

Glimpses of Our God Lesson 13 1Q 2012

The Promise of His Return

SABBATH

Read Memory Text: “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.”
Rev 22:12

Thoughts?

What do you think of the promise to return quickly?
What does it mean?

- That the actual time frame of his return will be quick? In other words very few minutes, hours, days?
- That He is doing all in His power to return as quickly as possible – in other words, He isn’t initiating any delay, but is in fact, trying to remove any obstacle that would cause delay, so He is return as quickly as is actually possible?
- But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 2Pet 3:8,9

What does this mean? Is it poetic or literal?

- Has God created some type of bubble in which earth operates separated, isolated, insulated, from the rest of the universe?
- Is it possible earth is in a time dilation field, where time passes slower outside the field than inside?
- If that were the case then the Lord has been gone only 2 days since He made the promise to return quickly.

The lesson offers another possible explanation for Christ coming quickly – read THURSDAY’s last paragraph, “In one sense...”

Thoughts?

Do you think when Christ said He will come quickly He was actually meaning we will die soon, sleep in the grave, be unaware of thousands of years and so it will seem like He is returning quickly?

I personally don’t find this idea satisfying. I think it is an important idea to remember in our personal journey, that at any moment life could be cut short, so we need to live in a constant state of unity with Christ.

But – it undermines a sense of hope to think that “quickly” means when we die. In fact, if we were to promote the idea that we can be with Christ quickly by dying – might that have a potential negative outcome?

What do you think it means that He has a reward to give according to each person’s work? What work?

The SDA Bible Commentary states, on this passage:

Work. Gr. *ergon*, “an act done.” The singular number suggests that the word is used collectively of the acts that make up the life as a whole that a person has lived. The effects of the grace of Christ or of the rejection of that grace are also taken into account when the “work” of man is examined (see on Eze. 18:22, 24).¹

What do you understand this to mean?

¹ *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Volume 7*. 1980 (F. D. Nichol, Ed.) (896). Review and Herald Publishing Association.

- God keeps a list of works, deeds, acts and if we do good works we earn, from God, good rewards and if we do evil works we earn, from God, punishment?
- Does it mean something else?

What about Jesus parable about workers in the field –

- Does God want us to work for Him?
- Do we have a work to do?
- Does our work achieve us rewards?
- Does God pay us for our work?

What about when they asked Christ what work they had to do?

Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.”²⁸ Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?”²⁹ Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” Jn 6:27-30

How does this fit in to the working in the Lord’s field? And what is the balance in receiving rewards?

It again goes back to how you understand God’s law:

If God’s law is natural:

- You exercise regularly – which is work to do, is there a reward for doing this? What is the reward? From where does it come?
 - The reward comes from the natural results of operating in harmony with God’s design
- If you eat healthy foods and avoid toxic substances, a diligent work, is there a reward? From where does it come?

- If you love others more than self, give of yourself to bless others, is there a reward? From where does it come?
- If you smoke two packs of cigarettes per day, is there a reward/punishment? From where does the “reward” come?
 - The punishment comes from the natural results of operating out of harmony with God’s design
- If you cheat on your spouse is there a reward/punishment? From where does the “reward” come?
 - While the spouse may leave, isn’t the true “punishment” the damage to conscience, character, that cheating inflicts? Thus the punishment comes from the natural result of operating outside God’s design for life.

If law is imposed:

- If you pay your taxes honestly, is there a reward? From where does the reward come?
 - The government - police, fire department, roads, currency, defense...
- If you cheat on your taxes or simply don’t file them, is there a “reward”/punishment? From where does it come?
 - The government – fines and imprisonment
- If you violate traffic laws by speeding, but not natural law of physics by getting in a wreck, and you are caught, is there a reward? From where does it come?

When we mix the natural and imposed laws:

- If you study regularly for school, is there a reward? From where does the reward come?
 - Natural – development of mind, brain circuits, knowledge, wisdom
 - Imposed – letter grades, diplomas
- If you cheat in school, is there a reward? From where does it come?

- Natural – damage to conscience, character
- Imposed – expelled from school, fail class
- If you train for and compete in the Olympics is there a reward?
 - Natural – better health, self discipline, improved confidence, developed brain circuits
 - Imposed – medals, endorsement contracts
- If you do illegal drugs is there a “reward”? From where?
 - Natural – damage to brain, body, character, possible death if overdose
 - Imposed – arrest, fines, jail

In God’s kingdom how does it work? Do we earn rewards or punishments that are externally imposed by God, because His law is imposed? Or when we live in harmony with His design/laws, there are natural benefits, or rewards?

What is the balance between what Christ does for and in us and our work and reward?

I thought this Christian author said it nicely in a book entitled *God’s Amazing Grace*:

In His **divine arrangement**, through His unmerited favor, the Lord has **ordained that good works shall be rewarded**. We are accepted through Christ’s merit alone; and the acts of mercy, the deeds of charity, **which we perform, are the fruits of faith**; and **they become a blessing to us; for men are to be rewarded according to their works**. It is the fragrance of the merit of Christ that makes our good works acceptable to God, and it is grace that enables us to do the works for which He rewards us. Our works in and of themselves have no merit. . . . We deserve no thanks from God. We have only done what it was our duty to do, and our works could not have been performed in the strength of our own sinful natures. {AG 244.2}

What do you hear?

- God's design, or ordained construction of the universe, is that life operates on natural law with built in inherent rewards for living in harmony with His methods and principles.
- We could do no work to create a remedy to our terminal state.
- Christ's merit, or the remedy He achieved, is the only solution to our condition. Thus God only accepts us healed, remaining in an unhealed, terminal state is unacceptable to God.
- When we partake of that remedy we get better. The improvement is not something we earn, but is evidence of having partaken of the remedy. Christ is our remedy, when we partake of Him our characters get better, and we begin to have signs or evidence of that improvement, which are the good works, or living in harmony with His kingdom of love.
- These good works themselves, bring with them built in blessings of joy, better relationships, better physical health etc. as we are again in harmony with God's design

Here is the next paragraph from the previous quotation:

We need . . . to bring the light and grace of Christ into all our works. We need to take hold of Christ and to retain our hold of Him until we know that the **power of His transforming grace** is manifested in us. We must have faith in Christ **if we would reflect the divine character**. . . Faith in the Word of God and in **the power of Christ to transform the life will enable the believer to work His works**. {AG 244.3}

What do you hear being described? A legal solution, or a healing process? What enables us? It is the transforming power of Christ in us, which we experience when we trust Him!

SUNDAY

Read first paragraph, “The description...” thoughts?

The lesson states, “The last chapters in the books of Isaiah and Revelation assure us that the destruction of sin is coming and that God’s kingdom will be restored.”

What does this mean?

- What do you understand God’s kingdom to be?
- How will sin be destroyed?
- Where does sin exist or occur?
- If sin exists in the hearts/minds of intelligent beings, then how does God eradicate it, without destroying the being?
- Can this be done by power, force, might?
- What method does God use?
- What happens to those who refuse to have their hearts, minds, characters cleansed from the infection of sin/selfishness?
- In the US Military it is illegal to commit adultery and one can be prosecuted and sent to prison for adultery.
 - What happens to a person who breaks God’s law for marriage and has unprotected sex and gets HIV infected?
 - What happens if that person believes their problem is a problem with the government, for adultery, rather than the problem being infected with HIV and so they seek a lawyer to defend them and eventually gets a legal pardon, but don’t get treatment for HIV?
- What happens to the minds, hearts, characters of persons, who are born in sin, conceived in iniquity, if they believe their problem is a legal problem with God’s government, and they accept a legal solution of having Jesus be their lawyer in heaven to defend them and their sins paid by Jesus’ blood, but never experience the actual transformation of heart and mind?

- Does this give us some insight into why God is waiting to return?
 - He wants all to be saved
 - But, many have been tricked into believing they have a legal problem, rather than an actual condition of heart/mind so they have false security believing they are saved, while their spiritual condition only worsens.
- Are our hearts and minds ready to stand in His presence?

WEDNESDAY

The first paragraph asks the question, how are we to understand the delay in the second coming of Christ?

Why has Christ delayed His return?

Is there anything we can do to speed His return?

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. Mt 24:14

What kingdom?

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." Jn 18:36

What kingdom? How would you differentiate the kingdom of Christ from the kingdoms of the world?

The germ in the seed grows by the unfolding of the **life-principle which God has implanted**. Its development depends upon no human power. So it is with the **kingdom of Christ. It is a new creation. Its principles** of development are the **opposite** of those that rule the

kingdoms of this world. Earthly governments prevail by physical force; they maintain their dominion by war; but the founder of the new kingdom is the Prince of Peace. The Holy Spirit represents worldly kingdoms under the symbol of **fierce beasts** of prey; but Christ is "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." John 1:29. In **His plan of government there is no employment of brute force to compel the conscience.** The Jews looked for the kingdom of God to be established in the same way as the kingdoms of the world. To promote righteousness they resorted to external measures. They devised methods and plans. **But Christ implants a principle. By implanting truth and righteousness, He counterworks error and sin.** {COL 77.1}

What do you hear?

- What are the kingdoms of the world based upon?
 - Brute force, coercive power –
 - What kind of law do such governments employ?
Imposed law!
 - What then do we do to God's kingdom when we promote the idea He uses an imposed law?
 - What kind of method would God be using if He were to use His power to inflict punishment?
- What is Christ's kingdom based upon?
 - The law of love, which is the design for life emanating from God's own nature!
- What message from Christianity has gone to the world?
 - If you don't accept Christ you will burn in hell
 - God is required to use power to punish sinners
 - God will torture the wicked
 - If you worship on the wrong day you will get the mark of the beast and God will throw you in the lake of fire
 - Justice demands God inflict punishment upon sinners
- What is the true kingdom of God?

- The kingdom of selfless love
- For God so loved the world...
- Greater love has no man than he give his life...
- This is how we know what love is...
- Not by might nor by power....
- Create in me a clean heart...
- I will write my laws on their minds....

Christ delays, waiting for the *gospel of the kingdom* to go to the world. It is our time, our generation, our privilege, our opportunity to take this message to the world. God is not like Satan and tradition has made Him out to be!

We will be opposed, but we must not fail. If we would do our job, if we would take this message to the world, Christ will come! Do you believe it? Will you become a part of a movement, a team, to share this message with the world?

At the end of class today we will share how we are working to spread this message and how you can be part of this ministry!

THURSDAY

Paul states in 2Thes 2:1-4:

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, ² not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. ³ Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. ⁴ He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

What is Paul talking about?

- That Satan was going to counter attack what Christ accomplished at the Cross, and infect the spirit temple with lies about God and Christ, so that humanity would end up worshipping Satan's false view of God rather than the truth.
- But God prophesied through Daniel (8:14) that before the end comes the truth about God would be recovered and the sanctuary would be cleansed from the lies about God.
- What were those lies?
 - God's law is imposed
 - God must inflict punishment on sinners
 - Christ came and God punished Him
 - God still seeks to punish sinners but Christ pleads in our behalf
 - Jesus is our lawyer in heaven to protect us from legal punishment
 - God is returning to punish unrepentant sinners
 - We can have safety from God's anger and wrath if we accept the blood payment to our legal record in heaven.

This is the distortion that the vast majority of the Christian world accepts, because they accepted Imperial Rome's view of God's law and subsequently the law Giver.

We are privileged to share a message which will cleanse the mind of these distortions and bring people back into unity with Christ and His Father.

MONDAY

Read top Dark Section, "How does Peter..." thoughts?

If there was no second coming, would you live your life differently than you currently do? Why or why not?

- If there was no speed limit would you drive differently than you do?

- Yes, in some places, – why? Because we wouldn't have to worry about punishment
- If there was no tax law would you pay differently to the government than you do?
 - Yes, why? Because we wouldn't have to worry about punishment
- Do we do what we do only because of avoidance of punishment or hope of reward?
- Smoking is legal for adults – why don't we smoke?
- Some states have legalized certain uses of marijuana, if it were legal would you use it? Why not?
- There is no law against poking yourself in the eye with a pen, why don't you do it?
- There is no governmental reward for not poking yourself in the eye with a pen, so why avoid doing it? Or is there a reward?

So back to the question, if there is no second coming, given the way God has constructed His universe, is there really a better way to live than in harmony with His methods and principles?

So do we do what we do because of fear of punishment, or hope for reward, or because it is really the most sensible way to live?

I liked the way this was said in a book called *Christian Education*:

Let the youth be led to understand the **object of their creation**,--to honor God, and bless their fellow-men; let them see the tender love which the Father in heaven has manifested toward them, and the **high destiny** for which **the discipline of this life** is to prepare them,--the dignity and honor to which they are called, even to **become the sons of God**,-- and thousands would turn with contempt and loathing from the low and selfish aims and the frivolous pleasures that have hitherto engrossed them. **They would learn to hate sin, and to shun it,**

not merely from hope of reward or fear of punishment, but from a sense of its inherent baseness,--because it would be a degrading of their God-given powers, a stain upon their God-like manhood. {CE 69.3}

Is this what we teach our young people? Is this what the church teaches its members? Do you see how this description is based upon understanding God's law as natural, not imposed?

The lesson asks us to consider several Bible passages:

- “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. John 14:1-3
- “In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. Dan 2:44
- Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, ²⁰ and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. ²¹ He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. Acts 3:19-21

What do these passages mean to you?

TUESDAY

Read last paragraph, “Of course...”

Thoughts? What do you like, or find encouraging about this paragraph?

The paragraph uses a metaphor of ransom – what does this metaphor actually mean? How would you explain it to someone who believes it is a literal blood payment?

How can the metaphor do harm?

Does it help by clarifying God’s law as natural or imposed? What difference does it make to look through these two lenses at this metaphor?

Read bottom green section SUNDAY’s lesson, “Some Christians...” thoughts?

How is this true and untrue?

- Didn’t Jesus say the kingdom of God is within you?
- What did this mean?
- Is it wrong to work with God to experience His restored kingdom within us?
- But, is this the same as God’s ultimate restoration of His universe?
- It would be a mistake to conclude the only kingdom is the internal restoration of a Christlike character within a sinful world?
- And wouldn’t it be disappointing if there was no more than this?

FRIDAY

Read and discuss questions 1-3