

LESSONS

1st Lesson: Exodus 24: 1-10

1. Now He said to Moses, “Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. 2. And Moses alone shall come near the Lord, but they shall not come near; nor shall the people go up with him.” 3. So Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words which the Lord has said we will do.” 4. And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. 5. Then he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. 6. And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. 7. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient.” 8. And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, “This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words.” 9. Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, 10. and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity.

2nd Lesson: Matthew 21: 28-32

28. “But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go, work today in my vineyard.’ 29. He answered and said, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he regretted it and went. 30. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, ‘I go, sir,’ but he did not go. 31. Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said to Him, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you. 32. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him.

3rd Lesson: Arcana Coelestia 9398

“And they said, all that Jehovah has spoken we will do and hear” [Exodus 24:3] means receiving the truth that emanates from the Lord’s Divine Human, and obeying it with heart and soul. This is clear from the meaning of ‘all that Jehovah has spoken’ as truth emanating from the Lord’s Divine Human; from the meaning of ‘doing’ as obeying with the will, thus with the heart; and from the meaning of ‘hearing’ as obeying with the understanding, thus with the soul. Obeying with the heart describes obeying with the will, thus with affection and love, and obeying with the soul describes obeying with the understanding, thus in belief; for ‘the heart’ means will and love, and ‘the soul’ means understanding and belief.

S E R M O N

Preparation for Heaven: Obeying the Lord

A Sermon

By

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So Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the Lord has said we will do." Exodus 24: 3

Introductory Ideas

Think of when somebody asks us or tells us to do something. We may want to know what to expect and how we will benefit from a particular course of action. This is quite natural. A person is likely to obey someone in a position of authority. Also a person's compliance is predictable especially if he has respect for the person making the request.

Consider now three classes of laws. Civil laws are commandments of justice (AR 920:3, CL 351) by means of which a person, by obeying them, can live peaceably with his fellow citizens. Moral laws have relation to what is honest and right (HH 512) from which we can acquire a sense of right and wrong. Spiritual laws are the religious teachings that are derived from the Word; they are the Lord's Divine commandments for leading a Christian life (AC 5826:2).

A person must obey the civil, moral and spiritual laws. To act contrary to civil and moral law is to commit transgression against other people and society. However, to act contrary to spiritual laws is not only doing evil against people and society but is also a sin against God. As our theme is preparation for heaven we will consider obeying the Lord. But first let's review three examples in the Word.

"Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations" as he obeyed the Lord in building the ark (Genesis 6: 9). Joshua "left nothing undone of all that the Lord had commanded" (Joshua 11: 15). Hezekiah "held fast to the Lord; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments" (2 Kings 18: 6). The choice always before us is to remain steadfast in our obedience to the Lord. By obeying the Lord we make it possible for him to prepare us for heaven.

Moses and the People

Three months after leaving Egypt the people of Israel arrived at Mt Sinai where they set up camp. Then the day came when they witnessed the thundering, flashes of lightning, sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking as the Lord descended upon the

mountain in fire. Moses went up the mountain to meet with God. There on Mt. Sinai the Lord gave Moses the Ten Commandments.

The Lord also gave Moses other laws. These laws set forth the Lord's precepts regarding altars, servants, prohibiting violence, moral principles, Sabbaths, and feasts (Exodus 21 – 23). The Lord commanded Moses to again come up the mountain but this time bring with him Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the elders. But first Moses spoke to the people telling them all the Lord's words and all the judgments.

And all the people answered Moses with one voice and said, "All the words which the Lord has said we will do" (Exodus 24: 3). Before departing to go back up the mountain Moses wrote all the words of the Lord. Then he arose early the next morning, built an altar, and supervised young men who made offerings and sacrifices to the Lord. Then Moses took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of all the people. And again the people were willing to listen as they responded "all that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient" (Exodus 24: 7). And thus we see the people making a solemn oath to obey the Lord.

Obedience and Love

Obedying the Lord is important because of what it says about us. It is true that our obedience can be external. For example, a person's obedience may spring from hope of reward, threat of punishment, feelings of what other people may think, or some other external motivation that compels. In this case the person does not obey from true freedom. To obey the Lord from freedom is to do what is good and true from love of good and truth. In this case obeying the Lords is from the heart; obedience then springs from love. Our hearts reveal where are real motivations are.

A person, who from the heart obeys the Lord, is a person who loves the Lord. We're told in the Heavenly Doctrine that "obeying with the heart describes obeying with the will, thus with affection and love" (AC 9398). In the Gospel of John the Lord makes this connection: "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me...if anyone loves Me, he will keep My word" (John 14: 21, 24).

Again, all the people answered [Moses] with one voice and said, "All the words which the Lord has said we will do." For the people to say this there must be love. Without love there is no underlying inspiration to obey the Lord. If a person feels uninspired or perhaps not excited about obeying the Lord then he may have a problem with his loves. In this case point the finger at evil loves. The Heavenly Doctrine tells us what these kinds of loves do: "evil loves - self-love and love of the world - are consuming fires; they consume the forms of good and the truths which true life comprises" (AC 9144).

Obedying the Lord requires then that we absolutely turn way from evils. Then and only then may the Lord instill His love within us. Like the people who answered Moses we can say "all the words which the Lord has said we will do." By obeying the Lord our love is revealed and takes outward form in our actins. Our actions and what we do are

necessary in any kind of relationship we have with other people. Our actions confirm what is seated in our will.

Is Obeying Painful or Delightful?

Perhaps obeying the Lord can be a hassle. It depends. Or obeying the Lord may be delightful. Once again, it depends. If a person rejects the Lord's ways, then obedience to Him could be problematic. Remember, people "loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil" and "everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed" (John 3: 19-20). Turning away from the Lord is one of the chief reasons for not obeying Him. To a person who wants to sin, the Lord is viewed as an unyielding judge placing restrictions on life. In this situation obeying the Lord could be a difficult struggle.

But the Lord is preparing us for heaven. Therefore, on the other hand, if a person is living right then obedience is not an aggravation. Obeying the Lord builds our confidence in Him. The Heavenly Doctrine speaks the truth on this point. "To believe in the Lord is to have confidence that He saves; and as only those who live rightly [by shunning evils, doing good and obeying the Lord] can have this confidence" (TCR 2: 3). As long as we are living right according to the Word we may have a heartfelt desire to obey the Lord.

Yes, yes we can obey the Lord. Obeying the Lord need not cause discomfort. The Lord said "My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). As we continue to obey the Lord, He is preparing us for His kingdom. In the Heavenly Doctrine, the Lord has given us a simple formula that consists of knowing right, thinking right, and doing right:

That it is not so difficult to live the life of heaven as some believe can now be seen from this, that when any thing presents itself to a man that he *knows* to be dishonest and unjust, but to which his mind is borne, it is simply necessary for him to *think* that it ought not to be done because it is opposed to the Divine precepts. If a man accustoms himself so to think, and from so *doing* establishes a habit of so thinking, he is gradually conjoined to heaven. HH 533.

All we need to do is follow this simple roadmap the Lord has placed before us. It is important to adopt this perspective of knowing, thinking and doing. By following this simple prescription a person may become more assured and strengthened. The likelihood is a person may find it easier to obey as the Lord builds within him a new will, a desire to obey what the Lord commands.

Heavenly Life

A person grows spiritually along their path of regeneration by obeying the Lord and living a good life according to the Lord's truths. Obeying the Lord is an integral part of our preparation for life among the angels. The Lord's commandments teach us the kind of life we must live in order that we may enter the kingdom of heaven. The Lord said,

“not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven’” (Matthew 7:21).

The Lord told a parable about a man and his two sons. One son did not obey his father. But it was the other son who first refused but later regretted it and eventually obeyed. This son did the will of his father. What does it mean to do the Lord’s will? “Doing the Lord’s will is acting from the good of love” (AE 155:3).

It is the life that we live by which we are either saved or condemned. Obeying the Lord by living His Word opens heaven. On the other hand, disobeying the Lord by living an evil life opens the hells. Surely we care about the kind of life that we live. Otherwise we would not dedicate the time and effort we’ve put forth in the Lord’s church. Therefore let’s continue to fight against evil in our lives. A repentant heart and commitment to obey the Lord should characterize the life we live. As long as we obey the Lord by living right He can free us of the bondage and pain that accompanies sin.

Concluding Ideas

As our theme is preparation for heaven we must always keep in mind how our earthly life has implications in the life to come. We know from the Heavenly Doctrine that “after death a person lives as a person as he did in the world” (LJP 90). Nothing changes in the next life as good people continue living as such while others who do what is evil continue that kind of life.

The Lord said “whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven (Matthew 16:19). From a practical standpoint we may learn from these words that a person who obeys the Lord while in the world continues obeying Him in the next life. Now on the other hand, the Lord also said “whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16: 19). In the context of obedience we may conclude from these words that a person who rejects the Lord and does not obey continues in disobedience after death.

Think of what the Lord has asked of us. He desires that we obey Him. If we follow the Lord we know what to expect. “Who does not know from common perception that a person who leads a good life is saved” and that after death “a person who leads a good life enters into the company of angels?” (DLW 361:2). Let’s be encouraged in our preparation for heaven to cooperate with the Lord and obey Him.

The hope is that upon our entry into the spiritual world the Lord will say “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25: 34).

Amen.