

Sabbath School Today **With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

Family Seasons **Lesson 3: Preparing for Change**

We are to prepare for future events. Marriage, parenting, golden years, yes, even death (if time should last) needs our attention in advance. As life grows long, we make plans. From beginning to end, we are preparing for life's changes and preparing for the return of Jesus. Each season of preparation is important. If done properly, we and our loved ones will be better off. To delay planning or forgo it completely can bring serious consequences.

For close to 3000 years, these "wise words" of the Psalmist have been studied and pondered by God's people. "Righteousness will go before Him, and shall make His footsteps our pathway" (Psalm 85:13, *New King James Version*). We are Seventh-day Adventists, people living in the "time of the end," in the time of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, in the great Day of Atonement. If time in this sinful world were to go on another 3000 years, these words would still be "wise." But we must look at them in the light of the "third angel's message in verity," to borrow Ellen White's description of the message that "the Lord in His great mercy sent" to us in the 1888 era. [1]

"Family Living" is living out the truths of genuine righteousness by faith. The emphasis in the lesson is on things that we must *do* in order to have happy homes. The Bible emphasis is on things that we must *believe* in order to have happy homes, because it is what we *believe* that transforms us in character from being the ornery, self-centered people that we are by nature into people in whom self has been crucified with Christ and He is permitted to live out His life within us (Gal. 2:20). Self-centered people are bound to have friction at home; the real, ultimate, powerful change in family relationships comes through the pure truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is what Ellen White described as "the third angel's message in verity."

The word "atonement" means reconciliation, at-one-with. Those who await the coming of the Lord on this Day of Atonement want to be reconciled with all the members of their families. This calls for some tremendous miracles! No one of us is innately more righteous than others, so the problems of family disorientation and alienation are in reality our "corporate" problems as a church. It seems awkward to pray to the Lord for "at-one-ment" with Him if bitter alienation with family members haunts our prayers.

And let us speak with compassion; those who fortunately have been spared the bitterness of separation or divorce should thank the dear Lord, and sympathize with those who have not been so fortunate. Marital discord is an extremely heavy burden to carry! When we all "appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:10), if we are

married, we shall be standing there with our spouse. Does the Lord Jesus have some special help for us during this Day of Atonement, to prepare for that tense moment?

Yes, there is, in God's promise to "send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5). If your mental image of "Elijah" is that of a specialist in chopping off heads of priests of Baal, look again. When "he" comes he will specialize in ministries of reconciliation: "He shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers" (vs. 6). Such a work could not be successful unless there is also a turning of the hearts of husbands to their wives, and wives to their husbands.

This cannot be a fear work, even though the concluding clause says, "lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." It gives the superficial impression of the greatest fear-driven movement in history; but it cannot be because fear never works the kind of "reconciliation" that is the subject of the great Day of Atonement. It's "hearts" that are "turned," and only love can do that kind of "turning." And the only love that can work that stupendous miracle (which is greater than creation) is the love of Christ.

The coming of "Elijah" means the ministry of the experience of self being "crucified with Christ," which in turn must mean the greatest uplifting of "Christ and Him crucified" that has ever been known on earth—and that of course will be the message of that fourth angel of Revelation 18:1-4.

How could Jesus be at peace at the most critical hour of His life? The salvation of a world lay in the balance—yes, as we learned last Sabbath, of the universe itself. But He was calm. The only possible answer is that He had "poured out His soul unto death," the second (Isa. 53:12), in a total commitment of Himself in the love which is *agape*. John says that "*agape* casts out fear" (1 John 4:18); it is sinful fear which always robs us of our peace.

Does the "most precious message" of 1888, which was the beginning of the latter rain, [2] make any contribution to our "peace" of soul? Yes! It transfers our thought from our own egocentric concern for our personal salvation to a different motivation of concern for the honor and reward of Christ. It makes it possible for us to receive the peace that Christ is already trying to give us, not merely to offer to us.

The prevailing motivation that has engrossed the church ever since the 1888 rejection of truth has been "what must I do so as to be sure I get through the pearly gates?" Our prayer has been, "Lord, please be sure that I and my loved ones are saved!" The greater love which is *agape* is a love that dares to relinquish personal salvation as Moses pleaded with God to blot his name out of the book of life if his love for Israel could not save them (Ex. 32:31, 32). That was *agape*!

Granted, such love is unnatural for us self-centered humans and it is impossible for us to achieve—of ourselves. Therefore the secret of receiving the peace of Christ is to "comprehend" the grand dimensions of the love of Christ revealed at His cross and thus

to be “rooted and grounded in *agape*” and to be “filled with all the fullness of God” which is a preparation for translation at the second coming of Jesus.

—Paul E. Penno

Endnotes:

[1] *Selected Messages*, Book One, p. 372 (*The Review and Herald*, April 1, 1890); *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 91.

[2] *The Review and Herald*, “The Perils and Privileges of the Last Days,” Nov. 22, 1892.

Notes:

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

<https://youtu.be/otd9tGA4hg8>

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