

LESSONS

1st Lesson: Genesis 42: 1 – 22

1. When Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, Jacob said to his sons, “Why do you look at one another?” 2. And he said, “Indeed I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down to that place and buy for us there, that we may live and not die.” 3. So Joseph’s ten brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. 4. But Jacob did not send Joseph’s brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, “Lest some calamity befall him.” 5. And the sons of Israel went to buy grain among those who journeyed, for the famine was in the land of Canaan. 6. Now Joseph was governor over the land; and it was he who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph’s brothers came and bowed down before him with their faces to the earth. 7. Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he acted as a stranger to them and spoke roughly to them. Then he said to them, “Where do you come from?” And they said, “From the land of Canaan to buy food.” 8. So Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. 9. Then Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed about them, and said to them, “You are spies! You have come to see the nakedness of the land!” 10. And they said to him, “No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food. 11. We are all one man’s sons; we are honest men; your servants are not spies.” 12. But he said to them, “No, but you have come to see the nakedness of the land.” 13. And they said, “Your servants are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and in fact, the youngest is with our father today, and one is no more.” 14. But Joseph said to them, “It is as I spoke to you, saying, ‘You are spies!’ 15. In this manner you shall be tested: By the life of Pharaoh, you shall not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. 16. Send one of you, and let him bring your brother; and you shall be kept in prison, that your words may be tested to see whether there is any truth in you; or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies!” 17. So he put them all together in prison three days. 18. Then Joseph said to them the third day, “Do this and live, for I fear God: 19. If you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined to your prison house; but you, go and carry grain for the famine of your houses. 20. And bring your youngest brother to me; so your words will be verified, and you shall not die.” And they did so. 21. Then they said to one another, “We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us.” 22. And Reuben answered them, saying, “Did I not speak to you, saying, ‘Do not sin against the boy’; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us.”

2nd Lesson: John 8: 1 – 11

1. But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2. Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. 3. Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, 4. they said to Him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. 5. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?” 6. This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground

with His finger, as though He did not hear. 7. So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." 8. And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9. Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. 10. When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" 11. She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

3rd Lesson: AC 5470

'Whose anguish of soul we saw' [Genesis 42:21] means the state of the internal in regard to good, once it was alienated. The nature of this state is as follows: The Lord comes to a person constantly, bringing good to him, and also truth within that good; but the person either accepts this or does not accept it. If he accepts it, all is well with him; but if he does not, all is ill. If, while not accepting it, he feels worried, described here as 'anguish of soul', the hope exists that he can be reformed...If therefore a person when he inclines to evils - as most people do in adolescence - feels at all disturbed when he reflects on an evil deed he has committed, this is a sign that he will nevertheless accept what flows into him from heaven through the angels. It is also a sign that subsequently he will allow himself to be reformed. But if he does not feel in any way disturbed when he reflects on an evil deed he has committed, this is a sign that he no longer wishes to accept what flows into him from heaven through the angels; and it is a sign too that subsequently he will not allow himself to be reformed...For with people who feel disturbed during this state, an internal recognition of evil is present; and when the Lord calls that recognition to mind, it becomes confession and finally penitence.

S E R M O N

Preparation for Heaven: Conscience

A Sermon

By

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We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us. Genesis 42: 21

Introductory Ideas

Let's come before the Lord with an affirmative attitude. Everything He does has the purpose of bringing us into heaven. In His mercy and with our cooperation, the Lord develops our conscience. Our conscience, while appearing to be something negative, is actually good for us.

If we've ever been convicted by our conscience, this is an indication that we are disturbed by anything that is contrary to the Lord and His teachings. This is good. Never should we delight in anything sinful against the Lord and other people. If we feel bad about evil and sin this is good because it is a clue that we care about goodness and truthfulness.

Conscience in General

In creating people the Lord imprinted within human nature the capacity of receiving His Divine. He draws a person toward everything that is good and truthful and averts him from everything that is evil and false. One way this work of the Lord manifest itself is through the voice of conscience. The voice of conscience, an integral part of human nature that separates us from animals, speaks to each person. In our preparation for heaven we must listen well and respond affirmatively to our conscience.

Our conscience is a wonderful tool that serves the important use as an evaluator of whether what we purpose to do is right or wrong. Our conscience functions like beacon to warn us of the danger of evils and sins. If we listen to our conscience we will do what is right in the sight of the Lord.

Acting contrary to what is good and true is to act against our conscience. Acting contrary to conscience could be very discomfoting. The reason is evil and falsity from the hells battle against our conscience and against our commitment to good and truth. However, during this struggle within a person "the Lord protects him and calls out his goods" (TCR 596: 2). Our conscience is the Lord's voice speaking to us as He prepares us for heaven.

Joseph and His Brothers

When he was a young lad, seventeen years old (Genesis 37: 2) Joseph told his family of his dreams but his brothers hated him. One day as he approached them while they fed their father's flock they said to one another "let us now kill him and cast him into some pit" (Genesis 37: 19). But Reuben convinced his brothers not to kill Joseph but to cast him into a pit. Later when Reuben returned to the pit intending to release him, Joseph was not there. Reuben's brothers had pulled him out of the pit and sold him to Ishmaelites who took him to Egypt where Joseph became a great ruler.

While in Egypt, Joseph rose to power and was "thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt (Genesis 41: 46). At least thirteen years had passed since Joseph was sold by his brothers. Then a famine arose throughout all the lands and Joseph's brothers traveled to Egypt to buy grain.

When the brothers appeared before Joseph, whom they did not recognize, he recognized them, spoke roughly to them, and accused them of being spies. He put them in prison for three days and released them with the order that one of them remain in prison while the others return home but come back to Egypt with their youngest brother.

Throughout this encounter with Joseph, the brothers suffered grief. Believing they were being punished for the wrong committed against Joseph many years ago, they said to one another, “we are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us.” Then Reuben reminded them how he had warned them against harming Joseph and how they did not listen.

Perception and Development of Conscience

In ancient times humans had perception. We learn from the Heavenly Doctrine that good and truth from the Lord flowed into people “and from that influx when they thought about anything holy, they perceived instantly whether a thing was so or was not so” (AC 2144:2). During these wonderful times humanity knew what was good and true. People lived in a world of love of the Lord and the neighbor. After death when people entered the spiritual world, they continued living as angels in heaven.

But humanity gradually turned toward evil, corrupted itself and therefore destroyed their ability to “perceive instantly.” Therefore the Lord miraculously separated the human will and the understanding so that the understanding part of human nature could receive truths by means of a written Word. The necessity for a written Word arose when humanity, dimmed by evil passions, failed to perceive from the Lord all that is good and true. Now we must learn truths from the Word. By means of the Word, we may come to know what good is and what evil is.

The human conscience has its origin in truths. The Word of the Heavenly Doctrine teaches that in its initial stages “conscience is formed by means of truths” (AC 9113). But as a person learns truths it is important that he “afterwards wills them and does them” so that as a result “a conscience is then formed in him” (AC 9113). The formation of conscience takes place by means of instruction and learning truths from the Word and then doing the good that truth teaches. During this process of learning and doing, our conscience is developed.

A New Kind of Perception

So we consider now one unique characteristic of our conscience. The Heavenly Doctrine says that “conscience is a kind of perception” (AC 2144:3). Perception is a human trait by which a person is able to discern, to know, to understand, and to see. In making sound, rational judgments we must perceive whether or not something is right or wrong. But there must be a foundation from which our perception springs.

Again, in ancient times people knew what was good and true since “they perceived instantly whether a thing was so or was not so” (AC 2144:2). But we can now have a new kind of perception. The foundation of this new kind of perception is truths. It is from truths, and not ourselves, that we may perceive and know right from wrong. It is from truths from the Lord that we may perceive and know the kind of life to live in our preparation for heaven. However, truth does not exist without good.

As we learn from the Word, the Lord builds up within us a storehouse of wonderful truths. Yet we must realize that “good is within truth” (AC 2434). Therefore, the human understanding performs the use of “perceiving the truth that emanates from good” while the human will serves by “perceiving the good present within truth” (AC 9716). But our conscience “is a kind of perception” by means of which we are able to see both good and truth.

Importance of Conscience

So we turn now to why our conscience is important. Our conscience, when formed by the Lord’s truths, serves a good use to warn us of the danger of living an evil life. By means of our conscience the Lord can help us avoid spiritual death. If we do not receive truths from the Lord, do not live a good life, and do not receive a conscience, we make it impossible for the Lord to prepare us for heaven. The Heavenly Doctrine warns us of the dire consequences of not receiving a conscience:

They who have not received conscience in the world, cannot receive it in the other life; thus they cannot be saved. The reason is, because they have no plane into which heaven, that is, the Lord through heaven, may flow in, and by which He may operate, and lead them to Himself. For conscience is the plane and receptacle of the influx of heaven. NJHD 138

Therefore we may conclude correctly that developing and living in accordance with a good conscience is necessary to get to heaven. A good conscience makes many evil, sinful acts unthinkable. A good conscience makes us constantly aware of our responsibility for our own intentions, thoughts, and behavior.

Our conscience is the Lord’s free gift that, if we listen, may redirect our steps if we’ve steered off the course to heaven. It is good for our spiritual health if after thinking or doing a sinful deed, we’re shaken by our conscience. Joseph’s brothers lamented, “we are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us.” These unsettling words of Joseph’s brothers symbolically represent an after-the-fact acknowledgment that some evil has been committed against good and truth.

We turn to the Heavenly Doctrine. “We are truly guilty concerning our brother” represents a person’s state upon realizing his “non-acceptance of good” which is his own fault “because good and truth has been cast aside” (AC 5469). Joseph represents “truth from the Divine” (AC 5469:2) which in simple terms is truths of the church from the Lord. Rejecting Joseph is not only rejection of truth but also rejection of the good in which truth has its origin.

Looking back upon their past behavior Joseph’s brothers expressed grief saying, “we saw the anguish of his soul.” At this point they knew they had committed an evil deed against Joseph. “We saw the anguish of his soul” can represent the state of a good person who “feels disturbed when he reflects on an evil deed he has committed” (AC 5470:2). This

kind of reaction to a sin of the past is good and useful in a person's preparation for heaven. A person's contrition for a past sin is good and useful because "this is a sign he will accept what flows into him from heaven" and furthermore "a sign he will allow himself to be reformed" (AC 5470:2).

Surely our conscience is important because it serves a before-the-fact use warning and encouraging us away from evil. But we are not perfect and occasionally give way to sin. That being the case, our conscience is also important for its use after-the-fact, stirring up discomfort as the Lord's voice within speaking with us. Consider from the Heavenly Doctrine that: "Conscience is a grief of the heart at having acted contrary to Divine precepts and at having entertained thoughts in opposition to them. The grief of conscience springs from people's seeing themselves as being in a state of damnation" (LJ (Post) 205).

But only a good person with a good conscience labors under grief at having transgressed against good and truth. A good person with a good conscience, after engaging in self-examination and seeing his sins, can be inspired to reform. A good person with a good conscience continues to shun evils as sins so that good and truth characterize the inner life of his soul and the outward life that he lives among his friends and neighbors.

Concluding Thoughts

Our conscience is useful and good for us so long as we allow it to inspire us to do good and to shun evils as sins. When we listen well to the voice of conscience the Lord may bless us with joy and satisfaction that follows from obedience to Him. Our conscience is the Lord's free gift that restrains us from doing an evil deed and produces feelings of shame, fear, and spiritual unrest if we've yielded to sin. Either way, our conscience uncovers within us our true motivations.

We must listen to the voice of conscience as the Lord speaks with us in our preparation for heaven. Speaking about Joseph, his brothers said "we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear." While the Lord does not necessarily plead with us as Joseph pleaded with his brothers, it is wonderful that "the Lord is present with every [person] urging and pressing to be received" (TCR 766).

Once again, our conscience is useful and good for us. In our preparation for heaven the Lord uses our conscience, on the one hand, as a means to steer us away from spiritual damnation and, on the other hand, as a wonderful tool to guide us to His heavenly kingdom. Let's turn to the Lord so He may clean our hearts. Let's pray to the Lord that He inspire us to hear His voice and do the things He has commanded.

The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. Psalm 29:4

Amen.