

LESSONS

1st Lesson: Genesis 45: 1 – 11

1. Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, “Make everyone go out from me!” So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2. And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it. 3. Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph; does my father still live?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. 4. And Joseph said to his brothers, “Please come near to me.” So they came near. Then he said: “I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. 5. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6. For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. 7. And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. 8. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. 9. “Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph: “God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry. 10. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children, your children’s children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have. 11. There I will provide for you, lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty; for there are still five years of famine.””

2nd Lesson: John 6: 22 – 29, 40

22. On the following day, when the people who were standing on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other boat there, except that one which His disciples had entered, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with His disciples, but His disciples had gone away alone – 23. however, other boats came from Tiberias, near the place where they ate bread after the Lord had given thanks – 24. when the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they also got into boats and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. 25. And when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, “Rabbi, when did You come here?” 26. Jesus answered them and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. 27. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.” 28. Then they said to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” 29. Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.” 40. “And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

3rd Lesson: Apocalypse Explained 98:3

“Works” signify, in general, all things of the church; and as all things of the church have reference to love and faith, therefore these are what are meant in the spiritual sense by “works.” These are meant in the spiritual sense by “works” because every work or deed or act, that to appearance is done from the body, is not done from the body, but is done by means of the body from man’s will and thought, for not a particle of the body moves itself except from the will and thought. From this it is that “works” signify, not the things that appear in outward form, but the things of will and thought. That this is so is known to everyone who reflects. Who that is wise regards a man from his deeds alone, and not from his will? If the will is good he loves the deeds; but if the will is evil he does not love the deeds. He sees the deeds also, but interprets them according to the intention of the will. He who is spiritual attends still less to the deeds, but explores the will; for the reason already given, that deeds in themselves are nothing, but all that they are is from the will, for deeds are the will in act. It is said “will” but in the spiritual sense love is meant, for a man wills what he loves, and he loves what he wills. Man’s will is only the receptacle of his love.

S E R M O N

Spiritual Labors

A Sermon

by

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Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you. John 6: 27

Labor and Food

One reason for instruction and accumulation of knowledge is that a person may eventually learn an occupation. It is after having gained the necessary education and skills that a person must work in the occupation he has studied. Consequently, he is then useful to himself and to the greater society at large. Laboring or work has its use as one means by which we may contribute to society.

We also need to care for our body. Food is necessary for nourishment to sustain our bodily functions. Our material body delights when we eat the proper foods that are conducive to good health. Food has a special use as the fuel and building blocks to make our body strong and vibrant. Everyone knows the importance of good dietary habits.

It was said that laboring or work is one means by which we may contribute to society. But there’s another side to the coin. Laboring is also a means by which a person may

receive something in exchange for his work such as prestige or upward mobility. As compensation for his laboring, a person also receives wages. These earnings can be used for the purchase and accumulation of material possessions, for contributions to religious or charitable organizations, and for a wide range of other things.

But there is a limit to what we may receive in exchange for our natural labors. Yes it is true that we often take pride in our employments. We find satisfaction in the material possessions we've accumulated. But we must be careful in doing our daily work, that we do not neglect the spiritual labor that builds our souls. The Lord told a parable of a certain rich man who acquired a great abundance of resources for himself; this man said to himself:

“soul, you have many goods laid up for many years.” But God said to him, “Fool. This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?” [The Lord said] “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” Luke 12: 16-21

Now, consider further that there is also a limit to what food may accomplish. Inasmuch as we delight in eating good foods, the food that we eat for the sustenance of our body does not feed our soul. As the Lord said, “do you not yet understand that what ever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated?” ((Matthew 15: 17) and “is not the life more than food and the body more than clothing?” (Matthew 6: 25). Natural food feeds our body. But spiritual food is the food that nurtures our souls.

As we celebrate Labor Day, let's reflect upon the uses that we serve from day to day. Laboring and work are important for the civil and political health of our nation. But here's a question: what is it that we are laboring for? The Lord said, “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for food which endures to everlasting life” (John 6: 27).

Food That Perishes

In the Third Commandment the Lord says “six days you shall labor and do all your work” (Exodus 20: 8). Laboring involves toil and application of one's knowledge, strength and abilities directed toward the purpose of accomplishing some objective. From the Word we learn that on a deeper, spiritual level, “laboring and doing one's work” means “to do those things which are necessary to life, here those which are necessary to spiritual life, that is, to the life in heaven” (AC 8888). Therefore, each of us is tasked with the responsibility to take charge of what we delight in and the kinds of thoughts we entertain. The life of heaven is the Lord's goods and truths that can dwell within us if we open ourselves to receive of Him.

In His mercy, the Lord encourages us to be very careful about the kind of foods we are consuming. While natural food sustains our natural body and its various functions, spiritual food feeds our souls. We can know from the Word that in the spiritual sense “celestial and spiritual food are nothing else than good and truth” (AC 5360). Celestial

food is the love and goodness that can nourish our will - our desires and intentions. Spiritual food is the truth that feeds our understanding - the knowledge that we have.

Food that perishes is food that becomes rotten and putrid. Just think of something left in your refrigerator for a long period of time. But as we look at this on a spiritual level, food that perishes is food that contaminates and poisons our soul. What kind of food harms our soul then? In the Heavenly Doctrine the Lord says “when a man is spiritually dead the foods with which his soul is fed are delights from evils and pleasantness from falsities-which are foods of death” (AC 680). Listen to what the Lord is saying here. Taking delight in something that is evil and finding satisfaction in falsity are “foods of death.” They will kill you. And as He said, “Do not labor for the food which perishes.”

Taking delight in evil is the wrong kind of food to nourish our loves because evil delights will replace heavenly loves the Lord is trying to implant within us. The Word is clear: evil is from hell while good is from the Lord (AC 2654:4, AC 3812:2, DP 151). And we know this very well. So, let’s realize that “evil destroys good” (AC 3993:11, AE 365:42) if we allow ourselves to get carried away in any delight from something we know is sinful.

Likewise, being content with falsity is also the wrong kind of food to nourish our understanding. The reason is because anytime a person knowingly and willfully does a sinful deed, he is susceptible to fabricating ideas that excuse and justify. These ideas are false. The Word is clear that in this case “falsity is from evil, and falsity produces evil” (AC 2243:2). Falsity that defends evil is from hell. But as we know so very well, all truth is from the Lord. The Lord says in the Heavenly Doctrine that “truth teaches man what is good and how he should live” (AC 10026). Falsity does not teach this. In fact falsity does not teach at all but steers us away from what is good and instead seeks to give credence to evil.

So again, the Lord says “do not labor for the food which perishes.” In other words do not chase after the thrill in something evil. And do not abuse your rationality – your ability to know the difference between good and evil. This abuse occurs whenever a person excuses his evil; all the while knowing that evil is not good. While evils have their delights, and a person may derive a sense of contentment in self-justification, these pleasantries are not uplifting; they are hellish. Evils and falsities destroy. A person living a sinful life is heading toward spiritual damnation and eternal misery in the life after death. The Lord says we can avoid spiritual death by engaging in the right kind of labor and eating food that nourishes our souls.

Food Which Endures To Everlasting Life

The Lord says to labor “for the food which endures to everlasting life.” Reference was made earlier to the Heavenly Doctrine that teaches “laboring” means “to do those things which are necessary to spiritual life, that is, to the life in heaven” (AC 8888). The Lord also explains what this “labor” is that we must do: “in the spiritual sense ‘labor’ does not mean such labor as there is in the world, but such as those who are in the church endure

before they enter the church and become the church, which labor is combat against evils and falsities of evil” (AC 10360).

Therefore let’s keep in mind that we must avoid, at all costs, unhealthy spiritual food that consists of “delights from evils and pleasantness from falsities” (AC 680), because they are “foods of death” (AC 680). On the other hand, the foods of life are spiritual foods – the Lord’s goods and truths. By means of the Lord’s goods and truths we can live a heavenly life here while in the world and in heaven provided that during our life in the world we stay committed to living according to the Lord’s commandments.

And so, are you hungry for the Lord’s goods and truths? Does our appetite yearn for heavenly qualities from the Lord? Take for example, a child who has eaten candy shortly before dinner. The child is “full” and has no appetite to eat. Sugar spoils your appetite because it sends a signal that you are “full” and have eaten enough when in fact that is not the case.

The delights from evils and falsities mask happiness. These hellish delights simulate what seems to be fulfillment causing a person to feel no need for the Lord’s goods and truths. In fact, it is the delights of evil and falsity that will ruin our desire for the Lord to feed us. Like a loving parent cautioning us not to spoil our appetite the Lord says “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life.” Therefore, in order that our appetite for the Lord’s goods and truths is not spoiled, we must engage in spiritual labor, i.e., “combat against evils and falsities of evil” (AC 10360) whenever we see them within ourselves.

First, each of us must battle against evil, one at a time, as we see within ourselves something hellish that must be removed. This struggle is necessary because human nature of itself inclines toward evil. By means of shunning evil and fighting against its hellish delights we can be rescued from hell. This is the kind of labor to engage in if we are to allow the Lord to liberate us from damnation.

Next, each of us must fight against false ideas that suggest evil is allowable. As we know and have heard on many occasions, the Lord commands that we do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, and do not covet. Any idea otherwise that makes these and any other sins allowable is horribly false. Therefore, we must engage our mind in study of the Word. We must work against ignorance and in its place allow the Lord to instill desire to be instructed in His commandments. We must continually seek to know and understand truths and then allow the good that truth teaches characterize the life we live.

Maybe someone feels that the Lord’s goods and truths are not enough. A solution is to trust in the power of the Lord to save and redeem. Joseph told his brothers to return to the land Canaan and tell their father to come down to Egypt, to bring “your children, your children’s children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have.” They were to tell their father that Joseph says “I will provide for you, lest you and your household, and all that you have come to poverty.”

The Lord will provide for you likewise. Take what you have – the desires of your heart, the thoughts of your mind, and the life you live – and turn them to the Lord. During your struggle against evils and falsities you see within yourself, trust that the Lord is presents each step along the way. “I will provide for you” says the Lord. We learn from the Word that to “provide for you” means “continuous influx of spiritual life” from the Lord into your soul (AC 5915). This influx is “of good and truth through heaven from the Lord” (AC 5915) to every person who labors against his evils and falsities so that the Lord may come in. It is the Lord’s goods and truths that sustain the angels of heaven and people of the church (AC 5915).

Concluding Ideas

Do you want to go to heaven? Then let’s labor for the right kind of food. The food which endures to eternal life is the Lord’s goods and truths. Yes, it takes some work on our part. Each and every one of us must battle against our own individual evils and falsities that plague our souls. We are not alone. The Lord is present with us.

“All who are to come into heaven must first be in combats against evils and the falsities of evil, and when these have been separated they enter heaven and are conjoined with the Lord, and then they have rest” (AC 10360:2). *AMEN.*