

# LESSONS

## 1<sup>st</sup> Lesson: Genesis 6: 1-14

1. Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, 2. that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose. 3. And the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years." 4. There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown. 5. Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. 7. So the Lord said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." 8. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. 9. This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God. 10. And Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. 11. The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. 12. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. 13. And God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. 14. Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Lesson: Luke 13: 22-30

22. And He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. 23. Then one said to Him, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" And He said to them, 24. "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 25. When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,' 26. then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.' 27. But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.' 28. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. 29. They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. 30. And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last."

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Lesson: Arcana Coelestia 587

The mercy of Jehovah, or of the Lord, includes everything that is done by the Lord toward mankind, who are in such a state that the Lord pities them, each one according to

his state; thus He pities the state of him whom He permits to be punished, and pities him also to whom He grants the enjoyment of good; it is of mercy to be punished, because mercy turns all the evil of punishment into good; and it is of mercy to grant the enjoyment of good, because no one merits anything that is good; for all mankind are evil, and of himself everyone would rush into hell, wherefore it is of mercy that he is delivered thence; nor is it anything but mercy, inasmuch as He has need of no man. Mercy has its name from the fact that it delivers man from miseries and from hell; thus it is called mercy in respect to mankind, because they are in such a state of misery, and it is the effect of love toward them all, because all are so

## S E R M O N

You Can Be Saved

A Sermon

By

Rev. Michael E. Ferrell

But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Genesis 6: 8

### Childhood - Remains - Adulthood

During childhood a person is tenderly open to the Lord and His teachings. Children are innocent. They are quite impressionable. Children will believe almost anything said to them and do just about anything they're told to do. Yet their innocence is an innocence of ignorance (AC 5608:9, AC 9301). Ignorance can be defined as simply not knowing any better. But lurking alongside the gentleness of childhood innocence is that certain part of human nature that inclines toward everything that is evil and false. Even though that may be the case, it is during our childhood that the Lord instills "remains."

The Word of the Heavenly Doctrine tells us that "remains" are "goods and truths that a man has learned from the Lord's Word from infancy, and thus impressed on his memory" (AC 561). Yet there's more since "remains" also include wonderful spiritual states such as innocence; love toward other people (family members and friends); charity toward the neighbor; and all states of good and truth (AC 561). These wonderful states are stored up within a person secretly by the Lord. He is ever so careful to preserve and protect a person's remains. It is by means of remains previously stored in a person that the Lord can influence him later in life when the person is mature enough, in freedom, to decide to do what is right.

It is true that during our childhood we were disposed, without questioning, to love and obey the Lord. But unfortunately as time goes by a person misbehaves, at first indulging in youthful indiscretions and, in some cases later on as an adult, in sins of a more

grievous nature. As we pass from childhood to adolescence, and then to adulthood, this evil inclination within the core of human nature has the potential of becoming more active in influencing the way we live. But it doesn't have to. An adult is more capable of self-restraint than a child and consequently able to shun evils.

Many among us have had sinful desires or thoughts or have committed deeds for which we are ashamed. We are quite familiar with guilt, despair, or hopelessness. These and other negative states are part of our life experiences. Each of us knows the agony of thoughts that cause us to feel unworthy. Troubling thoughts may suggest, for example, that you cannot be saved or heaven is not for you, or surely you've done wrong but somehow...maybe...the Lord will make it right.

### Problem of Evil

Long before we were born, hundreds or perhaps thousands of years ago people, in respect to their soul and life, were joined with the Lord. They lived in love of the Lord and served heavenly uses in support of one another. During these early times in the beginning, the Lord's heaven dwelled within humanity. These words of the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, as in heaven so upon the earth" were true in the beginning when mankind was joined with the Lord. But humanity turned away from its wonderful covenant with the Lord. And this can be true even in our lifetime today.

One problem is that we all stumble and make mistakes. We can harbor negative attitudes and even occasionally act upon them. At times it may seem quite difficult to rid ourselves of the propensity toward harming one another. Reading the Word and then compelling ourselves to obedience can be a monumental task. As we face our individual challenges it may appear as if the Lord's church within us may perish.

But it is true that as people of the New Jerusalem we are steadfast in our acceptance of the Lord's truths of faith that form the foundation of our religion. However, time and time again we must remain vigilant in shunning evils as sins and reject any and all persuasions and reasoning that cause us to deceive ourselves. Still, we come back to the reality that a person makes mistakes and has sinned in one way or another.

It would be convenient and a relief for a person to just somehow forget the wrongs he's committed. But the Heavenly Doctrine tells us that in their attempt to keep a person's evils at the forefront of his mind "evil spirits excite the falsities which he has thought, and the evils which he has done" (AC 5036:2). The person is not left alone however, because "the [the Lord by means of] angels defend him from within" (AC 5036:2). We don't have to listen to false ideas that condemn us. We can reject false notions suggesting that the Lord is angry or somehow disappointed with us. Let's remember however the importance of repentance and honest self reflection. Repentance and self reflection serve the use of helping us identify our sins so that we may desist from them and seek the Lord's help in living a heavenly life.

## You Can Be Saved

We're told in Genesis 6: 5 that "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." We can admit the reality that we all have entertained a sinful desire or thought and have transgressed the Lord's commandments. Even so, the Lord being very wise as He is knew that we would fall and lead ourselves astray. He was completely aware that even though as children we were once innocent, we were also subject to refusing to will good and disposed to damaging our ability to know what is good and true (AC 584, AC 585).

The Lord "foresaw that in process of time [we] would become such [i.e., will evil, turn away, and become corrupted] as is described" (AC 587) in Genesis: our wickedness would be great thereby causing us to reject heaven and instead rush into hell. But there was one, Noah, who found grace in the eyes of the Lord. We learn in the Word that by "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" signifies that "the Lord [also] foresaw that the human race might thus be saved" (AC 596, AC 598). You are a member of the human race, the prize of the Lord's creation, the purpose of which was that there may be an angelic heaven from people.

Therefore, whatever the nature of any sinful desire you've entertained, there is hope. No matter how obscene a thought may have been, there is hope. Whatever sinful act you may have committed, there is still hope. The Lord said, "All sins shall be forgiven to the sons of men, and blasphemies, whatever they shall blaspheme" (Mark 3:28). We can find comfort in the Lord's everlasting mercy toward us.

## Predestination

What about predestination? The Lord went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. Then one said to Him, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" Without answering this question in numerical terms or in terms of any particular person or group of people, we can say humanity (including you) can be saved. The Lord planned it this way from the very beginning.

The Lord says in His Word that "all [and you also] are predestined for heaven, and no one for hell" (DP 329). And moreover, "it is owing to Divine providence, therefore, that every person can be saved, and that those are saved who acknowledge God and live rightly" (DP 325). In His mercy and infinite wisdom the Lord has put everything in place making it possible for you to go to heaven. So let's turn now to building an ark.

## Make Yourself An Ark

Perhaps you've done something wrong. But again, there is hope. Remember that Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. As mentioned, that "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" means "the Lord foresaw that the human race might thus be saved" (AC 596, AC 598). From the first moment after your birth, the Lord foresaw that you likewise could be saved. Therefore we have a special task before us.

Like Noah, you can make yourself an ark of gopherwood, build rooms in your ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. And so we turn to the Heavenly Doctrine to enlighten us in the deeper spiritual realities living within the Word. The “ark” is you, a person of the church (AC 639). The “gopherwood” of which the ark is to be constructed signifies a person’s concupiscences (AC 638, AC 640). Concupiscences are evil, bad desires that can arise from relying solely upon our senses. The “rooms” of the ark are a person’s will and understanding (AC 638, AC 644). And finally, the pitch inside and outside represents preservation from an inundation [or flood] of cupidities (AC 645). The word “cupidities” is another word for evil desires.

The construction of the ark is the building of the Lord’s church and its heavenly qualities within us so that we can be saved. A problem is the gopherwood (concupiscences: evil, bad desires). The appearance is that we are to build the church with something that is bad. Of course the quality of the church to build within us is not characterized by what is evil and sinful. Building the ark (church) with gopherwood (something bad) is an appearance. The gopherwood symbolizes our propensity to delight in evil desires that are contrary to heavenly qualities of the church.

Therefore we must build rooms in our ark. These rooms are our will and understanding. As the Lord foresaw that humanity would will evil and prefer falsity, He provided for two distinct receptacles within human nature: the will which is created to receive His love and the understanding to receive His truths. Our task then is to shun evil desires of all kinds. Then as evil is pushed aside and rejected, our will is primed to receive goods from the Lord. At the same time we must reject all kinds of false ideas (for example, you cannot be saved, the Lord has frowned upon you, or heaven is not for you). As falsity is cast out, our understanding is primed to receive the Lord’s truths.

But once again there’s the problem of the gopherwood which can symbolize those evil desires that can contaminate the Lord’s goods and truth. This takes us to the pitch (preservation from a flood of evil flowing into us). Because an evil inclination sits at the core of human nature, we must cover our ark with “pitch.” In other words, we must be careful to preserve the good and truths we have from the Lord. We must be careful to safeguard the heavenly qualities of the church the Lord is instilling within us. The pitch covers over the gopherwood. We can say then, that bad desires must be covered over or, in other words, shunned, contained and eventually cast out so they cannot flow in and corrupt our will and pollute our understanding.

Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, meaning that the Lord foresaw that humanity (you) could be saved. So, build your ark. Let’s be encouraged to compel ourselves to do what is right so the Lord can then inspire and lead us to perform heavenly uses so that we can be saved.

Isn’t it quite delightful when you have done something good, not for yourself, but truly for the good itself? Isn’t it quite delightful when you have done something good, not for personal gain, but for the Lord and the neighbor you’ve served? Isn’t it quite delightful

when you've done something good and then recognized that the good was done "as of self" but was truly from the Lord? All delights from doing good are the Lord's free gift.

You can be saved. The Lord implanted "remains" within you long ago during your infancy and your childhood as you were growing up. The Lord knew that you would respond to His calling to turn away from sins so that He could fill you with His love. The Lord knew that you would receive, with pleasure, His wonderful truths and allow them to lead you to the good of life.

While a person may have entertained sinful desires or thoughts or committed deeds for which he is ashamed, he can be saved. He must build himself an ark and remember: "The Lord loves man, and from love wills that he may be happy forever, and man cannot become happy except by a life according to His commandments, because by means of these a man is regenerated and becomes spiritual, and in this way can be raised into heaven" (AC 10578:3).

*AMEN.*