

Sabbath School Lesson 3 – Jesus’ Messages to the Seven Churches –12-18 Jan 2019

Christ sent messages to the seven churches, of which without exception is this message to all churches: “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne” (Revelation 3:21). The seven churches cover the entire time between the first and the second advent of our Lord. Conditions in these churches overlap, one blending into another.

Sunday: Christ’s Messages to Smyrna and Pergamum – “Smyrna” meaning myrrh, sweeter, more fragrant, by being crushed. The Smyrna period, to about AD 323, covered a time of great persecution. Note Christ’s description to Smyrna (Revelation 2:8). He who suffered, died, and rose again comes to encourage the suffering ones in Smyrna. Think of the approval (verse 9), – “tribulation,” “poverty,” “riches.” “Jews” is used in the sense of the true children of God (see Romans 2:28-29). God knows, as He knows all the churches. How much better that He know our faithfulness in suffering for Him rather than our unfaithfulness in prosperity! Note Revelation 2:10 – fear not suffering even to death; the “ten days” are ten literal years, 302-312, the bitter trials under Diocletian, the last great pagan persecution. The promise fits the trial. Death may await the persecuted, but a “crown of life” forever beyond.

“Pergamos” is said to mean height, elevation, befitting that splendid city and the condition faced by the church from the time of the “conversion” of Constantine to near the middle of the early sixth century, when the papacy rose to supremacy. Note Christ’s introduction to Pergamos (Rev 2:12). The sharp two-edged sword is the word of God in judgment that cuts out the sin from the heart or destroys the sinner with the sin. In Pergamos condition, many in the church were departing from the word of God to human doctrines, human philosophy, and human tradition. Jesus would emphasise the one standard of the Word. This lesson is for all time, and for us today. Those who repent are promised “the hidden manna” and “white stone” (Rev 2:16-17). Against the unreal, visible charms of a superstitious age, is the invisible yet real manna: “the corn of heaven,” Christ (John 6: 33, 48-51). It is hidden only to unbelief; the mystery is unfolded to the child of faith (1 Timothy 3:16; Colossians 1:26-27). The white stone represents God’s choice for us. It refers to pebbles used in ancient voting, – black, if against; white, if favourable. Our Lord casts for us a white stone, upon which is a new name representing character. *Jacob* in the victory became *Israel* (Genesis 32:28). Our new name will be the sum of all our victorious experiences in Christ, which we are spelling out day by day under hard labours and severe trials, often making blunders, yet under the Master making progress. We see only the little present. God sees for us the finished name. He spells it out with us, and hence knows it; but no other earthly being does, because no other has had the experience. It is the secret between each overcomer and his Lord.

Monday: Christ’s Message to Thyatira – “Thyatira” means “sacrifice of contrition,” appropriately suggesting the torn and bleeding church of Christ in the dark days of papal rule. Note how the Lord describe Himself (Rev 2:18). The feet of burnished brass are evidence that Jesus still today walks the fiery furnace of trial with His loved ones. A reference is made to Jezebel. Ahab, contrary to God’s law, married this devoted sun worshiper and upholder of licentious worship (see 1 Kings 16:30-33; 18:19, 4, 13). Under the influence of Jezebel there was utter separation from God. And here Jezebel is a fit type of the great apostasy under the papacy, seducing God’s people to fundamentally depart from the truth. The overcomers receive “power over the nations” (Revelation 2:26) – a fitting promise to those who have suffered under nations that were misled by papal principles.

Tuesday: Christ’s Message to Sardis – “Sardis” means “song of joy.” Note Revelation 3:1-5. Sardis represents the conditions in the churches that grew out of the Reformation. “I will put upon you none other burden,” was the promise made at the close of the preceding period of the church (Revelation 2:24). For nearly eighteen centuries the church had felt the hand of persecution laid heavily upon her, and many millions had fallen in death. At the close of the Thyatira period, the church was never again to pass through like scenes. This is truly a cause for rejoicing – Sardis. The Reformation movement began by lifting up the Bible as the rule of faith, but soon creeds and customs prevented growth in the advancing light of truth. Those who have started in reform and then ceased to grow must take fresh hold of

principles already learned and go on to fuller knowledge and experience in the truth. The fatal weakness in the reformed churches was the tendency to stand still where the first reformers left them. Growth is the law of spiritual life (see Proverbs 4: 18; John 12: 36).

Wednesday: Christ's Message to Philadelphia – "Philadelphia" means "brotherly love." It refers to people developed out of the great advent movement in 1833 and onward. Note how Christ reveals Himself to Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7). He is the Royal Priest of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of David (Isaiah 22:22-23), beginning the last stage of His priestly work in the sanctuary on high. He is about to cease His ministry in the holy place; He is about to *enter* the most holy place for the final putting away of the sins of His people. To those who looked and longed for His coming and were disappointed, who became the butt and jeer of thousands, the Lord declares, "Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it" (Revelation 3:). The opened door means the light and truth of God's last message, explaining the darker past and revealing the entrance to greater truth. Apparent disappointment dimmed hopes and sapped power; but the faithful Philadelphians did not wholly relinquish the hand of power, nor did they deny Christ. It will be noted that there is no reproof in the Lord's letter to Philadelphia, unless it is implied in the "little strength" (verse 8). The advent spirit is the spirit to continue to the end. It is the spirit of "Philadelphia" – it is the spirit of "brotherly love." All the story of the early advent movement, leading up to the autumn of 1844, at which time the advent people expected to meet their Lord, shows that believers were bound together in ties of fellowship and love like that which reigns in heaven, which they expected soon to enter. Coming out from various churches and the world, they were made one by the "blessed hope." This "brotherly love" is to be seen among Seventh-day Adventists who believe in the Father and Son message, for "truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). It is by the Father and Son that we may "all speak the same thing" (1 Corinthians 1:10), then we may also sing the song: "Blest be the tie that binds; Our hearts in Christian love; The fellowship of kindred minds Is like to that above." Now, with the ministry in the heavenly sanctuary almost finished and the coming of the Lord at the very door, all hearts must again let in the love of heaven and the spirit of 1844, which will make the true believers one and fit them to live with the angels above.

Thursday: Christ's Message to Laodicea – "Laodicea" signifies a "judging of the people." From 1844 to the close of probation is the hour of God's judgment. After this work of judging the people, the Lord will come. The message to the world in this judgment hour is the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-12, the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus, are which has brought out this Seventh-day Adventist people. Note how the Lord reveals Himself to the Laodicean church in His greeting (Revelation 3:14). It is the Amen, the Firm, the Faithful, the True to the end, the faithful Witness from the beginning, the Author, the Beginner of God's creation, that gives the counsel. He is the Author and Finisher (Hebrews 12: 2). He witnessed true to Ephesus in the first period; He is the same to Laodicea in the last period of earth's history. The same True Witness testified to the blessed condition of Philadelphia who were expecting to meet with Him. He witnesses as truly to the deadly peril of drowsiness and formalism in the Laodicean period of waiting. He pleads that in the hour of the closing judgment work, not a soul may be lukewarm, assuming riches in the possession of the form of the truth, while lacking the real experience of the power of the truth. That is the special peril of the last days. Yet the Lord loves the souls in this church. Therefore He rebukes and chastens them, and calls for repentance. Repent when one does not feel like it? – Yes, repent. Confess all the sin, plead before God till the hard heart softens, and the stubborn will breaks, and the soul is no longer indifferent. There is no other way. The real experience is necessary to the giving of the message of the Judgment now due. Open the door; invite the Saviour. Let Him make the room of your heart ready, and cleanse the soul. Spread before Him all you have – sorrows, temptations, weaknesses – and let His presence transmute them into joys, faith, strength. Then become His guest. Sit at His table. Partake of all the delectable things of heaven. There is no promise in all the Word more precious than that given in Revelation 3:20. Christ will *give* the needed grace to every soul that heeds His counsel in this Laodicean time when the church must keep ready to meet its coming Lord.