



The Loud Voice - FIRST SABBATH

I was very tired, and the airport waiting room was so cool and comforting. For weeks I'd been traveling around the Caribbean taking pictures and making a movie about the many activities of fellow church members there.

I'd filmed pastors and laypeople sharing God's love with everyone they met. I'd seen doctors healing sick people, and students studying to become doctors and preachers and teachers. I'd met real heroes who'd sacrificed so much to worship the God they loved. I'd photographed young people sharing information about overcoming illness and disease. I'd heard music and powerful preaching, and watched people get baptized. Now it was time to go home.

Words of Love

"God's holy people must be patient. They must obey God's commands and keep their faith in Jesus" (Rev. 14:12, ICB).*

I closed my eyes as I felt the pressure of my busy schedule slip away. Soon I'd be home in my own bed.

Suddenly I became aware that I couldn't hear anyone talking near me. The waiting room, moments before filled with passengers, children, ticket agents, was empty. All that remained was silence and the sound of jet engines spooling up.

I panicked. My flight home! The journey that would return me to my home had left without me. I'd missed it! I'd fallen asleep, and while I dozed, I was left behind.

That's when I heard a loud voice echoed from the speakers of my lonely airport waiting room. "Your attention, please. Your attention, please. This is the final boarding call of Flight 982 to Miami. All passengers should be on board the aircraft at this time. If you have a ticket for Flight 982, you must proceed immediately to the boarding gate. This is your final call."

I probably created a record for the fastest sprint to the boarding gate. The door to the airplane was about to close when I raced up to the counter and shouted, "Wait! I'm on that flight. I have a ticket! See? Here's my boarding pass, too. Please let me on! I want to go home!"

Did you know there is a "loud voice" calling out to you right now? This "loud voice" is calling out to everyone in the whole world. It's God's voice echoing from the lips of three high-flying angels who've been sent from heaven to do two things: (1) to warn of coming dangers, and (2) to share what we need to do in order to go home with Jesus.

One time a loud voice woke me and told me to get on an airplane right now. God's loud voice has a similar message. Only this time we won't be going to Miami; we will be headed for heaven! So let's all be sure to stay awake and listen for it.

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SHARE

If you were God, what would you say to this world to invite everyone to go to heaven with you? Write that message down and e-mail it to everyone you know.

SUNDAY

Good News School

I don't want to go to church." Justin sat with his arms crossed over his chest, pouting.

"Why?" his father asked, watching the road ahead. "I thought you liked church!"

"I'd rather do other things today, like play baseball or watch one of my favorite movies on the Internet. Sometimes church is boring."

Justin's dad nodded slowly. "Well, you're right. Compared to an exciting baseball game or a movie about battling dinosaurs, church can be kinda boring."

The boy blinked. "You agree with me?"

Words of Love

"The angel had the eternal Good News to preach to those who live on earth—to every nation, tribe, language, and people" (Rev. 14:6, ICB).

"Sure," his father said with a smile. "That's why we're not going to church today."

"We're not?"

"Nope."

"Wow," Justin gasped, squirming excitedly against the seat belt.

"And," his father continued, "we're going to a place where you learn how to be an angel. As a matter of fact, you're going to learn how to stop wars, make your friends healthier, and bring love into people's homes."

The two sat in silence for a long moment. "Who's going to teach me all this?" the boy asked.

"God," Dad said.

Justin frowned. "How do you know God's going to do all that?"

His father shrugged. "Because He said He would. 'Go everywhere in the world. Tell the Good News to everyone' [Mark 16:15, ICB].

"Do you think God wants us to just head out into the world without learning how to do that? That, my friend, takes practice and knowledge. Learning, too. It requires that you do something very special once or twice a week—something that teaches you how to be a loving angel to the whole world. That takes—"

Dad steered his minivan into a parking lot filled with cars and smiling faces.

"That takes church," Justin said with a shy smile when he recognized where they were.

"People in Bible times had their sanctuaries and temples. Today we have churches. But the goal of these places is all the same: to learn how to spread the good news of God's love. Do you understand?"

Justin nodded. "Yes. And you know what, Dad?"

"What?"

"I'm glad we have this little church to come to. I'm sorry I complained about it. I do want to be an angel for God. I do want to spread His love to everyone."

Father and son walked from the car and headed for their church.

SHARE

If you were the pastor of a church, what would you do to make sure everyone had a fun learning experience there? Make a list and share it with your pastor. Then get ready to help him or her in any way you can.

MONDAY

Getting Ready

Lisa was as excited as a 10-year-old could be. “Do you see her yet?” her mother called from the doorway, holding a sizzling raspberry pie fresh from the oven. “Raspberry pie is her favorite, you know.”

“I know!” Lisa said beaming. “And she likes baked apples and watermelon and Spanish rice.”

Mother placed the hot pie on a cooling shelf by the window and sat down wearily on the porch swing. “You’ve missed your big sister, haven’t you?” she said.

Lisa nodded. “Sarah’s ship has been to so many interesting places,” she said excitedly. “Each time she is depl—deplo—.”

Words of Love

“What will happen to show us that it is time for you to come again and for the world to end?” (Matt. 24:3, ICB).

“Deployed,” Mother interjected.

“Yes. That’s it,” said Lisa. “Each time she’s deployed, the Navy sends her someplace really exotic. That means ‘strange, mysterious, and out of the ordinary.’ I looked it up.” The girl paused. “I’ve never been to anyplace exotic, unless you count Daryl’s bedroom.”

Mother laughed. “I think even he has cleaned up his act for Sarah’s arrival. The whole house is as neat as a pin.”

Lisa smiled. “Nothing’s too good for Sarah. I want her to feel right at home.”

Mother sighed. “I wish people worked this hard for someone else who’s coming back soon.”

The girl frowned. “Who’s coming back?”

“Jesus,” Mother stated. “He’s coming back to this earth.”

Lisa gasped. “When?”

“Soon,” her mother responded. “Jesus told His disciples that before He returned, the world would be a dangerous place. That’s why Sarah joined the Navy. She’s trying to keep the world peaceful.”

“Oh, yeah,” Lisa said. “Those were the signs Jesus talked about, the signs that He would be coming soon.”

More Signs

“You knew Sarah was coming back, so you’ve been busy cleaning your rooms, scrubbing the floors, picking beautiful flowers from the fields, washing your clothes—you want everything to be special for Sarah. I do, too. I’ve been making all of her favorite foods, like this pie. Why are we doing all those things?”

Lisa grinned broadly. “Because we love Sarah and want her to feel welcome when she gets here.”

“You know what? I like to think it’s the job of every Christian to show signs of loving service to the world, so everyone will know that something special and wonderful is about to happen. Our best friend Jesus is coming back, and we need to be the signs to show everyone that He’s coming soon.”

Just then a car appeared at the curve in the road, and Lisa started jumping up and down. “Here she comes! Here she comes,” she called out. Mom and Lisa waved and smiled at the approaching vehicle. They knew that everything was ready to welcome someone they’d missed greatly and was now coming home again.

SHARE

List five ways you can be a joyful sign to your friends and neighbours that Jesus is coming soon. Then write a song about your joy.

TUESDAY

Evidence

You don't look so good," Kim's dad said as his son stumbled into the kitchen. The teenager stood in his pajamas holding a half-empty glass of orange juice in one hand and a bottle of vitamin C pills in the other.

"Oh, I'm fine," Kim answered, "except for this cough, runny nose, scratchy throat, high fever, and bothersome ringing in my ears."

Dad laughed. "Poor baby."

Kim frowned. "You called me baby." I'm 13 years old and prefer to be called 'young person' or 'adult in training.' "

Dad shook his head slowly from side to side. "I know exactly what's wrong with you."

Kim blinked. "Well, Dr. Dad, what's your diagnosis?"

Words of Love

"It is important for you to understand what will happen in the last days" (2 Peter 3:3, ICB).

The man pointed a finger at him. "It's obvious you've got a bad case of twisted ankle."

Kim studied his father for a long moment. "Twisted ankle?"

Dad's eyebrows rose. "What do you think you have?"

"Dad," the teenager said, "I have a cold."

"So," the man pressed, "you have a cold based on the evidence, right?"

Kim nodded. "Right."

"And," Dad continued, "we should make decisions based on evidence, right?"

The boy hesitated. "Right."

"Then why is it so hard for you to believe that Jesus is coming soon?"

Kim gasped. "What does Jesus' coming have to do with my cold?"

Old-fashioned

Dad's eyes softened. "Last night you said that you didn't think Jesus was coming soon. You said that we should just love others and be kind and enjoy God's forgiveness, and that talking about the Second Coming was totally old-fashioned."

"Yes," Kim responded.

"So, what about the evidence?" the man pressed.

"Evidence?" Kim asked. "What evidence?"

“Jesus told His disciples that near the end of time there would be famines and pestilence and that people would be so afraid that their hearts would stop beating! And what about all these sudden illnesses like plagues that keep popping up? We’ve got people mistreating poor persons and making themselves rich off the suffering of others. That’s all evidence, Kim. That’s evidence that Jesus is coming soon and we have to tell people about it.”

“If that’s true, why hasn’t He come yet?” Kim asked.

“I don’t know,” Dad responded with a shrug. “I’m sure He has His reasons. But if you believe the evidence, you have to believe and trust the promise. I think we need to be telling people about the evidence and about the promise.”

Kim nodded slowly. “OK, OK. You’re right,” he said between coughs. “I guess I should take the Second Coming more seriously. I guess I should tell others about it too.” He turned to leave, then paused. “And I will start doing that right after I get over this twisted ankle.”

Dad smiled proudly. “That’s my . . . young person.”

SHARE

Draw a picture of three activities you can do in your home, your community, or your church to remind people that Jesus is coming back. Include this text with your drawings: “Listen! I am coming soon!” (Rev. 22:12, ICB).

WEDNESDAY

Waiting for the Harvest

Terry stood and stared at the freshly turned soil. Overhead, spring birds sang their sweet songs and clouds drifted in the bright blue of the sky. It had been three hours since he'd watched his father carefully plant seeds in the dirt, and yet nothing was happening. To his 5-year-old mind, that was simply not acceptable.

Dad had worked hard preparing the ground, adding just the right amount of fertilizer and dropping each group of corn seeds into perfectly spaced piles along perfectly straight furrows. Now the sun shone overhead and a cool wind blew through the branches of the tall oaks behind the house. It was time. But nothing was happening!

Words of Love

"Those who have died and were in Christ will rise first" (1 Thess. 4:16, ICB).

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Dad walked up beside his young son and smiled down at him. "Are you talking to my garden?" he asked.

Terry pointed. "I'm talking to the seeds. You put them in the garden this morning, and I want corn on the cob for supper. What are they waiting for? The seeds are just lying there."

"Oh, but they're doing something important," Dad urged.

"What?" Terry wanted to know.

"They're waiting. They're waiting for the days to become longer, the sun to become brighter, the air to become warmer, and summer rains to bring moisture down into the soil so they can drink of the life-giving water. Then something amazing will happen."

"What?" Terry asked, bending low for a closer look.

"They'll send shoots up through the soil to the surface while pushing roots down, down, down into the earth," Dad stated. "Then they'll take energy from the sun and grow up, up, up, forming stalks and leaves and finally ears of corn ready for hungry 5-year-old boys to enjoy with mashed potatoes and string beans. All that takes time, but it will be worth the wait."

Terry frowned. "Why does it take so long?"

"Well," Dad said, looking out over his garden, "everything has to be just right. Everything has to happen in a special order for things to grow. But as long as there's a sun overhead, rain coming down, and rich soil below, the seeds in my garden will grow just as they have since God created this world."

The man paused. "It's the same with people who die—like Grandma and Uncle Jarrod. Remember? We placed their coffins in the ground. But someday soon Jesus will come and call them from the earth. They'll be alive once more, and we'll be so happy to see them. Then we'll all go to heaven with Jesus, where nothing will ever die and my gardens will grow delicious food forever. Would you like that?"

Terry thought for a long moment. "OK. Then I'll wait too. I'll wait for my corn on the cob, and I'll wait for Jesus to make Grandma and Uncle Jarrod alive again."

"Good plan," Dad said, taking his son by the hand and walking toward the house. "Waiting isn't always fun, but it will be worth it. You'll see."

SHARE

Has someone in your family died? If so, draw a picture of some beautiful tombstones with their names on them. Include the sun overhead to help you remember what Jesus will do someday soon.

THURSDAY

A Safe Place

Elsa looked at the falling leaves and dying grasses. She noticed great lines of geese flying high overhead as a chilly wind blew up the valley, making her shiver and move

closer to her mother for warmth. "I don't like autumn," she said, jamming her hands into her pockets. "It makes me worried."

"Worried?" Mother repeated. "Why?"

Words of Love

"Blessed and holy are those who share in the first raising of the dead. The second death has no power over them" (Rev. 20:6, ICB).

"Because of the animals," the girl stated, pointing at the trees and meadows surrounding them. "See those squirrels and chipmunks and birds? And what about the foxes and bears and groundhogs and the whitetail deer? What's going to happen to them when the snows come? It gets so cold that Miller Pond freezes solid, and all their food goes away. They don't have a nice, warm fire like we have in our house. All they have are the woods and the snow. That can't be good."

Mother thought for a moment. "Well, you're right," she said. "They don't have a big home like ours, but they have God. When He created this world, He made sure that everyone had a home. As a matter of fact, the earth was one great big happy home for everyone. People and animals lived in the meadows or under the shade of beautiful trees—just like our animal friends out there.

"But after sin came along, Adam and Eve built their own home. Soon people were building houses and cities and living a life very different from what God had in mind. The animals continued to do many things as God intended. Sin created cold winters and brought many dangers into their lives—especially dangers from humans. But the animals dug into the ground or burrowed into trees, or flew south to faraway, warmer places. Many learned to sleep during the cold winter months in cozy dens while others figured out how to find food under piles of fallen snow. Animals are living in the arms of nature, doing what God taught them to do—survive."

The woman paused. "The same God who made us promised to protect us if we'd let Him. Someday heaven will be our home, and even though sin is destroying everything, we'll be safe and sound there. We'll learn more about God and worship Him. The birds, bears, foxes, squirrels, and deer will join us there too. One big happy family again."

Elsa thought for a moment, then nodded.

Mother smiled. "Hey, would you like to help God care for the animals?"

"Really?" the girl gasped. "We can do that?"

"Sure. Let's go to the hardware store. We can buy some birdseed and dried corn. Then, when it snows, we'll put out plenty of food for the squirrels and rabbits and deer and birds to eat. They can carry some of that food back to their dens and tree cavities for later. It won't be the Garden of Eden, but we can love and care for them just the same."

And that's exactly what they did.

SHARE

Put up some bird and animal feeders in your backyard this coming winter. You'll make a lot of critters—and the God who made them—very happy. Invite your friends to do the same.

FRIDAY

Worship the Creator

One day I was taking a Sabbath afternoon walk with my wife. We were enjoying the colorful summer leaves and listening to the birds chirping in the branches.

I stopped to take a picture of a flower as my wife continued walking, admiring the butterflies and blossoms. Soon she was some distance from me.

Suddenly a large shaggy dog burst from the yard of a nearby house and headed straight for my wife at full speed. By the look of his bared teeth and the sound of his deep snarl, I knew he didn't want to play fetch with her.

I had three choices. One, I could call out to the dog in a friendly manner. "Excuse me, Mr. Dog," I could say. "I would really appreciate it if you didn't try to eat my wife. Please return to your yard, and we'll just continue our walk in peace and tranquillity."

Or, two, I could have tried to reason with him. "Mr. Dog, your actions don't seem friendly. Being friendly is much more pleasant and rewarding than being all snarly and gruff. Besides, you might get into trouble. Why don't you simply bark a few times, and then head back home again?"

Or, three, I could do what I did. I shouted, "HEY! HEY! STOP! BAD DOG! BAD DOG! GET OUT OF HERE! GO HOME! GO HOME!"

That third solution worked like a charm. The dog hurried back toward his own yard. Whew! That was too close for comfort.

Words of Love

"Worship God. He made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water" (Rev. 14:7, ICB).

Snarling Dog Satan

In the fascinating book of Revelation the Bible reports that God sent three angels to warn everyone in the world that sin is destroying them. That old snarling dog Satan is on the attack. The Bible says they used a "loud voice." And one of those angels, the very first one, while using a very definite outdoor voice, said something strange. He shouted: "Worship God. He made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water." In other words, he told everyone: "GOD CREATED YOU, SO YOU SHOULD WORSHIP HIM!"

Why would an angel have to remind everyone that they were created by God?

So many people have forgotten that fact. They think we came from monkeys, or just evolved from pond scum. These people worship science or technology; they bow to human leaders, or use worldly ways of thinking and reasoning. That first shouting angel had news for them. Science, technology, humans, monkeys, or pond scum can't save a single person. Not one. Only God the Creator can do that.

I'm not suggesting that you go to your friend's house, knock on the door, and, when they come to answer, say in a loud voice, "HEY! GOD LOVES YOU. HE WANTS TO SAVE YOU FROM SIN. WANT TO PLAY SOCCER?"

Instead, you can say with an indoor voice, "Hey, how about some soccer?" And then you enjoy an honest, fair game, showing your friends exactly how Jesus would play and treat others.

And our kind testimony should work like the angels'.

SHARE

Ask your pastor to preach a sermon about how God created this world and everything in it. Then invite a few of your friends to come and listen with you.

SECOND SABBATH

Living Forever

Forever” is a hard word to understand. Why? Because no one has ever done anything forever. No one has walked forever, eaten pizza forever, played football forever, or watched television forever. Everything we do has a beginning and an end. Even this day boasted a sunrise and a sunset. Beginnings. Endings. Starts. Stops. Life as we know it.

Then along comes a Bible text that describes what we will be doing in heaven. Here’s what it says: “The Lord will give them light. And they will rule like kings forever and ever” (Rev. 22:5, ICB).

OK. That’s cool! The Bible says we won’t need a bright sun in heaven, because God’s glory will provide all the light we need. And as for me, I won’t mind being like a king. Here on this earth I’ve lived my whole life under the heavy hand of Satan, being tempted and many times feeling afraid and uncertain. In heaven there will be no temptations and sins to mess up a good thing. Being like a king is just fine with me!

But what is this “forever and ever” that the text talks about? Once heaven begins, it won’t end?

Words of Love

“The Lord will give them light. And they will rule like kings forever and ever” (Rev. 22:5, ICB).

Yes. That’s exactly what it’s saying.

We’re going to have to use our imaginations, because, as I said, no one has ever done “forever” before. Forever just is. It always has been and always will be. Our sin-filled minds and bodies simply can’t understand that type of existence.

Instead of trying to figure out what forever is, maybe we can have fun planning what our forever will be!

When I was young, I’d be out playing a really exciting game with my friends, and the sun would start falling toward the western horizon. Then I’d hear my mother call: “Charlie, come in now. It’s getting dark.”

I didn’t want to stop playing my exciting game. I didn’t want to come in. I didn’t want it to get dark. I wanted to stay outside and play with my friends . . . forever.

A few years ago I looked down at the smiling face of my father. He was very old and very sick. We talked about old times, and he told me how much he loved me. I started to cry. “Daddy,” I said, “I don’t want you to be old and sick. I want to visit with you and talk to you and love you . . . forever.” Not long after that, he died.

Do you see what forever means? It means that our fun doesn’t have to end. It means that you don’t have to stop playing. Best of all, it means that you never have to say goodbye to your dad, or mom, or friends. For those who love Jesus so much that they’re willing to start a new life with Him, forever has a beginning. But it doesn’t have an end!

That’s just fine with me. How about you?

SHARE

Draw some pictures of how you plan to spend your time in heaven. Under each picture, print the word “FOREVER.” Then post your pictures where you’ll see them every day.