

HOW DOES CHRIST'S BRIDE GET READY?

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The Jewish lad sat on the floor listening as his elders talked about solemn things. Why have the Jews been disappointed about the Messiah? was the great question. God promised Him, they wailed; but why has He never come?

One day, the name of Jesus of Nazareth came up. Little Joseph asked innocently, "Who was He?"

"A Jew of the greatest talent," was the answer, "but He pretended to be the Messiah, so the Jewish tribunal sentenced Him to death."

But the boy had questions. "Why is Jerusalem destroyed, and why are we [Jews] in captivity?"

This time his father answered: "Alas!" he said, "because the Jews murdered the prophets!"

Immediately " $2 + 2 = 4$ " flashed through the boy's mind: "Perhaps Jesus was also a prophet, and the Jews killed Him when He was innocent." The child was forbidden to go to a Christian church, but this conviction was so strong that he would linger outside just to hear the preaching through the windows.

When he was only seven, he was boasting to a Christian neighbor of the future triumph of the Jews at the coming of the Messiah. The old man interrupted him: "Dear boy, the real Messiah was Jesus of Nazareth. But your ancestors rejected and crucified Him, as they did the prophets. Go home, read Isaiah 53, and you will see that Jesus is the Son of God."

Joseph did so, young as he was. It fit perfectly; he saw the truth. He asked his father to explain the chapter.

But his father disliked even thinking about Isaiah 53; he was stern. Joseph never asked again, but truth moved him to grow up to be a Christian missionary proclaiming the *second* coming of Jesus. Steeped in Jewish unbelief, his father and the elders stayed behind.¹

They kept on praying the God of Abraham to send their Messiah while they refused to see He had already done so in Jesus. Another thousand years of those prayers would still be in vain. If God has given us a “most precious” gift and we sinfully refuse to accept it, does heaven send it again? The Jews will never get it unless they back up and receive the Gift heaven already sent them. God has a healthy self-respect.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is in a similar quandary. How can we explain to an innocent child why Jesus has not come back a second time when our pioneers proclaimed His “soon” coming over 170 years ago? Does “soon” mean nothing? Daniel and Revelation pinpoint where we are in time. Our pioneers expected to see Jesus come in their lifetime, and heaven gave Ellen White a vision in May, 1856 where an “angel” assured them that Christ would come within their physical lifetime. Then she added, “Solemn words these, spoken by the angel.”² We’re still here.

¹ See Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 357, 358.

² See *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 131, 132.

sweetheart to let him in, for he is in need. He is out in the cold and the wet. But the girl is thinking only of her own comfort and ease and scorns his appeal. Finally she arouses herself to sense of concern for him that transcends her concern for herself. But when she at last opens the door, she finds he has gone.

God expects us to ask “Why?” If we believe what we claim—that we “love His appearing”³—we will be concerned. Why this failure of the angel’s promise of 1856? Without history’s answer, the question is left begging.

Joseph Wolff’s elders were praying for something that had already happened. God has promised to send the “latter” rain of His Spirit before Christ can come the second time.⁴ As Joseph Wolff found in his Bible evidence that the Lord had sent their Messiah to the Jews in Christ, so we find evidence that heaven sent “us” the latter rain that we had prayed for so much. “The Lord in His great mercy sent a most precious message to His people” that was “the beginning” both of the “loud cry” of Revelation 18 and of “showers from heaven of the latter rain.”⁵ Then, adds Ellen White some hundred times, we disdained it “just like the Jews.”

We have deprived the world of blessing God designed they should have had.⁶ In her

³ 2 Tim. 4:8.

⁴ “I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.” Joel 2:28.

⁵ Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, November 22, 1892; *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, pp. 1073, 1478, 1479.

⁶ While it is true that “upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity” must be necessary in order for the great controversy between Christ and Satan to be completed, nothing in Bible prophecy suggests that this agony must be prolonged over three centuries since the beginning of “the time of the end” of Daniel 12:4 (cf. Luke 21:25-27). Too many innocent beings have had to suffer. We can’t be

understanding, there has never been a greater mistake made by the Lord's true church since what the Jews did two millennia ago.⁷

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO?

Recover what we have lost! An innocent child like Joseph Wolff saw that's what his people needed to do. To resolve our quandary is easy: let's give to the world church the message which "we" rejected. The problem is very simple: the world needs that special Good News that God wanted to give them. How can we dare to withhold it, century after century?

WHAT IS THE "LATTER RAIN"?

A special gift of God's Spirit to prepare His people for translation at the coming of Jesus. It "ripens the grain for the harvest," that is, it woos His people away from their love of the world so they want the kingdom of God to come. It awakens a zeal like those had who waited for Christ in the autumn of 1844.⁸

This means a shift in Christian experience from Old Covenant to New Covenant thinking. It was the principal issue that impacted the 1888 message. It

content to watch this continue another century or centuries while "we" in favored lands enjoy blessings and luxuries.

⁷ One example of these hundred or more statements: "All the universe of heaven witnessed the disgraceful treatment of Jesus Christ, represented by the Holy Spirit. Had Christ been before them [our General Conference Session at Minneapolis], they would have treated Him in a manner similar to that in which the Jews treated Christ" (*1888 Materials*, p. 1479). A few others: pp. 398, 399, 406, 512, 673, 911, 912, 1067, 1068, 1651, 1656.

⁸ See *The Great Controversy*, pp. 372-374.

What I am thinking of is the unfairness to Christ Himself of our long delay in the finishing of His work. *He* carries the burden on His heart of the world's sorrow and pain, while you and I and our families live in comfort, pleasure, and comparative ease. Every day we postpone the finishing of God's work adds to the pain in His heart.

Is our relationship to the Lord Jesus right if we either ignore or deny the fact that when He earnestly tried to give us the latter rain already in our history, we misunderstood, resisted, repulsed, and rejected it?

Would not simple courtesy to the Lord Jesus require that we humble our hearts before Him and ask His pardon? And would not reverence and godly fear even more insistently demand such?

The alternative is to give the impression that either God is reluctant to give the latter rain so that we must beg and plead with Him to release it, or that we must do more "works" in order to merit it, be more diligent, more zealous, work harder, give more, etc.

The point is that Christ is also a Lover who has been rebuffed, rejected, by His true love, the supreme object of His regard on earth. His high hope was that, in union with His bride-to-be, He could lighten the earth with the glory of a message through which "all families of the earth [should] be blessed."

Some dimensions of that divine disappointment can be grasped by considering the Laodicean message in the light of its true source, the Song of Solomon. In the poem, the true lover appeals to his

message, our corporate sin is a sincere, unwitting failure to discern our true position before the watching universe; and our corporate duty is, quite specifically, to “be zealous therefore, and repent.” The 1888 sin is not our sin *per se* but it is a revelation to us in history of our denominational guilt, even as Calvary is not our personal sin *per se*, but is a Revelation of our universal guilt (TM 38; DA 745).

The Spirit of Prophecy, in emphasis so emphatic and reiterated as to be beyond evasion, lays upon us the same corporate guilt as rested anciently on Israel. See 5T 456, 457, etc. In so doing, the Spirit of Prophecy reflects in its entire emphasis the message Jesus addresses to the Laodicean church. The complementary response is repentance, which experience the ancient Jews disdained. Incidentally, the call to repentance in the Laodicean message is the most encouraging, restorative, and hopeful message that could come to the church. Trying to soft-pedal the repentance will never accentuate the reconciliation with Christ!

The experience of repentance has almost always in past history been as unwelcome to God’s people, ancient and modern, as it is today; yet the entire sweep of history has always upheld the call to repentance and condemned its rejection.

Corporate repentance is envisaged in the prophecy Sister White uttered at the 1888 Session: “There will be great humbling of heart before God on the part of everyone who remains faithful and true to the end.” Ms. 15, 1888. What does that mean?

demonstrated that here is “light” in the gospel that is greater than that of the popular Sunday-keeping churches.

Justification by faith *in the Day of Atonement* is something beyond Luther’s, Calvin’s, or the Evangelicals’ understanding.

We see this shift in Revelation 19: “The marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife has *made herself ready*” (vs. 7). The “woman” grows up. She becomes a bride who understands and loves her bridegroom. Concern for Him becomes greater than her former self-centered concern for her own salvation.

Ellen White has taught us to think of the latter rain as “a message of Christ’s righteousness,” a clearer grasp of *practical* godliness—all by faith. The idea is in the next verse: “And to her [the bride] was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is *the righteousness of saints*.”⁹

At last the latter rain is welcomed, no longer resisted. Now it’s *received*. God’s people have

⁹ See Joel 2:23, 24, margin, “teaching of righteousness.” Here in Revelation 19 Christ uses a different noun, indicating that now the grand shift in Christian experience has taken place from the Old to the New Covenant. His word is *dikaïomata*, whereas the ordinary word for Christ’s righteousness is *dikaïosune*. The latter is imputed to the believer in a legal sense; His *dikaïomata* is imparted in a practical sense, now an intrinsic part of character, still by faith alone, but real. Now at last an immense hurdle in the great controversy with Satan has been surmounted—by the faith of Jesus. His people have “condemned” sin in their fallen, sinful flesh.

taken the step that concludes the message from the true Witness—they have “overcome even as [He] overcame” (3:21). Their faith has matured under the refreshing “showers of the latter rain” *received*.

According to Ellen White’s testimony all this should have come over a century ago, yes, within the lifetime of people living in 1856. When the latter rain is received, it prepares for a grand “harvest” of human souls who will respond to a final “lifting up” of Christ and Him crucified. It will be a revelation of the cross that the world has never seen so clearly. The “most precious message” will penetrate to every honest heart on earth.¹⁰

“Can God do something to force the sleeping ‘bride’ of the 21st century to motivate her to ‘make herself ready’”? No, God’s omnipotence must be restrained:

Never has a bridegroom dressed his bride for the wedding. She must always “make herself ready.”

Christ has given us an excellent system of church organization, but He has wisely left this initiative to us. Prayer is good but not good enough; it must be augmented by doing something—“be zealous

¹⁰ “The message will be carried not so much by argument as by the deep convictions of the Spirit of God. The arguments have been presented. The seed has been sown, and now it will spring up and bear fruit. . . . Now the rays of light penetrate everywhere, the truth is seen in its clearness, and the honest children of God sever the bands which have held them. Family connections, church relations, are powerless to stay them now. Truth is more precious than all besides. Notwithstanding the agencies combined against the truth, a large number take their stand upon the Lord’s side.” *The Great Controversy*, p. 612.

force, but failed because they had not really seen their deep sin of rejecting Divine providence. In the same way could those in 1893 have seen that indeed the loud cry had begun but without repenting for what had taken place in 1888 they were ready to demand or take by force, the Holy Spirit which had been so freely offered before. It seems we could also repeat this same mistake.

The only hope for the Jews is to frankly acknowledge the mistakes of their “fathers” at Calvary. Inspiration indicates that many will yet do so (Romans 11; Ev 578-79; AA 376-82). Likewise, the only hope for us to receive the “latter rain” is honesty beginning at all levels and therewith growing into corporate repentance and humbling of heart before God. Are we so much better than the Jews? Be not high-minded, the Lord says, but fear; the Jews might yet beat us to righteousness! That would be the irony of the ages.

Meanwhile, what kind of “latter rain” can an impenitent and stubborn people receive? Would it not be a taste of Spiritualism?

What we need is a corporate repentance and humbling of heart before God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Our history demands it.

The Lord Jesus Himself charges us with the guilt of corporate sin, and the duty of corporate repentance. No other conclusion can follow our common understanding of Revelation 3:14-21, unless we deny that this message is addressed to the corporate Seventh-day Adventist church. Such a position would run counter to our interpretation of over a hundred years. According to the Laodicean

we as leaders should take the blame and not seek to cast it on them.

Much of what is taught is *eros*-based. Appeals are made to the fears of being lost or rejected by the Lord. The larger issue of the vindication of Christ by the remnant church seems to elude the grasp. The egocentric rather than the Christocentric theme predominates. It is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who is put to an open shame by our refusal heretofore to acknowledge our true position before the world and the watching universe.

What can Heaven think as they look upon us? The dear Lord fulfilled the promises made to the pioneers and sent the beginning of the “latter rain” at a certain Session of our General Conference. Our fathers resisted it, spurned it, until that generation were unable to appreciate and receive it. They have now all gone to their graves. Declining to recognize that fact, we now renew our tearful and insistent prayers that God will graciously give us the “latter rain”, ignoring the fact that He has already tried to give it to us and we refused it.

The Lord likewise fulfilled the promises made to the patriarchs by sending the Messiah to the Jewish nation. They treated Him much as we treated the Elijah message, according to numerous Ellen G. White statements. And still today the Jews lift up their trembling hands to heaven to implore that God send them their Messiah.

It makes me wonder if it is not like the Israelites who came to the borders of Canaan and rejected to go up and take the land. Then when they realized they could have gone in they tried to take it by

therefore, and repent” (Revelation 3:19). Praying for the latter rain could drag on for another century. No bridegroom in his right mind can coerce his bride to say “I do.” Neither can Christ.

Merely repenting of some individual *sins* amongst us as individuals is good work, but it clearly doesn’t go far enough toward preparing the way for the outpouring of the Spirit in the true latter rain.

I do not understand clearly how *believing* that our sins are forgiven is the some method by which the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the latter rain is received. Our sins were forgiven long ago through the death of the Son of God on the Cross. “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, *not* imputing their trespasses unto them.” Thus, indeed, whether a person feels his sins are forgiven or not, it is a fact if he so believes. But can justification be thus confused with the more complete sanctification which the latter rain will develop? Is the “demand and reception” of which Sister White speaks merely our determined assumption that we have it? Again, to illustrate, would our lukewarmness be overcome simply by issuing through “faith” that we had overcome it? What is the faith which works—by love?

To the 1893 *General Conference Bulletin*, A. T. Jones quoted from a Spiritualist magazine as follows:

“Let Thursday be your day for declaring your faith. Say, ‘I do believe that God is now working with me and by me and for me;’ say it with a sure certainty, for it is true.”

What would be the difference between that doctrine and the doctrine that we have the power of the Holy Spirit simply because we believe with certainty that we do?

At the 1883 General Conference session, Elder W. W. Prescott preached a series of sermons on the Holy Spirit. He closed by appealing to the brethren to believe that they had the power of the loud cry (since Sister White had said that it had begun at Minneapolis), and thus go out determined to give it. If they only would believe it, that they had it, it would be so! They all agreed, said, “We are ready”. But—it didn’t come. Why? Further, he went so far as to predict unqualifiedly that from that day forth there would never be another hypocrite enter the Adventist church, for they were now determined to go from that session with the power of the Holy Spirit in the loud cry. History proves that that was a false prophesy. Was not his doctrine of believing that they had the Holy Spirit when they didn’t, equally false?

If the reception of the Holy Spirit depends upon an *act* of our minds in assuming that we have it, call it “faith” if we wish, would that actually in the final analysis, be receiving the Spirit by *works*? An act of believing that we have the Spirit is a *work*. Paul made it plain (Gal. 3:2) that the true Holy Spirit is not received that way.

He is still a human being as well as the Son of God. He cherishes in His heart a confidence that His people are basically honest. (We wouldn’t believe our “28 doctrines” unless we were!) This conviction that Christ cherishes requires that we

“overcome’ where Joseph Wolff’s elders failed.¹¹ Creating or joining an offshoot is not the solution. Repentance within the church, is the solution.

The apostles never wrung their hands over the impotence of the gospel. And it does no good to say that because people are more sinful now, therefore we can’t expect such results. Where sin abounds, grace is to much more abound. Otherwise there can be no “latter rain” and “loud cry” to enlighten the earth with glory. Paul said the gospel is “the power of God unto salvation.” When true righteousness by faith is proclaimed, something happens: the “love of Christ constraineth us,” and all the devils in hell can’t resist those who sense that constraint.

Through motif analysis it can be seen that much of what we naively assume is righteousness by faith proves to be a dominant legalism. When the gospel is clearly proclaimed, our people will respond loyally and will sacrifice to the finishing of the work in that very generation that is permitted to hear the gospel in its full clarity. I believe in our people, and I think

¹¹ The popular argument that the church will never experience “revival and reformation’ until persecution comes, is self-defeating and self-contradictory. Only those who “are godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). A lukewarm church can’t suffer for her ‘faith’! The United States government never came so close to passing a National Sunday law as when the 1888 message stirred some in the church to a significant revival and reformation, (then church leadership stifled it). The pattern is clear: “the most precious message” comes side by side with incipient persecution that stirs the church, but always the spiritual blessing comes first.