Waging Peace

Lesson 13, 3rd Quarter September 16-22, 2023.

Sabbath Afternoon, September 16

Memory Text:

"Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:" KJV — Ephesians 6:16, 17

"Now the church is militant. Now we are confronted with a world in midnight darkness, almost wholly given over to idolatry. But the day is coming in which the battle will have been fought, the victory won. The will of God is to be done on earth, as it is done in heaven. Then the nations will own no other law than the law of heaven. All will be a happy, united family, clothed with the garments of praise and thanksgiving—the robe of Christ's righteousness. All nature, in its surpassing loveliness, will offer to God a constant tribute of praise and adoration. The world will be bathed in the light of heaven. The years will move on in gladness. The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold greater than it is now. Over the scene the morning stars will sing together, and the sons of God will shout for joy, while God and Christ will unite in proclaiming: 'There shall be no more sin, neither shall there be any more death.' 8T 42.1

"This is the scene that is presented to me. But the church must and will fight against seen and unseen foes. Satan's agencies in human form are on the ground. Men have confederated to oppose the Lord of hosts. These confederacies will continue until Christ shall leave His place of intercession before the mercy seat and shall put on the garments of vengeance. Satanic agencies are in every city, busily organizing into parties those opposed to the law of God. Professed saints and avowed unbelievers take their stand with these parties. This is no time for the people of God to be weaklings. We cannot afford to be off our guard for one moment." 8T 42.2

Sunday, September 17

The Church: A United Army

Read Ephesians 6:10-20. What is Paul saying about the kind of warfare the church is engaged in? Is Paul primarily depicting just an individual believer's spiritual battle against evil or the church's corporate war against evil?

Joel 2:1-3 – "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand; a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations. A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them."

Here you see that a message is to be proclaimed to the church, to Zion, declaring that the great and dreadful day of the Lord is at hand; that it is to be devastating behind His people, and glorious ahead of them, – that the Lord is thoroughly to comb the field, that He is to gather every grain of "wheat," and then burn the tares.

Verses 4-6 – "The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen, so shall they run. Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array. Before their face the people shall be much pained: all faces shall gather blackness."

We see that the power which attended ancient Israel while they were taking the Promised Land, shall also attend the servants of God at this gathering time.

Verses 7, 8 – "They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war; and they shall march every one on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks: neither shall one thrust another; they shall walk every one in his path: and when they fall upon the sword, they shall not be wounded."

Nothing shall be able to hold down the people of God. Everyone shall perfectly attend to his business. They shall gather the fruits of the earth and nothing shall hurt them. The Spirit of Prophecy testifies: "As the saints left the cities and villages, they were pursued by the wicked, who sought to slay them. But the swords that were raised to kill God's people broke and fell as powerless as a straw" – Early Writings, pp. 284-285.

Verse 9 – "They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall, they shall climb up upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a thief."

"The servants of God" shall certainly gather all their brethren out of all nations (Isa. 66:20). Indeed so, for the legs of the Gospel are the legs of the people who proclaim it. Of course, only with perfect co-ordination and a bullet-proof army can the gospel work be finished when the two-horned beast declares "that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed." Rev. 13:15.

Verses 10, 11 – "The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining: and the Lord shall utter His voice before His army: for His camp is very great: for He is strong that executeth His word: for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?"

Having announced how great and dreadful the day is to be, the Lord is making this plea:

Verses 12-14 – "Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil. Who knoweth if He will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind Him; even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the Lord your God?"

God's plea is that we prepare to meet the day; that now as sincere Christians who realize that for such an hour as this has this message of mercy come to us, we penitently return unto Him.

Monday, September 18

Belt and Breastplate

How does Paul imagine believers beginning their preparation for the battle against evil? Eph. 4:14

Dan. 2:44 – "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever."

It is understood by most Bible students that this great image of Daniel 2 represents the kingdoms from Daniel's time down to the end. Here, you see, the stone which is cut out without hands smites the image in the feet, and the stone fills the whole earth. "In the days of these kings," our time, declares Inspiration, God will set up the kingdom that is represented by the stone, and it will smite the nations and thereby bring their end. What could that day be but great for God's people, and dreadful for the nations? Indeed, it is to be the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

Verse 45 – "Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure."

Daniel's account of the day is very brief, but Jeremiah describes the day in detail:

Jer. 51:21-23 – "And with thee will I break in pieces the horse and his rider; and with thee will I break in pieces the chariot and his rider; with thee also will I break in pieces man and woman; and with thee will I break in pieces old and young; and with thee will I break in pieces the young man and the maid; and I will also break in pieces with thee the shepherd and his flock; and with thee will I break in pieces the husbandman and his yoke of oxen; and with thee will I break in pieces captains and rulers."

Here Inspiration explains that God with His Kingdom is to break the nations, that His people are to be His battle ax. Both Daniel and Jeremiah are definite that the Kingdom is to bring the kingdoms of the world to an end.

Micah 5:7 – "And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men."

The remnant of Jacob (those who are left after the tares are taken out), when once set up as a kingdom, is to be as showers of blessing to those who seek salvation, and as a lion that tears in pieces those who continue in their sin. The day shall be great to the one people, and dreadful to the other.

Tuesday, September 19

Shoes: The Church Wages Peace

Review the eight times Paul highlights peace in Ephesians. Why does he use a detailed military metaphor when he is so interested in peace?

The Spirit's Voice through Isaiah is now also crying aloud: "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean... How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of Him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!" Isa. 52:1, 7.

The same Voice through Nahum also pleads: "Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings that publisheth peace! O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows: for the wicked shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off." Nah. 1:15.

But in all her history, the church as a whole has never accepted a message from heaven. The call therefore comes to each individual member. Each must decide for himself. No one should allow himself to be influenced by another. And "no one has a right to shut away the light from the people. When a message comes in the name of the Lord to His people, no one may excuse himself from an investigation of its claims....It was from pursuing this very course that the popular churches were left in partial darkness, and that is why the messages of heaven have not reached them."--Testimonies on Sabbath-School Work, p. 65; Counsels on Sabbath School Work, p. 28.

What better tidings than these would a people want while in their captivity? If this message, the Kingdom of God (the church purified), is not a message of peace and security, then tell us what Inspiration means by saying that the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the kid, the calf and the lion, shall lie down together, "and a little child shall lead them." "And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity." Isa. 11:6; 33:24.

Here the prophetic Word of God plainly declares by both Isaiah and Nahum the prophets that when we see these good tidings published by him whose feet are seen upon the mountains (and this is now taking place for the first time since the prophets wrote), it is to be a sign that the wicked, the violators of the laws of Moses, are soon to be cut off from among God's people.

"God help us to put on the armor and to act as if we were in earnest, as if the souls of men and women were worth saving. Let us seek a new conversion. We need the presence of the Holy Spirit of God with us, that our hearts may be softened and that we may not bring a harsh spirit into the work. I pray that the Holy Spirit may take full possession of our hearts. Let us act like children of God who are looking to Him for counsel, ready to work out His plans wherever presented. God will be glorified by such a people, and those who witness our zeal will say: Amen and amen." 9T 107.2

"When professing Christians are united as one,—one with Christ in God,—they are representatives of the church of the Firstborn. Unity should ever be the element of preservation in the Christian church. Men and women are united in church capacity by a most solemn covenant with God to obey his Word, and to unite in an effort to strengthen the faith of one another." RH January 6, 1903, par. 5

Wednesday, September 20

Shield, Helmet and Sword

When and how should believers as combatants in the great controversy use the shield, the helmet, and the sword? Eph. 6:16, 17

"The warfare between good and evil has not grown less fierce than it was in the days of the Saviour. The path to heaven is no smoother now than it was then. All our sins must be put away. Every darling indulgence that hinders our religious life must be cut off. The right eye or the right hand must be sacrificed, if it causes us to offend. Are we willing to renounce our own wisdom, and to receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child? Are we willing to part with our self-righteousness? Are we willing to sacrifice the approbation of men? The prize of eternal life is of infinite value. Are we willing to welcome the Holy Spirit's aid, and co-operate with it, putting forth efforts and making sacrifices proportionate to the value of the object to be obtained? RH August 25, 1896, par. 12

"The exhortation of the Spirit of God is of peculiar force at this time: 'Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.'" RH August 25, 1896, par. 13

"Selfishness and unbelief are spoiling many lives. The church is made weak by the inefficiency of those who should wear the yoke of Christ and lift his burdens. Christ has need of persons of genuine experience. Shall he have in his army men each with some spiritual defect, soldiers who must seek the easiest place, lest the rough path hurt their slippered feet? We are on the battlefield, enlisted for service. When the trumpet call is heard, "Advance!" do not stop to nurse your little infirmities. Forget that you have them, and move on. Where are the active soldiers, who, clad in all the armor of God, are prepared to do aggressive warfare? Where are the soldiers who are ready to lift the standard, and bear it through the battle, under the Captain's order, unto victory? RH August 21, 1900, par. 8

"Earnest engagements must be entered into; for the Lord is coming. Away with the ease-loving indolence that holds so many from the work. Unearth your buried talents. You are under obligation to be active, diligent workers. "Whosoever will come after me," Christ said, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Do not refuse to see your responsibilities. Unite in earnest work for God. Go forth to labor, carrying your colors with you." RH August 21, 1900, par. 9

Thursday, September 21

Practicing Battlefield Prayer

"There is a feverish love of pleasure at this time, a fearful increase of licentiousness, a contempt for all authority. Not only worldlings, but professed Christians also, are governed by inclination rather than duty. The words of Christ are sounding down through the ages, 'Watch and pray.'" RH December 20, 1881, par. 10

"Christ came to our world to engage in single-handed combat with this enemy of man, and thus to wrest the race from Satan's grasp. In the accomplishment of this object, he withheld not his own life. And now, in the strength that Christ will give, man must stand for himself, a faithful sentinel against the wily, plotting foe. Says the great apostle, "Walk circumspectly,"—guard every avenue of the soul, look constantly to Jesus, the true and perfect pattern, and seek to imitate his example, not in one or two points merely, but in all things. We shall then be prepared for any and every emergency. Unceasing watchfulness is a great help to prayer. It keeps the mind from drifting away from right principles. It shuts out that vanity and trifling which prevails in the world everywhere, and to an alarming extent among professed Christians. He whose mind loves to dwell upon God has a strong defense. He will be quick to perceive the dangers that threaten his spiritual life, and a sense of danger will lead him to call upon God for help and protection. RH October 11, 1881, par. 2

"There are times when the Christian life seems beset by dangers, and duty seems hard to perform. But the clouds that gather about our way, and the perils that surround us, will never disappear before a halting, doubting, prayerless spirit. At such times unbelief says, We can never surmount these obstructions; let us wait until we can see our way clearly. But faith courageously urges an advance, hoping all things, believing all things. RH October 11, 1881, par. 3

"Watchfulness and vigilance are needed now as never before in the history of the race. The eye must be turned off from beholding vanity. Lawlessness, the prevailing spirit of the age, must be met with a decided rebuke. Let none feel that they are in no danger. As long as Satan lives, his efforts will be constant and untiring to make the world as wicked as before the flood, and as licentious as were the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. The prayer may well be offered daily by those who have the fear of God before them, that he will preserve their hearts from evil desires, and strengthen their souls to resist temptation. Those who in their self-confidence feel no need of watchfulness and unceasing prayer, are near some humiliating fall. All who do not feel the importance of resolutely guarding their affections, will be captivated by those who practice their arts to ensnare and lead astray the unwary. Men may have a knowledge of divine things, and an ability to fill an important place in the work of God; yet, unless they cherish a simple faith in their Redeemer, they will be ensnared and overcome by the enemy. RH October 11, 1881, par. 4

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"It is because the duties of watchfulness and prayer have been so sadly neglected that there is so great a lack of moral power. This is why so many who have a form of godliness bring forth no corresponding works. A careless indifference, a carnal security concerning religious duties and eternal things, prevails to an alarming extent. The word of God exhorts us to be found "praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance;" and again, "Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer." Here is the Christian's safeguard, his protection amid the perils that surround his pathway." RH October 11, 1881, par. 5

Friday, September 22

Further Thought

Revelation 18:1, "And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory." It is at this time that Isaiah's prophecy will be fulfilled. Isaiah 52:1, 2: "Awake, awake: put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the Holy City: For henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean. Shake thyself from the dust; arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem: Loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion [God's pure church]."

Note the last part of the first verse: "For henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean." There has always been in the church the uncircumcised, the unclean, and unconverted, in all her history, but here the prophet declares there shall be "no more". Let us give thanks to our God for this precious promise, and for the revelation of His Word. Zephaniah also declares, "The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies, neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: For they shall feed and lie down and none shall make them afraid." In Prophets and Kings, page 725, we read: "Clad in the armor of Christ's righteousness, the church is to enter upon her final conflict. 'Fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners', she is to go forth into all the world, conquering and to conquer."

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