

CLEANSE AND CLOSE

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"Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." (Rev. 14:12) "The image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed." (Rev. 13:15) All hell is moved against the development of the people who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. So far all hell has been very successful in holding back the development of such a people.

"Had the purpose of God been carried out by His people in giving to the world the message of mercy, Christ would, ere this, have come to the earth, and the saints would have received their welcome into the city of God." [1900] (6T 450)

"I know that if the people of God had preserved a living connection with Him, if they had obeyed His Word, they would today be in the heavenly Canaan." (General Conference Bulletin, March 30, 1903)

"Had Adventists, after the great disappointment in 1844, held fast their faith and followed on unitedly in the opening providence of God,...the work would have been completed, and Christ would have come ere this to receive His people to their reward....It was not the will of God that the coming of Christ should be thus delayed." (mss. 4, 1883)

"We may have to remain here in this world because of insubordination many more years." (letter 184, 1901)

This means that you and I have a great deal to say about how long we will remain on Planet Earth. At a pastors' meeting the pastors were discussing how the signs in the world clearly reveal that the coming of Jesus is even at the door. One of the pastors confidently affirmed, "I'm not too concerned about what's coming or how He's coming, I am only interested in who is coming." It was a nice sound bite and many of the pastors responded with a hearty "amen." Many of our pastors have no idea of our real mission and why we are still here.

Paul Landa, who taught history at La Sierra University specializing in Reformation studies, wrote, "The world has changed....And even the Roman Catholic Church has changed....It is no longer the...liberty-opposing, Protestant-hating...organization of former years, intent on ruling the world from Rome....Seventh-day Adventists ought to involve themselves in building bridges of understanding to reach out to Roman Catholics and developing bonds of love to enable them with us to arrive at a fuller appreciation and application of the gospel of Jesus Christ." (Adventist Today, July/August, 1993)

Frank Knittel,, who at the time was an English teacher at La Sierra University said regarding Ellen White's view of the papacy in the book The Great Controversy, "White gave Adventism her interpretation of the Scriptures, and her view is not infallible....Whatever we believe should be based totally upon what we derive from our own study of the Bible and not upon anything written by anyone since the canon of the Scriptures was established....We wear out the pages of the Ellen White Index when we should instead be studying the Bible." (Adventist Today, July/August, 1993) It is obvious that we need to know who we are and what is ahead of us.

THE LATTER RAIN

There must be something special about this closing experience. This is a special war in this age-long controversy. "The dignitaries of church and state will unite to bribe, persuade, or compel all classes to honor the Sunday....And even in free America, rulers and legislators, in order to secure public favor, will yield to the popular demand for a law enforcing Sunday observance." (GC 592) The national Sunday law is a great landmark. It stands out as something that can be seen.

"As the approach of the Roman armies was a sign to the disciples of the impending destruction of Jerusalem, so may this apostasy be a sign to us that the limit of God's forbearance is reached, that the measure of our nation's iniquity is full, and that the angel of mercy is about to take her flight, never to return." (5T 451)

Our nation will align herself fully with the dragon and the beast. The only purpose of the time between the national Sunday law and the close of probation is to get God's people out of Babylon.

This is the time of Revelation 18:1, but the loud cry cannot happen without the latter rain. The early rain might fall for years, but without the latter rain Christ could never come. "Unless we are daily advancing in the exemplification of the active Christian virtues, we shall not recognize the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the latter rain. It may be falling on hearts all around us, but we shall not discern or receive it." (TM 507) But don't think that when the latter rain is poured out upon God's people it is going to be so quiet that many won't know anything is happening. "There is to be in the churches a wonderful manifestation of the power of God." (LDE 209) When the latter rain falls upon this people, it is going to come with mighty power. It will come like Pentecost, but more so.

It is not enough merely to say, "We are looking for the latter rain. We know the latter rain is coming. It will be glorious. We expect to receive it." The Jewish people expected the Messiah to come just as much as any Seventh-day Adventist expects the latter rain to come. If people will not accept the earnest plea to repent and change their lives, if they will not accept what the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy say, do not think that the power of the latter rain is going to cause them to embrace reform—the very thing they have hated, despised, and ridiculed.

“Those who come up to every point, and stand every test, and overcome, be the price what it may, have heeded the counsel of the True Witness, and they will receive the latter rain, and thus be fitted for translation.” (1T 187) “I saw that none could share the ‘refreshing’ unless they obtain the victory over every besetment, over pride, selfishness, love of the world, and over every wrong word and action.” (EW 71) Those who receive the refreshing have already obtained the victory. The getting of the victory comes before the latter rain.

“Oh, how many I saw in the time of trouble without a shelter. They had neglected the needful preparation; therefore they could not receive the refreshing that all must have to fit them to live in the sight of a holy God.” (EW 71) The only ones who get the refreshing are those who have regarded the needful preparation, which results in their getting the victory over everything. “I saw some, with strong faith and agonizing cries, pleading with God. Their countenances were pale and marked with deep anxiety, expressive of their internal struggle.” (EW 269) Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane had a struggle. And you and I, if we are ever to obtain the victory, are going to go through a struggle.

Jesus’ heart is set on getting sins erased, eradicated, and gone forever. That is what the remnant is praying for. They are not praying that what they did last year will be forgiven. They are praying that the sins they might do today and tomorrow will never be done, that the very roots of sin will be taken out, that they may stand before the Lamb without spot and blameless.

THE SHAKING

“Some, I saw, did not participate in this work of agonizing and pleading. They seemed indifferent and careless.” (EW 270) Within the entire church, there is represented a little company who are standing in the light. They are agonizing and praying. (The danger is that you and I will begin to make mental lists of who is in the light and who isn’t. But God never gave us that command.) It is dangerous to have the idea that because the movement is going through, that almost everybody in the church is going to go through. “To stand in defense of truth and righteousness when the majority forsake us, to fight the battles of the Lord when champions are few—this will be our test.” (5T 136)

“I saw angels of God hasten to the assistance of all who were struggling with all their power to resist the evil angels and trying to help themselves by calling upon God with perseverance. But His angels left those who made no effort to help themselves, and I lost sight of them.” (EW 270) Right in the church, angels leave the indifferent and careless and help the ones who resist the darkness. That does not mean that these people actually leave the church. They go right on in the church in good and regular standing, but the angels of God have left them. Why? Because they made no effort to resist the darkness. They didn’t plead with God for victory over their sins. They didn’t unite in earnest, agonizing prayer for victory. Before the loud cry can

come, there must come this time of preparation of agonizing prayer for victory over sin—sin in our hearts and sin in the church.

“The numbers of this company had lessened. Some had been shaken out and left by the way. The careless and indifferent, who did not join with those who prized victory and salvation enough to perseveringly plead and agonize for it, did not obtain it, and they were left behind in darkness, and their places were immediately filled by others taking hold of the truth and coming into the ranks.” (EW 271) They go out by the thousands and come in by the thousands. Many of our people are looking forward to when people will come in by the thousands. But very few are prepared for the awful disappointment that will come about as the majority leaves.

“I heard those clothed with the armor speak forth the truth with great power...I asked what had made this great change. An angel answered, ‘It is the latter rain, the refreshing from the presence of the Lord, the loud cry of the third angel.’” (EW 271) But before they got the latter rain they obtained the victory over sin. How many sins? Every sin. Is it a fanatical thing to believe that anybody in this world is ever going to come to the place where they quit sinning? Nothing is fanatical that the Word of God teaches. God teaches that some people are going to obtain the victory. Let us make up our minds that we are going to keep going in that direction, and never stop until we get there.

The same people who give the loud cry with mighty power and sing the song of victory are the ones who before were agonizing and praying, sighing and crying. What were they weeping about? Their own sins, weaknesses, and failures. “They lament and afflict their souls because pride, avarice, selfishness, and deception of almost every kind are in the church.” (5T 210-211) They are burdened about conditions in the church, and they are not lulled to sleep with a serene song that says everything will come out all right, that we don’t need to be concerned. “Just keep the Sabbath and pay your tithe, and everything will be just fine.”

The reason God is going to do something in His church is in answer to the prayers of the faithful few. If we are not among the faithful few, we had better get there as fast as we can. Let us never come to the place where we say, “I guess what I had better do is forget all that seeking, and just go along with the crowd. I will still get there.” The church is going through, but it is not going through without a terrible struggle. There is going to come a great shaking. Those who go through the shaking and sifting will come out victorious with the seal of God. They will go through the time of Jacob’s trouble, and will be translated when Jesus comes. We will either have to be cleaned up or cleaned out.

As we see worldly tendencies in the church, we sometimes become a bit discouraged. But the future is bright with the promise of God. As the church is shaken and sifted, the pure remnant will remain, and all the others will be sifted out. “The great issue so near at hand will weed out those whom God has not appointed and He will have a pure, true, sanctified ministry prepared for the latter rain.” (LDE 179) “To stand in defense

of truth and righteousness when the majority forsake us, to fight the battles of the Lord when champions are few—this will be our test.” (5T 136) Those who go through the shaking and get the victory over sin, through earnest prayer and crying to God, are those who receive the latter rain.

THE SEALING

What is the reason for this traumatic shaking? “Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of God in their foreheads.” (Rev. 7:3) “And the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.” (Ezek. 9:4)

What exactly is the sealing? It is a “settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved.” (4BC 1161) Whatever God believes about any vital subject is what the sealed person will believe. But for you and me to be settled into the truth spiritually means that we not only know the truth, but we love it and practice it. It is a part of our character. We must not think that the sealing is some abrupt act. Rather, we are in the process of becoming sealed over a period of time, and the close of probation must find that work completed. God’s people are to be settled both intellectually and spiritually so that they cannot be moved in the time of trouble. The sealing is the culmination of a long experience.

Those who are sealed will be those who feel truly sorry about sin. If there is in our hearts the desire and inclination to go after the things of this world, and the only reason we don’t is because we think we can’t get away with it, we are not ready for the seal. Any weakness in our own character should cause us to sigh and to cry. Any sins in the lives of others should cause us to sigh and to cry. If we are heart to heart with Jesus, we will weep over sin as He weeps over sin. Without this, we can never get ready for the seal of God.

The time from the national Sunday law to the close of probation is the special time of sealing and marking. The sealing work has been going on all through this time, but when a person is sealed, he will be sealed completely when the work is over. No one is sealed until the work is completed. The sealed person has so received the character of God that there is no way that he will change.

CLEANSING

The latter rain does not come to cleanse the people of God. That must be done previous to the latter rain. But the Holy Spirit does come to do something for them. He comes to settle them into the truth, the truth that they have already learned and practiced. “Those who are distrustful of self, who are humbling themselves before God and purifying their souls by obeying the truth—these are receiving the heavenly mold and preparing for the seal of God in their foreheads....When the decree goes forth and the stamp is impressed, their character will remain pure and spotless for eternity.” (5T 216) We will come out of that

experience with characters that will be the wonder and admiration of the universe. And even the devil will be amazed. He will stand viewing us as an incomprehensible mystery.

God must have a people prepared, perfected, and ready to meet Him. The preparation of those people is the work of this message. OUR REASON FOR EXISTENCE AS A CHURCH, AS A DENOMINATION, IS THE PREPARATION OF THAT PEOPLE. There is coming a time, though, when the church will be clean. God will have a people, pure and true before the visitation of His judgments on the earth. Remember, we will never get a clean world until we get a clean church. But something must come before that church is cleansed; the individual members must be cleaned up—have clean hearts. When individuals get clean hearts, God will soon begin the cleansing of the church. And when He gets a clean church, it won't be long until this world will be cleansed and be a fit place to live in.

The casting out of Satan makes it possible for the place he was cast out of to be clean. When Satan was cast out of heaven 6,000 years ago, heaven was cleansed. When Satan is cast out of the church, the church will be clean. And when Satan is cast out of the world, the universe will be clean. You can never have a clean heart while the devil has a foothold inside, because Satan defiles everything he touches. And the church can never be fully clean, fully purified, as long as Satan or His agents have any place within it. The world must be delivered from every vestige of Satan's influence before we have a clean universe. Satan is going to be cast out of hearts; he's going to be cast out of the church; he's going to be cast out of this world.

"There is a work to be done that has not yet been done. The temple courts are not yet cleansed as they must be." (mss. 105, 1898) "The purging and cleansing will surely pass through every church in our land that has had great opportunities and privileges, and has passed them by unheeded." (TM 414) But the only ones who can be in that experience, and continue through it, will be those whose hearts have been cleansed by Jesus. There must not be one impurity left in the heart. A pure church will be composed of pure, clean individuals. God is going to make a clean work, a thorough work. "Should Christ enter our institutions for the education of the youth, He would cleanse them as He cleansed the temple, banishing many things that have a defiling influence. Many of the books which the youth study would be expelled." (FCE 174)

Perhaps you're like many a soul who is waiting for God to cleanse him, waiting for victory over sin; perhaps it's an evil temper now and then, perhaps a critical spirit. You may say, "I wish Jesus would come into my heart as He entered the temple at Jerusalem and drive that sin out of my soul." You can pray about it, wish about it, and hope about it from now until probation closes; but if that's all you do about it, you'll be lost. With faith in your heart, courage in your soul, and determination in your mind, you must push the devil out. "The expulsion of sin is the act of the soul itself." (DA 466)

But many will say, "I thought Jesus did that. I'll just turn it over to Him." It is true that only Christ can cleanse the soul temple. But He won't do it without you. He does it through you. Whenever you get ready for the

devil to leave, God is right with you, infusing His strength into your poor, weak will. "True, we have no power to free ourselves from Satan's control; but when we desire to be set free from sin, and in our great need cry out for a power out of and above ourselves, the powers of the soul are imbued with the divine energy of the Holy Spirit, and they obey the dictates of the will in fulfilling the will of God." (DA 466) And when you have prayed to God for victory, then arise in the strength of God and be free. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you." (James 4:7-8)

From 1844 on, it is not a matter of days or weeks or months or years but, rather, a development of a people. And when those people are developed, when their characters are perfected, then the crisis at the close breaks with all the force of a great hurricane or tornado. And all of this will culminate in the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. The blotting out of sins in the sanctuary in heaven is the bookkeeping record of the actual blotting out of the sins of God's people from their hearts and lives down here below. And God will never blot out the sins in the books up there unless they are blotted out down here. When the sanctuary is cleansed up there, you may be sure that it is because the sanctuary is cleansed down here. Jesus is going to purify His church today as He purified the temple of Jerusalem.

THIS IS THE PRIMARY AND DOMINANT REASON FOR THE EXISTENCE OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH. WHEN THIS IS ACCOMPLISHED WE WILL FINISH THE WORK. Everything we do in our families, in our local churches, and in the worldwide church, must be focused on this mission. When our lives and the church are cleansed, the experiment of sin will be closed. Cleansed and Close. When that is a reality, Jesus will return. Until then we wait and hope.

(I am indebted to the studies of Elder W. D. Frazee for these concepts)