

## Lesson 5

### "The Holiness of God"

How does the holiness of God relate to the 1888 message? Every Bible teaching is viewed from the perspective of the cleansing of the sanctuary truth. It is from the Most Holy Place that our Priest is revealing light by the Holy Spirit of truth. Jesus is cleansing representatives from every people group in the world, preparing them for translation at His coming.

The Elijah message is "Christ our righteousness." A lethargic lukewarm church is awakened by the message which honors and uplifts the cross, revealing God's love for sinners. A corporate body of the remnant receives the heart-humbling truth in repentance for their long-neglect of a "most precious message." The latter rain Spirit accompanies the message to the Laodicean Church. It swells to a "loud cry." "The earth is lightened with His glory" (Rev. 18:1). Many heed the warning to "Come out of her [Babylon] my people."

Our High Priest bids His people to follow Him by faith into the holiest before they can comprehend the message He has for the world. Theirs is to be an experience such as the gospel prophet Isaiah had.

It was in times of apostasy in the church that Isaiah was called to the prophetic ministry. King Uzziah's "heart was lifted up to his destruction" (2 Chron. 26:16). He presumed to usurp the place of the priest and officiate at the altar in the temple. Seldom has divine judgment been executed so swiftly. He was struck with leprosy and he spent the rest of his days in isolation (vss.18, 19). He died the year Isaiah took the prophetic office.

The church was in a pathetic condition. But before Isaiah could minister he must have his own conversion experience. He wandered into the temple. What Isaiah saw was a vision of our Savior in the heavenly sanctuary, "high and lifted up" (Isa. 6:1). It was a vision of the character of the Lord, a heart-humbling appreciation of His glorious self-sacrificing love. The cry of "holy, holy, holy" was a revelation of the cross (vs. 3). The young Isaiah was overwhelmed with a humbling sense of his own sinful selfishness in contrast. It became the foundation of his entire lifetime of service.

"Woe is me!" he cries. "I am undone" (Isa. 6:5). A steamroller has flattened me in the dust. I had thought I could devote my life to the Lord's ministry, he says; now I see that "I

am a man of unclean lips." I have wandered into the "temple" of the Lord and I see I don't belong here; my heart is polluted in contrast with the righteousness of Christ. So prayed Isaiah.

Isaiah could never have written his 53rd chapter about the cross of Christ unless he had experienced that self-abasement early on, in chapter 6. The Lord gave Isaiah a cosmic view of the great controversy, which included his intimate view of the cross in chapter 53. "Woe" to anyone who presumes to preach or teach who has not had that self-humbling experience. That "glory" and "holy, holy, holy" was not a numbing experience; it was an awakening to full consciousness to the kind of love that led the Lord of glory to give Himself to the hell that was the second death on His cross. Every cell of Isaiah's soul thrilled to the holy solemnity of self crucified "with Him."

Isaiah is called "the gospel prophet" because fear is not his dominant appeal; he often rises to the level of New Covenant ministry. He is the Old Testament revelation of "Christ and Him crucified." If the civil leadership of Judah had cooperated with him, together they could have evangelized their ancient world. But there was "a crisis of leadership."

In these last days, the message to Laodicea is not addressed to the people, but to the leadership of the church ("unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans, write ..."; Rev. 3:14). It's a much-needed warning to all who serve in any capacity of leadership in the Lord's church--even those who teach the little children in Sabbath School. But with the warning comes the assurance of Heaven's rich blessing if we cherish the vision as Isaiah did, if we simply love it, as he did.

Ellen G. White applies Isaiah 6 especially to Seventh-day Adventists today: "The vision given to Isaiah [ch. 6] represents the condition of God's people in the last days. They are privileged to see by faith the work that is going forward in the heavenly sanctuary" (*Review and Herald*, Dec. 22, 1896; written in the 1888 message era). What Isaiah's vision meant to his ministry, our insight into the ministry of Christ in His closing work in the Most Holy Apartment means to our work for the world today. What Isaiah's ministry was to the ancient kingdom of Judah, the 1888 message which the Lord sent us "in His great mercy" is to this generation. This is because that "most precious message" was above all a call to follow Christ in that special final work of atonement--an understanding unique to Seventh-day Adventists. Christ has opened the door into the Most Holy Apartment. We are called to follow Him there, by faith; that's what distinguishes us as Seventh-day Adventists from being Seventh Day Baptists.

More than 130 years ago the Lord in His great mercy sent a most precious message to the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It became known as "the message of Christ's righteousness." It was not the "message of Christ's holiness." There is a vast difference between "righteousness" and "holiness." God's holiness is His moral purity which is unborrowed and underived (Psalm 111:9; 1 Peter 1:16). It distinguishes Him and makes Him separate and above all other gods (Ex. 15:11). The holiness of God cannot be tempted (James 1:13).

The Lord Jesus Christ was "holy" at His birth (cf. Luke 1:35); but He was "righteous" at His death (cf. Rom. 5:18). The glorious "plan of salvation" stretches between the "holiness" of Jesus at His birth and the "righteousness" of Jesus at His death on His cross.

The difference is spelled out clearly in Romans 8:3, 4, describing what happened in between Christ's holy birth and His righteousness at His death on the cross: "God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the *righteousness* of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

From His holiness at His birth, the Lord Jesus "took" upon His sinless nature (which He had brought from heaven) our fallen, sinful nature and "condemned sin" in that fallen, sinful nature; that's how "holiness" was transformed into "righteousness."

No "holy" angel ever performed that feat, because no angel ever took "sinful flesh" to contend with, as we must do and as Christ "took" upon Himself. The vaults of heaven rang with the praise of Jesus Christ who accomplished that mighty deed; He proved that One can take our fallen, sinful nature or flesh, live in it, and yet "overcome" sin, defeat it, condemn it, in that same fallen, sinful nature (cf. Rev. 3:21). Satan, the great Enemy of God's universe, has been defeated forever!

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