ran a mile in less than four minutes. Athletes around the world took special note of this accomplishment. His feat was considered so unique he was knighted in 1975. But his record did not rest alone. Since the year 1954, it has been broken dozens of times by no less than eight different nationalities. In the year 1957, the four-minute mile became so commonplace that a runner actually beat the once unattainable record and finished no better than fourth.

The achievement of Roger Bannister and all the others who stand with him have settled the question forever—a man can run a mile in four minutes. They are sealed in their victory and have passed judgment forever on all previous athletes who ever tried, both living and dead. They have set a standard that cannot be denied.

In a similar way, the last generation of God's people will pass judgment on the entire human race of past ages as well as all the living. They will verify that there is no reason for failure and sin. They will prove the truth of the cleansing of the sanctuary and confirm that a people can stand before God without embarrassment, having come up to the standard outlined for Adam before the Fall.

All cases will be decided when Laodicea, the last church, comes to see herself as she really is. Then the repentance of the ages can take place and she be granted the white raiment and spiritual discernment that has long been offered. Probation can close when, in humble repentance, the church accepts the wedding garment and opens the door to her Divine Lover. The wedding will be consummated. The Heavenly Bridegroom can say than, "It is done."

Then the vision of John will be a fact: "I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it" (Revelation 21:22). No building will be needed. God will dwell in His people and they in Him, bound in a union of genuine love that will forever prove the falsehood of Satan's charges and eternally vindicate the truth of the gospel and the character of God.