

# MORRIS VENDEN

SHARING JESUS ISN'T SOMETHING  
WE DO. IT'S WHO WE ARE.



# WHY

DIDN'T THEY TELL ME?



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## FOREWORD

It would be accurate to say that Jesus was controversial. He didn't set out to be. He just told the truth about God and the kingdom of heaven, and many (especially leaders) were offended by what He had to say.

*Why Didn't They Tell Me?* has the potential to have a similar effect for similar reasons. For too long, we have been conditioned to think of the Christian witness as dispensing information rather than as sharing a personal experience. We have talked about "the truth" as though it were a set of fundamental beliefs, but according to Jesus, the "Truth" is a Person. *He* is the Truth! Knowing the "Truth" is really about knowing the Lord! When we know Him as our personal Friend, our witness changes from merely being logically persuasive to being overwhelmingly contagious.

If Scripture is clear about anything, it is clear that God is out looking for friends. Amazing though it may seem, Heaven is hungry for friendship. All the leaves of Scripture are rustling with an invitation to a personal relationship with God. Those who respond to that invitation, have something to share that the whole world is searching for.

Jesus didn't restrict the Great Commission to a handful of super-salesmen evangelists. He didn't ask the clergy to assume responsibility for getting the work done. He asked *every* believer to tell what they know about *Him*.

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People are not waiting to hear professional proclamations. They are waiting to hear what we ourselves have seen and heard and felt of the power of Christ. This is the witness for which our Lord calls, and for want of which the world is perishing.

Some will think this book has it all wrong and that it flies in the face of evangelism. But for those who have ears to hear, it will strike a chord of response and launch a symphony of praise.

*Why Didn't They Tell Me?* will make *you* want to tell *them!*

Thanks, Dad, for yet another book which reminds us that it really is all about Him!

Lee Venden  
College Place, Washington



# CHAPTER 1

## FINISHING THE WORK IN CHINA

A Chinese college professor had a beautiful, brilliant daughter. He was interested in making sure she got the best husband. He had a difficult time accomplishing this task because there was just no one good enough for her, so he came up with a plan. He would put on a billboard, in the middle of town, one hundred of the most obscure and dimly understood Chinese characters, and the man who could understand the most of these characters would have his daughter in marriage.

A number of suitors tried, and the most any of them got was 80 percent. The professor was not satisfied. He wanted 100 percent.

One day a cobbler came to town and saw the billboard. He looked at it and said, "What a pity. I don't know one." And the townspeople said, "That's the closest anyone has come yet. He knows all of them except one." They went and told the professor, and the cobbler got the daughter in marriage.

On the wedding night she asked him which character he didn't know. He said, "You don't understand. I didn't know any of them." This got back to the emperor, who called him in and said, "No one in my kingdom is going to treat my subjects this way. I'm

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going to ask you three questions, and if you can't answer them, it's your head." He continued, "The questions are going to be with hand motions. No talking. I make a motion, and you answer with hand motion."

The emperor started by drawing circles in the air with his pointer finger. The cobbler motioned back by holding one hand up next to his shoulders and the other by his waist with the palms facing each other. The emperor was pleased as he wanted to know what to do with the enemies that surrounded him. And he understood the cobbler to say, "Suppress them."

Then the emperor held up three fingers. The cobbler, beginning from the waist and going down, swung his arms back with his palms open backwards. The emperor was pleased. As he motioned he had asked, "What do I do with the three enemies that are the most terrible of all the enemies?" And he understood the cobbler to say, "Don't worry about them."

For the last question the emperor moved his hand first pointing up and then down. In answer, the cobbler smiled and patted his hip. The emperor was again pleased. With his gesture he had asked the cobbler, "What do I do about the two worst enemies above and below?" And he understood the cobbler to say, "Sit on your throne and don't worry." So he sent the cobbler back to the beautiful daughter.

On their honeymoon, the daughter asked the cobbler how things went with the emperor. He said, "Great! The emperor asked me how many pancakes I can eat. I said, 'A stack that high.' He asked, 'Can't you eat three more?' I said, 'No way!' Then he asked, 'Where should you get the leather for your shoe business, from the upper part of the body, or from below?' I said, 'From the hip of the animal.' "

In this Chinese fable, we have an example of miscommunication.

I took a trip to China a few years back that had a tremendous impact on me. It reminded me of the miscommunication we have concerning God, His character, His work, and the people He has created. There is no place like China to remind you of this. In the first place, China is a country geographically about the size of the United States and it has five times the population—about 1.3 billion people. Talk about crowds. As one person said to me, if you were walking downtown in Shanghai and you fainted, you wouldn't even fall down for three blocks. The crowds are ominous.

Some years ago the church leadership in North America asked pastors to divide up the territory around them and plan strategies to reach the people of the world with the gospel. I didn't think of the crowds then. I was pastor of the church at Pacific Union College, in a predominantly Seventh-day Adventist community. We, the pastoral staff, laughed and said, "We have forty people on Howell Mountain who are not of our faith, and we have two thousand church members. No problem!"

Another time I found myself in Bombay, India, with millions of people, many of them sleeping on the streets and people walking over them at night—father, mother, children, grandparents, dog, cat. And the church in Bombay, India, with eighty members, was supposed to reach them all. How is that going to happen?

Then you put your foot in China, with 1.3 billion people, and you say, "And we have been trying to do the Lord's work!" That's our problem. *We* have been trying to do the *Lord's* work. It's about time we stopped trying to do the *Lord's* work.

Where does the miscommunication come in? The main passage of Scripture used for years to get the church off the dime and busy working is found in Ezekiel.

"When I say to the wicked, "O wicked man, you will surely die," and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for

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his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself” (Ezekiel 33:8, 9).

I have grown up with this idea, and it used to coerce me into witness and service. The assumption is that I am the watchman in this verse, and that the wicked is the great world out there, including 1.3 billion in China.

Big miscommunication!

As a result of this approach, we have people who are frightened of witness and service because if someone is going to live or die based upon my witness and my success or failure in it, then I don't want to get involved. I will get the professionals to do the job, and I will pay them the money. With this approach, we have killed the Christian witness in the church. Who wants to suffer the guilt that would come from thinking that I might have failed when I could have hired the satellite program speaker to do the job?

Another result of this thinking is that it has brought the character of God into ill repute. God, who is the Author of life and who knows we had no choice in being born into this world, would not be a God of love if He left someone's eternal destiny on the shoulders of some other person. This also brings into ill repute the character of God in terms of His power. Isn't He big enough to do the job? Why does He lay it on us?

A little book called *Steps to Christ* says, “God might have committed the message of the gospel, and all the work of loving ministry, to the heavenly angels. He might have employed other means for accomplishing His purpose” (79). Many times I've asked myself, why didn't He? The angels wouldn't goof like I do and turn someone away by a wrong word or look. So, there have been many, many misunderstandings and miscommunications concerning the mission and the purpose of the church and Christian witness and



service because of one passage of Scripture from which we glean the wrong information.

Augustine came along with his doctrine of original sin, which says that we are born sinners and we are *accountable* for it. When you are quoting the doctrine of original sin as expressed by Augustine, you are including the idea of “I am at fault, I am to blame, I am responsible, I am accountable for being born in the world of sin.” The things that follow, of course, are very common in the Catholic Church today—infant baptism and other things relating to the idea that we must get this problem taken care of early because we are accountable. Coupled with that is the passage in Ezekiel that makes me think I am accountable and my blood will be required if so-and-so is lost and I did not try to save him.

Another thing that comes to mind when one travels to these densely populated countries is the realization that people are still being born faster than the entire Christian church is taking the gospel to them, let alone the three angels’ messages. I heard someone trying to explain how that’s not true, but I don’t know what kind of stretch of imagination or what kind of a calculator they were using. Even with the birth control that is required in China, around the world people are still being born faster than we are taking the gospel to them.

Here is another question: If a person’s eternal destiny is based upon what we do, why should anyone ever hear the gospel twice before everyone has heard the gospel once? Yet we go over the same territories again and again. We like to go into places where people are responding and hundreds are being baptized. We don’t like it as well to go into places like the Middle East, where very few are interested. In our humdrum activities and our feverish attempts to try and cause church growth, we need to put a foot inside China and realize that we are not going to finish anything.

## Why Didn't They Tell Me?

There are possibly eighty million Christians in China under the Three Self movement, a movement led by David Lamb, and it is under him that our own churches operate. While I was in China, our visiting group met with the Adventist believers in Beijing, more than a thousand members who meet in a building that is not their own—it is owned and run by the government under the Three Self program of all Christians in China. Then we met with people at the Adventist hospital, Sir Run Run Shaw Hospital. We got a little glimpse of what is going on there. I began to realize that unless God finishes His work, we're all dead.

In Acts 17 Paul was burdened with the Greeks he met at Mars' Hill, where he said some very significant things.

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else’ ” (Acts 17:24, 25).

This is very interesting as we think of all the churches today. God does not live in temples built by hands. But the temples to other gods in our world today are numerous. Of course, in China the temples are everywhere—to Buddha and other gods. I got depressed after we visited so many temples. How can they worship and bow down to this fat, laughing, smiling Buddha? Have you seen him? *It's laughable that they would do that*, I thought. And in my depression, as I watched this, I began to wonder if it's just a matter of perspective.

I remembered the story about the Americans in Japan who made fun of Japanese religion. They were bold enough to make fun of the Japanese who put food out for their dead loved ones at the graves, and they asked the Japanese, “When are your loved ones going to come up and eat the food?” The Japanese replied, “At the same time that yours come up to smell the flowers.” Maybe it is

just a matter of perspective. When I go to a Buddhist temple and I'm turned off by it, I wonder what they would think if they went to the garden at Jerusalem and saw a dirty, empty tomb. Would they be any more impressed? So I began to think, is it just a matter of perspective?

Then I go to the Word of God, which we understand is the basis of everything. It says,

“ ‘From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. “For in him we live and move and have our being” . . . “We are his offspring.” Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man’s design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent’ ” (Acts 17:26–30).

As we study further we discover, in the two verses just before this speech, an interesting statement:

“Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: ‘Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you’ ” (Acts 17:22, 23).

It suddenly dawned on me that he didn’t say, “You’re worshipping the wrong god.” What he said was, “You’re worshipping God, but you are ignorant about the God you are worshipping.”

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Is there a difference? Is it possible that people in other countries of other religions can worship God by another name? Or is that too scary for a Christian to consider? Is it possible that God is fair enough and loving enough and logical enough to admit that if He is a God of love, that He is responsible for us living and moving and having our being and not we ourselves? (See Acts 17:28.) Is it possible that He, in order to continue to be a God of love, would have to give everyone born in this world an adequate opportunity for something better, regardless of what we do? Is it possible that He would not be a God of love, and it would bring into question His character, if He left the salvation of others dependent upon us, on what we do, and on whether the church succeeds or fails?

As I looked at the masses of people in China, I began to come up with this solid idea that God must have millions of people who could be worshipping Him ignorantly. Is that possible? They are worshipping according to the light they have, be it little or small, and no one is going to be lost because of what we do or don't do in the Christian church, except maybe for us. Is anyone going to be lost if I don't share, give, witness, and serve? Yes, I would be the one lost.

Because of the miscommunication created by using texts like the one in Ezekiel to prove that people's blood will be on our hands, we have parents who will lie awake at night with guilt and remorse concerning their own children. There were several on our trip who talked about it. They shared that half of their kids were in the faith and half have left the faith. I reminded them that God lost one-third of His kids. And just by way of comfort for your kids, the story isn't over yet. You mean God will give my children an adequate opportunity for salvation, whether I succeed or fail? Yes. God will give everyone in this world, with capacity, an adequate opportunity for salvation regardless of what we do. Otherwise He

would not be a God of love, because I had no choice being born here in the first place.

Many years ago I heard Pastor H. M. S. Richards, Sr., talk at the Gladstone camp meeting in Oregon. He pointed out that regardless of what we think, most of God's children are out *there* in the world. Then he said, "You may think I'm wrong. But I'm right anyhow." It so happened that he was quoting a lady who had written a lot of books. So also you may think that I'm wrong on the premise that I'm taking in this book. But I'm right anyhow. And I believe that all you need to do to convince yourself that I'm right anyhow is to step your foot inside China.

Another old wives' tale that has been around a long time in the church is that children who have not reached the age of accountability will be saved or lost depending on what their parents do. So, up until the age of twelve, and we usually give that as the age, their eternal destiny will be decided by their parents.

This idea was exploded a long time ago. If you want to check it out, read *Selected Messages*, Book 2, page 260: "As the little infants come forth immortal from their dusty beds, they immediately wing their way to their mother's arms. They meet again nevermore to part. But many of the little ones have no mother there. We listen in vain for the rapturous song of triumph from the mother. The angels receive the motherless infants and conduct them to the tree of life." There will be babies in heaven with no parent because God cares about everyone He created. And He is no respecter of persons. This observation made in *Selected Messages* is based solidly on Scripture—Ezekiel 18:20: "The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son."

This brings us to the hope and the light that shines ever brighter as the world grows larger. It is found in John, who declared Jesus to be "the true light that gives light to every man [who] was com-

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ing into the world” (John 1:9). You mean they have all heard of Christ? No, not necessarily. But He is still that light that lights everyone who comes into the world.

What about Acts 4:12, which says, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved”? In the name of Jesus, that’s true. It’s only because of Jesus that anyone is saved. As believers we know that. But the others may not know that until later. And the premise emerges that everyone born in this world will be given, sometime during their lives, an adequate opportunity to choose whether or not they’re going to be lost.

This brings up an interesting switch. For a long time the evangelical world has held on to this old approach—that everyone is born lost in this world until they choose to be saved. That was based upon Augustinian theology and the idea of original sin. Along came an author by the name of Neal Punt not too long ago, who took the exact opposite view. He said that everyone in this world is born saved until they choose to be lost.

So the people in the world are not born sinners? Yes, they are born sinners. But we are not held accountable for it, because God has never held it against us that we were born on the wrong planet. Here are some verses to study: “Jesus said, ‘For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.’ ” Then He added, “ ‘If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains’ ” (John 9:39–41).

Here’s another one.

“ ‘If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. . . . If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father’ ” (John 15:22–25).

What about this?

“(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) This will take place on the day when God will judge men’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares” (Romans 2:14–16).

And finally this one: “Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins” (James 4:17). Thus, Christ is the light that lights everyone who comes into the world, and until we understand light we are not held responsible. At whatever point we are given a revelation of light, be it big or small, and then we make a decision to go against it, at that point we choose to be lost.

When I read Punt, I thought, *I’ve read that somewhere before*. Suddenly I knew where. It was in the writings of the lady who wrote all the books. Let’s look at some of these quotations.

“ ‘For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men’ ” (*The Acts of the Apostles*, 205). Does that mean everyone who’s ever been born in the world already? Yes. Here is another one: “The Spirit of God is freely bestowed to enable every man to lay hold upon the means of salvation. Thus Christ, ‘the true light,’ ‘lighteth every man that cometh into the world.’ John 1:9. Men fail of salvation only through their own willful refusal of the gift of life” (*The Great Controversy*, 262). So we are born sinners, but we are not held accountable until we understand truth. And at that point, we decide whether or not we’re going to be lost.

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But angels of heaven are passing throughout the length and breadth of the earth, seeking to comfort the sorrowing, to protect the imperiled, to win the hearts of men to Christ. Not one is neglected or passed by. [Not one.] God is no respecter of persons, and He has an equal care for all the souls He has created (*The Desire of Ages*, 639).

Isn't that good news? This one will blow you over.

Those whom Christ commends in the judgment may have known little of theology, but they have cherished His principles. . . . Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly [What are you doing bowing down to that fat, laughing Buddha? Doing it ignorantly.], those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet they will not perish. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature, and have done the things that the law required. Their works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they are recognized as the children of God.

How surprised and gladdened will be the lowly among the nations, and among the heathen, to hear from the lips of the Saviour, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me"! How glad will be the heart of Infinite Love as His followers look up with surprise and joy at His words of approval! (*The Desire of Ages*, 638).

His followers? Yes, the ignorant, who have worshiped God ignorantly, who never saw the light from human instrumentalities. We used to sing a song, which even Tennessee Ernie Ford sang with gusto:



“Brightly beams our Father’s mercy from His lighthouse  
evermore,  
But to us He gives the keeping of the lights along the  
shore.”

But then we begin to concentrate on the lights along the shore.  
We get to the chorus and become “me”-centered. We sing,

“Let the lower lights be burning; Send a gleam across  
the wave.  
Some poor fainting, struggling seaman You may rescue,  
you may save” (“Brightly Beams Our Father’s Mercy,” Philip  
P. Bliss).

We concentrate on the lower lights and forget that *we* are the  
lower lights and that the bright beams are our *Father’s* mercy shin-  
ing from *His* lighthouse evermore.

We have noticed already that the Spirit is involved, and we have  
noticed that the angels are involved, and that we are just a drop in  
the bucket. We are not going to finish anything. If God doesn’t  
finish it, nothing will get finished. All we have to do is look into  
the heavily populated countries and you will know that is true.  
And yet we have enough denominational ego to think that we are  
totally responsible.

Well, you say, what about those hard texts like Ezekiel? Check  
out the context, and it’s pretty simple. It was revealed to Ezekiel.  
He was called the son of man, and the scripture we began with was  
talking about Ezekiel and his mission to Israel. It wasn’t talking  
about your and my mission to the lost in the world or in China.  
Then someone is always going to bring along some rare unpub-  
lished quotation about Christless graves and millions lost. But if  
you check it out you’ll find that a Christless grave is not necessarily

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a lost grave. And a lost person can be found.

While I visited China, I left some of my shirts hanging in the closet in Hong Kong. In the pocket of a shirt I left my credit cards and my driver's license. I managed to make a phone call back to the hotel and was thrilled when they informed me that my shirts and all their contents were found. What was lost was found. Jesus talked about the lost son and the lost coin and the lost sheep. But they were all found. God is committed to finding the lost, whether we are or not.

Salvation can be compared to walking from Los Angeles to Loma Linda, the "promised land." As I'm walking you come along in your car and you say, "Where are you going?"

"I'm going to Loma Linda, the promised land."

You say, "Get in. I'll take you there." So you have a part in my getting there, because you help me get there faster, and you probably even save me some blisters along the road. Yes, there are all kinds of differences that we can make, as Christians and as a church, in helping people along the road. And God might be able to use me to turn someone from going to Las Vegas, the "other place," and head them to Loma Linda. But if I don't do it, someone else will. And if I goof up in trying to save my children for the kingdom of heaven, God will give them another chance from many other sources. Therefore parents don't have to lie awake with guilt, thinking and wondering if they did it all wrong, because God is bigger than that. If you'll take the time to sit down with the book *Steps to Christ* and read the chapter on witnessing, you'll find out that the only reason God gave us a part to act in the plan of redemption is for our good.

Then what happens to the good that could come to me if all I do is pay a dollar to the satellite programs? Let's keep the satellite programs going but never as a substitute for the good God intended it to do for me. What good does it do for me if God gave

me a part to act in the plan of redemption, and instead I give a dollar to the Voice of Prophecy or a dollar to It Is Written, or whatever, and I think that's going to do it?

We have gotten spooked by the idea that *we* are going to fail and cause someone to be lost. We have developed our stars, our center-stage people, who are doing the work for us, and we are giving them the money to do the work for us. Then we call that soul winning, when the truth is, church growth is not growth in membership. It is growth in the members. If the members will get involved in Christian witness and service, they will grow. And if they grow, the membership will grow. That is guaranteed.

As I contemplated putting a book together on this subject, I thought it would probably be the last book I write just before I'm excommunicated. But, please, neighbor, think. The title of this book came to me while I was in China: *Why Didn't They Tell Me?* Why didn't they tell me? I'm glad that we can be lower lights and that we can burn. But I'm much more thankful about His lighthouse ever more—Jesus, the light that lights everyone who comes into the world. Why would we want the whole responsibility to fall upon us? Can we be that naive? Can we be that unthinking? Can we be that foolish?

If this causes you to stop giving a dollar to the Voice of Prophecy and to stop being involved in Christian service and witness, then you've missed the point. If you read that chapter in *Steps to Christ*, you will discover the real reason why we witness and why we go. If we have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, we shall have something to say concerning our best Friend. Not just a dollar for the satellite programs but rather something to say concerning our best Friend. If we have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, we will not be able to hold our peace. The genuine Christian doesn't have to be coerced into witness and service by some kind of jolt maneuvers. The genuine Christian witnesses sponta-

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neously. And the one who has a relationship with the best Friend they've ever had or known cannot keep quiet. It's about time we realize that this is the basis of genuine witness and service.

I don't want to sound angry. But I was angry when this began to dawn on me and I realized what a bill of goods had been sold to me by home, church, and school. I wish somewhere, sometime, someone would shout it from the housetops, the right approach to witness and service, so that we can really become involved with freedom and without worrying that our mistakes are going to cause someone to be lost.

I'm glad God is no respecter of persons. He has an equal regard for all the souls He has created, including the beggars who come along by the bus asking for money, the armless and the legless, the orphans. He has equal regard for the little seven-month-old baby that was sitting across the aisle from us on the airplane on our way back from China, who had been abandoned at a Chinese university, and someone from America paid twenty thousand dollars to take it home. God has an equal care for all the souls He has created. And that includes you.