

LESSONS

1st Lesson: Luke 10: 25 – 37

25 And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” 26 He said to him, “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?” 27 So he answered and said, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’” 28 And He said to him, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.” 29 But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” 30 Then Jesus answered and said: “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. 33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. 34 So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 On the next day, when he departed he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.’ 36 So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” 37 And he said, “He who showed mercy on him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

2nd Lesson: AC 4663:2

Those who maintain that a person is saved by faith alone cannot explain the things which the Lord speaks of as works as anything else than the fruits of faith, and that He made mention of these alone for the sake of the simple who know nothing about mysteries. But even this opinion of theirs shows that the fruits of faith are what make a person blessed and happy after death. The fruits of faith are nothing else than a life led in keeping with what faith commands, and therefore it is a life in keeping with what faith commands that saves a person, not faith apart from life. For a person takes with him after death every state of his life, so that he is like what he was when in the body. That is to say, anyone who during his lifetime despised others compared with himself continues in the next life to despise others compared with himself. Anyone who hated his neighbor during his lifetime continues in the next life to hate his neighbor. Anyone who engaged in deceitful practices against companions during his lifetime continues to engage in them against companions in the next life And so on. Everyone retains in the next life the essential character he has acquired during his lifetime; and it is well known that it is not possible to get rid of one's essential character, for if one does so, no life at all remains.

S E R M O N

Preparation For Heaven: Show Mercy

A Sermon

By

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Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.” Luke 10: 37

Intro

As we consider preparation for heaven the focus of our theme is to show mercy. A heavenly quality that we can ask the Lord to instill within us is that we can become merciful. We live in a world in which some among us are weak and feeble. They may lack adequate resources or the ability to care for themselves. We may reflect upon how the Lord desires that we respond to the needs of other people.

How a person responds to the needs of others is important because the Lord wants us to love our neighbors. He desires that we show compassion. He wants us to show mercy to those among us who are in need. Showing mercy to others stems from love that a person has from the Lord. It is extremely essential to show mercy and love our neighbors because the nature of a person’s life here in the natural world provides the foundation for the kind of life the person continues living in the spiritual world. The way in which we treat other people here while in the world determines our spiritual address in the other world, whether in heaven or in the hells.

Go And Do Likewise

In our lesson from Luke, a lawyer stood and questioned the Lord about inheriting eternal life. The question posed by the lawyer was not a sincere inquiry about heaven. The question was really a challenge since the lawyer “tested” the Lord. But the Lord countered the lawyer’s “test” by asking him his reading and understanding of the law. The lawyer answered his own question about inheriting eternal life, saying that a person should love the Lord and love his neighbor.

Therefore, the Lord told the lawyer that to inherit eternal life he must “do this and you will live” that is, love the Lord and love your neighbor. Still the lawyer persisted in trying to justify himself. By asking the Lord “who is my neighbor” the lawyer revealed an attitude reflecting minimal obedience to the Lord’s commandments.

The Lord then told the parable of the Good Samaritan. It was the Samaritan who showed mercy on the man wounded by the robbers who left him half dead. It is important to determine who the neighbor is – the one who showed mercy. However, as we consider preparation for heaven, the central issue for us right now is that we allow the Lord to help

us to show mercy. He said “go and do likewise” according to the example of the Samaritan who comforted the man wounded by robbers.

The Lord’s Mercy

As we turn to the subject of mercy we first focus upon the Lord’s mercy. The Lord is Love Itself, pure Love for every single man, woman, and child, the young and old, people from nations, tribes, and all walks of life. In the True Christian Religion the Lord teaches that “every love has an end in view” (TCR 47). Love has a purpose or some objective. Love is alive, vibrant with endeavor to accomplish something. The Lord’s love has as its end in view a heaven from people, from people who are willing to love Him and perform useful service to the neighbor.

The Lord saw that people were in such darkness because of their evils and falsities that they could not even acknowledge God. Filled with mercy He came into the world to cure the devastated condition of the human race. Picture the Lord in the world. He observes people on a daily basis. He sees the terrible state of the human race. He is moved with compassion because the human race turned away from God.

People did not know truths about how to live. People became like savages in their relationships with one another other. Even though the human race was on the brink of eternal damnation the Lord found consolation. The Heavenly Doctrine reveals something very special about the Lord: “the salvation of the human race was for Him the only comfort, for He was moved by Divine and celestial love” (AC 1865:2).

Surely the Lord is rich in mercy emanating from His great love for the human race. The depths of His mercy, beyond what we can imagine, motivated the Lord to continue with His purpose to save mankind. Close to the end of His life on earth the Lord travelled to Jerusalem. “Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it” (Luke 19:41). Without doubt, the Lord has mercy toward everyone.

Why Should We Show Mercy

But why then should we show mercy? The likelihood is we know someone who has been injured by robbers. Members of our family and many of our friends strive to follow the Lord. But robbers have attacked them. “Robbers” who “strip” people of their clothing and “wound” them represent falsities that torment people and deprive them of spiritual life (AE 444:14). In the Heavenly Doctrine the Lord has defined spiritual life: “spiritual life is life according to truths, and truths do not actually live until they are in deeds” (TCR 347).

When see our friends and neighbors who struggle to overcome their disorders. Some of their sins may be open to us. We see the flaws in their character and the life they live. Robbers have attacked and wounded them. Guilt, shame, feelings of hopelessness and other negative influences burden our friends and neighbors. For us to walk by, like the priest and Levite who refused to serve the man wounded by the robbers, is not an option.

In the Heavenly Doctrine the Lord tells us that the priest represents people who have no love to the Lord, while the Levite represents people who have no charity towards the neighbor (AE 444:14). If we frown upon our neighbors in need and show contempt toward them we are acting the role of the priest and Levite. In 1 John, a useful book for the church (AE 815:2) we are asked: “for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?” (1 John 4: 20). Let’s become like the Samaritan, who is the Lord, the one who showed mercy to the man in need.

We must turn to the Lord to inspire us that we may be moved with compassion so that we can then show mercy toward our friends and neighbors in need. In our preparation for heaven let’s allow the Lord’s mercy to dwell with us. The Lord says in the Heavenly Doctrine that the life of the angels “is grounded in love and mercy” (AC 1755).

Showing mercy to our neighbors is a heavenly quality that we should allow the Lord to cultivate within us. If we are merciful, then we are more disposed to serve our neighbors. We know that the Lord is regenerating us. He is reshaping us into angels so that upon our transition from the natural world we may freely enter heaven. So consider this wonderful description of angels: “angels love everybody and above all else wish to render kindly services, to inform, and to lead him to heaven. Their chief delight consists in doing these things” (AC 315, HH 450).

Why should we show mercy? Our friends and neighbors have been robbed. They are in need and we are positioned to serve them. The Samaritan, the one who showed mercy, was neighbor to the man wounded by the robbers. While we know who the neighbor is our focus right now is not upon what we know but what we should do. Again, the Lord said “go and do likewise.”

What Should We Do

Robbers have attacked people all around us and stripped them of their clothing. Consequently, as we learn in the Apocalypse Explained, they have been deprived of truths and imbued with falsities (AE 444:14). Walking by like the priest and Levite is not characteristic of a person who loves the Lord and the neighbor. An act of mercy is to share the teachings of the Church and not allow people to languish in falsities that deprive them of truths.

Because we possess the Word and know the Lord one of our tasks is to reach out to other people and share the good news of the church. We must turn to the Lord so He may prepare us for heaven. Heavenly life is a life of love and sharing. The Lord says in the Heavenly Doctrine that “love to the Lord and love to the neighbor wish to share with others all that is their own, for this is their delight” (HH 400:4). People who have been attacked and wounded by robbers need help with understanding the Word so they may see how to apply the Lord’s truth to living a good life.

By means of the parable of the Good Samaritan the Lord has given us a visual image of the life that leads to heaven. When we see that our friends and neighbors have been

robbed we can bandage their wounds and pour in oil and wine. The Word says “to bind up the wounds and to pour in oil and wine” means to provide a remedy against the falsities that have injured his life, by instructing him in the good of love and the truth of faith (AE 444:14).

When we see that our friends and neighbors have been stripped and wounded we can share the Word’s teaching about love and faith. We can help others to see that the Lord has mercy on them and loves them dearly. We can help them to realize that salvation comes from the Lord and is available to everyone who turns away from sinful living and embraces a life of obedience to the Lord’s Word.

If we become too focused upon ourselves we risk becoming blind to the needs of other people. Or, a consequence could be conscious disregard of the suffering we see around us. By all means our friends within the church are the neighbor to be loved. But let’s be mindful that the Lord teaches us to keep our dedication toward one another in proper perspective. He said, “But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same” (Luke 6:32-33).

Concluding Thoughts

The Apocalypse Explained tells us that “the Lord’s life in the world was an example according to which the men [or people] of the church are to live” (AE 254:2). The Gospel of John documents the Lord saying: “For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you” (John 13:15). Showing mercy, the Lord came into the world to serve, to teach, and to lead the way to heaven. He has given us an example.

As custodians of the Lord’s church we can help a dying world. The Lord has given us wonderful, healing truths that can help people avoid suffering. The life of heaven is a life of performing uses that serve the good of all. If our hearts are filled with the Lord’s love we could be more willing to show mercy to others. Like the Samaritan who cared so tenderly for the man wounded by the robbers, let’s “go and do likewise.”

As people of the Church we can actively involve ourselves in the Lord’s work of serving His people who are all around us. Remember the Lord said “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25: 40).

As the Lord prepares us for heaven while we are here in the natural world let’s not forget that “everyone retains in the next life the essential character he has acquired during his lifetime” (AC 4663:2).

Amen.