

LESSONS

1st Lesson: Genesis 50: 15-21

15. When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him." 16. So they sent messengers to Joseph, saying, "Before your father died he commanded, saying, 17. 'Thus you shall say to Joseph: "I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you.'" Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. 18. Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, "Behold, we are your servants." 19. Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? 20. But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. 21. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

2nd Lesson: Matthew 6: 5-13

5. And when thou prayest, thou shall not be as the hypocrites; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may appear unto men. Amen I say unto you that they have their reward. 6. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy chamber, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father who sees in secret shall recompense thee in what is manifest. 7. And when you pray, do not speak on and on as the gentiles, for they think that they shall be harkened to for their many words. 8. Be not ye therefore like them; for your Father knows what things you need before you ask Him. 9. In this way, therefore, pray ye: Our Father who art in the heavens, hallowed be Thy name; 10. Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done, as in heaven so upon the earth. 11. Give us this day our daily bread. 12. And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors; 13. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for Thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory forever. Amen

3rd Lesson: Arcana Coelestia 2493

I [Lord's servant Emanuel Swedenborg] have spoken with the angels concerning the memory of things past, and the consequent anxiety regarding things to come; and I have been instructed that the more interior and perfect the angels are, the less do they care for past things, and the less do they think of things to come; and also that from this comes their happiness. They say that the Lord gives them every moment what to think, and this with blessedness and happiness; and that they are thus free from cares and anxieties. Also, that this was meant in the internal sense by the manna being received daily from heaven; and by the daily bread in the Lord's Prayer; and likewise by the instruction not to be solicitous about what they should eat and drink, and wherewithal they should be clothed. But although the angels do not care for past things, and are not solicitous about things to come, they nevertheless have the most perfect recollection of past things, and the most perfect mental view of things to come; because in all their present there are

both the past and the future. Thus they have a more perfect memory than can ever be thought of or expressed.

S E R M O N

The Lord's Prayer: What We Ask (Part 2 of 2)

A Sermon By
Rev. Michael E. Ferrell

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Matthew 6: 11-13

The Lord Our Father:

The opening words of the Lord's Prayer "Our Father who art in the heavens, hallowed be Thy name" serves to direct our mind upon the Lord. Since it is God who provides well for our spiritual needs it is orderly that in prayer we first address Him. Our Father in the heavens is a visible God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (AC 2360, TCR 113:6, TCR 307, TCR 787).

His name is holy. His name represents His Divine qualities of all that is embodied in love and wisdom. In the supreme sense His name is His Divine Human in which He is now and forever more. This is the meaning of "hallowed be Thy name" that the Lord is holy as He is in His Divine Human (AC 6280:5, AR 692). The Lord said "all authority is given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18).

Therefore, when we pray to the Lord, our Father, we pray to Him who dwells in the heavens, in the spiritual world where it is His Divine that makes heaven (HH 78, HH 125). Yet at the same time we pray to the Lord our Father who also dwells on earth. He dwells in the interiors of our soul (HH 99, HH 313) for it is our soul that receives heaven. As we've been previously taught, the Lord's kingdom in the spiritual world is His heavens while His kingdom on earth is His church He is establishing within everyone who receives of His Divine.

What The Lord Demands:

Before considering why it is that we pray to the Lord we recognize what the Lord requires when we approach Him that we lower our spiritual disposition to a state of humbleness. "The Lord does indeed demand humiliation, adoration, thanksgivings, and many other things from man" (AC 5957). Therefore as we approach the Lord in prayer we must bow our souls in humiliation before Him. We come before Him in a spiritual state of adoration as demonstrated by the reverence we have toward Him. We approach the Lord in prayer because of the gratitude we have for the natural and spiritual blessings He has bestowed upon us.

The truth is the Lord does “demand humiliation, adoration and thanksgivings” from man. The spiritual significance, however, lies in how our humble approach of the Lord benefits not Him, but uplifts the man. The Lord does not demand the glory, honor or praises of man for Himself because “in the Divine, anything of the love of self is utterly inconceivable” (AC 5957). While the Lord assumed an impure, corrupted human when He was in the world, “He contended against the evils of the love of self and the world” (AC 2819) that characterized this fallen human nature He took upon Himself. The love of self, against which the Lord fought, is contrary to His Divine order. The Lord’s love flows out from Himself to humanity, so that He may join us to Himself and ultimately lift us up into the happiness of heavenly joy and blessings (TCR 43). This is the essence of His love.

Because of the love He has for us the Lord seeks our humiliation, adoration and thanksgivings. He demands we approach Him in a spirit of “humiliation” because “when a man is in humiliation he can receive good from the Lord” (AC 5957). When we bow down before the Lord in a state of subjugating our “proprium” we disengage from loving our “self.” In so doing we make it possible for the Lord to flow in with His love and truth. We pray to the Lord because only the Lord can provide for our spiritual needs. And it is when we are humble that the Lord can give unto us, forgive our many transgressions, and lead us to heaven.

Our Daily Bread:

We therefore ask of the Lord to “give us this day our daily bread.” It is true that the Lord is always giving to us whether or not we ask. His desire is to draw every one to Himself, to save all men, to give His own to every one, and to give every one heavenly love and faith (AC 6645, AC 8307, AC 8497, AE 250:2). There’s a rich abundance of natural and spiritual blessings the Lord gives. He gives food, clothing, shelter and other natural comforts. He sends forth love and tenderness to soften our hearts. He provides His truths and gives us understanding. He gives us the ability to learn and acquire all kinds of knowledge. The Lord gives us inspiration to perform uses and to serve others. The Lord gives and provides for man beyond what we can articulate or measure.

Since therefore it is not a prerequisite that we ask in order that the Lord give (since He is perpetually giving), we consider what it can mean to ask that He give unto us. Asking the Lord to give serves to help us focus upon what it is we need. Asking the Lord to give helps us acknowledge that in and of ourselves without the Lord we are nothing. And moreover, in addition to asking the Lord to give unto us we are also petitioning that He make us worthy to receive.

We must become worthy but not in the sense that we merit or deserve anything. The Heavenly Doctrine says that “as man receives good in truths so he receives the Lord into himself and lives; and he receives in the measure in which he abstains from evils” (AE 795). The worth of something is its value. The value or worth of anything is measured by its qualities. By making ourselves worthy to receive of the Lord we’re speaking about spiritual qualities we need to have

within ourselves. We become worthy when we turn away from evils and falsities that do nothing but hinder our reception of the Lord. To the extent that we abstain from evils and falsities we become worthy. In other words, the purging of evils and falsities from within us provides a plane for our reception of the Lord. Once again, the Lord is perpetually giving. A concern is whether or not we are receiving. So, let's not neglect to recognize that evils and falsities cause us not to want and care about what it is the Lord desires to give us.

Our prayer, "give us this day" is our supplication that the Lord provide for us and at the same time inspire us to delight in the heavenly gifts He wants to give. It is from His love that the Lord gives; but the giving of a gift becomes more meaningful in the joy of the one who receives. How can we ask the Lord to give us His goods, truths, and other spiritual gifts if we do not want them? And so our prayer "give us this day" is our appeal to the Lord to provide and to also help us in our quest to love the things of heaven.

We pray the Lord "give us this day our daily bread." By "day" is not meant a day in the natural sense but represents spiritual states (AC 4901) as do likewise all periods of time such as weeks, months, and years. While it is the essence of Divine love to give its Own to another, our prayer for "bread" is that the Lord sustain our spiritual life by feeding our souls with heavenly food. The Heavenly Doctrine teaches that:

Heavenly food is nothing else than love and charity together with the goods and truths of faith. This food is given by the Lord in the heavens to the angels every moment, and thus perpetually and to eternity. This also is what is meant in the Lord's Prayer by "give us this day our daily bread" that is, every instant to eternity. (AC 2838:4)

While we are here in the natural world, a day is relatively a short span of time. We need the Lord's goods and truths today, this very moment to sustain us in our spiritual journey. It is quite remarkable that in asking the Lord for "daily" bread we are seeking spiritual nourishment this very moment and also even every moment to eternity. We desire the Lord's goods and truths while we're here on earth and continuously in the after life in heaven.

Forgive Our Debts:

In addition to giving us our daily bread (love together with truths) we also ask that the Lord "forgive us our debts." The Lord tells us who it is that come into heaven, that "those come into heaven after death who have heaven in them during their life in the world" (AC 10717). In order for heaven to flow into us we must allow the Lord to remove evil. We know that the evil of hell is the opposite of the good of heaven. So long as evil abides in us, it stands in the way blocking the entrance of heaven.

In regard to forgiveness our first consideration is the teaching from the Word that "all evil is from hell" (HH 302). But not knowing any better a person "supposes that all things that he thinks and wills are in himself and therefore from himself" (HH 302). Consequently, a person

condemns himself thinking and believing evil and sin is his. On the other hand, you can know and believe that an evil desire or bad thought is not yours but is from hell. Our next point is the real truth about sin: “sinning is doing and thinking what is evil and false intentionally and willingly, for things done intentionally and willingly are such as come out of the heart and render a person unclean” (AC 8925). And finally, in the case of forgiveness of sin, “sins are not abolished, but removed; and they are removed so far as man continues to refrain from them and enters upon a new life” (TCR 539).

We’re quite familiar with the Lord’s teaching that a person must engage in self examination in order to recognize evil within himself (TCR 525, TCR 530). Evil cannot be removed unless a person sees it and then “as of self” refrains from willing, thinking, and doing the evil. When as-of-self a person has discovered evils within himself, what actually happened, according to the Heavenly Doctrine is this: “the Lord led him to search them out, disclosed them, and inspired grief for them, and together with this an effort to refrain from them and begin a new life” (TCR 539).

Our prayer, “forgive us our debts” is our appeal that the Lords assist us in our cooperation with Him in seeing evils within ourselves and then restraining our propensity to commit sin. The Heavenly Doctrine says we can participate in the process because in His mercy, “the Lord gives to every man to be able to desist from evil, because He gives him to will and understand as of himself” (AR 875:12, TCR 461:4). Forgiveness of sin is the Lord’s work of salvation in subjugating and reducing the power of our inclination toward evil.

As we grow spiritually we become more disposed to living a heavenly life as the Lord softly removes the desire to sin. But all along we must cooperate with the Lord so that any desire to “trespass against the neighbor” is “removed by repentance and by a life according to the Lord’s commandments” (TCR 459:12). And so another shade of our prayer “forgive us our debts” is forward looking. It is our plea that the Lord helps us not to sin against our neighbor.

Lead Us Not Into Temptation:

We pray “lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.” The sense according to the letter is that the Lord leads into temptation (AC 3425:5). Temptation has the connotation of something that entices a person toward evil. Temptation implies something that tends to allure a person away from good and in the direction of evil. The literal sense is confusing because it introduces a proposition contrary to order and the Lord’s love. As everyone knows or should know, the Lord leads to good.

And so we consider, a few general ideas regarding temptation. Regarding its source “the evil within the man causes, and even leads into the temptation” (AC 2768). We may conclude therefore that the Lord’s Divine love and truth has no role in producing evil. As the Lord leads each and every person “temptations appear to be from the Divine, when yet they are not” (NJHD 200). Surely the Lord leads everyone but, as we know, He leads to good.

One essence of temptation is its nature to attack. “All temptation is an assault upon the love in which the man is” (AC 1690:3). Temptation attempts to tear down a person’s love of the Lord, of the neighbor, and all the things of heaven. And we must realize that “there are two kinds of temptations, one as to things of the understanding, the other as to those of the will” (AC 751:2). While our understanding receives truth and our will receives love, temptation seeks to darken our understanding of truth and steer our will away from heavenly loves.

And therefore we pray “lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.” The Heavenly Doctrine teaches clearly that “the Lord does not tempt, but liberates, and leads to good” (NJHD 200). Further in the Word we read that:

In the time of temptations [the Lord] is continually liberating from them, as far as possible...and is continually looking to the good into which He is leading him who is in the temptations; for God never takes part in temptations in any other manner; and though it is predicated of Him that He permits, still it is not according to the idea which man has of permission, namely, that by permitting He concurs. Man cannot comprehend it in any other manner than that he who permits is also willing (AC 2768).

In permitting us to undergo temptation, the Lord allows our hereditary nature to rise up in its attempt to entice us to willing, thinking, and doing evil. In His mercy He permits our hereditary nature to lure us toward the disorder of sin. But the purpose is to test our resolve. He does not manipulate us. In our temptations the Lord can strengthen our ability to compel ourselves against what is evil and false, but only when as-of-self we force ourselves to resist.

Once again, the evil within the man causes, and even leads into the temptation” AC 2768). The idea of temptation originating from the Lord causes the angels to experience a “kind of indignation” and a certain degree of spiritual discomfort at the “thought that temptation and its evil come from any other source” other than man himself (AC 1875). The angels react with displeasure toward the idea “that anyone should have any thought of evil in thinking of the Lord” (AC 1875).

Our prayer, “lead us not into temptation” is an appeal that the Lord does not forsake us when we’re in temptation. As temptation is necessary for our spiritual growth, our supplication is not a plea that we do not undergo temptation. Our prayer, on the other hand, is that the Lord helps us in our struggles with our natural and spiritual flaws. As it is the evil with us that leads into temptation (AC 2768) asking the Lord not to lead us into temptation (evil) is redundant and quite pointless because He cannot lead to evil anyway as this is contrary to order and His Divine love.

We should still say the prayer. And it is all the more important that we understand when we pray “lead us not into temptation.” Our prayer is an invocation that the Lord leads us away from committing sin. As temptation entices our will toward evil and our understanding toward falsity, we pray therefore that the Lord “deliver us from evil.” The Lord says “do not be afraid. I will provide for you and your little ones.”

And so we pray “give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Amen.