

“God’s Word - Revealed and Guiding Truths”

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian

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Scripture

Deuteronomy 4:5-14

Matthew 13:10-23

Hymns or Songs

“Thy Word”

"Ancient Words" 27

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vmTkXNpwzs>

“Take Time to Be Holy” 656

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFApbg-wcmE>

Deuteronomy 4:5-14

⁵ See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. ⁶ Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ ⁷ For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? ⁸ And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?

⁹ “Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children’s children— ¹⁰ how on the day that you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, the LORD said to me, ‘Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they will learn always to reverence me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so.’ ¹¹ And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom. ¹² Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice. ¹³ And He declared to you His covenant, which He commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments, and He wrote them on two tablets of stone. ¹⁴ And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes

and rules, that you might do them in the land that you are going over to possess.

Matthew 13:10-23

The Purpose of the Parables

¹⁰ Then the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" ¹¹ And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹² For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. ¹⁴ Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says:

"You will indeed hear but never understand,
and you will indeed see but never perceive."

¹⁵ For this people's heart has grown dull,
and with their ears they can barely hear,
and their eyes they have closed,
lest they should see with their eyes
and hear with their ears
and understand with their heart
and turn, and I would heal them."

¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. ¹⁷ For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

The Parable of the Sower Explained

¹⁸ "Hear then the parable of the Sower: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. ²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. ²² As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²³ As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

Insights for Worship

Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture 3,8 by Emanuel Swedenborg

“Interiorly the Word is spiritual and celestial. It is written exclusively by correspondences, which conceal within [them] all angelic wisdom.... The style of the Word is such that there is holiness in every sentence, and in every word, and in some places even in the very letters.”

SERMON: “God’s Word - Revealed and Guiding Truths”

Can you remember back to the first time your eyes beheld the beauty and splendor of our sanctuary here? If so, what did you notice about the way things are organized in this place of worship? Or, if your memory of first walking into our sanctuary is decades old and not very vivid, let me ask you, in recent weeks when you have either stepped through the narthex or entryway of our amazing little church, or upon logging in to our Sunday services, what do you notice before your eyes? What is centrally located within our chancel, where are altar rests?

If you came to the conclusion that it is God’s Holy Word, which now sits behind me, then you are correct. But, what exactly do we mean by calling the Bible, “God’s Holy Word”? I remember back in one of my seminary classes our focus for several weeks was on this theme: God’s Word as Divinely revealed, holy and guiding truths, and **this is our wondrous theme this morning.**

Think about that for a moment: God or the Lord expresses unto the universe and to everyone on Earth and in Heaven His vibrantly alive and powerful truths! Truths about His existence and about His Divine nature as infinite Love and Wisdom in perfect Oneness. **What other kinds of truths does the Lord’s Word reveal to us about Himself and about life?**

First let me share with you what for me is the simplest definition of what God’s Word is (which is found in *New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* n. 251): “The Word is what God has revealed.” And so, what we are blessed to have within the Bible is what the Lord is speaking to us. It is *His Holy Word*, or rather, what He chose to teach us; it contains all we need to know to be able to freely choose how to live to allow the Lord to fill us to overflowing with happiness and peace.

Imagine for a moment as a brief thought experiment, that you knew absolutely nothing about the teachings and stories found within the pages of God’s Word. Let’s say that all you knew about it was that it was a written document containing what God

wanted you to know for a great quality of life. What subjects and themes would you discover within it?

Wouldn't we expect to find teachings and wisdom about how to live a good spiritual life? Wouldn't we hope to find within its pages teachings about the Lord God Himself—what His nature is, what kind of God He is, revelations about how He guides and leads us, and what He expects from us? Wouldn't we hope to find instructions on how to treat one another, even when the others involved with us have hurtful intentions? Wouldn't we hope to find through God's revealed Word teachings about how to worship and pray, and what core principles and laws of life to follow every day? And wouldn't we need to find in God's Word, teachings about His Kingdom of Heaven, the spiritual place that we are all being led toward—our promised reward after our time of serving on Earth is over?

Another teaching of the Lord's New Church lifts up that God's Word does in fact teach us all of these **very important** truths for life:

“Without the Word no one would possess spiritual intelligence, which consists in having knowledge of a God, of heaven and hell, and of a life after death; nor would they know anything whatever about the Lord [Jesus Christ], about faith in Him and love to Him, nor anything about redemption, by means of which comes salvation.” (*Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture* 114).

In another part of our theology we learn that the very innermost connection or “spiritual glue,” if you will, that keeps God's Heaven and this physical world of Earth interconnected is none other than God's Word! Wow!

And yet, when we open up our holy book, the Bible, a lot of what it contains are history-based stories of an ancient people, God's chosen ones, the Hebrews...who at times were very good and faithful, but a lot of the time they were not. They made an enormous amount of mistakes and bad choices, but, they also showed an ability to learn, to repent and deepen in their spiritual walk with God. Interestingly, the way that the Bible was pieced together, how it is structured, and the subject matter it contains, we do not often find that those extremely important spiritual matters and concerns are addressed. We hear stories after stories, about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, about Moses, Joshua and a whole very long line of mostly bad kings who led Israel and Judea. There are many wars, and then come stories about the disciples...about Andrew, John and Peter...and, their many foibles.

An intelligent question emerges: why would God choose to reveal His central spiritual truths by way of so many stories and parables? Why would the Lord give us trivial details about the journeys and choices people made over many centuries of time—choices that often were foolish with terrible consequences? These intelligent questions are addressed in another passage of our theology:

“Taken literally the Word appears like any ordinary book, written in a strange style which is neither so sublime nor so brilliant as secular books appear to be. For this reason a person...may easily fall into error concerning the Word, and come to despise it. While reading it he may say to himself, ‘What is this? What is that? Can this be Divine? Could God, whose wisdom is infinite, speak like this? Where is there anything holy in it, and where does this holiness come from?’” (*Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture* 1).

But those who have spent a lot of time with the Bible, reading and meditating upon it personally, hearing it read in formal and casual worship circumstances can say easily that there is a Divine energy, Spirit and life-force of goodness within its pages that is somehow mysteriously flowing down within it right into our oh so tender human hearts and minds. **Indeed, we are able to feel and perceive its holiness!** And, we are all very able to perceive many great spiritual truths and wisdom from the Bible’s many good and many flawed characters, and we are able to feel and sense ourselves within the bumbling and slow-to-learn Disciples, who in the long run, were able to grow immensely in their spiritual love and faith in the Lord—which gives us deeply needed **ENCOURAGEMENT**, doesn’t it? It tells us that even though we may fail and bumble along making many mistakes, still...miraculously...the Lord will see us through into immense faith and love, on our way into angelhood.

Another beautiful teaching within New Church theology says this about the Bible: **“The Word of the Lord is like a body, which has a living soul within it”** (*Secrets of Heaven* 1408). Or as Jesus Himself put it, **“The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.”** (John 6:63) Isn’t it amazing that people of every corner of the globe have known that the Bible is the most holy book ever written—not only because God’s Spirit wrote it through myriads of faithful writers, but also because people throughout history have witnessed the power of Divine Love and the Light of Divine Wisdom, enabling them to live good lives, teaching them what it really means to be holy, loving and merciful people rooted in the Lord Himself!

In the Lord’s New Church we refer to this deeper power and wisdom inside of the literal words, characters and stories in the Word its **“internal sense.”** **The whole Word is written with carefully chosen words, characters and images.** When we understand the inner or symbolic meaning, or the reason why those words and images were chosen, the Bible comes to life for us—and then we are able to see some of the living soul underneath and inside of the stories, allowing us to sense that God’s Word is

so very wisely able to speak to us within our own, personal spiritual life struggles and difficulties. And when we are able to engage the Lord's Word on both its literal and internal senses, we are able to feel fed by the straight-forward spiritual guidance it offers.

In several places in the Scriptures the Lord referred to the Word as **"living water"** or as **"the water of life."** In the *Book of Revelation* the Lord says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts." (*Revelation 21:6; 22:1,17*) Water throughout the Bible symbolizes truth, and the truth Christ offers us is "living" truth. Recall the Samaritan woman at the well when she engaged Jesus in a very deep conversation. To her Christ offered "living water." To her He said, **"Whoever drinks of this water [from the well] will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."** (*John 4:13-14*)

Even that natural well, next to which the Lord spoke these powerful words to that woman, is bursting with the Light of an inner meaning. That woman represents all of us when we are open, receptive and wanting to understand God's Word in order to delve down deep inside of it! Just as when we plunge a bucket down into the deep depths of a well, never able to know the bottom of it—so is this like the depths of the Bible, which contains more spiritual truth than any person can learn, even in a lifetime.

In conclusion, when we approach the Lord and His Word in awe and reverence over its incredible holiness, asking the Lord to lead and enlighten us with its meaning for living a good life, then the pathway into Heaven opens before us—but only if we allow the truths of God's wisdom to cleanse us of our evils and false ways of thinking. The Lord promises to feed us with His Love and to quench our spiritual thirst when our purpose for being here is to love the Lord with all our hearts and to love our neighbors as well as ourselves.

Amen.

Let us pray:

Lord God, we are in the thick of this Lenten Season, a season of repentance, of self-examination, of silence and waiting for the leading of your Holy Spirit. Through your Spirit you lead us into the temptations you experienced in the mind of Jesus Christ during His forty days in the wilderness. Like Him, in Lent our lives are laid bare, and we come face to face with our desires for power—power over our lives and the lives of our friends and enemies and maybe even power over you, O Lord.

Open us to your gracious Love, mercy and provision, as we confront our own temptations, through the demons that try to run our world and our lives. Give us that same power of truth from your Holy Word, that we may also throw off the insidious powers of selfishness and sin—the forces of pride and lashing out at others with our tongues, the forces that keep us from confronting the truth about our lives and the

world. During this season of Lent, shatter our illusions, save us from ourselves, and open us to the new life of your Spirit—a life of faith, hope, and love. Amen.