

Sabbath School Today

With the 1888 Message Dynamic

Family Seasons

Lesson 13: Turning Hearts in the End Time

The 1888 message is for imperfect people, yes, for sinners. The Pharisees complained of Jesus, “This man receiveth sinners” (Luke 15:2). The main appeal in the message is to people who come from dysfunctional families. Abraham came from a dysfunctional family—they were actually idolaters, worshipped idols (Joshua 24:2). The family that Abraham and Sarah established was dysfunctional—Abraham had two wives, and if you want trouble, that’s the way to have it. So Isaac grew up in a dysfunctional family, problems between Ishmael and himself. Then there was also trouble between Isaac and Rebekah, disagreement as to how to relate to Jacob and Esau, and Jacob grew up in a very dysfunctional family. And what about his twelve sons? Almost endless family problems. And these are what we call “the patriarchs.”

But there is good news. When the long story began, the Lord promised Abraham when He called him to leave his idolatrous family, “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). Jesus specializes in blessing dysfunctional families. No matter how deep are the psychological scars you carry, in Him you will be blessed. The record says that when God promised Abraham rich blessings, “he believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness” (Gen. 15:6).

If you have come from a dysfunctional family, do not despair. That’s where many of God’s true people have come from—even David, the man after God’s own heart (yes, Jesse’s family was dysfunctional). And something further: so was the family of “the son of David.” John 7:5 tells how Jesus suffered the unbelief of His family. We are invited to “overcome” through faith in the One who has promised to bless our family (Rev. 3:20, 21).

God’s solemn promise to “send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord” intrigues the people of God worldwide (Mal. 4:4, 5). What will “Elijah” specialize in? Beheading “prophets of Baal”? Undoubtedly, yes; but Malachi says no, “Elijah” will specialize in “turning” hearts that have been alienated from one another and from God. This is clearly stated in the original Elijah’s prayer before all the people gathered at Mt. Carmel: “Hear me, O LORD [Jehovah, clearly distinguished from Baal], hear me, that this people may know that Thou art the LORD God, and that Thou hast turned their heart back again” (1 Kings 18:37).

“Turning hearts” is reconciliation, and nothing but the proclamation of the love [*agape*] of Christ can “constrain” a modern alienated, worldly heart that is infatuated with the world’s pleasures and cars and houses and dress and entertainment, yet wants to get ready for the second coming of Christ. All the dire warnings of beheadings to come

cannot “turn the heart.” The new “Elijah’s” message must therefore be “Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:1, 2). Unthinkable as it may be, this will anger the new “Ahab and Jezebel.” But “Elijah” will again demand that everyone come out of the closet; the good news is now that those “7000” hiding in the closet will this time have the courage to take their stand with him (on Mt. Carmel not one dared say a word of support). And all together, God’s numerous “Elijahs” will proclaim a message that will “lighten the earth with glory.”

“He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers.” That of course cannot be unless he also “turns the hearts” of husbands and wives, and love will be reawakened.

Elijah’s work of “turning hearts” is what the word “atonement” means; here is God’s prophecy of the greatest ministry of heart-reconciliation the world has ever known since the days of Jesus. Elijah’s message is the solemn call of the great antitypical Day of Atonement that closes the work of Christ as the world’s High Priest. It’s the “Loud Cry” of the angel of Revelation 18.

—Paul E. Penno

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno’s video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_JcrLMIZ9Y

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