

The Fate of The Pilgrim

Happy Sabbath to everyone.

In our recent studies, we have looked at the nature of faith, we have examined the spiritual applications of some of our senses and, most recently, we have begun to look at the concept of “time.” Specifically, we have asked – with regard to the fulfillment of Yah’s promises – “When?”

Some of the promises our Father makes to His people are fulfilled at some future date. Prophecy is particularly difficult to evaluate, since it is rarely fulfilled in a straightforward manner. There are partial fulfillments, dual fulfillments, and of course conditionality based on the spiritual state of those who receive them.

There are, however, some promises that have nothing to do with this type of prophecy. They are designed to be interpreted literally, and fulfilled immediately. We know this because the record of Scripture shows that those who accepted them saw results as soon as they did so. We may read such events in verses like the following: “And Elisha sent a messenger unto [Naaman], saying, ‘Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.’ Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.” (2Kings 5:10, 14) There are a number of passages like this one and, while this was technically “prophecy” in that it indicated future events, it was not symbolic, and therefore not in the same class as the writings of Daniel and John in the Bible’s last book.

It is usually obvious when the Scriptures are giving the symbolic kinds of prophecy that indicate a distant fulfillment, and when they are indicating an immediate promise of healing or success. As I said in our last study, which examined the timing of Yah’s promises of cleansing, the power of these promises is that they are not “someday.” The resurrection, and the translation, are future... and to a degree they depend on the work of the Church, (2Pet 3:12) but no individual Christian needs to wait a single moment for the blessing of spiritual cleanliness. In fact, this characteristic is an attribute of one who truly is a Christian.

From the moment of conversion, Yahshua the Savior – Who cannot lie, and Who cannot be deceived – says to us, “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.” (John 15:3) A few verses later He adds, “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.” (verse 8) We are clean, not because of anything Yahshua will do on our behalf... Now, this is something that should be addressed, perhaps, specifically to Adventists.

One of the unique doctrines of Adventism is the Investigative Judgment. Yahshua is in the Sanctuary, and according to the mainstream interpretation of the teaching is going over names, and determining some for everlasting glory, and others for destruction. Now, some have said, “The close of probation is the point at which our fates are decided.” I would submit that this is incorrect. The close of probation is the point at which destinies are revealed to the on-looking universe, but since it is character that determines destiny, it is actually the point of conversion, not the point of judgment, that determines our ultimate fate.

The point of conversion is when character changes, from carnal to spiritual, from natural to divine, from Adamic to Christian. (1Cor 15:45) The investigative judgment is a revelation to the universe of the difference between these two natures, the first that began with the fall of Lucifer, and the second that was in the Father and Son from the beginning.

Yahshua says to those that are His, “Now ye are clean.” This is an immediate fulfillment, and then He tells them why, “through the word which I have spoken unto you.” Finally, He tells them the consequence of being made clean, “that ye bear much fruit.” In this is the Father glorified. In this is the Father’s nature revealed. To glorify Yah does not mean to invent any praise; it is the truth about Him that brings Him glory, and at the point of conversion we become those who glorify His name, those who reveal the truth about Him, through our trials, through the investigative judgment, and through eternity after probation closes.

But note, again, that we are made clean now, not because we will be resurrected some day, or because we will endure the judgment. These are also merely the effects of the cause, that we have been made clean. The reason we are made clean is because of who Yahshua is, the embodiment of the creative Word, and what He has already done on our behalf.

Sanctification, as was pointed out in the conversation at the end of last week’s study, is a growth in knowledge of Yah’s character, not an improvement in the quality or nature of the Christian soul. It is a realization, a recognition, that we have been declared clean, and a putting-away of those things that we come to understand are not in harmony with that state of being clean.

The sinner who seeks to be cleansed from a sin has no power in himself to put it away. He may, for a time, or outwardly, cease a sinful action, but the desire from the flesh is not truly overcome, and so the character is not made divine. Yahshua has given to this individual the same grace as He has given to His followers, but because the sinner has not believed it, he cannot manifest the cleanliness he has been given, for as it is written, “as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.” (Pro 23:7)

And what of the nominal Christian? He thinks he is saved, yet he cannot truly put away sin. Should it not be the case that his belief that He is a faithful follower of the Messiah be sufficient to actually make him this? We must remember, although it is faith that allows us to receive the grace of Yah for the fulfillment of His purposes, there is no power IN us, in the belief itself, to accomplish anything. This is a bit of a fine line... faith is required to please Yah, and to manifest His gifts to us, but faith is the means, it is not the cause.

If there is a storm outside, we say that we are safe if we are “indoors,” but if we merely give someone a doorway in the middle of a field and they step through it, they are not inside a house. This is like the faith of the unconverted Christians. They step through the door, they call upon their faith, but since it is not the Biblical faith, since it is not the faith that leads to victory, and the faith in the Biblical Creator, it is not actually connected to anything. The result is merely going through the motions of walking into a safe place... but in the end they are just as soaked as those who have no doorway.

Faith is just the doorway. It is Yah that is our Strength, our Safety, and our Victory. The Scriptures do say, “this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith,” (1 John 5:4) but that is only the second half of the verse, only a portion of the inspired thought. The full verse reads, “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” It is not merely “our faith” that gives us power. Although the world tries to teach us otherwise, “believing in yourself” has no real virtue. It is believing in the Father and Son; it is faith in the reality that we are “born of God,” and therefore His children. It is conviction, assurance, in the truth that we have thought – not in our heads, for we might be deceived as many have. It is in the truth that we have thought in our “hearts,”

(Pro 23:7) in our innermost selves, in the place where we see ourselves before the Father, without excuse, without self-justification.

Sanctification is becoming more and more aware of what Holiness to Yah means, but it is not that our faith gets “stronger,” or that we receive “more” grace. As we saw from last week, when we are truly born again, we receive “the faith,” all of it, and we receive “the measure of grace.” There are not measures, as if there were different levels for different people, or different amounts over time for the same person. We receive the Gift of Yashua, His entire self, when He (all of Himself) abides in us and we in Him.

These are the ideas on which I have been meditating for the past few days, and Yah brought to my mind a song that Christians sometimes sing. It begins with the lines, “I’m just a poor wayfaring stranger, I’m traveling through this world of woe. Yet there’s no sickness, toil nor danger, In that bright land to which I go.” I believe that the author of this hymn is John Bunyan, who also wrote the book *Pilgrim’s Progress*. The very name, identifying Christian as a “pilgrim,” brings to mind the idea of a journey. Now, there is nothing necessarily “wrong” with these images... but there is a way of thinking of them that will not lead to perfect righteousness.

As Adventists, we know of the “impressive dream” that envisioned the Christian community as on a long journey, bringing with them their possessions. Over time, they discarded more and more of what bound them to earth, until eventually they were left with nothing but their faith and their character, which they took with them over the final obstacle.

The Scriptures themselves, in fact the very words of Yashua, speaks of the Christian’s life as a kind of journey, for He said, “Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Mat 7:14) But let me say this... there is a way to think of these images that will not lead to perfect righteousness.

The non-converted Christian may see these images and say, “Oh, yes... the life of the Christian is a journey to Heaven, and we walk along it... I know that someday I must be holy enough to enter Heaven, but I am not that far along the path yet.” Hopefully you see the danger I am pointing out.

Adventists may see the impressive dream of Ellen White, and they may say, “I know I still have all these bags, all this luggage, but I’m not yet at the point where I can give this or that up.”

Those who think like this will ever be placing the “duties” of their faith in the future, but what does this truly reveal? This reveals a faith that is not genuine; it is not the faith of Yashua. Once one with the faith of Yashua “sees” a sin, sees a transgression, the realization of it immediately leads to the healing of it – IF they have truly believed the promise of Yashua,” You are clean by the word I have spoken unto you.”

If they truly believe this in their heart, then this is what they will be. They will say, “This action/thought/habit is not that of one who is clean, and I know I am clean, because Yashua has made me so by His word. Therefore, this cannot be a part of my life.” In the realization of it, there is the cleansing. It is not our faith that cleanses us, to be sure; but our faith allows Yah to cleanse us... and in this work He does not delay.

So then, if the “wrong” way to think about the pilgrim’s journey can cause the carnal mind to have an excuse to delay putting-away sin, how is it that the Christian sees these things?

The songs and allegories do speak of travel. Ellen White spoke of a caravan toward the Heavenly City. Yahshua spoke of a narrow way.

It is true that the Christian moves closer and closer to the Heavenly City, but the journey is one through time, not one through holiness. If you read Pilgrim’s Progress carefully, you will see that the main character actually begins his journey with everything that he needs to complete it. Ellen White’s description of the journey does not have the Christian “gaining” a single thing in terms of holiness or perfection; it is merely a shedding of the world from what the converted, born-again believer already IS. In the realization of what we have become is the realization of those things we no longer need, or want, and they are put away.

And of Yahshua’s way, of the journey that He describes... let us be clear. Yahshua said, “I AM THE WAY, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6)

This may take some thought, some prayer, some meditation, but come to understand it. The “way” to Heaven is not a long (or short) journey of increasing holiness. It is not an experience of growing in faith, or receiving more grace. It is the Person of the Redeemer. We must have ALL of Yahshua, or we are not born again, and once we have Him, we have the Way.

Yahshua did not say, “Narrow is the way... and few there be that complete it,” or “few there be that walk it.” No; few there be that “find” it, because once we “find” the Way, we have the Way already.

Now, again, it is not at all incorrect to utilize these allegories, of a journey, a pilgrimage, a walk through a way... but let us know the spiritual truth behind these images. In the physical world, the pilgrim sets out on a journey, and when he arrives at the end he has accomplished his purpose. In the spiritual world, the pilgrim has all that he seeks to obtain from the very beginning of his journey, and in due time arrives at his destination. We have had a study some time ago, stating, “It is easier to be saved than lost.”

If we understand the Christian journey in this way, that the pilgrim, the Christian, has already obtained all that Yah would have him obtain from the beginning of his journey, then this becomes obvious. It is written, “The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand.” (John 3:35) Yahshua then says that He has received the truth from the Father, and He has given it to us. He has received grace from the Father, and He has given it to us. He has received victory from the Father, and He has given it to us. All that He has received from the Father, He has given to us, and through these things, through the words that He has spoken unto us... we are clean.

Peter tells us plainly that He “hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue.” (2Pet 1:3) What, then, do we lack for our journey?

Now, we must experience the journey through time, of course. There are things to learn, and there is work to accomplish. The Gospel must be shared, after all... but let us not think of the journey as some do, as a process of advancement. We do go from “glory to glory” as the Bible says, (2Cor 3:18) but what this

means is that the “natural man” is shed (revealed to be gone) more and more as our understanding grows, revealing Yahshua within us (more and more clearly) from the moment we were born again.

The fate of the pilgrim is determined at the beginning of his journey, not the end. He need only rest in the assurance of his arrival at the destination, he need only Sabbath in the knowledge that it is not his trials that are the Way. It is not the set of obstacles that are the way to Heaven (for different people have different obstacles, after all). It is Yahshua who is the Way, and if he has received Yahshua, then he has found the Way, and the truth and the life that come with that Way. Today is the day of salvation. We tell the world, “The Way is here, come and find it,” and then the Father will translate them – today – into the Kingdom of His Dear Son. We receive all the blessings of that Way at the very first step. We walk to the Kingdom through time, of necessity, but having already become citizens of the Place to which we go.

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