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Last Generation mission and message:

I. *I am an old-fashioned Adventist.* I still believe that we are part of a movement; we were never meant to be a church. Churches settle down and enjoy their comfort of being accepted. For example, Seventh-day Baptists share many truths with us but they are a church, not a movement. Good friends, but they hardly exist.

Movements focus on the future and do not stop until their purpose is achieved. Movements arise when people sense that they have a special mission—and that means they have a special message. When movements have a special message, everything in the lives of the people in that movement is secondary.

But if Adventists are a movement, what is our *special mission*? Simply this: **to prepare a people to be translated, not merely to live ten years longer!**

And what is our *special message*? Its core is simply this: **God is not what Satan has made Him out to be**—He is the Best and Wisest Friend that anyone on earth could have. And He is doing all He can to rescue everyone who choose to call Him Friend, rescue them from this rebel planet and to make them worthy of eternal life. Our message grows out of Revelation 14.

Because of this special mission and special message, Adventists must do theology differently than any other religious group. With this special mission and message, it follows that we should think differently about sin, about faith and grace, about death, about who Jesus is and why He came the way He did, and about what is meant by “the last days.” **And if we don’t think differently about these subjects, then we surely do not have any reason to exist—we don’t have a special mission or special message.** Just that simple! We are as useful as portable typewriters.

II. *So let’s unpack what we mean by this special message.* It can be said in three parts that will form the outline of our discussion for the next hour.

#1. Jesus is delaying His return because He is waiting for His professed people to wake up to their privileges and their responsibilities. In

Revelation 7, God is waiting for people that He can stamp with His seal of approval. In Revelation 14, God is waiting for the world's harvest to ripen, both the wheat and the tares. In Matthew 24, God is waiting for the "everlasting gospel" to be fairly and convincingly given to every living person on all continents. *Only Adventists talk like this.*

#2. God never intended time to last 160+ years after the first angel's message was given in 1844. In other words, He never intended the words, "The End is Near," to become meaningless jargon. Often I have been asked to speak at Adventist centennials. Am I supposed to congratulate that institution or church for being around so long? Or should I weep that we are still here? How should Adventists celebrate centennials? Are we supposed to be happy or sad? In view of the Adventist mission, is a centennial celebration a sign of success and achievement, or something much less?

From 1844 to 2006 is a long time. Were the Adventists in 1850 premature in announcing that Jesus could return in their day? Do we give them A for enthusiasm and F for theology? 160+ years is a long time to preach that the Second Advent is very near! What does language mean when we say something is "near" for over 160 years? So, we are forced to ask ourselves another question: What happened! Why are we still here? *Only Adventists ask that question.*

#3 We believe that rebels will never be among the redeemed. The universe has seen what rebels can do to themselves and to others and to the planet itself. And if anyone is still deaf and blind, then we have the coming Seven Last Plagues for evidence of what happens when Satan has his last chance to control this planet. Rebels who make a habit of saying No to God will never get off this planet alive! And we all have been rebels sometime or another!

But God has a rescue plan: And it is simple—He offers everyone, not only forgiveness, but the power to work out of the rebel's mind everything that sin has worked in. We call it the "restoration of the image of God." *That thought alone distinguishes Adventists from every other religious group.*

III. Now back to point #1: *Why has Jesus delayed His return.* Let's look at Revelation 7, perhaps for the first time all over again. You probably remember that **headline** in a recent magazine article that focused on Firestone tires on Ford Navigators—"Guarding the Name is Job #1." The

article first referred us to 1982 when somebody **spiked Tylenol with cyanide**, killing seven people. Johnson & Johnson, the manufacturer of Tylenol, sprang into action. The pharmaceutical giant promptly recalled 32 million Tylenol bottles from stores, hospitals, and nursing homes. Soon Tylenol came out with a new kind of tamper-resistant package that was copied by the whole industry. The **result**: the names and their business survived—Tylenol and Johnson & Johnson are still highly respected names to this day.

But for several years now, **two world-class giants** have been facing the same awful reality: Ford Navigators and Firestone tires have a problem regarding their names. Many have been killed, many more injured and Ford is blaming Firestone for faulty tires and Firestone blames Ford for poor design. Millions have already been paid out to grieving people and it is not over. The number one challenge for both companies is similar to what Johnson & Johnson faced in 1982: **How to Guard their Name! Today, guarding their Name is Job #1 for Ford and Firestone.**

Guarding one's name is not a recent phenomenon. This problem is **exactly** what God has had on His hands for a long, long time, even before the creation of this world. **Satan** has done his best to **spike the Name** of God with something more deadly than cyanide. **Cyanide kills temporarily**; its victims rest until the resurrection. But getting the picture of God wrong **can kill a person forever.**

We all know what it is like to see someone **ruin his or her family name.** Perhaps some here know what it is like to be misrepresented and to have a cloud on your name. How does one go about clearing his or her name? Not easily! *Throughout the Bible, God makes it very clear that nothing is more important for the entire universe than to have His reputation cleared and His name honored. That's the whole point of the Great Controversy!*

And that is exactly what John is telling us in Revelation 7. **Jesus will not return** until God has a people who make guarding His Name the most important purpose of their lives. That's right! **God is holding back** the seven last plagues; He is delaying the return of Jesus! Why? **He is waiting for a people** on whom He can **safely put His name** because they are guarding it well! They guard it by telling the truth about God and they guard it by reflecting His character—which is the same as His Name.

Revelation 7 opens with these words: “I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. Then I saw another angel ascend from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, saying, ‘Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads’” (Rev. 7:1-3).

What on earth could John be describing? Why is God holding back these last-day winds of terror and destruction? **Why** is He telling angels to: “**Hold, hold--hold back the north wind of nuclear war. South wind, hold back those seven last plagues!**” **Why?** “God’s people are not ready! **Hold back the east wind of human madness!**” **Why?** “God’s people haven’t caught on yet as to the purpose of the gospel!” “**Hold back the west wind of satanic fury** until God’s people are ready to carry out their last assignment. **Hold the winds** until God’s people are ready to be sealed, **Hold the winds** until His people are ready for His stamp of approval, **Hold the winds** until His people are ready for God to use them in His final message to earth’s last generation, people who will not embarrass Him.”

How many years must God keep holding these winds? We know on good authority that He never intended to hold them this long!

“And I heard the number of the sealed, a hundred and forty-four thousand sealed.” **The number, of course, is symbolic of people in the last days who are totally committed to guarding God’s name.** This sealing work is the **final work** to be accomplished by the gospel.

Now, let’s turn to the 14th chapter of Revelation. Again John picks up his sealing theme: “Then I looked and lo, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father’s name on their foreheads.” **Some picture, some future!**

What will identify God’s people in these last days? Sabbath-keeping, health-reforming tithe-paying churchmembers? **Yes and No!** After all, Sabbath-keeping, health-reforming, tithe payers once crucified God!

John tells us how God's people will be identified in the last days—they will have the Father's name written on their foreheads. They will be **sealed** with His approval. Many products can't be sold without a certain seal of approval, the seal that tells the world that the product has passed all the tests—such as or that little yellow **seal of the Underwriter's Lab** on the bottom of electrical appliances or imprinted in the plastic casing.

What's the importance of a seal? Every gasoline pump has one, as well as every elevator. No seal—no service! **What's the value of a signature?** Ask any art collector, or clock collector, ask any world-class violinist as he checks his **Stradivarius**. Why do people buy **Tiger Wood golf clubs** or **Venus Williams tennis rackets**. Or look for **Ralph Lauren** shirts and **Tommy Hilfiger** sweaters, or buy **Gucci** or **Dooney Bourke** handbags or shoes. Or those looking for a reliable washing machine (perhaps a **Maytag** or **Kenmore**; or a lawn mower (maybe a **Craftsman** or **Toro**).

For most products, the **name means everything**. It means that the product carries the **endorsement** of someone who cares about quality, someone who can be **trusted**—therefore you can trust those Tiger Woods golf clubs or a Maytag washer. **Those names mean quality and you can trust anything that those names are on.**

Remember those **TV ads for Hanes clothing**? Can't you see that determined female inspector on the assembly line, with all of her formidable charm, looking over each item: **"The quality goes in before the name goes on."**

Down here in these days of the held winds, that is what God is telling the universe when He writes His name in the foreheads of His faithful: **"Listen to them,"** He is saying, **"You can trust what they say. I am proud to give them my seal of approval. The quality goes in before My name goes on."**

What could be more wonderful than to have our heavenly Father write His name across your forehead? Is this a group you want to be a part of, or what? **With that signature, God is saying, "Here are people who have let my Holy Spirit do His work, people who indeed are telling the truth about Me. I am not embarrassed by how they represent**

Me and they have my seal of approval.” Later in Revelation, John describes the redeemed on the other side: “They shall see His face, and His **name shall be on their foreheads**” (Rev 22:4). **Some future!**

The Bible calls this process of having God’s signature on our lives, the “**sealing work.**” And this is what all heaven is focusing on today. And that is why Jesus still waits. **Satan knows it, God knows it. Do we?**

The Sealing Work is part of the central core of our mission and message.

IV. *Now back to the fact that God never intended time to last 160+ years after the first angel’s message was given in 1844.* Some of us come down on the side of our early Adventists--they were not wrong! We don’t give them A for effort and Flunk them for poor theology! The generation that proclaimed the judgment hour message from 1844 on **could have been and should have been the last generation**--as a very special lady has often told us.

For example, in **1888**, in *The Great Controversy*, p. 458: “It was **not the will of God that the coming of Christ should be so long delayed** and His people should remain so many years in this world of sin and sorrow.”

In **1901**, writing to P. T. Magan, that remarkable visionary who led out in the early years of Andrews University, Madison College, and then Loma Linda University, Ellen White penned sorrowfully: “God’s people have been **far behind**. Human agencies under the divine planning **may recover** something of **what is lost** because the people who had great light **did not have corresponding piety, sanctification, and zeal** in working out God’s specified plans. . . . **We may have to remain here in this world because of insubordination many more years**, as did the children of Israel; *but for Christ’s sake*, His people should not add sin to sin *by charging God* with the **consequence of their own wrong course of action.**” MS 184, **1901**, in MR 20, pp. 310-314.

The question: How would Adventists **charge God** with the consequences of “their own wrong course of action”? Surely, not directly! Yet, could it be possible that **some of the reasoning** used over the years to explain why Jesus has not returned, may have done just **that—blamed God for man’s failure?**

For example, **such explanations as, a)** Jesus has not come because the angels have not yet turned all the pages in the books of judgment—when the last pages of those living have been turned, probation is then closed and the plagues will fall. Or, **b)** God has His own celestial clock; its hands move inexorably—when the time appointed arrives, probation will close, ready or not. In other words, because He came the first time on time, so He will come the second time, on time, regardless of anything else. Or, **c)** the Lord can't come because the world is not evil enough but when the cup is full, then God says, "That's enough!" for surely God will have an end to His patience. Or, **d)** another reason that has become fashionable in the last few years in many pulpits and classrooms— we have no idea when Jesus will return but our task is to occupy till He comes because there's nothing that human beings can do to hasten the Advent.

The Bible or Ellen White or common sense supports none of these explanations! **But what is worse**, these excuses have lifted the responsibility for the delay of the Advent off the backs of God's professed people and "their own wrong course of action" and **thrown it back on God**. Unintentionally, of course, but the effect is the same: **Satan is pleased with these mental decoys**, and the **real** solution to the delay in the Advent is overlooked

Let's use Bible answers to our question of "why are we still here?"

Why is God holding back the end of time? Because His people are not ready for His seal of approval, they are not ready to have His name written in their foreheads. (Rev. 7, 14). **He will not give Latter Rain Power to people who will embarrass Him!**

Jesus Himself gave us another clue as to when He would return—it was our Lord's "harvest principle."

Remember how Jesus referred to the end of the world in Mark 4: "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground. . . . The earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come" (4:26-29, NKJV).

And John was given a picture of this harvest in Rev. 14: "And I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat one like the Son of Man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who

sat upon the cloud, “Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the hour has come to reap, for the harvest of the earth is [fully] ripe” (14:14, 15, NKJV).

What is Jesus saying here? The first lesson I hear is that the purposes of the kingdom of God and of your backyard gardens or your huge ranches are the same--the **harvest is ready when the seed has matured**. Who plants tomatoes or wheat, just for the fun of it? Of course there is pleasure in planting the seed; yes, there is even fun in cultivating growing plants. But we **don’t plant seeds merely for the fun of weeding** the rows. We plant because we enjoy juicy red tomatoes or heavy, waving wheat fields.

In other words, just **as farmers must wait** for his seed to mature, so Jesus has told us that **He will wait** until the gospel seed has produced a harvest that He can stamp with His seal of approval. **When that harvest is ripe**, when the wheat and the tares are fully mature, **all the events we associate with the end will happen very quickly**, such as Latter Rain, Loud Cry, Sunday laws, etc. For example, the “latter rain” falls only on mature Christians, which makes possible the “loud cry.”

Jesus is telling us that the harvest is ready when the seed is mature, both tares and wheat! The **wise Heavenly Reaper waits until the harvest is ready!** The sealing work is another way to describe the ripening of the harvest. The end comes when the **harvest is ripe (Rev 14), that is, when God’s people are sealed (Rev 7)**. Use COL:67, 68, and DA:633, 634 (if time)

The second lesson of our Lord’s harvest principle is this: Farmers and prophets engage in **conditional prophecies**. Farmers know, for example, that early corn should be ready in 68 days, some in 74, some 88 days. That is what **seed catalogues promise, if!** **If**, the corn gets enough rain, but not too much, **if** the nights stay warm in July, **if** the birds don’t eat the seed--all these ifs, the farmer has no control over.

Jesus is saying, Listen to the parable of the farmer. The delay in the harvest of this world has not been due to a change of mind on the part of the divine Farmer. As far as God’s seed catalog is concerned, the harvest could have and should have ripened decades ago. We have been living in the time of the **delayed harvest for far too long**. The fruit, the fruits of the Spirit that reflect the character of Jesus, has not yet matured.

Paul often reflected on this parable of the harvest. Look at the first chapter of his Philippian letter: “This I pray . . . that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the

day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” (Phil. 1:9-11, NKJV)

In letting the Bible speak to us, we save ourselves a lot of theological abstraction and jargon, as well as a lot of philosophizing. So much Adventist talk these days is not much more than justification for whatever the human spirit wants to think or do.

This line of thought is not new to Seventh-day Adventists. In 1883, Ellen White pleaded with fellow church members to understand why Jesus was delaying His return: **“It is true that time has continued longer** than we expected in the early days of this message. Our Saviour did not appear as soon as we hoped. But has the word of the Lord failed? Never! It **should be remembered that the promises and threatenings of God are alike conditional.**” *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 67, 68. (Manuscript 4, 1883)

As clearly as words can convey thought, Ellen White on many occasions declared the sad yet challenging truth that the return of Jesus was **already** delayed in the 1880s! **Further, God would continue to wait** until His people were ready for His endorsement and sealed with His approval. No gardener picks green tomatoes!

V. Let’s unpack another prediction from our Lord’s own lips: “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14).

Why is Jesus waiting? Because He wants the gospel to go to all the world-- but it must be a clear gospel—not a confused gospel. The gospel is the good news about His Heavenly Father—that was His earthly assignment and it is ours.

God is not the Cosmic Cop or the Stern, Harsh Judge. **Only when God is truly known can people make a fair and informed choice.** And Jesus makes it very clear that He will not return until every living person in the last generation has had a fair chance to say Yes or No to the true picture of God—even though some may have more light than others. Light is still light regardless if it is a 10 watt bulb or a 500 watt bulb. Nothing is clearer in the entire Bible and in the writings of His last-day messenger—everybody will have some light, enough light to make an informed decision regarding right and wrong..

But this **gospel can be truly given only by those who** can give a personal witness to what this truth has meant to them: In other words, when people

look at God's professed people, what kind of a God are they representing? Are they the kind of people that God can stamp with His seal of approval?

What is so difficult about all this-- is that many church members are using the right words but they are not good witnesses—they do not walk the talk! If they were indicted for saying that they are good Christians, would there be enough evidence to be convicted?

This simple principle has been **core Adventism for more than a century**, and core Bible, especially whenever Jesus emphasized His second coming. We emphasize again that this concept of the harvest and the delayed Advent is not something new that the Adventist Church had to think up to explain away what could be a century-old embarrassment in proclaiming a soon-coming Lord who never seems to come.

Jesus continued to emphasize the harvest principle when He answered the question: "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" in Matthew 24 and 25.

Why did Jesus want us to keep our eyes on the church rather than on the world? For this reason: to place undue emphasis on world conditions, which are always in distress, would be similar to a farmer saying: "I oiled my combine, it must be time to harvest the wheat." Or, "It looks like there will be a bad thunderstorm. It must be time to pick my corn." There is as much relationship between a thunderstorm and picking ripe corn as there is between distress in the world and the readiness of the church for the Advent.

In summary, our Lord's harvest principle is so simple any elementary school student or backyard gardener can get it. It focuses on the purpose of the gospel, not only on the grace of forgiveness but also on the grace of restoration so that men and women are able to make moral choices and by the grace of God to make those choices a forever habit.

The truth about God is that He is our Healing Father who does not condemn us because we are sinners. He is our Heavenly Parent who is doing all He can to save and heal us (the same word) so that those who trust Him will be safe to save. There is plenty of condemnation ahead but it will be sinners condemning themselves.

It is a crime when all His appeals for character transformation by His free grace are ridiculed as works-righteousness or pure legalism.

It is a crime when the Bible and Ellen White’s emphasis on character determining destiny is called pure legalism and a man-centered gospel.

It is a crime to hear and read that any emphasis on man’s change in the process of righteousness by faith is Roman Catholic doctrine.

It is a crime to hear that Adventists should have no other teaching about righteousness by faith than what the Reformers taught, to which I only add, which Reformer are you referring to, because they all had deep differences on that subject.

It is a crime to hear that we should focus on a relationship with Jesus rather than commandment-keeping. But any emphasis on a relationship theology should consider that any man may have a relationship with a prostitute and that would be something different than my relationship with Norma. A relationship with Jesus means I am agreeing with Him in all that He is telling me to do in order to be faithful partner.

And this leads me to our conclusion for this day. Everything we have said is wrapped up in what Adventists call “the Great Controversy Theme.” You know it well: the central issue in the Great Controversy is over who can best run the universe, God or Satan. That issue must be resolved before the universe can be eternally secure. That is why the Christian’s highest motivation is to help clear God’s name—that name Satan has done a terrific job in misrepresenting. That is why the plan of salvation is God-centered, not humanity-centered. The vindication of God is vastly more important than your personal salvation or mine.

That is why God is so particular about whom He will seal before He withdraws His restraining hand and lets Satan fully demonstrate how evil he really is with his Seven Last Plagues.

The Great Controversy Theme is God’s strategy for making loyalists out of men and women who have been snared in Satan’s rebellion. And that means that the primary message of the Great Controversy Theme and the purpose of the gospel is simply this: God will restore whatever sin has damaged and in so doing men and women will be part of the reason that God will be finally vindicated. Only then will the universe be eternally secure—never again to hear the rebel say No.

That is why God gave to faithful men and women in the middle of the 19th century a special assignment: to proclaim this “everlasting gospel.” For hundreds of years, this gospel had been diluted and counterfeited. That is why Adventists have been assigned to look at the gospel more clearly than any other group on earth.

We say it again: the purpose of the gospel is to develop men and women who will receive God’s name written on their foreheads (Revelation 22:4; 14:1). God will give us exactly what is needed to change rebels into loyal witnesses to the truth about His character, people who won’t embarrass Him. This witness, in life and message, is what alone will fulfill Matthew 24:14.

That is the central theme of the Bible and on that theme rests the timing of the Second Advent. Paul called it, the restoration of the image of God in those “called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:29). On that theme rests the future of the universe—a universe free from the accusation that God has been unfair and harsh in dealing with His created intelligences.

Who produces a better man or woman? God or Satan? We are part of that answer. We truly make a difference as to how soon God can say that He has made His case. That’s why John emphatically said that when the first angel begins to sound, it is time for the judgment of God to begin. In a reverent way to look at all this: God needs you as much as you need Him in proving to the universe that Satan has been terribly wrong and that God has been marvelously fair, patient, and infinitely gracious.

Don’t limit the Holy One of Israel in your life? In these special days when God is preparing to stamp His seal on men and women, there won’t be first- and second-class members. One class who want to go all the way with the Holy Spirit and to be overcomers; the others who are satisfied with the doctrine in their head but who don’t want to walk what they talk, who simply want to sin and pray for forgiveness until Jesus comes.

Let God do His Holy work in you! He is able. He is very good at what He does. Believe it, love it, and live it and your life will never again be the same.

<http://herbdouglass.50megs.com/sermons.htm>