

“Mercy”

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian

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Scriptures

Micah 6:8

Colossians 3:13

Hymns/Songs

“Praise to The Lord, The Almighty”

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

“Here At Your Feet, Lord” 301 (tune: “Morning Has Broken”)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GXQeFWa9ngc>

“Precious Lord, Take My Hand” 474

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jHBzl_Jb-o4

Micah 6:8

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Colossians 3:12-13

¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

***MAY THE GOOD LORD BLESS THE HEARING,
THE UNDERSTANDING AND THE LIVING OF HIS HOLY WORD. AMEN***

Insights for Worship

Heaven and Hell n. 522

“First, though, let me state what divine mercy is. Divine mercy is a pure mercy toward the whole human race with the intent of saving it, and it is constant toward every individual, never withdrawing from anyone. This means that everyone who can be saved is saved. However, no one can be saved except by divine *means*, the means revealed by the Lord in the Word. Divine means are what we refer to as divine truths. They teach how we are to live in order to be saved. The Lord uses them to lead us to heaven and to instill heaven’s life into us. The Lord does this for everyone; but He

cannot instill heaven's life into anyone who does not refrain from evil, since evil bars the way. So to the extent that we do refrain from evil, the Lord in His divine mercy leads us by divine means, from infancy to the end of life in the world and thereafter to eternity. This is the divine mercy that I mean."

SERMON: "Mercy"

In my favorite movie of all time, titled "Jesus of Nazareth" made in 1977, one of my favorite scenes happens about one-third of the way into Christ's life and ministry. In it, Jesus is on His way to have dinner one evening in the region of Galilee at the home of a well-known local tax collector, whose name was Matthew. But at this point in the movie Matthew has yet to repent and reject his dishonorable way of life of serving the brutal Roman Empire. It is dinnertime at Matthew's house, which is filled with many Jewish religious Law breakers. As Jesus is walking towards Matthew's residence several of His new disciples and a bunch of other local Jewish peasants from Galilee surround the Lord and are walking with Him, telling Him, "Master! It's a scandal for you to eat with these people! Don't you know who they are?! We've lived our lives honorably, made sacrifices to keep the Law. They are thieves, whores, userers! Violent and Godless people. And now you sit and eat with such people! They spend their lives in orgies and perversions!"

Christ's response to their condemning words was, "I've not come to call the righteous to repentance, but the sinners. And they might enter the Kingdom of Heaven before you." Then James comes forward and says to the Lord, "Listen Master, if you go and eat with these people they will contaminate you. **The whole town will abandon**

you!” And then Jesus puts His hand upon James’ shoulder, looks him in the eye and says, **“James, the heart of the Law is mercy.”** And then not long after stepping into Mathew’s house He says to everyone there, “Peace be with you.” Matthew then welcomes the Lord eagerly, and then not long after this, the Lord proceeds to tell them all His famous parable about the Prodigal Son. That parable is all about the importance of us being willing to recognize when we have chosen poorly to live in ways contrary to God’s Laws and commandments—and, it’s about the Lord’s unfailing love and mercy towards us all, and the joy God feels after we’ve repented and returned in humbleness. Notice in that story how the two sons’ father rejected his older son’s condemnation of the wayward son.

So, what do you think about what Jesus did and what He said? Would you agree that *the heart of the great religious Laws of Israel was...mercy?* Given what the Lord’s parable of the Prodigal Son was, and also many other things that Jesus did and said, I would unequivocally say **YES**, that the beautiful heart of the Laws of Israel was mercy. Our New Church theology wholeheartedly supports this Divine truth. It tells us that mercy is an outcome of knowing the Lord, because the Lord is ***mercy itself***. So you see, knowing the Lord deeply and personally causes spiritual qualities and strengths to develop within us—and one of these spiritual values is a heart of kindness and mercy.

In short, my friends, the Lord does not like to condemn, and in fact, He never does condemn anybody. And so, if we have trouble and difficulty with mercy, we should know and grasp that this is a serious problem and it is our issue within us, and not God’s

issue. In other words, **mercy is always in order**. The Lord can stand in the middle of Hell itself, and still not condemn the people there. In fact, the opposite of condemning them is what He does, which is to welcome them to come out of Hell and change their lives. Now and then the Lord literally invites the people of Hell to come out of Hell, and then He leaves them free to make their choice about His invitation.

In my opinion this is the only truly wise understanding of what Hell is. It is a spiritual realm where people go who freely choose to cultivate and act upon their evil, selfish and ungodly desires. But it is **NOT** a place of eternal punishment because God is merciful and loving and forgiving, and never angry nor punishing. I like the view within our theology that says, that the unfortunate people who enjoy living in Hell must experience over and over the punishments that they all inflict upon each other. What else would happen when people live amongst liars and swindlers, who enjoy being cruel to one another.

So you see my friends, if you ever find yourself feeling afraid about what might happen to you after you die and then find yourself in the presence of God, who will at some point open up your “Book of Life” in your presence, revealing all of the good and all of the bad things you’ve done during your stint of life on Earth—you don’t need to be worried about anyone casting you or throwing you into Hell. The only way you will wind up in Hell is by your own doing, not God’s. This has to do with how very, very serious the Lord is about **spiritual freedom**. This value of freedom is the number one value that the Lord protects for you every second of your eternity. We see this acted upon while

Christ was hanging upon the cross—it was one of His messages He left with us before He died that day. Even then, after He had been falsely condemned, whipped horribly by the Roman soldiers...flogging is what they called it...and after He was forced to endure the nightmarish, slow death of crucifixion, even then the Lord was merciful.

Do you remember what He said? **“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!”** (*Luke 23:34*) This is another way of saying that evil is mostly blind. And, beyond this, evil may appear appealing to us at first, but if we freely choose to indulge ourselves in it, it causes us to wander into a spiritual desert, where deep down inside we will feel very thirsty for the truth of our lives, and not truly happy either. In this whole sort of scenario, however, when we find ourselves wandering into and through a long spiritual desert experience, in reality the value of the desert experience is that it is an opportunity to get out of hellish evil. Spiritual desert wanderings, which can last 40 years for some of us, help us to be able to get out of habitual selfish ways of living because the pain we experience while in such deserts tends to open our eyes a great deal to what we are really doing. **Said differently, the only motivation that evil understands is pain.** For example, no one could have ever reasoned Hitler out of his terrible design. When he found out that he was losing the war and that the Allied forces were closing in on Berlin, he killed himself, which was of course the coward’s way out after the enormous destruction and loss of life he caused.

Essentially speaking, all evildoers are cowards because they are not willing to face the truth of who and what they are. They run from seeing and especially from

feeling the truth about themselves. Imagine someone like Vladimir Putin looking deeply at himself with true, spiritual discernment. It could happen, theoretically, but only if he's willing to perceive the monster he has become. One of the amazing aspects of evil oriented people is that they are uncomfortable with moving into true, lasting happiness, which may have its roots within a very unhappy and abusive childhood, where happiness and real joy was needed, but was lacking or absent.

Remember what the Lord said out of His great loving-mercy and wisdom in *John 3:19-21*, "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God." And then later in *John 15:11* the Lord said, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."

Spiritual joy is much deeper than happiness, because it has mercy and depth as its soul. The heavenly teachings of the Lord's New Church declare: "**The Lord is Love itself, to which no other attributes are fitting than those of pure love, thus of pure mercy toward the whole human race, which [Love] is such that it wills to save all and make them spiritually happy to eternity, and to bestow on them all that it has, thus out of pure mercy to draw to Heaven all who are willing to follow...by the strong force of Love.**" (*Secrets of Heaven* 1735). It further states that "**the Lord never curses anyone. He is never angry with anyone, never leads anyone into temptation, never**

punishes anyone...for such things can never proceed from the Fountain of mercy, peace, and goodness.” (*Secrets of Heaven* 245).

In conclusion then, my friends, the Lord wills that everyone should enter into the deeper degrees of happiness of Heaven, which was the joy that Christ spread throughout the Holy Land during His ministry. This, in fact, is His purpose in creation. But since Heaven is within a person according to his or her reception of good and truth from the Lord, therefore only those who have Heaven in themselves can be received into Heaven after death. When the evil are punished, it is not because the Lord wills it, but because such people have separated themselves from His Divine Love. And so, our theology teaches us: “The Lord in no case sends anyone down into Hell, but a person sends himself.” (*Secrets of Heaven* 2258) The Lord seeks our real happiness, and through His church seeks to promote our real, eternal welfare. If we elevate our thoughts above our natural senses, we are able to see that if we will freely walk in the way of truth, in the path of life, we will feel the warmth, mercy and reassurance of our Lord’s very deep Divine Love. Amen.