

LESSONS

1st Lesson – Exodus 3: 14 - 18

14. And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” 15. Moreover God said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.’ 16. Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, ‘The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me, saying, “I have surely visited you and seen what is done to you in Egypt; 17. and I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey.’” 18. Then they will heed your voice; and you shall come, you and the elders of Israel, to the king of Egypt; and you shall say to him, ‘The Lord God of the Hebrews has met with us; and now, please, let us go three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.’

2nd Lesson – Luke 7: 11- 17

11. Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. 12. And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. 13. When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.” 14. Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” 15. So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother. 16. Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has risen up among us”; and, “God has visited His people.” 17. And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region.

3rd Lesson – Arcana Coelestia 6895

Visiting I have visited you. That this signifies His coming to those who are of the spiritual church, is evident from the signification of “visiting” as being the coming of the Lord, which precedes the last time of the church, which time in the Word is called the Last Judgment....The disciples said unto Jesus, Tell us when shall these things shall be? And what is the sign of Thy coming, and of the consummation of the age? (Matthew. 24:3); and then the Lord instructed the disciples about the last time of the church; and He said that when all these things should come to pass, “then shall appear the sign of the Son of man, and then shall all the tribes of the earth wail, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and glory” (Matthew. 24:30). [2] That by the “coming of the Lord” is not meant His appearing with angels in the clouds, but acknowledgment in hearts by love and faith; also His appearing from the Word, the inmost or supreme sense of which treats of the Lord alone. This coming is meant by the coming of the Lord which takes place when an old church is rejected, and a new church is set up again by the Lord. And as newness of the church was now to be restored with the posterity of

Jacob, it is said, “Visiting I have visited you”.... By “visiting to visit you” in the sense of the letter, is here signified liberation from slavery in Egypt, and introduction into the land of Canaan; but this is not the spiritual content of the Word, but the natural. The spiritual of the Word treats of the Lord, of His kingdom and church, and of love and faith; and therefore by “visiting to visit” in the spiritual sense is meant liberation from falsities, and thus initiation into what is of the Lord's church and kingdom, thus the coming of the Lord in love and faith with those who will be of the new church.

S E R M O N

God Has Visited His People A Sermon by Rev. Michael E. Ferrell

Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has risen up among us” and “God has visited His people.” Luke 7:16

Introduction:

The Lord was in Capernaum, a city on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee where He healed the servant of a centurion. Then the Lord traveled south arriving the next day at the city of Nain. This city was located between Galilee and Samaria. His disciples and a large crowd followed Him. Near the city gate there was dead man being carried out of the city.

The man's mother, a widow, was crying, saddened by the death of her only son. A large crowd of people from the city walked along with her in the procession. Two large crowds converged near the gate of the city. One crowd is a group of people who followed the Lord because they heard His teachings and witnessed the miracles He performed. The other crowd of people participated in the burial procession.

A Widow:

The widow is weeping over the death of her only son. Her husband is dead. She is in need of protection. What is she to do now that her son has died? We know very little of her life. We may assume that the death of her husband and now the death of her son cause her to suffer sadness and despair.

This story of the widow of Nain speaks about those times in our life when the Lord's goodness seems to have departed from us. When we allow the Lord to lead us He can gradually instill within us the love of serving heavenly uses. We know from the Heavenly Doctrine that people who perform heavenly uses in service to others because they love the neighbor and think nothing of receiving anything in return are in heavenly happiness (AC 6393:2). The delight derived from charity toward the neighbor is the Lord's free gift. It is true for us that we have obeyed the Lord. We have served our neighbor in the church, our family, and in the community around us.

But occasionally it seems something within us has died. We may become like the widow. Without her husband and now the death of her only son, the resulting void in her life seems too much to bear. Like the widow, something is missing in our life. The Heavenly Doctrine teaches that “a ‘widow’ signifies the truth of the church without its good, because a ‘wife’ in the representative sense signifies truth, and a ‘husband’ good (AC 4844:2). The Word continues further to say that a widow represents people “who are in truth without good and still desire to be in good, consequently who love to be led by good” (AC 4844:3). It is the desire to be in good that distinguishes a person (represented by the widow) from a person who knows truth but does not care about the good of life that truth teaches.

A widow can describe those momentary states in which it seems as if we have made little or no progress in our life of regeneration. It goes without saying that we love the Lord. We serve our neighbor. But sometimes a person does not sense within himself an internal perception that he is actually on the way to heaven. This does not mean that a person should ever make a spiritual judgment about himself or another person. This also does not mean that a person should look for a sign or rely solely upon feelings.

A widow can stand for those states when we have a burning desire to continue obeying the Lord and living a heavenly life even though we may become weak or frail or feel spiritually drained. This is not a permanent condition but is usually a transitory state that we may experience. Shunning evils is a constant struggle. A person may weary and become like a dead man not as to the body but in his spirit. It may also seem that the Lord is distant. But the Heavenly Doctrine says that “the Lord comes to a person constantly, bringing good to him, and also truth within that good” (AC 5470). The Lord’s endearing love cannot do otherwise but come to us since His love is for the salvation of the entire human family.

Do Not Weep:

The Lord arrived near the gate of the city while a dead man is being carried out. A large crowd had followed the Lord. At the same time a large crowd accompanied the widow who is weeping. As we turn to the Heavenly Doctrine we learn that “weeping means lamentation over vastation of the marriage of good and truth, which constitutes heaven and the church” (AE 630:14). Weeping also signifies mourning because of falsities (AE 1129:2). But realize that it is a good person who yearns for truth and who laments because falsities endeavor to supplant truths.

This image of the widow who is weeping symbolizes a person desirous of heavenly qualities but grieving over the loss of good from the Lord. This image of the widow describes us because we do not want to ever lose sight of the wonderful things of heaven and the church that we have from the Lord. It is true that we cherish the richness of our life. The Lord has bestowed heavenly, spiritual riches upon us as is evident in our relationships with our spouse, children, friends and our neighbor. But when it appears that the life of heaven has left us, we may drift into sadness. When it appears that the Lord’s goodness is afar off we may drift into mourning like the widow whose son has died.

But when the Lord saw the widow He said, “Do not weep.” Before we examine what this can mean for us we turn first to the Heavenly Doctrine. The Word of the Arcana tells us that “when

the literal sense refers to two people [e.g. the Lord and the widow] only one person is meant in the internal sense” (AC 1012). The Arcana goes further to teach us that “in the internal sense everything is withdrawn from ideas about persons; an idea in the literal sense describing a person [e.g. the widow] becomes an idea describing some spiritual reality” (AC 5434).

The image of the Lord comforting the widow, saying to her “do not weep” can describe the spiritual reality of the Lord speaking within us as He draws near. In the Psalms of David we’re told that “the Lord is near to all, to all who call upon Him in truth” (Psalm 145:18). The Lord is present with us each and every moment even if it seems there’s a void of His goodness in our life. The Lord is saying “do not weep” because He is coming to revive us from states of despair.

As we enter the season in celebration of the Lord’s Advent we can prepare ourselves for the Lord’s coming into our life even now. Surely we may lift up our hearts and minds to the Lord. And yet this is something we must do “as of self.” The Heavenly Doctrine says that “the Lord will come near to man and be conjoined with him. And because the Lord draws man to Himself (John 6:44; 12:32), it appears as if man of himself comes near and conjoins himself. This takes place when the man desists from evils” (AC 9378:2).

The Lord says “do not weep” because He is coming. Through the prophet Isaiah the Lord says “surely your salvation is coming” (Isaiah 62:11). As we enter the season in which we worship the Lord for His coming into the world we must “desists from evils” so the Lord may join us to Himself. As the prophet Isaiah says “keep justice and do righteousness for My salvation is about to come” (Isaiah 56: 1).

Moses at the Burning Bush:

Our participation with the Lord in the process of our regeneration requires that “as of self” we shun evils as sins against the Lord and the neighbor. As the Lord is coming to dwell with us, we must be willing to reject all manner of sin and disorder so that we may receive of His Divine. While our path may seem difficult at times, the Lord is present with us as He silently battles with us and for us in our efforts to overcome evils.

When Moses was at the burning bush the Lord told him to speak to the people of Israel saying, “I have surely visited you and seen what is done to you in Egypt; and I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt” (Exodus 3: 16-17). And likewise, the Lord has visited us. As we enter the season in commemoration of the Lord’s coming into the world we celebrate that the Lord is coming even now at this day.

In the Heavenly Doctrine we’re told that by “visiting” is meant “the coming of the Lord” (AC 6895). But once again, in order for us to receive of the Lord as He descends to us, we must be willing to continue shunning evils as sins and reject our tarnished human nature so the Lord can build us a new one. The Heavenly Doctrine has revealed that “the coming of the Lord takes place when an old church is rejected, and a new church is set up again by the Lord” (AC 6895:2).

The “old church” with us can be our corrupted will that inclines us away from loving charity and faith. And like the widow, we may mourn if we treasure the charity and faith we have from the

Lord. The “old church” with us can be our darkened understanding that clings to falsities to justify us if we’ve steered away from what is good and true. And like the widow we may mourn because we desire the Lord’s Divine truth to teach and enlighten us. The “old church” with us can be the stain of sin upon the life we live. And again, like the widow we mourn because we desire to live a heavenly life grounded in the Lord’s goodness. The Lord is saying “I have surely visited you and seen what is done to you in Egypt; I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt.”

God Has Visited His people.

Turning back to our lesson we see that the Lord came and touched the open coffin. People who carried the dead man stood still. We learn from the Word that “To touch with the hand signifies to communicate and transfer to another what pertains to oneself, and also to receive from another” (AE 79). If touching “is done by the hands, everything of the life is communicated, because by the hands...is signified power, which is the active of life” (AC 10023:9).

The Lord is coming that He may “touch” us. He is sending forth His Divine so that what is of His Own may dwell within us. Even while we are unaware, the Lord is silently maintaining us in a state of good and withholding us against evil. At the same time He is saying, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” Deliverance from spiritual alienation can be accomplished if we “arise” by always turning to the Lord in prayer and in living as He has taught us in the Word. The Lord is not distant. He is coming.

When the Lord said “arise” the young man who was dead sat up and began to speak. And the Lord presented him to his mother. Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has risen up among us” and, “God has visited His people.” The Lord came into the world and lived among mankind. And He is coming even now, visiting His people today, tomorrow and throughout eternity. The greatest of all miracles is the Lord’s coming into the world. And yet as we set our hearts and minds upon the Lord He is coming this very moment. “The coming of the Lord...is His presence in everyone and this exists whenever the gospel is preached and what is holy is thought of” (AC 3900:9).

Concluding Ideas:

We now enter the season of rejoicing that the Lord came into the world. The story about the Lord visiting the city of Nain tells of His coming. He is coming to restore us to spiritual life when His goodness and truth with us appear to have died. The resurrection of the dead man back to life speaks of the Lord coming to raise us from the dark recesses of spiritual death. But we must prepare ourselves for the Lord’s coming. One way to prepare for the Lord’s coming in our life is to open our hearts and minds to Him and live according to His Word. In so doing we may receive of His Divine.

During this season of Advent let’s pray to the Lord to strengthen our willingness to abandon hellish loves, to inspire us to reject false ideas, and to grant us power to shun evils as sins against the Lord and the neighbor. Like the dead man who sat up and began to speak when the Lord said “arise” the Lord can likewise resurrect our love of good and truth. He can awaken within us a

fresh love for His church and quicken our understanding to see the way we must live. We are the people of the Lord. “A great prophet has risen up among us” and “God has visited His people.”

“He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments” (Deuteronomy 7:9).

Amen.