

The Gospel *and* Judgment



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Leviticus 16; Rom. 8:1, 34; Heb. 6:20; 7:25; 9:24; 1 Pet. 1:2, 18, 19.*

Memory Text: “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (*1 John 2:1*).

As Adventists, we believe that since 1844 we have been living in the antitypical day of atonement. This means that the earthly day of atonement was simply a model, a type, of this true day of atonement. In the same way that the animal sacrifices were symbols of the Cross, the earthly Day of Atonement was a symbol of the real one, the one inaugurated in 1844 by Christ's work of judgment in the heavenly sanctuary.

This, of course, is good news. After all, what is atonement other than the work of God saving us through Christ's blood? The law can't atone; obedience can't atone; character can't atone. Atonement comes only one way, through the Cross.

If, then, we are living in the day of atonement, shouldn't that be good news? Shouldn't any “day” dedicated to atonement, to God's work of saving us, be something we should be thankful for? Shouldn't we be rejoicing in the hope of living in the day of atonement?

Of course. The judgment is good news because it forms an inseparable part of “the good news”; it is the climactic application of the Cross in our behalf. This week we'll look at the gospel and the judgment, because it's only through the lens of the gospel that we can fully see just what the judgment means for us.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 23.*

We Must All Stand

As we saw in week 2, the Bible is clear that there is a judgment and that this is a judgment by works, a judgment where our works come under scrutiny. (After all, what is a judgment without such a scrutiny?) Remember, Jesus said that we shall give an account of “every idle word” (*Matt. 12:36*). *Every* idle word? And is this not the same Lord who said that the “hairs of your head are all numbered” (*Matt. 10:30*), who knows when a sparrow falls to the ground (*Matt. 10:29*), and who said in His Word that He shall bring “every work into judgment, with every secret thing” (*Eccles. 12:14*)? *Every* work? *Every* secret thing? Thus, the whole idea of a scrutiny of works, an investigation in judgment, is biblical.

But more important is the question, How could any sinner stand when *every* idle word, *every* secret thing, comes into judgment? It’s a pretty frightening thought, standing before God in a judgment when everything you have ever done comes under review, especially before a God who, in His holiness, is a “consuming fire” (*Deut. 4:24*). What person, no matter how obedient, righteous, or faithful, has the kind of record that could put him or her in good stead with such a God?

Read Romans 8:34, Hebrews 6:20, 7:25, 9:24, and 1 John 2:1. How do they answer the above question?

The good news of the judgment is that Jesus, in His righteousness, gets us through the judgment because He stands there in our place. This is what His intercession, His high-priestly ministry, is all about. Otherwise, all of us would be lost because none of us, no matter our works, has enough righteousness to stand before a Holy God. Unless we are clothed in a perfect righteousness that none of us possess or could ever earn, we would have to stand in our own works, our own righteousness; and because we are all sinners, we would all be condemned.

“Man cannot meet these charges himself. In his sin-stained garments, confessing his guilt, he stands before God. But Jesus our Advocate presents an effectual plea in behalf of all who by repentance and faith have committed the keeping of their souls to Him. He pleads their cause and vanquishes their accuser by the mighty arguments of Calvary.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 471. How does this quote from Ellen White help you better understand your only hope in the judgment?

Blood and Judgment

Central to our theology as Seventh-day Adventists is the sanctuary, both the earthly as a model of the plan of salvation and the heavenly as the place where Jesus is now ministering in our behalf the merits of His atoning death. We as Adventists believe—based on (1) the earthly sanctuary model, (2) the book of Hebrews, and (3) the prophecies in Daniel—that since 1844 Jesus has been in the Most Holy Place, where the judgment, clearly seen in Daniel 7, is now taking place.

Much of our understanding for this comes from the earthly Day of Atonement, in which once a year the high priest entered the Most Holy Place of the earthly sanctuary. This is found most clearly in Leviticus 16.

Read Leviticus 16. How many times is the word *blood* mentioned? What does the blood symbolize? See also *Heb. 9:12-14*.

Central to the Day of Atonement ritual was blood, a symbol for the blood of Jesus, shed in our behalf at the Cross. Also, because the Day of Atonement is the day of judgment, then judgment and atonement are closely linked. And, because atonement is, indeed, good news, judgment should be, as well. And it is, but only because of the blood, which represents the life and death of Jesus in our behalf.

Read Leviticus 17:11; Luke 22:20; Romans 5:9; Hebrews 10:19; 12:24; 13:20; 1 Peter 1:2, 18, 19. What do they tell us about the central role of blood in the plan of salvation?

Blood is a symbol of life; shed blood means death. All this was a symbol of Christ's life and death for us. And, because blood was shed and then ministered on the Day of Atonement, this tells us that, central to the Day of Atonement, are the life and death of Jesus—in our behalf! That's why the judgment, for Christians, is good news. We have a Substitute who stands in the presence of God "for us" (*Heb. 9:24*), now and especially in the judgment.

Imagine your case before God on Judgment Day—without a Substitute! What hope would you have? Why, then, must you have a Substitute stand in your stead in the judgment?

The Garment

Early in the quarter (week 2) we looked at the wedding parable in Matthew 22 as evidence for a pre-Advent judgment. Yet, there's more to this parable than just the timing; instead, it's a powerful revelation of what it means to be covered by the righteousness of Christ in the judgment and what it means not to be covered.

Read the parable (*Matt. 22:1-13*). **What ultimately made the difference between whether the man stayed or left?**

What does the garment symbolize? *See Isa. 61:10, Zech. 3:1-5.*

In this parable we see a clear example of someone who heeded the invitation to the wedding but not the conditions. He refused to accept what the owner offered him: the robe of Christ's perfect righteousness and, thus, upon investigation was found wanting.

Notice, the parable said that both the good and the bad came. It didn't say whether the man without the garment was good or bad. In one sense it made no difference: Before God in judgment, we all—"good" or "bad"—without a garment stand condemned. What the guest needed at the wedding is the same thing that we need in the judgment, something covering us; otherwise, we will be cast out where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. That covering, symbolized by the garment in the parable, is the righteousness of Jesus, credited to His followers by faith—and it is their only hope now and in the judgment.

Whether through the imagery of the blood, or the garment, the point is the same: We need something other than ourselves to get us through the judgment. And the good news is that, through the sacrifice of Jesus, we have all that we need: the righteousness of God Himself (*see Rom. 3:21, 22; 10:3; 2 Pet. 1:1*) credited to us by faith.

Ponder this question carefully: Have you accepted the invitation to the wedding but not the conditions? What are those conditions? Be prepared to talk about these conditions in class on Sabbath.

No Condemnation

Read Romans 8:1. What message is found in this text that is especially important for us, who face judgment?

The good news of the judgment is that we don't have to stand in our own righteousness. We can stand in the righteousness of Jesus. That we are judged by works doesn't mean that we are saved by them; we are saved, instead, only through the righteousness of Jesus, which is credited to us by faith, a faith that is always manifested by works. This righteousness covers us the moment we, through a complete surrender of ourselves to Christ, claim it for ourselves, and it stays with us (though not unconditionally) right through the judgment. After all, what good would being covered by that righteousness do any of us if we did not have it when we needed it the most, which would be in the judgment?

How does James 2 help us understand the role of works in the judgment?

But how do I know that I will have enough works to show that I have faith? That's a logical, but wrongly premised, question. It reflects that attitude of those who said, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" (*Matt. 7:22*), or of the Pharisee who said, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess" (*Luke 18:11, 12*).

Instead, our attitude should be that of the publican, who smote his breast saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner" (*Luke 18:13*). Those who have ever glimpsed the righteousness of Christ know that they must throw themselves on the mercy and grace of God and that their works—whatever they are, however much done out of a pure and loving heart—are never enough. This is why they have to live by faith, trusting in God's promises that He will save them because of Jesus and Jesus alone. It's the realization of the inadequacy of our works that drives us to faith and to the promises of salvation through Christ. And it's that faith—the faith that believes God's promises—that transforms the life, a transformation revealed in works.

Judged by Works; Saved by Faith

Follow the train of thought below, looking up the various texts. How does this help you understand what a judgment by works means for us who are saved by faith?

A professed follower's life comes up before God: Every work, every secret thing, every idle word comes into review (*Ps. 135:14, Eccles. 12:14, Matt. 12:36, Rom. 14:10-12, 2 Cor. 5:10, Heb. 10:30*). Who could stand before such a scrutiny? No one (*Rom. 3:23, Gal. 3:22, 1 Tim. 1:15, Rom. 3:10*). However, for the true followers of Christ, Jesus stands as their Advocate, their Representative, their Intercessor in heaven (*Rom. 8:34, Heb. 6:20, 7:25, 9:24, 1 John 2:1*). And though they have nothing in and of themselves to give them merit before God, though they have no works that are good enough to justify them before the Lord, their lives—however faulty, however defective—nevertheless reveal their true repentance and faith (*Matt. 7:24-27, John 14:15, James 2:14-20, 1 John 4:20, 5:3*). How they treated others, the poor, the needy, prisoners, how they forgave as they were forgiven, the words they spoke, the deeds they did (*Matt. 7:2; 12:36, 37; 18:23-35; 25:31-46*)—while these things never could justify them before God, while they never could answer the demands of a broken law, they reveal those who have accepted Christ as their Substitute—and His righteousness alone, which covers them like a garment, gets them through the judgment (*Leviticus 16; Zech. 3:1-5; Matt. 22:1-14; Rom. 8:1, 34; Heb. 9:24; 1 John 2:1*).

Or, as Ellen White so clearly expressed it: "But while we should realize our sinful condition, we are to rely upon Christ as our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption. We cannot answer the charges of Satan against us. Christ alone can make an effectual plea in our behalf. He is able to silence the accuser with arguments founded not upon our merits, but on His own."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 472. The futility of our works for salvation should cause us to lean totally on the mercy and merits of Christ. Then, out of love and thankfulness for the assurance of salvation that's ours through Christ, we serve Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and body, a service that's expressed in works. How else could it be?

How well do your works reflect your faith? Or, is that the problem: Your works only too well reflect your faith? What things do you need to repent of and change in order to reflect more fully the righteousness of Jesus, which is yours by faith?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, “Joshua and the Angel,” vol. 5, pp. 467–476.

In the context of the saints in judgment, Ellen White writes: “Their only hope is in the mercy of God; their only defense will be prayer. As Joshua was pleading before the Angel, so the remnant church, with brokenness of heart and earnest faith, will plead pardon and deliverance through Jesus their Advocate. They are fully conscious of the sinfulness of their lives, they see their weakness and unworthiness, and as they look upon themselves they are ready to despair. The tempter stands by to accuse them, as he stood by to resist Joshua. He points to their filthy garments, their defective characters. He presents their weakness and folly, their sins of ingratitude, their unlikeness to Christ, which has dishonored their Redeemer.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 473. Again, in the same context: “Now he [Satan] points to the record of their lives, to the defects of character, the unlikeness to Christ, which has dishonored their Redeemer, to all the sins that he has tempted them to commit, and because of these he claims them as his subjects.

“Jesus does not excuse their sins, but shows their penitence and faith, and, claiming for them forgiveness, He lifts His wounded hands before the Father and the holy angels, saying: ‘I know them by name. I have graven them on the palms of My hands.’”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 484.

Discussion Questions

- 1 As a class, talk about your answers to the question at the end of Tuesday’s lesson.
- 2 Why do you think for so many people in the church, has the pre-Advent judgment been a cause of much fear and concern? Why must we keep the Cross at the center of our understanding of the judgment?
- 3 What can you do as a class to help all the members of your local church better understand the good news of the judgment?
- 4 What could you do for someone who is very discouraged about his or her walk with the Lord? How can you use what we’ve studied this week to give that person encouragement not to give up?

Sharing the Light

Thomas Alai

Thomas Alai lives in Papua New Guinea. One day he looked up from his work to find a friend standing near his desk. He had come to sell him a Bible. Thomas had planned to spend the 20 *kina* (about US\$6.50) in his pocket for beer, but instead he bought the Bible.

He opened the Bible and found a list of topics and Bible references. He began reading the Bible by topic. When he came to the Sabbath, he was puzzled. But as he read the verses listed, he was convinced that the Sabbath was God's appointed day of worship. Thomas asked an Adventist woman at work where to find the Adventist church, and the next Sabbath he attended worship.

He knew immediately this was where God wanted him. After church he told his wife where he had been. "I want to change my life," he said. She had heard that line before and was not convinced. However as weeks passed, she realized that her husband was indeed changing. While she did not attend church with him, she was glad he had found God.

An elderly church member told Thomas that he was working in a town not far away where only four Adventists lived. The man was teaching his neighbors the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, and the people wanted to know more. He asked Thomas to help him. So Thomas began visiting the village to help his friend teach the people.

The people told Thomas that the Protestant pastor in town did not want Adventists in his territory and planned to make trouble for them. Thomas prayed that God would intervene and calm the man down. One evening the Protestant pastor entered the home of one of his members. Thomas was there showing pictures to explain the Bible prophecies to a group of people. The pastor said nothing but sat down to watch the presentation.

After the presentation ended, Thomas was surprised to learn that the visitor was the Protestant pastor. Thomas approached the pastor and said, "I'm sorry, Pastor. I did not know you were here, or I would have greeted you properly." The pastor simply nodded and thanked Thomas for the presentation. He showed no signs of anger.

Thomas has continued meeting with the people, and several of them have been baptized. The believers meet in a simple shelter made of sago palm leaves. Thomas reports that some 45 people have asked for Bible studies in preparation for baptism.

Our mission offerings help start work in new areas around the world.

Thomas Alai lives in Lae, Papua New Guinea.