

## SHINE LIKE STARS

By Vasti S. Viana

Theme: Women's Ministries history / living (shining for Christ) / evangelism

Suggested Call to Worship: Psalms 43:3, 4, or Responsive reading, SDA Hymnal, #721, The Lord is My Light.

Primary Bible text : **Matthew. 13:43; Daniel 12:03.** (Suggestion: give each person in the congregation a copy of the text found in Daniel 12:3).

Opening Song: #21, SDA Hymnal, *Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise*

Closing Song: #206, SDA Hymnal, *Face to Face*

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Today's sermon is focusing on Women and what they can do for the Lord. There has been a new emphasis on women in the church since the beginning of Women's Ministries. Let us review a short history of this department.

Sarepta Henry was the first director of Women's Ministries in 1898. (If possible, it would be effective to show her picture to the congregation).

Unfortunately, after her death, the position was left unfilled; consequently, the ministry became dormant. A 90-year pause ensued in which only a small majority of Adventist women were recognized for outstandingly missionary work for Jesus. The majority participated mostly through their presence in church, and perhaps helping to distribute pamphlets or invitations in the community.

We are no doubt living in the last days. The Divine call to receive the Holy Spirit and transmit the message of the gospel is also made directly to girls and women. Let us read Acts 2: 17 and 18. (reading from the New International version)

In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see  
visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants,  
both men and women, I will pour out My Spirit in those days,  
and they will prophecy.

Is it any wonder that in these last days God has reinstated the Women's Ministries Department to inspire Seventh-day Adventist women to grow, to strengthen their faith, to develop abilities and to use their talents to bring people to Jesus, taking hope and happiness to many hearts?

In 1990 the Seventh-day Adventist Church, during the Annual Council, voted the establishment of an office of Women's Ministries at the General Conference. The specific function of this office was to foster ministry by women to women in the world church.

Praise the Lord for this new and enthusiastic Department of Women's Ministries. Praise the Lord because many sisters are awakening to a more dynamic spiritual life. They too are being encouraged and trained to employ their talents, to prepare the way for the glorious return of Our Lord Jesus, together with the brothers of the church.

(If available tell local or worldwide news of outstanding experiences of women involved in ministry which resulted in baptisms or former-Adventists returning to the Church, or other outreach activities which made a difference in the lives of others.)

**For our sermon, let us focus on the Value of Light.**

In the physical world or in nature, what is our greatest source of light? The sun! And the exciting fact is that the sun is a star. It is a star with a very special function. It illuminates, gives warmth and serves as a guide. What would it be like if the sun did not exist?

The effect of the absence of the sun would be intense darkness upon the earth. People would not be able to move around. Vegetation would not be able to grow; consequently there would be no food. And what would happen with a permanent absence of the sun? We would be frozen to death in a short time.

Praise the Lord for this shining star named the sun, which illuminates, warms and guides us. With the sun life continues its movement each day! Quite often we neglect to recognize the value of this spatial light and many times we take it for granted because routinely it continues to fulfill the task which God designated for it.

God made the moon and the stars for the night. What would our nights be like without the stars and without a moon? Certainly our nights would be very dark and dull. The stars, in addition to decorating the sky with their twinkling lights, also gives direction to travelers and those who navigate the high seas. How many people would be lost and would even die if the stars did not shine to guide them on their way? There are millions and millions of stars so distant from us that they seem to be nebulous in our Milky Way. I invite you to take the time to look at the heavens on a starry night, especially when you are far from the lights of the city.

In Genesis 15:5 is the account where God used the stars as a visual illustration to help Abraham understand the plans He had for him.

God took him outside and said, "Look at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them." Then He said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

In that dialogue with God, Abraham must have been very excited and happy to know how many descendents he would have. However, let's leave Abraham admiring the heavens and talking with God; later we will return to him.

In the spiritual world, what is our greatest source of light? Light for our soul, our reason, and our emotions? Light that illuminates, warms, and guides us?

Psalm 27:1, first part tells us - The Lord is my light, whom shall I fear?

Let us consider two ways in which the Lord communicates His Light to us:

#1. James 1:17-- Every good and perfect gift, comes from the Father of Lights.

God communicates His Light to us through talents and gifts which He grants to us. How marvelous to think that all the talents, gifts, and abilities that we possess are gifts from the Father of Lights. These gifts are used to illuminate and brighten our lives and the lives of others. This is one of the ways in which God communicates His light to us.

#2. James 1: 18 –He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all He created.

God communicates His Light through His Word. What is the Word of God if it is not the "Lamp for my feet and the light for my path?" Ps. 119:105 --; we all know this verse by heart. Let us say it together, in unison and with force like an army.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”

How many of us brought the light of the Inspired Word today? (Congregation lifts up their Bibles).

No one lights a lamp and hides it under the bed or behind a dresser! In the same manner the closed Bible does nothing for me: it does not illuminate, guide or warm me. In order for the Light of God to shine on us, we must open the Holy Word. The Bible is ineffective if it is left closed!

In His infinite knowledge, Jesus invites you and me to participate with Him in the pleasure of receiving and transmitting. This happens when in partnership with Him, we take His light to individuals in order for them to experience a personal relationship with Him and to be saved. It is our privilege to accompany Him in this work and allow Him to inspire us, strengthen us and give us power to do this work. Receiving and transmitting is a constant work.

What happens to individuals who develop this dynamic process of receiving and transmitting? Let's look at John 4: 7.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?”

We have heard many sermons and comments regarding this text, haven't we? Prominence is generally given to the steps which Jesus applied as a model for us to follow in evangelism.

Let's analyze the facts through the eyes of the Samaritan focusing on: What did Jesus see and hear? Then, let's put on His sandals and look for water at Jacob's well.

According to the story, there are ten (10) positive points in the life of this woman. Many times

we only think of the negative side.

Positive #1. She was a good worker. Water is a heavy load to carry yet it is a necessary load because it is needed for all types of domestic cleaning and for food preparation. It is a must for accomplishing household chores every day.

Positive #2: She was not prejudiced. How do we know this? Upon arriving at the well she found a Jew; he was not only a total stranger but he was from a race known to be prejudiced against the Samaritans. Yet, she spoke with the Jew at the well; if she were prejudiced, she would not have done this. She discussed, questioned, and said what she knew regarding the history of her people and regarding the Jews and the Messiah.

She treated the Jew with respect and asked him who he was and if He was greater than "our father Jacob." (She included herself as a daughter of Jacob.) A woman without prejudice. Prejudices create barriers. She had a pleasant surprise when she discovered that this Jewish man also was not prejudiced.

Positive # 3. She was humble. She confused the analogy of water from the well with "Living Water," and it took some time before she understood the difference. Jesus did not criticize her because she did not quickly understand. He was patient and explained. But what is good about confusing the concepts? The positive point is that she was humble enough to accept orientation and change her wrong concepts to concepts that were correct.

Positive # 4. She was observant and paid attention to what she heard. She maintained a dynamic and intelligent dialogue. In this manner she discovered what was spoken by the Prophet.

Positive #5. She spoke the truth regarding her life, even though acknowledging it hurt deep down within her soul. She was sincere as she said, "I have no husband" when Jesus said to her to go find her husband and return. She then heard two compliments from Jesus as found in verses 16, 17, and 18. One: "You are right" Two: What you have just said is quite true."

Positive #6. She recognized something divine in Him. He saw her soul, knew her sins, and revealed them without belittling her. Yet, He continued to treat her with dignity and respect.

Positive #7. She affirmed that she awaited the coming of the Messiah and desired to learn of Him "all things."

Jesus saw that her heart was prepared to receive the entire truth, and so He felt safe to reveal His identity by stating, "I who speak to you am He."

Positive #8. Upon hearing that He was the Messiah, she accepted and believed in her heart. Then she clearly understood the meaning of the term "Living Water." During the dialogue, Jesus had said that the Living Water becomes the fountain within the one who receives it.

Have you ever taken the time to observe a fountain of water? What description would you give

of the fountain? A fountain is full of movement, it always flows forward. It is quite contrary to stagnant water that is lifeless and in deterioration. Fountains were created to flow forward, never backward, nor to stand still.

The Samaritan upon drinking of the Living Water felt impelled to take it to the inhabitants of Sycar, her city. The living water flowed like a fountain of salvation in her heart.

Let us remember that it was her custom to go to the well at the hottest time of the day, when no one else was there. She possibly wanted to avoid contact with others as all that they would do was to gossip about her and the life she was living. But now it was different. She had found the Messiah! This news was too marvelous to remain only with her; she just had to share the excitement of this knowledge with others. So she left her water container at the edge of the well and ran to find people to transmit this message to them.

Positive # 9. She formulated her strategy of communication while she ran. If she came announcing, "I found the Messiah!" she would not be taken seriously. She quickly studied a strategy to obtain maximum efficiency and minimum disbelief. Her strategy was inspired in the steps that Jesus used to transmit His message to her.

She courageously decided to begin calling the attention of the people with an invitation, "Come see!"

Afterward, she continued by telling that He, without knowing her, stated all that she had done wrong in her life and, although He knew everything about her, He continued to relate to her with respect and dignity.

This attitude could only be divine, because if it were from a common human, he would have belittled her or made abusive remarks toward her. She ended her proclamation asking a question: "Could this be the Christ? Could He be the promised Messiah?"

Within her heart she knew that He was the Messiah, however she felt that it would be prudent to confirm this certainty to avoid a possible resistance or negative response. The question would suggest the answer.

Positive # 10. She transmitted the message with wisdom and enthusiasm, which attracted people to come to Jesus. The "Samaritans of that city" (verses 39 and 42) believed in her word that the Messiah was beside Jacob's Well and they went there to meet Him. They invited Him to go to their city, and Jesus remained with them for two days teaching them "all things." The Samaritan woman held a successful evangelistic campaign!

Sadly, we must acknowledge that even today there are some people who do not give credit to the work of women. However this Biblical evidence demonstrates that God entrusts women with the responsibility to transmit the message of His Light to both genders.

Let us read Daniel 12:03 together: "Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the

heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.”

Now it is time to return to Abraham. We left him speaking with God and looking at the starry sky, pleased because he had received the news that His spiritual descendents would be like the stars: numerous and brilliant.

Considering that the Samaritan woman led many people to Jesus, I ask, is it possible that Abraham saw the Samaritan woman shining as a star of God on that night?

And you? I ask you very kindly, Were you among the stars that Abraham saw that night?

Let us reread the text from the Word of God in Daniel 12:3, together, in unison and strong like an army. “Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.”

(Have soft background music played at this time.)

The great Procession of the Centuries and all Eternity is soon to take place. We attempt to visualize it through the eyes of faith! All participants of the procession are individuals who chose to shine through their life on Earth by reflecting the light of God. They arrive from all parts of the earth and seas.

We consider that marvelous procession passing through the heavens! Overcoming the barrier of gravity, calmly crossing space to meet the powerful Savior. Excitement, happiness, gratitude will be shining in the eyes of all as they near the cloud of glory of Jesus.

Let's imagine marching with that parade with numerous marchers in their resplendent white uniform!

When all the righteous are gathered beside Jesus, He, the great victorious Commander will take over the leadership of the procession. The rejoicing of all will be expressed in victory songs while Heavenly angels accompany the singing with their glorious music. Those angels are the ones who ministered in favor of humanity.

The festive Procession will continue through outer space passing by the planets, rapidly going through the Milky Way and the galaxies, which today are only known by radio waves because of the fact that they are hundreds of millions of light years away. Jesus will have transformed our bodies to adapt them to life in that infinite spatial dimension.

The glorious procession of the righteous enroute will be acclaimed and applauded by unfallen beings that will unite with the triumphal entourage.

Jesus, leading the procession as the indisputable King of the Universe brings into eternity multitudes from the planet Earth, so that they may shine in His kingdom as stars forever and ever.

Before the gates of Paradise, the procession stops. Two splendid groups formed of millions and millions of angelic beings are lining the main entrance to receive the royal entourage.

According to what we read in Psalm 24, we have the distinct impression that the gates of Paradise will be closed and that two large choirs of angels will sing alternately, one in response to the other. (Have someone help you lead the congregation in reading Psalm 24:7-10 responsively).

During the angelical song, the Gates of Paradise will be opened. Filled with emotion we will see our God, our Father, shining on His throne surrounded by a rainbow.

He will come to the midst of the righteous; He will sing and will be joyful as one does on a day of festivities. His marvelous, special, unique voice will be filled with joyful singing because of the presence of His children. He will be reaffirming His love for them. We read this in Zephaniah 3:17. This is the only time in the entire Bible that one reads that God will sing.

What will it be like to hear God singing with His impressive thunder-like voice, which is mysterious like many waters? He will sing because we are there with Him! It is marvelous to know that your presence and mine with God on that day is the great motive for His joy and His song!

How will His song be presented? Will it be a cappella solo or will He be accompanied by angelic voices? Will it be a duet with Jesus or will the Holy Spirit join in to form a trio? Will we sing together with Him, or will we listen, marveling at His voice? Will the heavenly orchestra accompany Him? Oh! It will be a beautiful surprise!

After the victory song, Jesus will place himself at the entrance of Paradise and say, "Come ye blessed of my Father." Matt. 25:34.

Each one of the multitude of the righteous saved will have the privilege to be personally received by the Savior. There is no hurry. At this time eternity is just beginning.

### **Then we will receive two presents.**

Jesus will present to each individual two precious jewels:

A crown of gold - I Peter 5:4. A crown, symbol of victory, which will be credited to Christ.

A white stone with the inscription of the new name. Rev. 2:17. The white precious stone with the new name inscribed, symbolizing eternity, which is only possible through Christ and will be credited to Him.

In the warmth of the arms of Jesus, we will have the indescribable pleasure of telling Him how thankful we are for all of His effort and sacrifice involved in saving us. With a caring embrace,

He will say, "Come and share Your Master's happiness." (Matt. 25:21).

Entering through the gates of Paradise we will begin to walk on the streets paved with gold. What more will we see? Ah! Marvels never before seen, heard or imagined will overwhelm the righteous for eternity!

May the vision of eternity with Christ, remain before us each day, motivating us to say to the great Savior, "Here, I am to shine for you." I am available to be an instrument in Your hands, fulfilling your expectation that I shine for you as the stars. I want to receive Your light, learning from Your Word; and I want to exercise and transmit the talents which you have given to me. Strengthen me Lord, give me Your power so that Your will can be accomplished in me. If this is your desire, my brothers and my sisters, please stand with me and with all our heart we will say together in one voice, "Lord, here I am to shine for You." (Repeat together).

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**Biographical Information on Sermon Writer:**

Vasti Viana, wife of Pastor Jose Viana, is mother of two adult children, both married. At the time of this writing, Vasti was the director of the Women's Ministries Department in the South American Division. She has been a contributor to the women's devotional book. She enjoys music, reading, and walking.