

Along For the Ride

Happy Sabbath to everyone.

The study tonight will, I believe, have a critical purpose. Sabbath days are times of rest, of worship, and times of refreshing that serve as a foretaste of the glorious age to come. They are also times when we come together for study, and as we study, we might find areas that need further examination. We might find light revealed to us, showing where we might have an area for improvement, or even repentance.

In other words, although Sabbaths are joyful occasions, there is also an element of examination, of reflection as a part of the earthly worship that we offer to our Father in Heaven. Normally, we would associate the solemnity of such occasions with the New Moon, but as we CSDAs have often pointed out, Sabbaths and New Moons are comfortably listed together in the vision of worship for the days to come. (Isa 66:23)

Tonight I want to look at a topic that should get you to consider yourself carefully, perhaps in a new light. It is not an open rebuke, or a warning of judgment; however, if you see yourself outlined in what I am going to share, perhaps the Spirit will give you a rebuke. Perhaps you will find yourself standing in judgment. If that is the case, and if you are troubled by that, then this is the time to draw nearer, not to draw further away.

It is a tendency of the flesh, of the carnal mind, to withdraw from pain, or perceived pain. It is a tendency of the “animal” part of our biology (for we are created with much the same organic qualities of any animal) to avoid danger and seek out comfort. However, man was created to have dominion over the animals, and this was because we have been given the gift of reason. Reason, the ability to think, and judge, and make mental connections, is a part of what it means that we have been created in the image of Yah.

Ever since the entrance of sin, there has been a conflict between the flesh and our spiritual nature, which includes thought and reason. Paul states it this way, “This I say then, ‘Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.’ For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.” (Gal 5:16-18) He then goes on to give a list of qualities produced with the fruit of the Spirit, and a list of works of the flesh.

Learning to walk in the spirit means learning when we need to endure trials, and troubles, rather than to flee them. In the flesh, we will not want to hear unpleasant things, or even those concepts that may require us to consider and perhaps make uncomfortable changes; but this is necessary, because we have been born into a world that is of sin, and insensitive to what sin does to the mind, body and soul. As we draw nearer to Heaven, we will gain the sensitivity of the angels, and much of this world – and who we were IN the world – will make us uncomfortable. This is ultimately a good thing, but as it is written, “no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous. Nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” (Heb 12:11)

I say all this as a way of setting up the topic for tonight, because sometimes when the messenger says, “Consider your ways,” you may consider them for a short time, and then abandon the exercise in favor of some more pleasing considerations. But if we are dedicated to Yahshua, and to His kingdom, we will stand in His light, even if our eyes are uncomfortably unused to the brightness at first. Consider a mother or father who rushes into a burning building to rescue a child, caring nothing for the injuries that might be sustained in the attempt. Those in the world are in need of people to risk injury, imprisonment, tribulation, and suffering, in order to show them what Christianity is. And, closer to home, some of our own souls might be in need of “rescue,” and we must stand in the fire for a time in order to see them to

safety. So then, let us commit to doing the necessary cross-bearing of our faith, for love of Yah, and love of our neighbors.

The topic tonight is called, “Along For the Ride.” Based on that title, and some recent studies I have given about the importance of Church membership, formal membership, and the covenant of marriage to the Lamb, one might assume that those who might benefit the most from this material would be non-members who study with us.

In fact, I am speaking to everyone. Non-members certainly qualify, because it has been revealed to Yah’s people plainly that He has given His people the Church, and all its principles, ministers, and responsibilities for the express purpose of preparing people for judgment, and thereafter for Heaven. The obvious counterpoint is that those who do not learn the principles, heed the ministers, and take on the responsibilities, of this covenant, they will NOT be prepared for judgment or Heaven. Certainly, nobody who has had the opportunity to KNOW the message, and thereafter rejects or avoids it, can be “of us,” or “one with us.”

But members also qualify, specifically because of what it means to be “along” for the ride. The real soul-searching must begin, and be maintained, in the House of Yah. We are the ones commissioned to show others how to DO it, but of course, Satan is always poised to direct his attacks specifically at those who would be examples and leaders. We have the teaching in our faith, that Yahshua will leave the ninety-nine sheep that are safely in the flock, and seek out the one that has gone wandering away. Are we to think that Satan does not have a dark inversion of this principle? Surely, he will leave the ninety-nine goats that are safely under his authority, and actively seek out those that are furthest from his control.

Many of our studies deal with the nature of these assaults, some open, and some so skillfully introduced that they will be missed by all but the “very elect.” And here is one of the latter.

We speak of the Faith of Yahshua. We speak about “believing on the Son of Man,” so that He and the Father abide within us, and Their Spirit guides our thoughts and actions. We consider ourselves apostles and disciples of the Master; and yet, even among the original twelve was one who betrayed Him, most of the time thinking that he was just like the others. Certainly, Judas was not (until his open betrayal) what the world would have thought of as “evil,” and in order to do what he did, he must have justified himself constantly, in order to travel with the others, in order to heal the sick, and preach the word. But he himself was not committed personally to Yahshua’s teachings, or his principles. Even when he was speaking, and doing, as the others, he was only along for the ride.

Once Yah showed me this topic, I was immediately surprised that I have heard very few sermons or studies, from any Church or religion, that deals with anything close to this matter. After some reflection, however, I suspect I know why. It is something that can hit very “close to home” even for the preachers, and it may be that they do not WANT to undertake this kind of examination, because it will reveal them as they truly are. They will be forced to admit, if they seriously meditate on this matter, that they are NOT living up to the Word of Yah. They are NOT overcoming sin daily in their lives, and teaching others to do so. They are NOT consistently keeping the teachings of Yahshua, and certainly not the commandments of Yah in many cases (and I include Adventists in this).

It is much easier to say, “Here is the right thing to do,” that to ask, as an element of our own lives, “Is THIS the right thing to do?”

Fear is a powerful motivator. In truth, it is second only to love in its ability to drive the words and actions of humanity. As I have written in a number of books and studies over the years, the root of every sin is fear. We can go through the entire list of the “deadly sins” to confirm this. Pride and vanity are based on a fear of not being “good” enough. Gluttony, selfishness and lust are based on a fear of not “having”

enough. Depression and despair are largely due to an individual fearing to rejoice in life, because they might lose what they value.

Those who struggle with the principles of righteousness are being motivated by fear, rather than love. If anyone who hears, or reads this study, is finding it “difficult” to overcome some sin, to commit to some righteous act, or to choose something holy over something unholy, there is a root of fear that you must identify, and then surrender to Christ, or you will not survive your struggle.

And for us, who are standing in the investigative judgment, in the judgment of the living, we are “in training” to be intercessors for others and ourselves. We are faced, moment by moment, with choices of everlasting importance, for every decision contributes to the beings that we are becoming for eternity. What are we learning? What are we developing? What are we choosing?

Of course, we are HERE, in the Church, with the Church... but so was the one who betrayed Christ; thus, it is not enough (as we have said) to merely have one’s name on the rolls. Like baptism, it is an essential step; but is the beginning of a narrow and narrowing road for our journey. And we will be asked, as we move forward, “Why are you here?”

The question might not always be so obvious. Those who endure unto the end will be glorified, but circumstances might tempt you to say, “I am not sure why I am here.” Troubles and trials might try to convince you, “I do not belong in this place.” Rebukes and corrections will work on our flesh, as we saw above, to entice us to draw away from the places of health and holiness. And yet, Yah desires that ALL shall be saved; therefore, as we were seeing just before, this means that Yah desires that ALL shall be “one” with His people, learning from His teachers, living according to the principles He shows them, committed to doing their best for their brethren and the world. This kind of family, this heavenly society, pleases Him, for the very life of His Son has purchased this spiritual home for us.

Why are you here? The question might also be asked, “What do you really believe?”

I can recognize this issue in others, because it was once in me. I have shared with you all, a number of times, how I became a mainstream Seventh Day Adventist. Briefly told, a few friends of mine converted, and began to share with me the traditional SDA interpretation of the Book of Revelation. To my non-committed Roman Catholic ears and mind, this was all new information – and it was frightening. On some level, I did believe that the Bible was true, and that its message, with its warnings and judgments, was real, and would all be fulfilled some day.

How did I deal with that? Well, like many “religious” people, I imagine I focused on the pleasant aspects of my faith, and did my best not to think about those matters I didn’t know how to deal with. But when it is brought right up in your face, and you are forced to deal with those things you have been hiding from, that is when you know the quality of your righteousness.

I did like the message of Adventism, but by far the most important factor influencing my decision to be baptized was the desire to not be caught outside when the plagues began to rain down. In the Scriptures, we have a passage in the Book of John, in which some of Yahshua’s followers were listening to Him, and traveling around with Him, because He could perform miracles of healing, and because He could feed their multitudes with a small amount of bread and a couple of fishes.

In this generation, closer to the judgments, there are multitudes, multitudes, following Him because they fear the destruction that they have been taught will come upon those who are not faithful. Now it is true, it is certainly true, that there is a judgment. Those who are “found wanting” will not enter into everlasting life, and justice and nature dictate that the realization of how they have fallen short will be painful to them; it will be a “burning” that will leave them as ashes and dust.

These things are true, and necessary to awaken the consciences of those who are spiritually asleep. But we do not go through our days with an alarm clock ringing in our ears. Once we have been awakened, that message has served its purpose. We must then each “enter into the joy” of Yah (Mat 25:23) rejoicing that He has rescued us from these things.

But what happens to those who do not focus on the beauty, and the righteousness, and the holiness, of Yah? They may do the same things as those who are joyful in their salvation. They may speak the right words, and they may lead others to Yahshua. They may give their tithes and offerings faithfully, perhaps even going beyond what is required because, really, it does feel good to do righteousness if we understand how our actions can help others.

I do not imagine for a moment that Judas “felt bad” to do the works of the ministry when he was surrounded by the others, sharing in their fellowship and their successes. But he did not consider carefully enough the principles that Yahshua was trying to show them, especially in their private lessons with Him, apart from the crowds that were just learning the first principles of the Heavenly Kingdom. He did not ask Himself, “Why am I really here?” And so, when he had the opportunity to advance carnal principles at the expense of spiritual ones, he made the wrong decision.

Fear was the reason why I joined the mainstream SDA Church and therefore, like many who were with me, I did not last. Those who attend the Revelation seminars and crusades are often introduced to the warnings and judgments far, far more than they are familiarized with the goodness and promises of our Father. But the minister cannot help this; he is in a tight place, because he himself has not grasped the goodness and promises of the Father. He cannot testify, “Because of the goodness of the Almighty, I have overcome the world. Let me share with you this wonderful message – that has freed me from the sorrows and condemnation of my previous, sinful life.” No, he does not even ask himself the necessary questions; how can he be expected to have the right answers?

But the carnal mind understands the avoidance of danger very well; therefore, many are baptized into that and various other churches every day, bringing their carnal minds with them “along for the ride.”

The true victory, the true message of the Gospel, this is not a testimony that is heard in the world today, except for one crying in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord for His soon return.

So, now we see the problem, but what is the solution?

We cannot judge others by outward appearance, but it seems that we cannot judge ourselves by our outward appearance either. It is true, certainly, that the tree is known by its fruit, but if we do not have spiritual discernment, we might not even know what manner of fruit we produce. Consider – those who are the worst enemies of Yah are the ones who have convinced themselves that they are doing Him a favor. They persecute others in the name of the Lord, to preserve His name and His institutions, and like Judas, they betray Him with a kiss of familiarity.

I could say, we must “pray for wisdom.” But we must do that always, in all things, anyway. We must pray for wisdom, specifically for THIS. As we know from our inspired writings, when we confess a discovered sin, we must be specific in the confession. When we repent of something we have learned is contrary to the principles of Christ, we must repent of that particular thing. Similarly, when we pray, we are taught to pray for specific things. At times, we have been uncertain of how to deal with prayer requests, even shared by those among us at times, that go something like, “Please pray for my friend John, he is going through a hard time.”

It is not that we mean to be nosy, but we cannot say “Amen” to a prayer for John if he would benefit more from a spiritual education (given and received prayerfully) than a general prayer offered by some people

he does not even know. We must give our Father the actual opportunity to answer the prayers we send to Him.

In this matter, where we need to examine our own motivations, and our most deeply held beliefs, we must pray for wisdom for this particular thing. King David offered such a prayer, so this is not really a new revelation, but an everlasting principle, even if it has not been mentioned as much as I believe it should have. David prayed, “Search me, O Elohim, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Psa 139: 23, 24)

David did not offer this prayer as a mere formality. He knew that he could not evaluate his own works as accurately as our Father, and therefore when he prayed he did not do so carelessly. He truly wanted to know. He actually wanted to hear the answer to this question, and he did not let fear, his natural, carnal tendencies, cause him to turn away from what might be revealed.

We must believe that we are Yah’s, because He has claimed us as His own. We must not allow temptations to convince us we are not. If we have been fearful in our motivations, so that we have just been going through motions because we should, then we have the opportunity now to confront this fear, and to overcome. It is not enough to do as I have done in my past with the SDA Church; you cannot be here “just in case” our teachings happen to be right. You cannot survive the attacks that the enemy will make upon the saints if you are here because of a fear of being wrong. It has to go deeper than that. You must be dedicated, personally, uniquely, and completely, not to the words of the message, or the ways the doctrines are expressed necessarily, but what that message means, and how those doctrines change us, transforming us into the very image of Christ and His perfect character.

Dedication of time, dedication of effort and resources, these are indicators. We would do well to meditate often on the covenant we have made with Yah, as expressed in our baptismal vow. But we cannot “rest easy” because we can check our works off on a list. Our rest, our Sabbath Most Fully, is in our connection with Yahshua; that we would do as He did – that He does as He has always done through the vessel of our lives. Our rest is in our confidence, and knowledge, that given the choice between the principles of righteousness and the principles of the flesh, we would not make the same decision as the one who betrayed the Savior with a kiss. We would choose to bear the cross. We would choose to face the temptation to fear, and to endure discomfort for the sake of the love of another.

We must pray, honestly, seriously, as David did, and we must do so despite temptations to fear what we may have revealed to us, “Search me, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” If we can pray that honestly, and then rejoice in the answer, then we can teach this also to others, because – unlike those popular ministers who only know to “save” based on fear – we will have asked the right questions, and we will be true leaders in Israel. We will be here truly for the journey to Heaven, rather than merely along for the ride.

Are there any questions or comments on tonight’s study?