

SLA Alumni October 11, 2008

Ah, October in South Lancaster! Alumni all over the world know that October is the sweetest month of the year! Days are cooler. Mornings more crisp. Time for that first sweater. Color explodes everywhere, never prettier than on George Hill Road under the golden boughs of those rugged maple trees.

But especially for South Lancaster, autumn comes with the first rosy apple off the orchards that sprinkle all over George Hill. The class of '44 knew when late September and October were here. Most of the boys made extra money picking the apples, a few cents a bushel when it was real money!

These apples are famous all over the world. We call them McIntosh, but not the way that Apple Computer spells it. They spell it with an "a" and a "k"—Mackintosh. The McIntosh Apple is a direct descendant of a single tree discovered in 1811 by John McIntosh on his farm in Dundela, in the Canadian province of Ontario. His son saw its remarkable qualities and began grafting from this tree to many trees and the rest is history. From that first parent tree, many apple offsprings are famous, including Pippin, Cortland, Jonathan, Empire and others, besides our favorite McIntosh.

And that's why we have rosy red, McIntosh apples on George Hill and that's why we have that tart, reddish applesauce that only Mcs make. **And that's why we know it's harvest time in South Lancaster!**

A few years ago while speaking at a Canadian campmeeting, Norma and I stayed with a Northern Alberta rancher who owned a huge acreage of wheat and soy beans. The cabs on his combines and spraying machines were about eleven feet off the ground! The fields stretched beyond eyesight, the wheat was gloriously growing.

I asked him one night how he knew when to start harvesting, knowing that a few days too early or too late would be a disaster. He said, “We know that merely looking at the rippling fields in the wind, is not enough. We must open the heads of wheat in our hands. We must gauge the water content as well as the color. We don’t go in, until the grain is ripe. We must wait, some years longer than others, but we must wait until the grain is ripe. And we don’t wait one day longer.”

His advice sounded so much like our Lord’s counsel: “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” (Mark 4:26-29, NKJV).

Years later, Jesus reemphasized this harvest principle by giving John a picture of how the kingdom of God reaches its purpose on earth: “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 on the cloud, ‘Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the hour has come to reap, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe’” (Revelation 14:14-16, NKJV).

What is Jesus saying here? The first lesson I hear is that the purposes of the kingdom of God and of our backyard gardens (or our 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! Sinking the knees into warming April soil, planting peas one by one, is there a man or woman alive that doesn’t know that joy! Yes, there is even fun in cultivating growing carrots and beans. But really, we don’t plant seeds merely for the fun of weeding down the rows, week after week! We plant because we enjoy those first, ripe, red tomatoes, and

the juice dripping down our faces, as we eat them in the garden!

In other words, just as farmers must wait for his or her 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 approval.

The reason why Jesus has delayed His return is spelled out in Revelation 7. God has been waiting a long time holding back the Seven Last Plagues. He is holding back the colossal horror of the Plagues, because He has not yet found people to seal with His approval—people in whom He can give Latter Rain power to finish the gospel commission. . He is still waiting for His people to stop playing church and step up for Him to write His signature in their foreheads. **He is waiting for the ripening of the gospel seed in willing men and women.**

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, sealed Christians, which makes possible the “Loud Cry,” which waltzes with the Sunday law, which segues into the Seven Last Plagues.

Question: Do you think that God will give Latter Rain power to people who only pray for it? Do you think God will give Latter Rain power to people who will embarrass Him and the truths they may proclaim but do not live?

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, later corn in 74 days, some 88 days. That is what my seed catalogue promises me!

Norma and I would mark off the kitchen calendar those dates that our seed catalogue tells us when we should expect ripe carrots, beets, beans, corn, etc. That is the date promised in the seed catalogue, if! If, the corn gets enough rain, but not too much, if the nights stay warm in July, if the birds and bugs don't eat the corn—all these ifs, the farmer has no control over.

Jesus is saying to everyone everywhere: "Listen to the parable of the farmer." If you are farming along the Nile or in the Ukraine, in Northern Alberta, or in rocky New England, the delay in the harvest of the world has not been due to a change of mind on the part of the Divine Farmer. As far as God's seed catalogue is concerned, the harvest could have and should have ripened decades ago."

God's seed catalog says that Jesus could return anytime after 1844. But the middle of the nineteenth century is a long time ago! Is there something wrong with God's seed catalog that foretells when the harvest of the world should be ripe?

No, dear friends, God has made it abundantly clear that Jesus could have returned many years ago, if the harvest had ripened as scheduled! **We are living in the time of the delayed harvest. Just like some farmers have had to wait long past the time when their wheat or corn should have been ready.**

Farmers and God work with conditional prophecies—the harvest will be ripe, when and if!!

Of course, we all have read many statements that have said exactly the same thing—that Jesus has had to delay His return. 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 Emmanuel Missionary College, 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.

We **don’ t have time today** to go over the long list of excuses that we have used to explain why Jesus had not returned—in effect, blaming God for the **“consequence of own wrong course of action.”**

We should take the Bible as it reads. Let Jesus tell us why He has not returned! **THE HARVEST IS NOT YET RIPE!** For some today, this may be a new thought but we could read dozens of statements such as this one:

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.**

“Had Adventists, after the great disappointment in 1844, held fast their faith, and followed on unitedly in the opening providence of God, receiving the message of the third angel and in the power of the Holy Spirit proclaiming it to the world, **they would have seen** the salvation of God, the Lord **would have wrought**

mightily with their efforts, the work **would have been completed**, and **Christ would have come ere** this to receive His people to their reward.”--*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 67, 68. (Manuscript 4, **1883**)

It's the simple truth of the harvest: We harvest our wheat when it is ripe, fully ripe. It is the lesson of the farmer, the promises of the seed catalog and the promises of God are alike conditional. In other words, **God will continue to wait** until His people were ready for His endorsement and sealed with His approval. That's the message of Revelation 7 and Revelation 7 is crying out to all of us today, louder than He called out last week, last year. Today, we are one year further into the delayed harvest—**and our seed catalog says that we are the harvest.**

Remember how Peter describes those who wait for the Lord: Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, **looking for and hastening** the coming of the day of God. . . . Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless.” (2 Peter 3:11, 14).

Think about it, dear friends: Mark the ripeness in what Paul is talking about. **Look at this apple and note three marks** of a mature, fully ripe, apple.

Beauty—as the fruit ripens the sun tints it with surpassing loveliness, and the colors deepen this apple is equal to the beauty of its blossom—, the beauty of realized, ripened sanctification— the beauty of holiness.”

Tenderness— young, green apples are hard and stone-like; ripe apples are soft—, —ou easily take the first bite, Ah, the tenderness of fully ripe Christians.

Sweetness—*unripe fruit is sour*, good thing, because if not, we would eat all the fruit while yet green! In

God's plan, the **sharpness of youth, the self-assertions of the spiritual immature**, will be removed by sympathy, compassion, eagerness to serve.

So my dear friends of South Lancaster Academy and Atlantic Union College—**what kind of apple are you becoming?** What can we do about Paul's **call to hasten** the coming of Jesus?

Listen carefully: **The Second Advent is not merely a Bible doctrine that you must memorize all the texts to get a good grade. Jesus is not just another doctrine to know. Jesus is a Person who did not have to come to this messy world. He came because God so loved us that He gave Himself to us forever, forever limited to time and space, as we are, so that whoever would have genuine faith in Him, would never commit spiritual suicide but have everlasting life. That's the correct translation of John 3:16.**

How many here will hail with joy the glorious appearing of our Lord and Savior?

How many here will lift up your voices, "Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints?"

Today, tonight, next week, we are sowing the seeds of habitual character. You are becoming more of today that you were yesterday, **like the ripening apple, I pray!** We all will be harvested one of these days, real soon now. **No more multiple choices! No more fence-sitters, no more moderates, whatever that means. Either wheat or tares.**

The **Reaper's primary purpose** is to see His own seed ripened—the seed that He planted—and He is doing all that the Almighty can do to get as much wheat to ripen as He possibly can but no farmer can make a stone into an apple, or weeds into wheat! **The Reaper is our Best Friend and He will ripen all of us, if we**

don't reject Him! —but there is something that God can't do—He won't force anyone to be wheat!

How many are saying to yourselves: **Lord, count me in!** Do your job of weeding in my heart!

How many, by standing, will tell the universe looking on us today—just that! Lord, count me in!

Remember dear alumni and friends of SLA: Jesus is preparing a place for you and He is preparing a people for that place!

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