

**Notes for Children's Talk & Sermon Outline for  
Sunday, 27 September 2020**

# Children's Talk: The Value of People of All Ages

- For the next four weeks we're going to be reading the story of Moses.
- Moses is one of the very few characters in the Bible who we get to see as a baby, a young adult, an older adult, and finally as an old man.
  - We're going to be thinking about what people of different ages can do for each other.
  - I'm going to read the story and see if you can keep track of how many different ages people are in the story.
- Exodus 2:1-10 (NKJV)
  - <sup>1</sup> And a man of the house of Levi went and took as wife a daughter of Levi. <sup>2</sup> So the woman conceived and bore a son. And when she saw that he was a good child, she hid him three months. <sup>3</sup> But when she could no longer hide him, she took an ark of bulrushes for him, tarred it with tar and pitch, put the child in it, and laid it in the reeds by the river's bank. <sup>4</sup> And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him.  
<sup>5</sup> Then the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river. And her maidens walked along the riverside; and when she saw the ark among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it. <sup>6</sup> And when she had opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby wept. So she had pity on him, and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children."  
<sup>7</sup> Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you?"  
<sup>8</sup> And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the maiden went and called the child's mother. <sup>9</sup> Then Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him. <sup>10</sup> And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. So she called his name Moses, saying, "Because I drew him out of the water."
- In the story there's Moses' parents who were adults.
  - There's baby Moses who is just three months old when he's put into the ark.
  - There's the daughter of Pharaoh who was also an adult.
  - And her maidens who may have been adults or possibly teenagers.
  - There's Moses' older sister who was probably about seven years old, a child who was old enough to watch what was going on and report back to her mom.
- What do the people of different ages do for each other?
- Moses' parents look after him when he's a baby.
  - And brand new babies need that—they can't do anything for themselves.
- Moses' sister, even though she's still a kid too, she also helps to look after baby Moses.
  - If you're a kid who's old enough to be watching this video and paying attention to what I'm saying, then you're old enough that you can be a big help with looking after littler children.
  - And you probably know that the littler kids will love it if you, an older kid, will pay attention to them and play with them.
- Pharaoh's daughter was another adult who helped in a big way to look after and protect Moses.
  - He wasn't her child but she knew that the law was that he was supposed to be killed and so she did what she needed to do to protect him.

- And lots of adults do lots of important work to help children who aren't their own.
- What about the baby?
  - Did the baby do anything for the other people?
  - At first it might seem like not—it seems like the baby just needs things from other people and doesn't do anything for other people in return but that's not true.
  - Babies can have a powerful effect on people.
    - Notice when a little baby comes into a room how lots of people turn to pay attention.
      - Notice how many people smile and feel a little bit happier when they see a baby.
  - What about when a baby is crying, then is it doing good things for other people?
    - What effect did that have on Pharaoh's daughter?
      - She had pity on him and did what she could to look after him.
      - We don't know what Pharaoh's daughter's day had been like up until then or what her life had been like up until then but it wouldn't be surprising if she had spent most of her life mostly thinking about herself and how to get what she wanted.
        - But when she saw that baby crying it stirred something in her—something from the Lord.
          - Something of innocence and sweetness.
          - That's what babies and little children bring into the world.
          - Imagine what we would be missing if there were no children younger than you in the world—it would be missing a lot!
  - Today, try to notice and appreciate the people of different ages that you get to interact with—babies, older people like your granny and grandpa, your parents, your older or younger cousins, *etc.*
    - Notice and appreciate what those people bring to your life and try to offer something good to them.
  - *Amen.*

# Stages of Life, Part 1: Childhood

A Sermon by Pastor Malcolm G. Smith  
27 September 2020

## Intro

- I've found that these COVID times have got me thinking about questions like "What's the point of my life right now?"
  - And not necessarily in a depressed way but just wondering.
- As we, maybe, head back towards things being more normal again there's the chance to look with some perspective on the different parts of our lives that we just took as normal and ask ourselves whether those things are good or not.
  - But to answer those questions about what things are good or worth doing and which are not leads to those deeper questions.
    - I can't evaluate this particular thing unless I know what's the point of my life right now anyway.
- And I think it was because of those questions being on my mind that I found this sermon series on stages of life appealing.
  - To zoom out from a focus on my life right now and think back to earlier stages of my life and to look forward to future stages of my life, helps to put my questions about what matters and what's important into a different light.
- The purpose of this first sermon in the series is to cover some general ideas about stages of life and then to focus in on the stage of childhood.

## Stages of Life in General

- Let's start with some general thoughts about stages of life.
- Here's a great passage on the topic from the teachings of the New Church.
- *Secrets of Heaven* §10225:1, 3-6
  - [F]rom earliest childhood to extreme old age a person passes inwardly through a number of states....

[T]he first state [from birth to five years old] is a state of ignorance and also of innocence within ignorance.... While this state exists the inner levels of the mind are being put into shape for the use they will serve, and consequently are not yet opened up. Only the most external levels, those of the senses, are open; and when these alone are open ignorance exists. ....

[T]he second state [from five to twenty years old] is one in which instruction is received and knowledge is acquired.... This is not yet a state in which understanding exists because the young person does not arrive at any conclusion by themselves; neither by themselves do they draw any distinction between one truth and another, nor even between truth and falsity, only with the help of others. Their thought and speech consist purely of matters contained in their memory, thus solely of acquired knowledge; nor do they see or perceive whether something is true unless they take it on trust from their teacher, consequently because another says it is true.

The third state [from twenty to sixty years old] however is called a state in which understanding exists because the person now thinks for themselves, drawing distinctions and arriving at conclusions; and the conclusions are theirs, not another's. At this time belief begins; for belief is not a person's own until they have confirmed what

they believe with ideas that are the product of their own thinking. Till then the belief is not theirs but another's within them; for till then they trust in the person, not in the matter of belief. .... This comes about according to how far and in what kind of way the inner levels have been opened; and how far they are open depends on how far the person leads a life looking to heaven and not to the world.

The last state [from sixty years old and up] however is one of wisdom and of innocence within wisdom, which exists when a person is no longer concerned just to gain an understanding of truths and forms of good, but is concerned to make them part of their will and life; for then the person has wisdom. And how far that person is able to make them part of their will and life depends on how much innocence they have, that is, on how far they believe that, left to themselves, they have no wisdom at all, but that whatever wisdom they have is derived from the Lord, and also on how far they love this to be so.

- Passages like this, that talk about stages and steps of development and growth are some of my favourites.
  - I love to have some way of understanding where I was, where I am now, and where I'm meant to be heading.
- It makes a difference in my life to know that, in the state I was in before, it was fine that most of my thinking was based on things that other people had said.
- But that, in the state I'm in now, it's important for me to be working on thinking through the things I believe for myself.
- And that, the state that I'm hopefully going to get to is not one of knowing everything but one of acknowledging how little I know on my own.

### ***A Process That Takes a Long Time***

- Another thing that is emphasised in this passage is the idea of a gradual developmental process—something that happens over the course of decades.
  - This is such a useful perspective to have.
  - This idea is further emphasised in another passage that talks about the time that it takes for us to be regenerated or spiritually born again into people who love heavenly things rather than worldly things.
    - *Secrets of Heaven* §4063:3
      - So that a person may be led from the state of the old self into that of the new, worldly passions have to be cast aside and heavenly affections assumed. This is accomplished by countless means known to the Lord alone.... When therefore a person is converted from an old self into a new one, that is, when they are regenerated, it does not take place in an instant as some people believe, but over many years. Indeed the process is taking place throughout the person's whole life right to its end. For the person's passions have to be rooted out and heavenly affections implanted, and they have to have a life conferred on them which they did not possess previously, and of which in fact they scarcely had any knowledge previously. Since therefore the person's states of life have to be changed so drastically they are inevitably maintained for a long time in an intermediate kind of good which has aspects of both worldly affections and heavenly ones.

- This is why I love the passages about these stages and steps along the way.
- We're not just given a description of the ugly basement in which we are and the glittering top floor where we're supposed to get to; we're also given a description of the stairway that we can climb to get there.
- It's a long process and there is different work to do at different stages of the process.
- And there also are things to enjoy in each stage.
  - *Secrets of Heaven* §4063:4.
    - [I]f anyone thinks it over they can also recognise that each phase of life has its particular delights. They can recognise that by means of these delights they are introduced by consecutive stages into those delights which belong to the next phase and that such delights have served to bring them through to that next phase, till at length they are brought to the delight of intelligence and wisdom in old age.

## Childhood

- Now let's talk specifically about the stage of childhood, using the Moses story.
- Moses eventually becomes one of the greatest leaders of the Children of Israel but in the story we read today in the Children's Talk, he is just three months old.
  - Eventually Moses represents the Word of God in our lives (*Secrets of Heaven* §6723:3) and how it leads us but at this stage he represents just the first beginnings of that—the seed from which the tree will grow, the foundation on which the church will be built.
- So how does the Lord lay the foundation, in our earliest childhood, for the later development of our spiritual lives?
  - Moses' father and mother were both "of the house of Levi" and the name Levi means "cling to" and so Moses' parents represent our longing to cling to or connect with the Lord and our neighbour and this longing is what gives birth to Moses.
    - The Word will never lead in our lives unless there is something within us that longs to know the truth and longs to do good to the Lord and to our neighbour.
  - And so the Lord gives us "states of the affection of good and truth... from earliest infancy even to the end of life..." (*Secrets of Heaven* §1906) that provide the basis for those loves.
  - In the teachings of the New Church these are often called "remains" or "remnants"—things that remain with us as we get older, remnants that we hold onto from an earlier time in our lives.
- Innocence is one of the precious things that the Lord stores up in us in our childhood and preserves for us throughout our lives.
  - *Secrets of Heaven* §3183
    - [A]s soon as anyone is born they are brought into a state of innocence. This state then serves as the basis of all other states and is the inner core of them all....

- And those remnants of innocence are used by the Lord throughout our lives, as a crucial piece of how the Lord can lead us to the final stage of life and development that He wants for us.
  - *Secrets of Heaven* §3183
    - [The final state of development] is a state of wisdom which has the innocence of earliest childhood within it, and so the first state and the last are united. And when the person is old, being so to speak a small child again yet one who is now wise, that person is led into the Lord's kingdom.
- In the story it says, "And when she saw that he was a good child, she hid him three months" (Exodus 2:2).
  - We can see so much that is good and precious in little children and those things must be protected, like Moses' mother hid him for three months.
    - These states of innocence from early childhood play a crucial role in our spiritual development and so the Lord carefully hides them deep within us.
- But it's not very long before Moses can't be hidden anymore.
  - Children can't stay in that simple, innocent, and ignorant state forever.
  - They must, gradually be introduced to the broader world with its culture and values.
    - Imagining exposing our precious children to the world with all its vindictiveness, tragedy, lusts, complexity, and confusion can feel an awful lot like dropping our baby into a rushing river.
      - It's horrifying to even contemplate.
      - But Moses' mother doesn't do that—instead she does all that she can to protect Moses in the river.
        - We read, "But when she could no longer hide him, she took an ark of bulrushes for him, tarred it with tar and pitch, put the child in it, and laid it in the reeds by the river's bank" (Exodus 2:3).

## **The Threat of Egypt**

- To understand why Moses' mother had to do this, rather than just looking after her sweet baby in the safety of her home, we need to back up a bit and remember the context in which Moses was born.
- Moses was born in Egypt.
- When the Children of Israel first went down to Egypt it was a great place for them.
  - The rest of that region was going through an awful famine but there was grain in Egypt because of Joseph.
  - While Joseph was alive and for a while afterward things were good for them in Egypt.
    - "The children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them" (Exodus 1:7).
  - In the good sense Egypt represents another important foundation for our later spiritual development—factual knowledge.
    - *Secrets of Heaven* §6750
      - [F]actual knowledge is what those who are being regenerated must learn first, for that knowledge is the groundwork for things that compose the understanding, and the understanding is what receives the truth of faith... and the truth of faith what receives the good of charity. From this it may be seen that factual knowledge constitutes the first level to be laid down when a person is being regenerated.

- You might remember that the Lord Himself was taken to Egypt as a baby.
  - He was taken there to escape from Herod but also because of what going to Egypt represents—getting that important basis of factual knowledge, particularly knowledge of teachings from the Word.
- Kids *love* learning things—they seem to have an insatiable desire for it.
  - They're curious about everything.
  - They want to know how things work which is why they often like to take things apart or destroy them.
  - And they absorb information like sponges.
  - My kids already know far more than I do about marine biology, Egyptian archaeology, lyrics to songs.
    - And they remember and recall things far more quickly than I do.
  - When we think of factual knowledge we often think of concepts you might learn in school and kids often like learning those things but they seem to particularly enjoy acquiring practical knowledge—knowledge of how to *do* things.
    - How to climb a tree, play a video game, do a puzzle, throw a ball far, change the background on a Zoom meeting, cook breakfast.
  - This isn't to say that it's all easy for them to learn these things or do them.
    - They battle to learn things sometimes, they get frustrated that they can't already do them as well as they want to; they give up on trying sometimes.
  - But they have an endless appetite to want to know about things and especially how to *do* things.
    - And generally that's a good thing but there also is a dark side to it.
- In the story, after Joseph died, eventually “there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph” (Exodus 1:8) and he decided that the Egyptians should enslave the Children of Israel and eventually he commands that every Hebrew son who is born must be thrown into the river (Exodus 1:22).
  - This is the context into which Moses is born.
    - A desire for ever more factual knowledge is ruling and religious principles—which might lead us in a different direction—are seen as a threat to be destroyed.
  - To spend some time in Egypt can be very useful; to stay in Egypt with Pharaoh in charge will eventually mean that we are enslaved.
    - People say, “Knowledge is power” and it can be a very powerful tool for us to get what we want and to get other people to do what we want them to.
    - We want children to have lots of knowledge to have the ability to be able to have an impact in the world and interact with other people in productive and useful ways.
    - But we also want to preserve some other things within them.
      - Goodness and compassion.
      - Belief in God.
      - Innocence.
      - The desire to be a good person and do what's right.
    - We desperately don't want that overwhelmed by or drowned in the flow of worldly knowledge.

- And so Moses' mother does not expose her little baby to the whole flow of the river all at once: instead she builds a barrier between her baby and the river.
  - She weaves an ark from bullrushes, coats it with tar and pitch, and then puts her baby in that before putting him in the reeds by the riverbank.
  - This ark is quite similar—though much smaller—to Noah's ark, which was also covered with tar and pitch.
    - In both of the stories of arks covered with black tar the symbolism is of something precious being preserved within us, while surrounded by false ideas and selfishness (see *Secrets of Heaven* §6724).
  - The way we weave things together in our minds might be a pretty messy tangle.
    - And the decisions we make about what to expose our children to when may be haphazard and inconsistent.
  - And our motives for what we tell them and what we don't are sometimes good but not always good.
    - But part of what I take from that is that our imperfect efforts to try to give our children and the children around us our best understanding of the world can and will be used by the Lord, despite the fact that we are often misguided and selfish.
  
- This is encouraging to me because it can be hard to figure out what to do to protect our children's innocence—we don't want to smother them and be over-protective and yet we also don't want to just let the world dictate what they should experience and what's best for them.
  - We can try to do our bit but be reassured by the fact that the Lord is working on doing this very carefully for each person.
  - He's leading each of us that is willing to follow him on a journey from the innocence of ignorance to the innocence of wisdom.
    - It was powerful to me to think about how each stage of life has a different form of innocence.
    - And there is a loss of that innocence that has to happen for them to advance to the next stage of life and it's sad to contemplate that loss.
    - But at the same time there also is an opportunity to gain more understanding and wisdom in the process.
      - First, think about the innocence of brand new baby.
      - Then compare that to the innocence of a four year old who can play games with you and chat your ear off.
        - Both are sweet and innocent but the innocence of the four year old is different and a bit wiser.
      - Then think about having conversations with a ten year old about how things work in the world and think about the innocence in all that they don't know and don't understand about how things work.
      - Then think about the idealism and principles of a seventeen year old who believes that they would never in a million years go against their principle.
      - Then think about a 21 year old.
      - Or a 32 year old.
      - A 55 year old.
      - You get the idea.
      - In each age people who are older would look back on that phase and see something innocent there.

## Conclusion

- In the following weeks we're going to talk about Moses as he grows up and what his story can teach us about what goes on for us as we grow up.
  - Moses eventually leads his people out of slavery in Egypt to Mt. Sinai where he brings down the Ten Commandments to them and ultimately he leads them on to the promised land.
  - But he never would have been able to do all of those things if he hadn't been carefully protected during the first few years of his life and all along the way.
  - So, today and in this coming week, I encourage you to reflect on the value and purpose of the different stages of life—the stages of your own life and the stages of life of the people around you.
  - I would particularly encourage you to reflect on the value of childhood with its opportunities and dangers and how the Lord works to preserve our innocence through all the stages of our lives.
- *Amen.*