

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

***The Least of These:***  
***Ministering to Those in Need***  
**Lesson 5: The Cry of the Prophets**

The prophets used colorful and poetic language to express their outrage at the sins of the people, contrasting the people's inhumanity and lack of compassion with God's concern for the most vulnerable. The prophets expressed God's particular care for the widows, the orphans, and the aliens or foreigners. Those who accumulated wealth at the expense of others and who live in luxury while others can barely survive were targets of the prophets' message. Leaders who failed to defend the poor or weak were addressed. Micah gives a colorful description of the rich, rulers, and officials: "The people with influence get what they want, and together they scheme to twist justice. Even the best of them is like a brier; the most honest is as dangerous as a hedge of thorns" (Micah 7:3, 4, *New Living Translation*).

The prophets called their nation, the leaders, and the people to a radical and practical repentance. To be true to their calling from God, they had to admit their wrongdoing and take practical steps to turn things around. Nathan Brown writes: "We have often thought of repentance as confessing and turning away from sin in our personal lives. But have we considered that this might also include realizing and acknowledging our complicity with—and sometimes even benefit from—larger evils in the world, with broken systems and relationships, and then seeking to reform these as we have influence and resources?" [1]

Repentance alone can prevent a repetition of the fathers' sins. The reason why the Lord requires repentance for the sins of "our fathers" is that without it we are programmed to repeat them. No one has any natural-born righteousness. "In Adam" we all partake of the sin of Adam in the same way that any lion partakes of the man-eating nature of all lions. Only fortuitous circumstances can intervene to prevent any hungry lion from eating people.

We share a common humanity. Because of our common solidarity with the human race, partaking of a common sinful nature, the sins of others would be our sins, but for the grace of Christ ministered in His gift of repentance. We are by nature no better than those who rejected and crucified Him. If we were in their place, we would have done the same. This is what Ellen White means, "The books of heaven record the sins that would have been committed had there been opportunity." [2]

The 1888 message points the way for in Christ's cross we see the ultimate sin which is the measure of our true guilt, for "all the world" is "alike" guilty, for "all alike have sinned" (Rom. 3:19, 23, *The New English Bible*). In our present state of Laodicean blindness we

may not see this clearly, but the Lord has promised to convey to His people this realization of what “the books of heaven” record as our true human guilt: “... I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him ...” (Zech. 12:10).

This was partially fulfilled at Pentecost when Peter pressed upon the Jews the truth that “... ye denied the Holy One and the Just, ... and killed the Prince of life” (Acts 3:14, 15). Even though many who heard him may not have joined in that awful cry Friday morning, “Crucify Him,” at Pentecost they saw how they shared a common guilt. That repentance prepared the way for pouring out the Holy Spirit in the “former rain.” But a greater fulfillment must yet come.

The reason is that we also share that common guilt. When John Wesley saw a drunkard lying in the gutter and said, “There am I, but for the grace of God,” he was expressing this same truth. We share a guilt for the sins of the whole world, including the crucifixion of the Son of God—apart from the grace of God, something which the 1888 message highlights.

That promise of Zechariah will meet its final fulfillment before the end, when God’s people come to see its reality, which as yet is largely unrealized. Then the complement of Pentecost will come, as surely as day follows night—the “latter rain.”

Again, the 1888 message is a Day of Atonement message. The practical results of the great cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary will be realized when Zechariah’s conclusion to his prophecy is fulfilled: “In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness” (Zech. 13:1).

Blessed cleansing! It can be accomplished only on the Day of Atonement. It will be the practical result of the “final atonement,” a final heart reconciliation with Christ. Only from the Most Holy Apartment of the sanctuary can our great High Priest accomplish this work of justification by faith in the hearts of His people.

This is why Ellen White has so often declared that “the third angel’s message in verity” is essentially “Christ and Him crucified.”

Our denominational history is only one step away from Calvary. Once we see our true involvement in the crucifixion of Christ, we are prepared to recognize our involvement in the sin of rejecting the latter rain and the loud cry message of 1888. No longer can we smugly brush it off, saying, “It’s no concern of mine, I wasn’t even born then,” any more than we can brush off our involvement with the cross. As surely as the shadow of Calvary hangs over the Jews as a nation, so surely does the shadow of 1888 hang over us as a church. “Just like the Jews.”

With anointed eyes, we can see the innumerable evidences all around us that we are repeating that history today, the same spiritual and professional pride, the same resistance of self-humbling truth.

—Paul E. Penno

**Endnotes:**

[1] Nathan Brown, *For the Least of These*, Pacific Press Publishing Association, p. 46.

[2] Ellen G. White, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1085.

**Notes:**

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=syBRJPz2VMU>

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