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Good afternoon. It was not terribly long ago that I found myself running in an unfamiliar neighborhood in an unfamiliar city. Early in the morning, I was running along, and then I saw him. Out of the corner of my eye, there he was, a member of one of those breeds of dogs. One of those breeds that some of you own, and the owner will always say something like, "I know the reputation of this particular breed is blah, blah, blah, but my little sweetheart..." And the little sweetheart always has a name like "Chainsaw" or "Hitler," "Satan." Well, I see out of the corner of my eye, Satan is coming after me. He sees me. Closer and closer he runs. I can see his jowls flapping. His teeth are bared. I think this is the last run. This is the last day of my life. I look down; he is just a foot away. When all of a sudden his neck snaps back, and he comes to a screeching halt, and I see it. Satan is on a leash. Satan does not get to go any further than right there.

I proclaim to you this afternoon on this, the final One Project gathering, Jesus Christ has put Satan on a leash. Death still rears its ugly head, but death has been put on a leash. Remnants of the Great Controversy continue to echo in the universe, but the devil is no more powerful. We worship Jesus. Born. Lived. Died. Raised from the grave. Ascended with power into the heavens. We worship a Jesus who is strong, who is muscular, who is powerful, who is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He has got everything under control. And so we gather one last time. We gather one final time.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this afternoon, I have an invitation for you to consider. It is an invitation to revival, and therefore, because all revival depends on it, it is also an invitation to reformation. This afternoon, I don't wish for you just to muse but to do. To consider the active work of reformation. I don't have in mind reform of church governance nor church financial reform nor structural reform and not evangelistic reform, educational reform, or liturgical renewal, though these all may be needed. The reform I'd like to put on offer is deeper. It's more foundational. I want to propose the possibility of doctrinal reform.

For starters, then, I suppose it's important that we have a definition of doctrine. Perhaps we might get at this with an analogy. The acclaimed nature and science writer, Jennifer Ackerman, in her best-selling book, "The Genius of Birds," tells us about an African gray parrot named "Throckmorton" (spelling?) who was owned by a British couple named Karen and Bob. Throckmorton mimics the voices of human family members so closely, that Karen cannot tell her husband Bob's voice from the bird's perfectly performed copy. When Karen is called by Bob from across the house, she doesn't know who's actually calling for her, Bob or the bird. Throckmorton has also mastered the cellphone ringtones of both Bob and Karen. One of the bird's favorite plays is to summon Bob from the garage by imitating his cellphone ring. When Bob comes running, Throckmorton mimics answering the call in Bob's voice: "Hello. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Uh-huh." And then he finishes with the flat ringtone of hanging up. Throckmorton imitates the bark of the family's former dog, a Jack Russell terrier dead nine years. He has also nailed the bark of the current family pet, a miniature schnauzer, and will join him in a chorus of barking, making the house sound like a kennel. Karen says he is pitch perfect. No one can tell if it's the parrot barking or the dog. Finally, noises. The parrot imitates the glug, glug sound of Karen drinking water, the slurping sound of Bob trying to cool his coffee while he sips it, as well as once when Bob had a cold, Throckmorton added to his repertoire the sounds of nose blowing, coughing, and sneezing. Another time, when Bob came home from a business trip with a terrible stomach bug... That's right,

Throckmorton made sick to my stomach sounds for the next six months.

Throckmorton is a parrot and, therefore, has the gift of impersonation. In this realm, he enjoys an unrivaled, preeminent obsession. He longs to master the noises, the sounds, the voice of his master. This great passion requires two essential skills. First, listening. The bird listens really, really well. He carefully hears the inflection, the tone, the pitch, the cadence, the accent, the intricate nuance of the sound of his master's voice. He is a great listener of his master. Second, he has a skill for speaking. The parrot speaks what he hears really, really well. He articulates with uncanny precision. He describes, he explains, he revoices his master's voice with remarkable resemblance. He works hard to speak like his master. Yes, he longs to master the voice of his master.

And there it is. That's the way, the truth, and the life. That's what we covet above all. Mastering the voice of our master. Listening to him really, really well and speaking what we hear really, really well. There's a word we give this experience: revelation. God reveals His voice, His word to us. We hear, and we speak of what we hear. There's a term we give the work of thinking deeply and carefully about this revelation, this word. It's call theology. And when we put these words to memory, to practice, we organize our learning, and we call this doctrine. Christian doctrine. Revelation, theology, doctrine. The sacred and humbling work of hearing God and speaking God. Parroting the divine. Mastering the voice of our master. And this is a work done in community. It's a work of community. This is a work done for community. We listen together. We speak together. That's what the One Project's recalibration table has been all about after all. Theology done in fellowship. And this communal work must also be continual work. We must be regularly remastered. The music of Jesus once recorded on the vinyl of our ears and vocal cords needs to be perpetually rerecorded, cutting fresh grooves, sharpening the sound, retrenching the rhythm, remastering the melodies. Without this ongoing work, we find that our church voice degrades, and what emerges then from our theological vocal cords, from the doctrinal testimony of our collective life, is a sound that would hardly be mistaken for the voice of Jesus. Absent the work of regular revelation, it doesn't take long for us to sing and shout, to preach and pontificate, to write and to regulate, to lead and to lurch in ways that don't sound at all like the voice of our Master.

Perhaps this is why Jesus reminds us that His sheep faithfully follow Him because they know His voice. They do not follow strange voices, and they do not make strange noises when they are actively, intentionally, consistently hearing from Him. The church, Jesus says, must engage in ongoing revelatory reform. The serious business of continually listening, eternal voicing, if we are to sound anything like Him. Yes, we must live in a permanent state of theological renovation and doctrinal renewal.

Now, at this point, some of you may be asking, "Can we do this? Is this legal? Aren't we in dangerous territory right now?" Yes, perhaps. But we are not alone. I remind you of the astonishing words of Christ in Matthew 5. Jesus makes plain that He loves the Scriptures. He adores the Bible. He cherishes the Word of God. He covets the revelation of the divine so much that not a jot or a tittle can be removed, and anyone who degrades the Scriptures even a little bit should be condemned. But that's not all He has to say. Jesus continues, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that, surpasses that, goes beyond that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will not realize the richness of the kingdom of God. In other words, unless your doctrine, your theology, your knowledge, and your enunciation of what you understand

the voice of God to be is going beyond the current status quo, you are in deep, deep trouble.

If you take the revelation of God seriously, if you take the Word of God seriously, if you take the voice of the Master seriously, you must be doctrinally ever surpassing, Jesus says. It's been heard yesterday and today won't do. Tomorrow's airwaves are pregnant. Now let me admit, when Jesus says "Pharisees and teachers of the law," I am uncomfortable. For he's talking to me. I'm a Seventh-day Adventist minister. I'm a Christian theologian. I'm a teacher of the law of these Scriptures. Christ's warning is about those of us in this room, leaders, teachers, preachers, influencers, church administrators. We are the one Jesus warns the church about. Congregation, He says, don't let those who sit in the seats of honor limit the language of God. And so we must love the Bible like never before. Lift the Scriptures higher than ever before. Raise the word of God in ways never seen. But the way we do this is unexpected. We must be disruptive by doctrinal planting, watering, feeding, and yes, at times pruning in order to realize fruit not yet tasted.

At the risk of belaboring the point, but in the interest of not being misunderstood, let me say again, I am not at all, in any way, shape, or form, diminishing the importance of doctrine, for doctrine is our best attempt to echo God's voice in this world. Quite the opposite of lessening doctrine's import, I wish to raise its value. But the way to raise the value of theological work is not preservation but reformation.

Do you remember the scene in Matthew? Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, but I say it to you." And this enraged the Pharisees and teachers of the law but thrilled the crowds who cried, "We have never seen anything like this before. No one has ever taught like this. This has authority. This has power. This has life for our lives." Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said, but I say unto you," and the people cried out, "Who knew church could be this good." Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, but I say unto you," and he resurrected a dead revelation. He raised the deceased Scriptures to life. He revived long dormant theological impulses. He applied some violent chest compressions and called for the coming of the Spirit. Mouth-to-mouth resuscitation for the church, and God's people came to life once again. Longstanding veneration of "You have heard that it was said" had rendered a sterile church. A Christ-led reformation of "But I say unto you" brought new, unimaginable fertility. And make no mistake. Jesus brought doctrinal reformation. The gospels contain, against the backdrop of established doctrine, radical new teachings about the personality of God. The wideness of grace. Racism, nationalism, sexism, and sex. New views of prophecy. The poor. Why people are sick, and the centrality of resurrection. The doctrine of Messiahship was dramatically altered as Jesus brought to bear theological ideas far from settled opinion. It is hard to overstate the revolutionary doctrinal impact of "You have heard that it was said, but I say unto you."

So what happens if we say this afternoon, "You have heard that it was said, but I say unto you." What happens if we declare that what has been written is good and right and holy, but it is time to surpass the teaching of the past and present with yet more as we lean into our future. What happens if we say of our twenty-eight fundamental doctrines, "You have heard that it was said, but I say unto you." Aren't we in dangerous territory now? Yes. Perhaps. But we are not alone. May I remind you of the distinctive spirit of our Adventist ancestors who claimed progressive revelation and present truth. "You have heard that it was said, but we have something new to say to you." The foundational Adventist impulse was a rejection of what is now at least 1700 years of Christian credalism. Catholic credalism followed by anti-

Catholic Protestant credalism, followed by countless sects and cults and denominations, each with their own creeds. Endless Protestants protesting other Protestants. Each laying down truth in response to perceived error, and now we have a full on outbreak of credalism in the universal Christian expression. And Adventism. And Adventism. And Adventism is now no longer an exception. We now, in significant measure, practice credalism with a creed, and in places, our creed has become a de facto replacement for the Scriptures themselves. I think the most sobering conversation that I had in the last seven years, Japhet (spelling?) were engaged in dialog with a couple of significant Adventist theologians who said to Japhet and I, “You have to understand that our job as theologians is to defend the twenty-eight fundamental beliefs. And so we only have one question for you about the One Project. Do you preach the Adventist Jesus or the regular Christian Jesus?”

But our Adventist ancestors fought this credalism (embrace? [AUDIO FAINT]). Yes, in part because of a fear of persecution, but I wonder the greater alarm they recognized, even more than threats to religious liberty is what credalism thinking does to the Spirit. What credalism thinking does to the Word of God. What credalism does to the fresh voice of our Master, Jesus.

Put bluntly, I suspect they concluded that credalism makes us deaf, and credalism makes us mute in matter of contemporary revelation. When Jesus arrived on the scene, he found a church freighted with doctrine. He found a church well-endowed with theological tradition. He found God’s chosen people immersed in ecclesiastical policy. What He did not find, however, was the Word of God alive. Why else would the people cry, “Jesus, this is the teacher we’ve been longing for our whole lives. This is the teaching we’ve been longing for since forever.” What had they been missing? An active doctrinal word. A living theological spirit. A present truth. A contemporary voice of God’s revelation. Jesus would say it again and again. Rigidity and revelation cannot coexist. Where there is rigidity, there is no revelation, and where there is revelation, there can no longer be any rigidity.

Please hear me this afternoon. There is much to love in the Christian creeds. Much to agree with in any list of historical theological propositions, including much to appreciate deeply in the 28 fundamental beliefs of the Adventist church. I stand before you unapologetically pro revelation, pro theology, pro doctrine, pro 28 fundamental beliefs. But I’ve taught Christian beliefs in one form or another for many, many years. I’ve taught the list of 28 fundamental doctrines. And here’s my realization. Inherent in doctrinal lists, in doctrinal list-making, are at least three problems, which must be named and confronted if we are to experience revelation leading to revival.

First, when you make a list, you always forget to put something on the list that ought be on the list. It’s just human nature. There is much to love in our list. But the list does not contain everything. For example, our Adventist list includes a doctrine devoted to Adventist remnant status, but there’s no doctrine devoted to some 2000 biblical verses which command us to serve the poor. Our list includes a doctrine devoted to the 2300 days prophecy, but there is no doctrine devoted to a clear, prophetic, and ethical calling to care for God’s creation. Our list includes the doctrine of Ellen White’s ministry based on a few phrases of Scripture, but there’s no doctrine devoted to the subject of human forgiveness or racial reconciliation, nor the pursuit of peace, all of which are heavily attested to in the biblical library. Our list includes the doctrine of a literal 1000 year post-Advent millennium, but there’s no doctrine related to the daily work of economic justice. We have a doctrine fully devoted to the fourth

commandment, but no such treatment of the ninth commandment. Is it any wonder why bearing false witness is too often generally accepted practice among Sabbath keepers? We have a beautiful doctrine, beautiful doctrine devoted to seven verses in Revelation 14. A beautiful doctrine. But no such doctrine devoted to the doctrine of Romans chapter 8. No doctrine devoted to the powerful sweep of Hebrews 11. No doctrine devoted to the poetic perfection of Psalm 23. Nor the agape masterpiece of 1 Corinthians 13. The ethical tour de force of Matthew 5, 6, and 7, the passion of Luke 15, or Paul's Pulitzer Prize smashing letter to the Ephesians. My point is nothing more and nothing less than this. When we take the Scriptures and pick and choose, even when we do our best, and try to figure out what we will deem especially important, and we make a list, this list will invariably leave things out. Important things. And this inadvertent reduction muffles and sometimes silences the fullthroated voice of the Master.

The second problem, the second challenge with list-making I've learned in teaching Christian beliefs, is the challenge of how to weigh what is important, what is more important, and what is most important within the list. How are we to weight the importance of the doctrine of salvation against the doctrine of good Christian behavior, which in our case promptly mentions the need to dress appropriately. Is the doctrine of God and the doctrine of a thousand year literal millennium of equal weight? Should each be given the same air time in a pulpit. Is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit of equal importance with the doctrine of the Adventist church as an end-time remnant. And we could go on. Again, don't mis-hear me. I am not saying that the list is unimportant. What I'm saying is that some important things get left off the list, and the list itself runs the risk of treating everything of equal value. And in both ways, the clear voice of the Master runs the risk of being compromised in church.

The third and final danger is most alarming, I think, however. And now we return to the danger of creedal cement, which is poured and set. "You have heard that it was said" becomes final cold product, amendable by only a few chosen men in special settings, while a popular, widespread, Acts chapter 2 style "But I say unto you" is left without a place amid the priesthood of all believers. I love my church. Hear me. I love my church. And so what I'm about to say comes with humility and affection.

This past fall, it struck me, Jesus' words in Mark chapter 2: "No one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise the wine will burst the skins and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins." Oh, we love to talk about new wine. We love new wine. Oh, the new wine of the Spirit. The new wine of the next generation. The new wine of revival. There is no danger at all, from any pulpit, in any place, talking about new wine. Oh., we want the new wine. Do you know where the danger lies? The wineskins. You start talking about new wineskins, and your palms start to sweat. You start talking about the new wineskins of maybe restructuring the church. Finding ways that more resources might stay at the local level. New strategies. New ways of thinking about leadership. New ways of just doing church more effectively. You start talking about new wineskins, and it gets dicey. Or you start talking like I've attempted to do for a few minutes about the possibility of fresh language and new voice, renovation and new construction in terms of how we convey the voice of God. Oh, you talk about wineskins in that way, and we get nervous. But Jesus says to us in that little text, new wine without new wineskins—malpractice. Jesus says, new wine with old wineskins, and everybody gets hurt in the process. The old wineskins break apart, the fresh wine of the spirit of renewal of the next generation--it spills on the ground. Now Jesus says to us, Church, if you want revival, new wine, you've got to have the

guts to do reformation. New wineskins. It takes both. It takes both.

So what does the pursuit of new wineskins, of deep, doctrinal reformation, look like? First, we must read the ancient revelations. Study the old theologies. Embrace the denominational doctrines of the past. We honor the ears and the voice of those who've come before. Those who have tried faithfully in their day and in their own way to capture the voice of God. "You have heard that it was said" is valuable and must not be casually dismissed. Let us not be so arrogant as to simply cast aside what is. We aren't the first generation of parrots who have longed to master the voice of our master. But the time has come for more. The time has come for "But I say unto you." The time has come, as we near the completion of the first quarter of the 21st century, like the days of the mid-nineteenth century, to get to work. The time has come for a fresh word, a new sound, a tender music. We must allow the Holy Spirit to remaster our ears and our vocal cords. We need revelatory reform. We need a new era of theological and doctrinal progress and growth. The time has come for both men and women, young and old, all of God's people in these last days, to grab hold of a marker and a blank flip chart, and the story of Jesus in front of us, reading together, telling one another, listening to one another, sanctified, anointed, theological dreaming and doctrinal visioning.

Our Methodist brother, Leonard Sweet, reminds us, "God didn't send a proposition. He sent a person. He didn't send a statement. He sent a story. He sent His Son." I'm wondering, at this final One Project if perhaps the way forward is reengagement with the story, with the story of Jesus. The first generation of Christians was moved by the story, were they not? Wasn't this what fueled their fire? They just couldn't stop listening to the story of Jesus. And as they recounted the glorious tale of His life on earth, something miraculous happened. They heard His voice. Not the voice of yesterday but of the present moment. They heard the living Christ. They heard the resurrected Lord. They heard the Lamb from the throne. Fresh revelation. Timely theology. New doctrine. A present voice. And this was the work of everybody.

Oh, my brothers and sisters, may we all do revelation in the days to come. May we all participate in theology. May we all hone doctrine. May each and every one of us participate in a grand, new wave of listening to the sweet voice of our Master, Jesus Christ. All of us. At the first One Project gathering in Atlanta, I concluded my reflection by telling you about my daughter, now twelve, who at the age of three stood on the back patio with a helium balloon in hand and asked me, "Daddy, if I let this balloon go up, would it go all the way to Jesus?" Not sure of a good response, I finally said, "Yes, Audrey, yes. It would go all the way to Jesus." And then she followed up, "When would He get it back to me, Daddy?" After a long parental pause, I said, "Soon, sweetheart, soon."

Adventist sisters and brothers, may we keep looking up, and one day soon when we meet Jesus, we will know His voice, for we will have heard Him all along.