

Sabbath School Lesson #13 – Final Restoration of Unity – 22-28 December 2018

Chrst is soon to make the final restoration of unity. “Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13). The apostle Peter says that it is necessary to remind us of the words that were spoken by the holy prophets because “there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.”

Therefore they do not believe in the promise at all. But they do not reason well, “for this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water, whereby the world that then was being overflowed with water, perished; but the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:5-7). Take notice that not only has the promise something to do with the fathers, but it concerns the whole earth. The complaint of the scoffers is that since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. But the apostle shows that when they say so they shut their eyes to the fact that the same word that in the beginning made the heavens and the earth, also destroyed the earth by the flood. Also the earth is by the same word now preserved until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men, when it will be destroyed by fire. Peter then say, “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

This is according to the promise to the fathers, which was that Abraham and his seed should inherit the earth. Men think it has been a long time since that promise was made, but “the Lord is not slack concerning his promise.” The Lord has not forgotten; for “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” The reason why He has waited this long is that He is not willing that any should perish in the fires that will renew the earth, but He desires that all should come to repentance. And so we find that we have as great an interest in the promise to Abraham as he himself had. That promise is still open for all to accept. It embraces nothing less than an eternal life of righteousness in the earth made new as it was in the beginning. The hope of the promise of God unto the fathers was the hope of the coming of the Lord to raise the dead, and thus to bestow the inheritance. Christ was once bodily on the earth, but then He did not have any more of the inheritance than Abraham had. He had not where to lay His head. God has sent His Holy Spirit to seal the believers for the inheritance, even as He did to Abraham; and when all the faithful shall have been sealed by His Spirit, “He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you; whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:20-21).

Replying to the question of the disciples, “What shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the world?” our Lord Jesus briefly mentioned some of the events which would mark the progress of the world’s history from that time until His second coming, speaking with special definiteness of the signs which would appear in the last generation. And then, in view of the fact that the exact time of His coming is not revealed, He gives the exhortation to watchfulness, which furnishes the basis of our waiting for the final restoration of unity.

In the coming of the Lord is found the consummation of the hope of every believer in Christ. Then will be “the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” The promise to Abraham was “that he should be the heir of the world,” but “by faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise,” and God “gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on.” “These [Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob] all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declared plainly that they seek a country, ... But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly’ (Hebrews 11:13-16). And if we are Christ’s, then are we Abraham’s seed, and

heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:29). For our citizenship is in heaven, wherefore a Saviour also we are ardently awaiting, the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:20).

Christ's work for us includes the restoration of all that was lost through sin. Man will be "renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him," and the earth will be freed from the curse and its effects, "For the Lord shall comfort Zion: He will comfort all her waste places; and He shall make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody" (Isaiah 51:3). But this work will not be completed until He returns to this earth for His people. His promise is: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2-3). "Behold, I come quickly; and *My reward is with Me*, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Revelations 22:12). So it is in the coming of the Lord that the hope of the waiting church has centred during all the centuries. We are instructed concerning those who "are fallen asleep in Christ:" "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. ... For the Lord Himself shall descend with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. ... Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). So at the coming of the Lord the dead are raised, the living will be changed, and the reward will be given to God's servants, the prophets, and to the saints, and to them that fear His name, small and great.

Now the exact time of the Lord's coming has not been revealed. "But of that day and hour and knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matthew 24:36). And some seem to regard this as a sufficient reason for not knowing anything about the event, but many prophecies point out when it is near, and after giving a series of signs connected with His second coming, the Saviour said: "Now learn a parable of the fig tree; when his branch is yet tender and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that He is near, even at the doors" (verses 32-33). Those who will believe the Word will know of the time. "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief" (1 Thessalonians 5:1).

Those who may know that He is near, even at the doors, are urged to watchfulness: "Watch therefore; for ye know not when your Lord doth come." The thief chooses the night for his work, and his efforts are successful when he can find "the master of the house" resting in fancied security, with the idea that no thief is likely to visit his premises. But even if careful watch should be maintained for a part of the night, and then relaxed because no thief had been seen, then would be just the time for a successful robbery. "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night." "Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." Watching includes working. We are not to sit idly by, waiting for the time to pass, but "what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, *looking for an hastening* the coming of the day of God." These are they who are diligent in making known that their Lord's coming is near, and knowing the terror of the Lord they persuade men. "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over His household, *to give them meat in due season!* Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when He cometh shall find so doing." It is the duty of the servant to "feed the church of God," by teaching them the Word of God, and he who has been set as a watchman on the walls of Zion should be the first to give warning of any approaching event. What a neglect of duty it is when he is the very one who "shall say in his heart, My Lord delayeth His coming!"

Just now the exhortation to watchfulness should be earnestly heeded. "For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." We are living in the last generation. The last signs are being fulfilled. We now see "upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth." What means this war spirit which is now taking such a hold upon men in all parts of the world? What means this arming of the nations? It is simply the preparation for "the battle of that great day of God Almighty."