

Voices In The Ark

Happy Sabbath to everyone.

This week, there are two distinct, yet related, ideas that I would like to present to the Church. They are certainly connected, but I will point out when I transition between the two, since I believe that they are both important for us this week.

I would like to begin by examining a certain statement by Yahshua about the last days. It is a comparison that we often use when speaking about the (few) number of believers in the Gospel in its full power, but there is more to learn from those verses, which I believe can be of practical use to us at this point in our history.

We read, to begin, “And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all.” (Luke 17:26, 27)

In the last days, there are some things that are very similar to the days of Noah, and one thing that is significantly different. First, let us consider the similarities.

The first is that the number saved was extremely few. Compared to the potential population of the earth in those days, the number of individuals who had kept themselves from the corruption was almost zero. Peter points out there were only “eight souls” saved from the destruction, (1Pet 3:20) as indeed the record in Genesis reveals. Peter also wrote in the next chapter, “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of Yah; and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” (1Pet 4:17, 18)

Now, I want to be clear on this; Peter is not disputing the power of Yahshua to save. Salvation is an “easy” thing, once the choice to give all to Yahshua has been made. We even have a study, a sermon entitled “Easier to be Saved than Lost.” But in terms of the numbers, there are few, few who find the Way of life. (Mat 7:14)

Second, the reason why some chose to enter, and most chose to remain outside, was because of righteousness. Noah was invited to labor for Yahweh, and in so doing to be preserved from destruction, because Yah revealed, “Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.” (Gen 7:1)

Just as today, the criteria for entering into Yah’s safety is not of works, lest any man should boast, but because of faith in the Almighty’s salvation, and that we keep ourselves unpolluted from the world. Noah was, “perfect in his generations,” (Gen 6:9) and we of Yahshua’s Bride are they – the ONLY ones – who speak rightly of Christian perfection, of righteousness by faith, and of victory over sin. It is Yahshua’s righteousness that leads to salvation, not our own; yet those who are counted righteous before the Father are those who accept His righteousness upon them... and this leads, not to a mere “covering,” for that is external, but something far different.

In most Christian faiths, Yah calls us righteous if we accept Christ, even if we are not actually, truly righteous. His statement, which would actually amount to a false testimony, is considered the “reality,” while our continuing sins would be the illusion. But the Scriptures, while they do say that Yah calls things that are not as though they were, (Rom 4:17) indicate that when He speaks, even if something is not so, it BECOMES so. That is the key difference.

If Yah calls a sinner a saint, that sinner IS truly a saint, not merely a sinner called a saint. The words would not be spoken to a sinner if he were not willing, and ready, to become the saint. And in the calling of the individual a saint, Yah – who does not err – transforms the willing sinner into one of the redeemed.

Third, there was a probationary period allotted to mankind. Noah preached for a number of years, while mercy lingered over the rebellious human race, but they continued their disregard of the Law, of the will of the Creator, “until the day that Noah entered into the Ark.” In that day, we read, “And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as Elohim had commanded him: and Yahweh shut him in.” (Gen 7:16) In such a day as this, we have “a little space” (Ezr 9:8) in which to work before Yah closes the door, and after that, there is only destruction for those who have not been sealed.

There is a direct parallel between Yah shutting the door with His infinite strength, and Him sealing us by the hand of a mighty angel for everlasting service. We must be willing to receive this salvation, but we have no power of ourselves to accomplish it, and no power of ourselves to maintain it. Now, and this is very important... because I think there is yet some misunderstanding among our own people...

Now, it is not enough to simply say, “I want to be a saint.” It is not sufficient to say, “I intend to be among the sanctified,” even if it is said with sincerity. And even in some of our recent meetings, I have heard statements too close to these for comfort. “I want,” is like, “I try,” because it speaks of our own desires and attempts. That is the first step, but that first step need not last a moment before it is no longer needed.

In other words, by the time one can make the testimony, “I want to be born again,” the request could have been submitted to the Father, AND answered. Thus, there should not be enough time between the desiring of salvation, and the receiving of it, for the utterance to be made. At least, not for those who are connected with the messengers of truth, and have heard the oracles of Yah. If one wants to be a child of the Almighty, let them accept it, and then the testimony that comes forth is thereafter, “I am a saint of Yah, by His mercy, by His work in me.” That is righteousness, true righteousness... actual, detectable, visible righteousness, that comes about by faith. I think that some among us do need to meditate on this idea; perhaps it was the entire reason for my bringing this issue up tonight.

Fourth, the help of the angels was required. This one is a particularly Adventist idea, which we believe correct, that no human effort could build a structure to survive the destruction of the earth by water. Even with divine instructions, even with a divine mandate, humanity could not construct anything that would survive a worldwide flood. The rains were but one source of the water; most of it came forth from the earth in great fissures, with earthquakes when “all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened.” (Gen 7:11)

With those tame words, great violence and calamity are described. The very shape of the earth was changed, such that the mountains themselves would rise up from the great pressures exerted on the

surface, for the Psalmist wrote, “The mountains rose, the valleys sank down to the place which thou didst appoint for them.” (Psa 104:8, RSV)

This is a strong commentary on the role of the Scriptures, and the Law, in the life of the believer. We are given instructions, commandments, such as “Thou shalt be perfect with Yahweh thy Elohim,” (Deu 18:13) and repeated by Christ, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect,” (Mat 5:48) and repeated again in the writings of the apostles, “That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” (2Tim 3:17)

Clearly, this is NOT some abstract teaching, nor an exaggeration merely to point out the holiness of the Law. This is an expectation of the One who has given all for our salvation. Not only CAN we do it, but we DO it indeed... just as Noah built the Ark that survived the waters. Though it is impossible for our perfection to survive Yah’s wrath, nevertheless it does, because we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the ministry of the angels, and the blessings of providence, though which the Father keeps us always from falling. (Jude 1:24)

No effort of will can earn the Heavenly inheritance, just as no effort of obedient Noah could build an ark strong enough for its intended purpose... but Yah gives the instructions, and lets us choose to do them. Then, as we choose, He supplies all that we in our humanity lack, so that divinity will be glorified. We glory not in self, but we rejoice in the works done through these frail human vessels. But here we see, if there is no willing vessel, no obedience to bring this forth, then the impossible is left undone, and the will of the Almighty unfulfilled.

Now, these are four similarities, which are instructive for us to consider, for we see the urgency of the days in which we are living. We see the small numbers of workers. We see the purity, the holiness to which we are called before Yah in this last generation. We see the impossibility of the task before us, yet we see also the assurance of success by One who cannot fail.

There is also one big difference, which ought to cause us rejoicing, and it is this:

When Noah was preaching to the unconverted, trying to bring them into the Ark, he was not yet, himself, IN the Ark. Now, this was not because Noah was not yet declared worthy of entrance... but because the Ark was still being constructed – it was not yet completed.

The things that human beings build, as representations of divine structures and concepts, are subject to the limitations of this physical world. This is why angels were required to keep the Ark from falling apart. This is why it took time to construct. But the true Ark, the Bride of Christ, just like the true Tabernacle in Heaven, these things were prepared “from the beginning,” and available to all at the moment they accept Yah’s mercy.

The metaphor, then, is adapted to us in this way, that while we call out to others to enter into the Ark, we are asking them to “join us” in an even more immediate sense than Noah did. Yah is about to shut the door, and we are standing within the doorway, already experiencing the care of our Creator.

This is where my second topic comes in, which will be more brief than the first. Being within the confines of the Ark gives us a particular kind of closeness. It gives us a sense of unity, a sense of family, that cannot be shared with those who are not yet within... even if they have claims on us by means of shared

genetics, firm friendship, or even marriage. It is the ones IN the Ark with which we are “one,” and though we do not deny or forsake any compatible covenants that we have made beforehand, though we do not cast away care for our parents, children, or friends, they must know that we expect the door to be shut in short order... and that those on the outside will be separated from us in any event.

Yah has the first and greatest claims on us, not merely because He redeemed us and placed us within the Ark, but also because that claim is the only one that will survive the closing of the Ark’s door and the events that take place thereafter.

When probation closes, only those connections and associations that we forge within the faith will remain, and these are the ones that edify us to build. If any have father, mother, spouse, children, or any other relative, it is our responsibility to let them know that unless they become One with us in Yahweh, as well as any other way in which they and we are “one,” that is at best a temporary connection, and one that is about to end. We say this in love, hoping for the conversion of the individual, AND the conversion of the relationship into one that will endure past the last few minutes of our time.

So, my second topic is, for those of us who are in the Ark, how do we forge those bonds among ourselves, to make them stronger, that they may (rightly) eclipse all that may be offered by the world? With what manner of communication do we speak to one another “often,” as the Scriptures teach, that our names may be found in the Book of Remembrance?

The answer to that is probably a large one, probably consisting of many aspects, and perhaps Yah is calling us to a series focusing on communication. But I think we should start by an examination of what it means to “filter” our thoughts and our words. This is something that we have said to one another a few times. There are still some who will speak too quickly, before thinking through their intent, and the consequences of their actions. To such as these we give the advice, “Filter your words,” or “Filter your thoughts.” But... we must also be clear enough with regard to how to accomplish this.

Consider the way that Yahshua taught. It was often by asking questions. He would ask, after giving a parable, “What think ye?” When dealing with the woman caught in adultery, He asked, “Hath no man condemned thee?”

Individuals are often educated through questions. He asked us questions so that we would be sensitive to His Spirit, when He asks us questions within ourselves. By asking ourselves questions, we may effectively answer ourselves, or at least consider what may be best to say and not say, what best to think and to reject as not our own thought.

Of the many that we might ask ourselves when we feel led to speak, I think that the following might be the most initially useful, in terms of practically preparing us for sanctified conversation.

The first, with regard to statements and comments, would be, “Is the comment accurate?” We want to be free of errors in our thoughts, as in our minds, therefore asking ourselves if what we are about to say really “true” is quite valuable.

Sometimes even accurate statements are best left unsaid, if they do not actually contribute to the ongoing discussion – one of the reasons, perhaps, why some of our meetings tend to run on longer than is healthy. A good question to assist us on this point might be, “Is the comment or question relevant?” If we are

truly paying attention to what is being spoken by others, we are being courteous toward them, esteeming them better than ourselves. (Phil 2:3) When we speak, it will be either to support, or to dispute, or to question, what they are saying... but it should be relevant, or else it indicates that we are dismissing the importance of one or more of our brethren.

Third, we may ask, "Is comment/question timely?" Again, this is largely a matter of courtesy; we want to have orderly, progressing conversation. We do not want to skip around among a variety of topics, for this is an invitation to confusion. As we discuss matters as a people, especially in formal meetings, it is best to raise issues, settle them, and then move on. If we are three topics in, and individuals keep referring back to a previous matter, or asking questions about it... this means that they were never settled on it in the first place, and should have objected, as is their right, before the others considered it closed.

A fourth question we may ask is, "Will my comment teach others anything new?" Or, for questions, "Will the answer to my question teach me anything new?" We do not want to simply give a comment, or ask a question, just to insert ourselves into the conversation. Of course, I would hope that ALL, being possessed of the Spirit of Christ, would HAVE worthwhile contributions to make... but all are also subject to temptation, and this is where the screening comes in. We read, "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin; but he that refraineth his lips is wise." (Pro 10:19) If we ask ourselves this, and the other, questions, when we speak, it will be a blessing to ourselves and others.

This brings us to the final question that may assist us to develop a more sanctified level of communication with the other residents of the Ark. We may ask, "Does the question/comment contribute to the sanctified atmosphere of the meeting?" If we are voicing a complaint, if we are merely lamenting, if we are speaking on any matter, we must be sure that we are edifying the brethren. What we speak, especially in public, must be toward edification, as we read, "Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification." (Rom 15:2) And of course, "Let all things be done unto edifying." (1Cor 14:26)

Now, I am not trying add additional "commandments," but none of these things are new at all. They come forth naturally from the basic principle of Christianity, to treat others as we would be treated. In our conversations with one another, we have opportunities to be sensitive, to be courteous, to perceive one another's needs, to be humble, to be teachable, and so on. How can we be evangelists to the world, if we cannot practice this before the brethren? These "little" things, if we are faithful in them, will lead us to receiving power to handle the "great" things.

Do we want to be evangelists? Do we want to convince souls to choose life? Do we want to reach out to the deceived and the faithless, to bring them to the House of Yahshua? Let us begin by expressing Agape within the Ark, respecting the brethren in our talks with them. This may seem a small thing to some, but perhaps, perhaps this is the little stain that Yahshua wishes us to wash away, before we can receive a great outpouring of His Spirit.

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