

I Will Remember Your Sins No More

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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A most marvelous study awaits us in God's Word this morning. I would use the word "incredible," but that word is self-defeating, for the word "incredible" means "not believable". God wants us to believe what He reveals to us. In fact, believing Him, believing in Him and through Him is what we are required to do. It is the "work" that God has assigned to us. Jesus said, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him Whom He sent." John 6:29. What God is going to do is not "incredible" in the sense that it can't be believed, but it is marvelous and awesome.

Three different times the Lord used an expression to emphasize the miraculous nature of what He was about to do. On one occasion it was to the youthful Samuel. "Then the LORD said to Samuel: 'Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle.'" I Samuel 3:11. I believe that the message God has for us this morning will cause us to sit up and take notice and give our fullest attention. These things are going to become reality very soon.

We refer to His promise, "Their sin I will remember no more," called by the Apostle Peter the "blotting out of sins." Jeremiah 31:34; Acts 3:19. The Bible tells us that the time will come when our sins, forgiven and put away, will be removed from the memory of the Omnipotent One. It is obvious that for this promise to be fulfilled a miracle is required, for God is the One Who is perfect in knowledge. There are no gaps in His memory. Yet He says He will remember our sins no more. An intentional act is required. But it is actually even more wonderful than that. We'll explore those aspects a little later.

But first we must lay the foundation of understanding the method by which God deals with sin. It is critical that we know what God is doing! We are taught that when a person sins and ask forgiveness, God forgives the sin. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." I John 1:9. But what if that person turns against Him later and renounces the gift of grace? We still have freedom to choose when we become Christians. What will happen if I remove myself from under His umbrella of grace; if I take off the robe of Christ's righteousness? If I do that, my past sins, forgiven though they might have been, will become visible again and will stand against me.

We are warned against lapsing back into the ways of the world and leaving our inheritance. Jesus said, "Behold, I come quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown." Revelation 3:11. There are stories in the Bible that indicate that one can be "made into another

man” and be “given another heart” as in the case of King Saul and later change his mind and apostatize.

There can be a changing of the direction of life, as in the case of Paul’s helper Demas, who later deserted the apostle for “this present world.” However, when my probation closes in death, my case is settled for eternity. There is no more decision making in the grave. “In the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie.” Ecclesiastes 11:3. When a person dies, their choice is then settled for eternity.

Give careful consideration to this: it is obvious that there must come a time when probation will close not only by death, but for the living also. There must come a time when the process of the finalization of decision will occur not just by death but for those who are also alive, for if that did not happen; if probation could close only by death, that would mean one of two things. Either it would mean that Jesus could never come (because people would still be living and their probations would still be open and they could still change their minds), or it would mean that there would be no one alive when Jesus comes back; all would have closed their probations by death. Both of these propositions we know are inaccurate, because the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus will return according to His promise and that there will be people alive at that time, both righteous and unrighteous.

Therefore there must come a time when even the living will make a “final decision” for or against God, prior to Jesus Second Advent. There must be a time when people will have settled into their way of thinking so firmly that their minds will not be changed henceforth forever. There must come a time when Jesus’ statement will come to pass, “he who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy let him be holy still.” Revelation 22:11. Notice that this statement is made before His return, because the next verse says, “And behold I am coming quickly.” We catch a glimpse of this in the story of Noah, who entered the ark with his family and were “shut in” by the Lord prior to the coming of the flood. In his day, there came a time when decisions were finalized before the promised event. As we know, that story is given for our instruction who live in the last days.

This information describing God’s method of dealing with sin was presented and made available to believers long ago in the Old Testament and reaffirmed by what Jesus and the apostles taught. We’ll take a quick look at five different passages which bring this process to view; in the sanctuary service, in the establishment of the cities of refuge, in the testimony of the prophet Ezekiel, in the words of Jesus and in a sermon given by Peter.

The truth of how God deals with sin was clearly revealed in the sanctuary service and could be understood by the devout believer in Moses’ day. Let’s review what happened. When a person sinned, a sacrifice was offered, symbolizing the coming of Jesus, the Lamb of God. The repentant sinner placed his hands on the head of the sacrificial victim and then killed it. In this verse the Hebrew verb indicates a more forceful meaning; they were to “lean” or place their weight on the animal. Leviticus 1:4. The sin was transferred in type or symbol from the sinner to the sanctuary,

either by the blood of the sacrificial victim being sprinkled before the veil (Leviticus 4:6), or by the flesh of the animal being eaten by the priest who ministered in the sanctuary. That's why the sinner had to lay his hands on the animal before it was killed. In this way the sin was removed from the sinner and placed in the sanctuary. But this was not the end of the story. Once a year there was a special service called *Yom Kippur*, the "day of covering," which we call the "Day of Atonement." On this day the full range of God's plan was revealed, including a "cleansing" of the sanctuary, in type, from those sins which had accumulated throughout the previous year.

In other words, there was a dealing with sin that occurred on a daily basis which transferred the sin from the believer to the sanctuary, but there was also an ultimate dealing with sin which later removed it from the sanctuary itself. What if I had shared in the daily service which transferred the sin from me to the sanctuary, but I refused to participate in the yearly service which removed what the writer of Hebrews calls the "reminder of sin"? Hebrews 10:3. The Bible states that if a person did not participate by faith in that later service he was "cut off," or disinherited from the commonwealth of God's people, obviously meaning that his sins were then in a state of being exposed and uncovered. Leviticus 23:29.

This truth was taught by the operation of the cities of refuge set up in Old Testament times. Essentially, if a person accidentally killed someone, he could flee to the nearest of six cities designated as cities of refuge to escape the sword of the "avenger of blood" (the next of kin of the deceased). Within those walls he was safe, clearly an allusion to the sinner's refuge in Christ. If he removed himself from the protective walls of the city, he was left exposed to the wrath of the avenger. However, there came a time, at the death of the high priest, when the slayer could safely leave; his case was determined to be settled for time and eternity. Do you see the principle at work here? There was immediate safety for the manslayer (but he dare not leave the confines of the refuge), but there was also a final disposition of the matter. See Numbers 35 and Deuteronomy 19. These illustrations contain important lessons of truth that pertain to us today. They teach us what Jesus is doing right now to get us ready for heaven.

This same principle was taught by the Lord through the prophet Ezekiel. "When a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity....he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered." Ezekiel 3:20. This is repeated later, "When I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, but he trusts in his own righteousness and commits iniquity, none of his righteous works shall be remembered; but because of the iniquity that he has committed, he shall die." Ezekiel 33:13. That's clear, isn't it? Can we say then that the believer who comes to Christ and repents and confesses his sins receives "conditional forgiveness"? The forgiveness which he receives is very real, but it is conditioned upon his remaining in Christ. The manslayer received asylum as long as he remained in the city of refuge. Should he stray from the bounds of safety he would be exposed to the avenger, representing Satan. The one whose sins were transferred to the sanctuary remained right with God if he participated by faith in the yearly service; otherwise he was "cut off."

When Jesus was on earth He told a parable that illustrated this truth. It concerned a certain man who owed a fabulous amount of money, ten thousand talents, so large that the man could never have repaid his debt. When the king gave the command that he and his family be sold into slavery, the man begged the king to forgive him. “Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.” Matthew 18:27. It sounds like this man’s debt was cancelled, doesn’t it.

But what happened right after that? The man, instead of showing gratitude for being released from the debt, went out and found someone who owed him a small amount of money and “grabbed him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’” Verse 28. When the king found out about this, the royal forgiveness was removed, and the man suffered punishment. Even though the man was “forgiven,” his later wicked behavior resulted in the relinquishment of forgiveness.

From these passages, we’ve seen that God’s administration regarding sin is along this order. When we sin we are invited to repent and confess our sin and obtain pardon. That’s what happened when the lamb was brought to the tabernacle. That’s what is illustrated by the slayer entering the city of refuge. But we are free still at that point to change our minds and relapse into apostasy, as did Saul and Demas. A slayer could remove himself from the city of refuge; a “righteous person,” in the words of Ezekiel, could later commit wickedness and be lost.

However, we’ve seen also that there will come a time when all decisions will be finalized, illustrated by the door of the ark being shut with Noah and his family inside before the flood. We know that this will, according to the words of Jesus, take place before He returns. At some point (it hasn’t happened yet) probation will close for all the living and all decisions will become unchangeable. It won’t take place the same instant for everyone. Those who have been living by faith and in obedience will make their decisions and be “sealed,” and then be empowered to give a last, final warning to the world, meaning of course, that decision making will still be going on in the minds of those who have as yet not received an opportunity to know God’s truth.

Let’s get back to where we began. With respect to the righteous, the ones who are in Christ, it is at this point that God’s promise reaches its fullest application, “their sin I will remember no more.” As we’ve seen from the Scriptures we’ve studied, prior to this great event, previously forgiven sins may be reinstated if a person apostatizes. There was forgiveness, but it was conditional. Yet, God’s promise will be fulfilled one day when the sins of the righteous are blotted out forever; they will have not only been transferred to the sanctuary but they will also have been removed from the sanctuary.

Let’s give close attention to the words of the Apostle Peter as he described this wonderful, miraculous process. He and John had gone to the temple to pray when they encountered a man who was lame, asking for alms. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, told him that he not silver or gold but in the name of Jesus Christ to rise and be healed. This caused no small stir among the people and gave Peter an opportunity to share the Gospel with them. He reminded them that they had

denied Jesus, the “Prince of life” and put Him on the cross, but that He was resurrected. Peter explained that it was through faith in His name that this healing took place.

Under the inspiration of God Peter then said, “Those things which God foretold by the mouth of all his prophets, that the Christ (“the Messiah”) would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, Who was preached to you before, Whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” Acts 3:18-21.

Notice five separate things that are brought to view in these verses. First, Peter appealed to his hearers to repent. The word in their language has the nuance of “changing your mind.” To repent means to recognize and acknowledge your sin and be sorry for it; not sorry just because you got caught; not sorry that things didn’t work out the way you wanted. It means to be sorry for the sin itself. This would result in their being converted, or thoroughly changed from the inside out. Paul uses the word “transformed,” which is our word “metamorphosis.” Romans 12:2. These two things are indispensable parts of the Christian experience, right? But there is more to it than that. As we’ve seen, a person may repent, be forgiven and converted and yet relapse.

The next phase that Peter addresses is the “blotting out of sin.” This refers to the process in which all righteous reach the point, through the grace of God, in which they settle into a way of thinking and living that will never be changed. Their probation is closed, even while they are alive. In the words of Jesus, they will be “righteous still.” They are in the “ark” and the door is shut, even before the “flood” comes. Their sins, having been transferred to the sanctuary are now removed from the sanctuary forever to be forgotten.

Peter states that this “blotting out of sins” will be followed by the “times of refreshing.” What is that? That will be the final outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon God’s people which will result in the giving of the Gospel to the world in a way it has not been done before. God cannot entrust the power of His Holy Spirit to unconverted, unsealed people who might abuse this Power. But when this time comes, the Holy Spirit will be ministered in a way that will surpass the outpouring that took place in Acts 2. This will be the “latter rain” of which prophets spoke.

Remember that in their agricultural way of life, there was rain that came that caused the seed to sprout and grow, called the “early rain,” and there was rain that came just before the harvest, called the “latter rain.” Prophets made use of this as an illustration of the work of God’s grace in the heart. Hosea wrote, “He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth.” Hosea 6:3. Repentance and confession of sin; the beginning of the new birth experience are symbolized by the “early rain.”

But notice carefully; in Peter’s sermon, the “blotting out of the sins” of God’s remnant occurs before the “times of refreshing.” It would be a serious mistake to procrastinate and not put away sin from my life thinking that the latter rain experience will rectify my character flaws. That would

be a terrible error. In this sequence, first there is the blotting out of sin, the settling into the truth, the choosing Jesus with such commitment that my mind will never be changed. Then will come the “times of refreshing,” which will send the last warning to the world, followed by the return of Jesus.

Here’s the great and wonderful news that God offers us. When this happens, when our sins are “blotted out” and forever forgotten, this means that they are removed not only from the mind of God, but from the minds of all the loyal members of God’s entire universe. Can you imagine the impact and importance of this?

Think about this for a moment. Let me ask you, have you ever heard of angels being called “recording angels”? What does that phrase mean? It means that part of the job description that God has given them has been to faithfully record all that happens, including when I sin. God’s angels are faithful attendants of us, giving protection and guidance and recording our deeds, whether they are good or bad. Our entire lives have been open to their view. The Bible describes angels as those who “excel in strength.” That means not only physical strength but also mental strength. Would an angel ever forget something? Would an angel have a memory lapse? Under normal circumstances, the answer to that question would be “No.”

Try to imagine what heaven would be like if that were to remain. What if you were in heaven and an angel spoke with you and said, “Oh yes, I know you. You were the one who.....” and recounted some sin that you had committed. Would that make you feel comfortable? Would it be “heaven” knowing that all the angels knew all your sins? That they were still in their memory bank? Even if the angels didn’t speak about your sins, if you knew that they knew all you had done, wouldn’t you feel uneasy? Would it be “heaven”?

The good news is that that isn’t going to happen. God is going to “blot out” all our sins. He is not only going to blot out our sins from His mind, so that He will remember them no more, but from the minds of the angels and the minds of the inhabitants of the unfallen worlds. This will be a redemptive miracle! He is going to miraculously blot those sins out of the memory of those whose minds have perfect retention.

The sins will be blotted out from our minds as well. When you walk down the streets of gold, though you will always know you were saved by grace, there will be no discomfort wondering about who knows the mistakes of your past. God’s plan will be so effective that they will never again surface for eternity. They won’t come to mind: His mind, the minds of angels or your mind.

Do you want the peace that that kind of heaven offers? Do you want the perfect serenity that Jesus has for you? Do you want to live in a place where the mistakes of the past are blotted out forever and you’ll never have to be embarrassed about the foolish things you’ve done? That’s what Jesus has planned for you, if you will accept Him.

What can we do today to prepare for that great event? Peter's counsel to the people 2,000 years has lost none of its wisdom. "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, Who was preached to you before, Whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." Pray that God will forgive your sins and remove them from you. Pray for His Holy Spirit to empower you. Pray for His return in glory. Pray that that day will be soon!