

I've Heard That Before

I Am Not Afraid series

by Chris Famisaran

I titled this sermon. I've heard that before. How many of you have been a member of the Seventh Day Adventist Church? Anybody more than a year? Five years? 10 years? 30 years? 45. Okay, we're getting up there. 50? 60? Less than 60. How about 55? Okay. Rick I know raised his hand at 50, so God bless you. Oh, I am so sorry. You what? [79] Wow. Okay. Awesome. So these are our faithful. Our faithful, How should we call spiritually baptized in PA Jesus. Thank you so much for your faithfulness and your commitment to the church. We all have a journey. We all start somewhere.

Several years ago, before I came here to this church, I had a deacon, a faithful deacon who got up every Sabbath to open the gates, turn the air on, make sure everything was presentable. And towards the end of my time there, I think maybe a year before I left, we were sitting, it was a Friday night, just sitting down, talking. I just loved talking to him. And he asked a very honest and heartfelt question. "Pastor, when is Jesus going to return? I've been a member my whole literal life. Even before I got baptized. I was in Sabbath school. My parents taught me." And it pains me because even though he had the hope, last year he passed away. And I didn't know what to say other than, Jerry, I love you. I don't know when Jesus is coming. He's promised though us that he will.

But what do we say then? Because we've all heard that before, right? I do believe though, that scriptures will come true. We will be reunited with not only us here, but our loved ones as well, who've fallen asleep. I long for that day. But until then, let's press forward with courage.

Several years ago, the New York Times, I think it was Alex Stone, shared a story of executives who oversaw a large airport in Houston. I don't know if it was Houston International or what, but prior to sharing that story, this particular airport received a robust amount of complaints. And it all centered on the one item. People felt like they were waiting too long for their baggage.

How many of you have experienced frustration when you have to stand and wait for your baggage? Okay, now is two minutes long to wait for your baggage. How about five? Pushing it. I appreciate your honesty. How about 10 minutes? Absolutely too long. Anybody had to wait more than an hour? Okay, how many of you...

Oh, last time I flew, we were headed to a destination and we were concerned because it was late at night. I was already feeling sick, like I thought I actually had COVID and I didn't. Tested before I got on the plane. Because I didn't want to make a bunch of people get sick. I went for a conference back east. We got on the plane after much consternation, and yet we still sat there. And there's a rule that if your pilots have been flying too long and don't start the airplane in time, they will call the flight off and they will have everybody get off the plane. See, I was enjoying my time on the airplane, waiting and ready to go, excited to see friends I hadn't seen in years. And then they all told everybody to get off the airplane and rebook your flights. We were on the plane so close. I think they knew that this was the whole game that they were gonna have to play. And we all played along. Surprisingly, there was no screaming and shouting and shouts of outrage. But everybody, a number of people were upset, and I was upset, too. But what can you do? Eventually got to my destination 10 hours later than I had intended. But I made it.

Time. Is time precious to us? Absolutely. We're very busy. You look at how things have shifted in the last 10, 20, 30 years. I felt like 30 years ago, you still had enough time. We weren't so preoccupied.

So going back to this story, the executives were trying to figure out, well, how can we make... It was only eight minutes is how long people were waiting for their baggage. And they tried to figure out, how could we fix this? And so they hired multiple extra, extra baggage handlers. And still the problem was not resolved. So somebody came up with the bright idea, let's just move the arrival gates farther away from baggage claim. And what do you know? There were no more complaints.

Because, you see, again, time is precious to us. Sometimes time is more important than money. We think, or we don't think. Maybe people love to make more money. But time is important. And you see, it's the illusion that

people are experiencing that my time is precious and it's being wasted. And yet all they did was move the arrival gates, and it was what was occupying in their mind when they're by themselves or maybe their family, and maybe they've had a bad day because, you know, travel sometimes brings the worst out of us. Right? I'm guilty. I get hangry sometimes. And what is your mind thinking when you're standing there waiting because you know the baggage is coming and you want to be out of there as fast as you can to get your rental or to go home?

I often think that sometimes our brains are our worst enemies because there's so many things that you can create in your brain that oftentimes is not what. True. So the appearance. And all of a sudden they have to walk a little bit further, which is not a bad idea to get your steps in. But as you are headed towards baggage claim, maybe you're still irritated, whatever. And you figured out what they did. Who cares? Eight minutes in the long run is not a long time. But I wonder, I often think, what does eight minutes to God mean in God's time?

So as Larson writes, the length of our wait is not as important as what we're doing while we wait. Often the psychology of queuing is more important than the statistics of the wait itself. Essentially, we tolerate. We tolerate occupied time, things that occupy our mind. And what we're doing far less better than unoccupied time, such as standing at the baggage carousel.

Now, I'd like to go to the Bible. Let's go to Acts 1. I know for today we're not going to get through all these texts, but I want you to circle Matthew 24, 25. I'm giving you some homework. I want you to read those two chapters, Matthew 24 and 25. We're going to dip into 24, hopefully a little bit today if we have time. But make sure you read that for the next couple of months. We're going to be talking about that. Not this coming Sabbath, but the following two Sabbaths. So let's go to Acts 1, Acts 1. I'm sorry, it's after Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And I wrote 9, verse 9. But actually I want to start at 6. I was rereading that, and I think, you know what, I need to include this.

Acts 1, verse 6. Then they gathered around him and asked him, lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?

You see them? The Israelites had been waiting for many years for the Messiah to come to free them from their captivity. Although they were not necessarily formal slaves to Rome and basically felt like it, some were slaves and they thought that the Messiah was supposed to take over and bring things back as they should have been. So this was their question. Are you going to restore things? Are you going to take us out of the structure that we're in?

Verse 7. It is not for you to know the time or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. And you will be my witnesses. Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth.

Of course, if you read the next chapter, when Pentecost happens, it happens.

Verse 9 After this he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as they were going, when suddenly two men dressed in white and stood beside them, men of Galilee, they said, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.

This is one of the many hundreds, if not thousands of promises that Jesus will what, Return? Amen. I did a search because I haven't counted how many times the Second Coming has been cited. But depending on how you the methodology, some will say over 1500 passages of scripture refer to the Second Coming.

And so ultimately the focus underscores. The Second Coming is central to our theology and our eschatology. Our name reflects that. And I mentioned this, I believe last week and that we're seventh-day, we worship on the Sabbath. And the second part of that is we're Adventists. We're awaiting the advent of God.

Now, if you also look at Israelites, were they not also waiting for the Messiah? If you look through the Old Testament, there's at least 100, maybe 125 verses that directly refer to the Messiah. And the Messiah was the awaited one who

would come and restore order to the Israelites. And for many, many, many years as well, they waited. Did they know when the Messiah would show up? They didn't. Much like we are. We don't know exactly when Jesus will return, but in many ways we can identify with them. One of the things though that is challenging is I think that we have to recognize too that God's version of time is a little bit different than us. Okay, so I want to go to 2 Peter, chapter 3. 2 Peter, chapter 3. It's to the right. It's towards the end of the Bible.

Okay, it says, dear friends, this is now 2 Peter 3, verse 1. Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior, your apostles, through your apostles. Above all, you must understand that in the last days, scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They'll say, where is this coming? He promised. Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of the creation. But they deliberately forget that long ago, by God's word, the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of the water and by water. By these waters also, the heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But don't forget this one thing, dear friends, with the Lord. A day is like what? a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

So is there an element of grace here as well? Okay, so kind of, if you, if you look at the big overall part of this passage is that Peter is giving a couple of reasons why we can have hope, we can have calmness, we can have perseverance. And so we have to look at the big picture. So someone maybe just tease you. Okay, if God promises to come back, where is he? Peter reminds us to remember that God has stepped in before, like Noah's flood, and has a clear plan for the future, knowing how the story will end. And it will end in God's favor. Right?

But God's clock is also different. To God one day feels like a thousand years, and a thousand years feels like one day. God isn't being slow. He's not being forgetful. Ultimately, he's being patient. He is waiting so that more people

have time to hear the story and seek Him. So God is not just floating around waiting with nothingness. It's a real final destination we're headed to. And knowing where we're headed keeps us on path.

One of the reasons, I think that sometimes we. One of the reasons why we are in this point is do you know how the Adventist church started? So before there was a church, there was a movement and one key figure played a part. His name was William Miller. And some of the things that you may not know about him is, number one, before he was a preacher, he was a farmer. He held civil positions such as he was actually deputy sheriff or constable and justice of the peace. He served in the army during the War of 1812. And actually before he was actually a deist, he was kind of a skeptic of organized religion. And he believed in God but did not intervene in human affairs. That's what a deist is. And then eventually he was converted to the Baptist faith after his experiences in the war. And then he began starting to read the Bible around 1816, and he focused especially on the books of Daniel and Revelation and concluded that in 1818 the prophecies pointed towards Christ's return in roughly 25 years. Okay. And that would be. He continued his study for a total of 14 years before sharing this message. And he landed on the time of 1843. And so he starts to preach. So Jesus is returning. And then he receives his license as a Baptist minister. And so eventually, though, 1843 comes along, and what happens? Jesus doesn't return. Right. So then they redid the mass of how he studied the Bible, and they predicted that Jesus would come on October 22, 1844. What we know as what? The great disappointment. Okay.

And so while I believe William Miller was very earnest and very sincere, unfortunately, how he studied the Bible as well led him to conclusions that were a little bit off. As we're going to learn, nobody knows when Jesus is going to return. Amen.

And so out of that, out of that, there were four groups that popped up. And one of them was the forefathers or the founders of our church. We didn't become a church right away, though. In fact, it was sometime we didn't become a church until almost 20 years later, roughly. And so the forefathers of our church realized that it's not that Jesus returned.

It's that what we believe and have taught as a church is that he entered the most holiest place in the heavenly sanctuary. So he got the idea, but it was a little bit off.

Now let's go to Matthew 24. Okay, let's go back to Matthew 24. And I want to start at verse 36. Matthew 24, verse 36. Okay, we all there? Okay.

But about that day or hour, who knows? No one, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. And they knew not, knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came, took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field. One will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding the hand mill. One will be taken and the other left. Therefore, keep what? Keep watch. Be mindful before you, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this. If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and not have left his house to be broken into. So you must also be ready, because the Son of man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

And I think this whole overarching theme is that what is most important to know Jesus. Amen. And not only that, why would you want to spend eternity with somebody you don't like? Think about it, *know and fall in love with Jesus*.

And we're going to share a few things. Not necessarily today, we're going to kind of get a hint of it, but we'll talk more about that in a couple of weeks. What does the second coming actually really look like now? We kind of read a passage over. I'm not going to ask if you want go back to 2 Peter 3, but what were some of the challenges that the believers were facing at that time that Peter writes about? They had some. What? They had some scoffers. You know what a scoffer is? A Debbie Downer, Negative Nancy. They have nothing good to say. Are there scoffers out in the world? Well, that was rather firm.

Let me ask you this. Is it also possible to be a scoffer to your own self? Things that we think about dictate how we move forward. Everything starts with a thought. It's a good thought. Hopefully you trend in a positive direction. If it's a negative thought, where does that go? Usually easy down spiraling.

You know, scoffers, they love to mock, they love to ridicule or dismiss or whatever you may potentially value. And the best response depends on the situation. Now, have you ever tried to argue with a scoffer or a Debbie Downer or Negative Nancy? It's usually an unwinnable situation because they're going to be very firm and are convicted in what they believe. Or maybe they're just being difficult. Do you need to have that in your life? Not necessarily. What if it's a family member or a friend? Gets harder, right?

And you know, so as it says in verse 3, above all, you understand that in the last days scoffers will come scoffing and following their own evil desires. They'll say, where is this coming? He promised. Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation. Has everything stayed the same though, since creation? No. A lot has kind of changed since then. The unbelievable amount of technology that we have today to learn and to grow and to see and to experience in many ways is great, but it's a double edged sword. There's a lot of negativity that also comes with it. You know, if you deal with people who are intentionally rude and maybe it's not just talking about God, but just being around that person. They just have to criticize everything about your life. Why do you want to be around that? And I think, what are some things that we can deal with that either somebody or even our minds maybe tell ourselves? What do we do? What are some practical steps?

Number one, stay calm. Don't let that other person bring up your emotions. Now, I'm not going to say I'm immune to that because sometimes I get frustrated. But as best of all, as best as possible, detach yourself. What are they trying to do? What is their motive? Are they really sincerely questioning or are they there to provoke you? You know, on social media, we got these things called bots. You know what a bot is? It could be anybody, but maybe a certain group decides we're going to flood YouTube, Instagram, Facebook or whatever with things that are untrue to what? get you riled up. You see people get riled up today? All the time. I feel like sometimes people, they're paid to. It feels like they're getting paid to be riled up. Is it healthy for us to be upset and

angry all the time? Is the person you're talking to who maybe is a scoffer, are they being sincere or are they just being difficult? Are they trying to provoke you? And one of the things that I have learned over the years is if you want to try to help change somebody's mind, don't hit them with a mallet of truth, because what are they going to do? They don't believe it already. This is going to go over their head or in their ear and out the other. Right? What do you do? Ask questions. Ask questions. And sincerely as well, don't ask questions just to be just as provocative either. Because as followers of Jesus, we're talking about this earlier is we lead with love, we lead with humility, ask earnest questions. And sometimes, though, that just ends up being a fight, and we don't want that. I think it's also, at this point, it's okay to set boundaries. You don't have to engage every insult or every sarcastic comment, but live by your convictions. Don't let them... Don't be dissuaded by somebody.

Character will win. Or actually, character speaks louder than arguments. Because if somebody's being provocative and difficult, they're going to recognize that if you don't respond to them, what are they going to do? They're going to go to somebody else and get their attention. Sometimes you don't have to say anything or just ask Questions.

And also choose your battles. Decide is this a hill I want to die on?

But we also see from a biblical perspective. Proverbs talks about warning that correcting a scoffer will always often result in his hostility. Proverbs 26:4,5 talks about how teachers teaching discernment sometimes don't answer a fool according to his folly, yet other times a response is appropriate. 2 Timothy 2: 24, 25 says, to instruct the believers to be kind, to be patient and gentle, even when opposed. So, something that you also have to ask yourselves. Again, okay. Is this person truly seeking understanding? Are they asking questions about you and what you believe versus just trying to tell you how you're wrong?

When you engage, be loving, humble, and respectful, but also be mindful. Don't take the bait. Okay. And if they continue, and is this a conversation that you're having, is it productive? And if it is, continue. If it's not, just engage.

I told somebody I don't want to have a Bible study with them anymore because they were being rude. It was. Or they wanted to have a Bible study. It was somebody who called me, and the gist of the argument was he started asking questions about the church. I think he was also drunk. Yeah. And so maybe not fully drunk, but enough to have enough sense to ask some decent questions. But I could sense on the phone this person just was a very unhappy, angry person and said, well, all you guys, you don't. Something to the effect of y' all are weak and not ready to fight for your truth. I think that there is a time to have great conversation. To have a conversation, but if this person is just being provocative or trying to rile me up, what does that accomplish? I wanted to say, well, how effective are you being over the phone by berating me? How effective... What I really wanted to say is, you know, before you actually want to make a difference, why are you cold calling me? Why don't you actually try and reach out to your family first? Because who's the most important people you're supposed to minister to? Your closest people, your friends, your family, your neighbors. And that guy had no interest because. Well, I don't know. I don't know his situation much, but I just know that he called the church and he just. He was being rude and he wanted to have a Bible study. I actually offered to meet with him on a Sabbath, but guess what? He never showed up. Why? Because he just wanted to be provocative. And was it helpful? It wasn't.

So I think that there is a time I want to say, if somebody's being sincere, yeah, let's talk about Scripture. But if you just want to argue, what's the point of that? Because I could say some mean things back too. But is that good for me? No. I lose my credibility right away. And even though I may win the fight, have I won the war for me? I want to teach as much as I can about the love of Jesus for everybody. And I can't do that by myself. I want to. I want to honor God as well, with how I minister and talk to others and just berating and making fun of somebody. Or maybe I'm not even thinking. I'm not saying anything. But it's just as important as what am I thinking about that person? Because I can be just as judgmental as everybody else.

Am I responding in anger or wisdom? If anger is driving the response, Pause, ask why. It can be difficult when we're dealing with scoffers or even our own thoughts. And we sometimes have to wonder, God, why. I've lived a long life.

I've been told you are coming. And I think we have to have a broader macro perspective, look at the big things.

And sometimes it's hard to accept things because we want things immediately. Waiting is difficult. We don't like delayed gratification anymore. We have to keep our eyes on the prize, as somebody once said.

So I talked about mail last week, right? And how sometimes bills create fear and a sense of unwellness and anxiety. But let's say on the other side of that, you received an envelope with a check in it. And you pull it out, you find it very crisp. It's a new envelope, it's a new check waiting just for you. And maybe you were expecting it. And so you rip that envelope open and you see this beautiful, crisp, perfectly written check, right? But ultimately, what is it? It's a piece of paper with some ink on it. What makes it unique is what's written on it. And it's waiting for you to cash. Might be a check from an employer, a bonus. Grandma and grandpa sent you a check for your birthday, or maybe Grandma and Grandpa. But it seems that checks, they're not written as much.

When's the last time you wrote a check? How many checks have you written in the last I see a check their book? Kids, you know what a checkbook is? Have you ever seen one? Mom and dad show them what a checkbook is. This was the way a number of years ago. So I think I've maybe written two, maybe three checks in the last year, about 10 years. 10 years. Because why it's so easy for online bill pay or banking, or, you know, just the bank or the. What do you call it? The electric. Electric bill just automatically takes it out of my account and I keep track of it.

Now, some of you, I think these facts are a few years old, but still pretty close enough. While checks may be less popular, 54% of Americans still allegedly write checks. In fact, according to recent survey, Go banking rate says 17% of Americans are still writing checks on a monthly basis. And 23% of Gen X Americans are still sending checks on a monthly basis. In 2021, the Federal Reserve reported 27.23 checks were written.

Okay, why do I say all of this? Why is this important? How long is a good check for? Some will say 90 days, 180 days, maybe a year. But at some point, that check becomes ineffective because it's past due the expiration date from when you wrote a date on the check.

The beauty is that God has already written a check for us. It's not. Well, it's dated from whenever Jesus returns and takes us home. But the gift has already been given to us. The gift of experience, of salvation. And while we know we want to cash that check and be with God as soon as possible, the promise is still good. The check will never, ever expire. And so the bottom line is that cashing a check as well promptly ensures that you can access the funds without issue. The check doesn't go stale.

Now, 2 Timothy 3:1:5 says this. There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful and holy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self control, brutal, not lovers of good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure, rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying his power.

Does that sound familiar at all? If you look around, you can find it everywhere. Times will be difficult, and we'll talk about that in a little bit more. But again, I'm reminded that of the promise.

And lastly, to close out, let's go to James 5. James 5. That's towards the end of the Bible. James 5, verses 7 through 8.

Be patient then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how a farmer waits for the land to yield his valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is how far? Near. Okay.

And I know we've been saying near for for roughly 2,000 years. But I know in my own experience, God has been faithful. Okay. I can't always explain some of the things that have happened in my life.

And I want you to reflect. What's your why? I mean, why are you even here? Are you here because that's what you were told to do when you were a kid? Maybe your parents dragged you. But there's a blessing. Not just because we're here to learn about God. There's a blessing in the community to help one another, care for one another. And it's hard to go on a journey by yourself.

I'm planning a trip that I'm going to take pretty soon and part of the trip I'm going to be by myself. And I'll share what that trip is later, after it's done. I don't want to give it away yet. Part of me, though, I was researching and I'm a little nervous because I'm venturing into a path that I've never done before. And that's scary, right? It's going to be hard. There's going to be a lot of effort, but the price is going to be amazing based on what I've seen. So that's going to take time. I'm having to train for this adventure and the training is hard. You know what the hardest part is? Eating healthy. Because I have to be healthy for this trip. If I don't get in shape in time, I may not be able to complete it.

And so that's why I also encourage everybody. Take time to know God, read about the bread of life, drink the water that was promised in John, get to know God now. Learn, worship, come together and see what God's amazing love and grace will do. The journey is hard, but what is your why to keep going. We're not alone and Jesus will return.

So to reflect this week. Sorry. The promise is worth it this week. Where are you impatient and relying on yourself instead of trusting in God's timing? Okay. Where are you impatient in your life and relying on yourself instead of trusting in God's timing?

There's an exercise now for our challenge this week that I want you to do and that is this. It's a 24 hour hold. Oftentimes I say, hey, action is good, take care of it. But sometimes if you're dealing with a very difficult situation, should you just jump in right into it and try to deal with it or should you take time to think about it? So the 24 hour hold, identify one decision or conflict. You're rushing to fix today. I want you to pause, I want you to pray and refrain from reacting for 24 hours to let God give you wisdom.

Prime example, you got to buy a car. Do you just go and rush and buy a car, any car, or do you take time to think about it and maybe there's a really good offer, but it might be a little bit more expensive? Pray on it. Maybe this is not the right car. Okay.

It could be trying to resolve a relationship take time. How are you going to ask and deal with the situation? What's needed to help move forward? I hope and

pray that this will help to be a little bit more patient in our journey. Waiting for Jesus let's pray.

Father in heaven, Lord, we know your arrival is imminent, but we don't know when exactly. And at the end of the day, help us Lord, to have patience and confidence in you, Lord. There are days though that it is difficult. I'm not going to lie. Sometimes we just want to say why Lord, and just give up. Help us Lord, to remind us of your goodness and at the end of the day it will be worth it. In Jesus name everybody said amen.

Grace and peace, everyone.