

GOD'S LOVE TO THE RESCUE OF A LOST WORLD¹

By Pastor Paul Penno Jr.

February 22, 2014

George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, and Jesus Christ have one thing in common: each predicted a profound change in human values in our day.

Orwell prophesied that we would all be trampled by Big Brother—dictators banning books, rewriting history, and manacled human freedom.

Huxley, witty and brilliant, also gave up hope for the West. His *Brave New World* predicted a less frightening future, but one no less lethal beneath the facade. People would lose human freedom, not by new Hitlers and Stalins marching them to gas ovens, but by pleasing themselves to death. Modern technology, he said, would develop a compulsive addiction to unending amusement. But neither Huxley nor Orwell penetrated to the inner core of our spiritual decline.

Jesus' view leaped across centuries to perceive its true character. The root, He said, would be the loss of an essential ingredient of human stability—a special kind of love known as *agape*: “False prophets will . . . deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love [*agape*] of many will grow cold.” Matt. 24:7-12.

This priceless ingredient of *agape* love once rescued civilization from a nose dive into chaotic despair.

When Cæsar made the Mediterranean a “Roman lake,” mankind had already sunk into a frightful depravity. Watching people die in violence in the Coliseum was as much fun to Cæsar's crowds as a football game is to us. The sight of naked political outcasts writhing in agony nailed to crosses attracted spectators like stock car racing now. Little wonder that many Romans, jaded by their pleasures and sadism, coveted suicide as much as many today want to win a lottery jackpot.

Onto such a world stage came this new idea of *agape*, a love embodied in the life and death of an obscure Galilean. What He brought to view was an idea that overturned all human values, because it revealed dimensions of God's character no one had ever dreamed of. God's Son actually died as a cosmic Outcast, nailed on a Roman cross. Did He, *could* He, *love* this evil world? People couldn't get over it.

He had revealed a love that went as far as hell, and came out the other side, redeeming the whole of lost humanity. God Himself was seeking man—not vice versa as everybody thought—and the price He was willing to pay was infinitely individualized. That is, each human being personally was the object of the sum total of His love. Slaves, outcasts, and despairing lords and ladies alike, discovered a new basis for healthy self-respect.

And with it came a new sense of humanity toward man. Attendance at the gladiatorial combats fell off; crucifixions lost their appeal; vomitoriums in Roman restaurants were forgotten; slavery became passé. The once-despised Man of Galilee became widely

¹ Matthew 24:11-14. “Love Divine;” “184”

known as the world's Savior, and His cross its most honored symbol.

No other religion or philosophy had ever embodied an idea like *agape* love. The world itself became a more pleasant place in which to live. As the idea of *agape* penetrated beyond the Christian church itself, it became the secret source of stability for the human race—although often unrecognized.

Yet strangely enough, *agape* came to meet its most determined, yet subtle, opposition *within* the Christian church which had adopted the pagan notion of natural immortality of the soul. Thus medieval Christianity adulterated and distorted *agape*, but the idea survived and enjoyed a partial restoration in the Protestant Reformation.

Now we're there—the time Christ spoke of, "Because of lawlessness, the love [*agape*] of many ["most" KJV] will grow cold." Matt. 24:12. Christ's word *wickedness* (*anomia* in Greek) means rebellion against the holy law of God, a cynical irreverence for *agape*, a hatred of His commandments, all with an arrogant flaunting of divine judgment.

What we view nightly on TV is a cultural love affair with death. This *anomia* shows up today in our ability to make sport of sexual infidelity, materialist greed, sensuality, and even crime. Hollywood glorifies it. Where once such things aroused outrage and righteous indignation, today we have an open tolerance (like White House scandals gladly tolerated so long as the economy is good). Most of the nightly TV shows make fun of purity and

fidelity, and revel in *anomia*. What we are viewing is actually a cultural love affair with death.

An article on "The Science of Addiction" has touched raw nerves in those who sense that "the gospel of Christ . . . is the power of salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). "Investigators have begun to figure out exactly what goes wrong in the brain of an addict, . . . how deeply and completely addiction can affect the brain, by hijacking memory making processes and by exploiting emotions . . . the craving that drives an addict irresistibly toward relapse—the greatest risk facing even the most dedicated abstainer."

The writer of the article probably does not realize that he is commenting on "the science" of the gospel of Jesus Christ; it is the only ultimate solution to the addiction problem that captivates so many millions. In God's plan, the church in the last days, "the remnant," is to plumb these depths of gospel understanding, to proclaim to "every nation" of those "who dwell on the earth" a special understanding described as "the everlasting gospel" (Rev. 14:6, 7). It is to culminate in a message that "lightens the earth with glory" (18:1-4), in the process preparing a people to stand in the close of human probation, face and challenge the final "mark of the beast," endure "the seven last plagues," and constitute the welcoming committee who will greet the Son of God upon His return to earth.

Nothing short of this is worthy to be called "the gospel." But God's church in the last days, the seventh of the historical series of Revelation 1-3,

has disdained this deeper understanding of the “everlasting gospel,” resting upon her self-appointed laurels as “rich and increased with goods, in need of nothing” (3:14-21).

The article makes clear that addiction is a love affair with death. Christ in Proverbs 8 says, “All who hate Me love death” (the final thing; vs. 35). There is where we find addiction; the cure? Nothing short of “the mind of Christ” (cf. Phil. 2:5-8). To have the mind of Christ means that we are “crucified with Christ” (Gal. 2:20). The addict would fellowship with Christ as He dies on His cross; experience with Christ what the second death is (by faith); “taste death” with Him “for every man” (Heb. 2:9). Thus the addict “comprehends” the “breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the *agape* of Christ that passes knowledge” (Eph. 4:17-19, KJV). The addict will hear some rare preaching of “Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:1, 2).

If you knew for certain that Jesus Christ Himself, the true Christ, was going to speak in the town square at a certain time, I am sure you would cancel all other appointments and go and listen. (Of course, we know that someday the false christ will maybe speak in your town square—don’t go to hear him!). But what I mean is, deep in your heart you would like to hear what Jesus says to us to day in our modern world.

Luke, who wrote the third Gospel in our New Testament, allows us to hear Jesus’ last-days message just as clearly as if He were speaking on TV or the radio now. And we can trust what Luke

says more than we can trust any imposter who manages to get on TV or radio!

In Luke chapter 17 Jesus opens a curtain and reveals truth about the time in which we live now today. He exposes the reality of mysterious things that are happening around us. Unless we know what Jesus says about our times today, we are left in darkness, confused, bewildered, discouraged. Let’s pay attention to what Luke reports that Jesus said:

First, Jesus said that the world in our day has become like the world was in the days just before the Flood of Noah: “As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man” (Luke 17:26). When He says “the days of the Son of man” He is speaking of the time just before His second coming. He says further, “They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all” (vs. 27).

In order to understand what Jesus says, we must go back and look at what happened “in the days of Noah.” Genesis chapters 6 through 9 describe that tremendous time. “The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth” (6:11, 12).

That’s a very sad picture. “All the earth”! Wickedness had spread so badly, that everyone was taking part in it. As Jesus says in Luke 17, people were all-absorbed in selfish pleasure. The

things they were doing weren't bad in themselves—it's not wrong to eat, it's not wrong to marry; but these people just before the Flood were crowding righteousness out of the world. Everywhere you turned, it was selfishness, getting ahead, no matter if that meant walking all over your neighbor. "Me, me, me"—that was everybody's cry. Buying things, keeping up with the neighbors, getting rich, enjoying selfish pleasure—this was what was on everybody's mind all the time. And it's that way now!

And to make bad matters worse, this extreme selfishness became so bad that "the earth was filled with violence."

Does anything about that Bible record remind you of what you see every day in the newspapers and see on TV and hear on radio? All around us is this incessant materialism and selfish pleasure-seeking. And what does it all lead to? Yes, you're right. It leads to violence. Murder, thefts, oppression of the poor, and AIDS.

God had to do something, or the world itself would be a vast cesspool, making it impossible for anyone to live here and be clean and righteous. Because God loved you and me and all the generations of human beings yet to live on planet earth, he decided He must destroy that ancient world and all those wicked people who had gone so far in evil that even God knew no way to change their evil minds and heart.

In all the world among its huge population, there was only one man (with his family) what was right with God, who cared more for righteousness than he did for pleasure or riches—and that man was

Noah. Hebrews 11 describes him as a man who "condemned the world" because he was not afraid to be different from the world. He let it be known that he condemned the evil that was in the world. He wasn't afraid to be different than everybody else even if people laughed at him. And because he was loyal to God and to His holy law, we read that he "became heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (Heb. 11:7).

Think of the inestimable riches of truth that Noah became "heir" to! The wicked world despised him, but God honored him. Not only was his life spared when the Flood came—he "inherited" great honor for all of time to come and for eternity as well. If you are a student in school and the students laugh at you because you are loyal to God and to His holy law, don't be afraid to be different than "everybody else." You too will "inherit" everlasting righteousness. Nothing on earth can equal that, in value.

Second, Peter tells us a lot when he says that Noah was "a preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5). That means that Noah was far more than a mere boat-builder who built the ark. Doubtless Noah traveled all over the earth giving lectures about the coming Flood, answering questions, seeking to turn people away from their judgment-bound sins. He proclaimed the pure, true gospel of righteousness by faith. He did for his world what this broadcast is seeking to do for our world today—lifting up the Savior of the world as our only hope as we face our future.

We don't know how many people received his message during the 120 years of his ministry, but when the Flood came, only eight people were safe with him inside the ark; every other person on earth had in some way rejected the message. It was an advance play-out of the final crisis of "the mark of the beast" and "the seal of God," which the Book of Revelation says again will catalyze humanity just before the return of Christ in the clouds of heaven.

Luke reports to us in his chapter 17 what Jesus said about our end-times today. The people carried on their pleasure-seeking "until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all" (Luke 17:27). To those people, the Flood came suddenly, even though Noah had faithfully warned them for 120 years. Right up until "the day" when the door of the ark was shut, there the people were outside the ark—defying God, insulting Him, trampling upon His holy law. And what does Jesus say? "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in the days of the Son of man."

Praise God that He has made it possible for this broadcast message to find you where you are today! This is for you another evidence that He loves you personally, individually!

But Jesus said more: "Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot: they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all" (Luke 17:28, 29).

We don't read that Lot was "a preacher of righteousness" as Noah was, but he is spoken of as

"a just man" who was "vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked; (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds)" (2 Pet 2:6-8). It's not hard to imagine what Sodom life was like that Lot was forced to observe. Jude says that those people in "Sodom and Gomorha, and the cities about them in like manner, [gave] themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh" (Jude 7).

It's the same today! Daily, our TV and radio and newspapers are filled with the same evil. People "give themselves over" to the clamors of the flesh, fornication, and "going after strange flesh" just as it was in the days of Lot. If Lot was "vexed in his soul" by all this, it means that he hated to watch this corruption. If they had had TV or radio or DVD's in his day, he would have turned them off or walked away, to show how he was "vexed" by it all. He may not have preached, but by his quiet life of righteousness he bore witness to the people of his faith. But sad to say, again they all turned him down and they perished. Even Lot himself barely escaped destruction by a hair. Even his wife was corrupted.

Jesus tells us, "Remember Lot's wife." She was the lady who really didn't want to leave the doomed city; her heart was there with all its beautiful dresses and its sensual, selfish pleasure. But she was Mrs. Lot, and her husband had often conducted family worship in their home; so she to some extent "feared the Lord," but when the angel took her by the hand to lead her out of the doomed city to a safe distance away, she couldn't stop

herself crying. Instead of saying “Thank You for saving my soul!” and gladly obeying the divine command “Don’t look back!” she resented the angel holding her by the hand. She wrenched herself free from Him, and turned to look longingly at the beautiful but sinful city. As she stood there lamenting that she had to leave her wicked neighborhood, saying in her heart, “God is not fair!” the fire and brimstone fell, and the intense sudden heat as of a nuclear explosion turned her into an eternal pillar of solidified chemical substances.

And Jesus kindly yet solemnly warns us: “Remember Lot’s wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it” (Luke 17:32, 33). The way Mark tells this same incident, Jesus added, “Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it” (Mark 8:35). So it’s not that there is any virtue in dying for nothing—sadly lots of people do that; what’s important is giving your life for the One who died for you; then your sacrifice is not wasted.

And that does not mean merely being burned alive at the stake, as many faithful people of God were martyred in the Dark Ages by priests at the Inquisition—the Bible says the martyrs will have their special reward of glory. But “losing one’s life for Christ’s sake and the gospel’s” can mean a constant, daily life of self-sacrifice for Christ, even through a long lifetime. It’s living as Jesus lived. He said: “I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me.” “I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him

that sent Me” (John 5:30; 6:38). Daily the Father awoke Jesus from sleep, even as a youth, says Isaiah 50: “The Lord God hath given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: He wakeneth morning by morning, He wakeneth Mine ear to hear as the learned. . . . And I was not rebellious, neither turned away back” (vss. 4, 5). A recent modern rendition of this passage says, “I didn’t pull the covers over My head and go back to sleep.”

Living for Jesus, serving Him daily, ministering the Good News of the Gospel to others—this is what it means to prepare for Jesus’ soon coming.

Noah and Lot encourage us down through the millennia. And just as the Lord’s angel took Mrs. Lot by the hand to lead her out of the doomed city of Sodom, so He takes you by the hand today to lead you out of doomed “Babylon.” He says, “Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues” (Rev. 18:4).

Oh, thank God for that loving call to be saved! Won’t you say “Yes!” right now and say, “Thank You, Lord, for saving me!”

Christ said people of today would be like those of Noah’s day: “They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all” (Luke 17:27). Aldous Huxley was not far off the mark: obsession with amusement will as surely destroy all that makes human life worth living as did the waters that drowned the ancient world. The media has

transformed science, education, journalism, politics, court justice, and even religion, into bite-sized “fun” samples.

In the same breath a newscaster announces a horrible disaster, and then adds with a smile, “And now, this word from Burger King.” Scenes of earthquakes or mass killings are juxtaposed with frivolous commercials to induce laughter. We are only a step away from cracking jokes at a crucifixion or cheering as a lion eats a reformer. Our mindless prerecorded laughter is what Huxley feared; the people in his *Brave New World* were laughing instead of thinking—but worse, they did not know what they were laughing about. No wonder Jesus looked ahead to this generation and asked: “When the Son of Man comes will he really find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8).

One word, rightly appreciated, would overnight put an end to wars, crime, military spending, selfishness, and corruption.

Can our downward spiral of *anomia* be averted before global suicide occurs?

Our only hope is to discover a heart appreciation for God’s *agape*. The apostle John declared that “God is love [*agape*] (John 3:16). In *agape* is found “all the fulness of God” (Eph. 3:19). That one word, rightly appreciated, would put an end to wars, crime, selfishness, and corruption—what all the scientists and politicians in the world are powerless to do. But the Bible declares that the present world, as a whole, will never accept this solution.

But as individuals, we can. To believe that God loves us with this special kind of self-sacrificing

agape gives us a true sense of our importance in the sight of Heaven—we are expatriate citizens of God’s unfallen universe. We see ourselves as allies with Heaven, members of His “whole family in heaven and earth” (Eph. 3:15), who “may be partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). That experience is what the New Testament means by the word “faith.”

Finding the solution to *anomia* (selfishness) is not something that we do so much as something that we see. Paul explains: “[I pray that you] . . . may comprehend . . . what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love [*agape*] of Christ, which passes knowledge” Eph. 3:17-19). The person who has grasped doesn’t have to grit his teeth and force himself unwillingly to turn away from sinful allurements; *agape* motivates him to do so. The evil becomes distasteful. We have wondered how the early Christians could endure the privations they suffered in following Christ in those days of Roman tyranny. We misread history if we assume that it was a mere hope of pie-in-the-sky, an “investment” that required foregoing present good for the return of a greater good to come. That would be next door to selfishness, a what’s-in-it-for-me religion.

There was a purer motive—a comprehension of *agape* that transcended all self-centered concern: “For the love [*agape*] of Christ constrains [compels] us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” (2 Cor. 5:14, 15).

For some in all lands the glitter of sensuality and materialism has lost its appeal. These people would never claim that they are an iota better than anybody else; they have simply *seen* something others haven't seen!

They are the "salt of the earth," exercising an influence for good all out of proportion to their scant numbers, preserving the world from complete deterioration. And this is the reason why Huxley's and Orwell's pessimistic prophecies have not yet come true. The presence in the world of at least *some* people who have the faith of the apostles keeps the entire world from rotting away at the seams. Jesus begs us to pray that the Lord of the harvest will send forth laborers into the harvest field of His Seventh-day Adventist church—and on into the world—who can proclaim *agape*.

How Does One Catch the Vision?

(1) By *looking* at the magnificent love God has revealed in His cross ("Babylon" can't comprehend it!). (2) By telling Him, "Thank You!" (3) By *choosing* to let His love motivate one to take the first step of faith, letting faith bear its fruit of self-denial. (4) By *letting* its power begin to work in us "to will and to do for His good pleasure," rather than our own selfish will (Phil. 2:13). (5) By *choosing* not to dam up the love which has flowed down to us from the cross of Christ. (6) By *letting* it flow out from you to someone else. (7) By *letting* tears of contrition flow from our eyes for all our hardhearted unbelief in the past. (8) And by choosing to *believe* the heart-melting assurance of God's personal, persistent love for unworthy *us*.

Those who have such faith in Christ are not looking for a crown to wear; they want to crown Him as KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

He is still asking, "When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" Imagine His joy when He answers, "Yes! In you."