

**Notes for Children's Talk & Sermon Outline for  
Sunday, 21 February 2021**

# Children's Talk: The Lord Kept His Promise And Taught Us More About Life After Death

- When the Lord was on earth He taught people a lot of new things.
  - He taught people how to understand confusing things from the Old Testament.
  - He taught people about love and forgiveness and how to keep the 10 Commandments.
    - Lots of things.
- But He wasn't able to to teach people everything that He wanted people to know.
- At one point the Lord said this to His disciples:
  - John 16:12-13 (Kempton Project Translation, modified)
    - <sup>12</sup> "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup> However, when it shall come, the spirit of Truth, it will guide you into all truth; for it shall not speak from itself, but whatever it shall hear, it shall speak; and it shall tell you things to come."
  - And a little bit later on, in the same conversation, He said,
    - John 16:25 (Kempton Project Translation, modified)
      - <sup>25</sup> "These things I have spoken to you in parables; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in parables, but I will tell you openly about the Father."
- The Lord couldn't tell people all of the things He wanted to tell them.
  - But He promised that He would tell them at some point in the future.
- One thing that people didn't know much about from the Bible was what happens to people after death.
  - There is a little bit of information.
  - And the most important ideas are there:
    - There is life after death.
    - People who are good go to heaven.
    - People who are evil go to hell.
  - But there are a whole lot of details that are not explained.
    - Wouldn't the Lord want us to know what life after death is like?
    - And so, when the time was right, the Lord kept His promise.
      - He taught people the "many things" that He still wanted to say to us.
      - He spoke to people plainly about lots of different subjects, rather than just telling them in parables.
      - He did this through a man named Emanuel Swedenborg.
- Emanuel Swedenborg lived in the 1700s and he was allowed to see into heaven and hell and the place in-between called the world of spirits.
  - And he wrote down the things that he saw in books and all of the things that the Lord told him to write down so that, from then on, people could have a clearer understanding of lots of things that the Lord hadn't explained to people before.

- Swedenborg wrote about how things work in the spiritual world but he also told a lot of stories about things that he saw there.
  - We can learn a lot from these stories.
- I want to read you one short story of something that Swedenborg experienced in the spiritual world.
  - *Secrets of Heaven* §447
    - One new spirit who was talking with me heard that I was speaking about the spirit, and he asked, “What is a spirit?” He thought that he was still living on earth. “Everyone has a spirit inside,” I said. “The living part of us is a spirit, and the body only serves to makes it possible for us to live on earth. The body—the flesh and bones—has never possessed life or engaged in thought.”
    - He looked doubtful, so I asked, “Have you ever heard of the soul?”
    - “What is the soul?” he said. “I don’t know what the soul is.”
    - “You yourself are now a soul or spirit,” I was allowed to say. “You can tell, because you’re above my head, not standing on the ground. Don’t you realize that?”
    - He fled in terror shouting, “I’m a spirit! I’m a spirit!”
- This story is sort of funny and sort of sad.
- But we can learn some useful things from it.
  - One is that after death things will seem very familiar to us so that we might not even realise at first that we have died.
    - That’s a nice thing to know.
  - Another thing we can learn from this is kind of the opposite—that things are definitely going to be different there than here, because they’re following the laws of the spiritual world instead of the natural world.
- There’s lots more that we could talk about but for today I mostly want to focus on feeling grateful for all the new things that the Lord has taught us in the teachings of the New Church and especially for what He has taught us about life after death.
- *Amen.*

# What Do People Do After Death? Stories from the World of Spirits

A Sermon by Pastor Malcolm G. Smith  
21 February 2021

## Intro

- We're going to try something different with this sermon.
  - A big chunk of it is going to be a story.
  - That's not that strange for a sermon except that the story we're going to focus on today is not a Bible story but instead is a story of one person's experience in the spiritual world.
- You may or may not know that the teachings of the New Church contain many stories of things that happened in the spiritual world.
  - Older translations called them "memorable relations"; more recent translations have called them "memorable occurrences" or "narrative accounts".
  - Whatever you call them we haven't tended to focus on them in church in the last few years.
  - But they play a significant role in the teachings of the New Church.
    - One estimate is that more than a quarter of the last book that Swedenborg published, *True Christianity*, is these stories of things that happened in the spiritual world ("Memorable Relations" Rev. Erik Sandstrom. *New Church Life*, 1964. p.399).
- So it seemed like a good idea to spend a bit of time talking about these stories—their purpose and importance in the teachings of the New Church.
- And I also just wanted you to get the chance to hear some of them.
  - We talked two weeks ago about what people do after death.
  - But it focussed mostly on the structure of the afterlife and the succession of states that we go through.
    - This week and next week we want to flesh these ideas out with stories— anecdotes, case studies, illustrative examples.
- Today, we'll talk first about why these stories are included in the teachings of the New Church and then we'll read one of them at some length.

## The Purpose and Importance of Spiritual Experiences

- Why are these stories included in the teachings of the New Church?
  - Some people wish that they weren't.
  - Right now, some of you listening might be a little bit uncomfortable that I'm talking directly about the Swedenborg stuff and the fact that he says he saw things in the spiritual world.
    - It's a little weird.
    - It's stuff that you can't really prove to be true.
    - It's stuff that people might say Swedenborg just made up out of his imagination.
- Swedenborg knew that some people would think that.
  - At the beginning of the book *Married Love*, which contains lots of stories of his experiences in the spiritual world, he writes this:

- *Married Love* §1

- I anticipate that many who read the following... accounts... will believe they are figments of my imagination. I swear in truth, however, that they are not inventions, but actual occurrences to which I was witness. Nor were they witnessed in any condition of unconsciousness but in a state of full wakefulness. For it has pleased the Lord to manifest Himself to me and send me to teach the doctrines that will be doctrines of the New Church, the church meant by the New Jerusalem in the book of Revelation. To this end He has opened the inner faculties of my mind and spirit. As a result, it has been made possible for me to be in the spiritual world with angels and at the same time in the natural world with men, and this now for twenty-five years.

- He knows people might think that they're made up and yet he doubles down on it and still includes them.
- We know from letters between Swedenborg and some of his acquaintances that Swedenborg knew that people might think that he was lying or might ridicule him for them but that he included them anyway because he said that he had been ordered to by the Lord ("Why Should I Read the Memorable Relations?" Rev. Derek Elphick *New Church Life*, 1999. p.244; see also *Apocalypse Revealed* §962).
- So we know that these stories are meant to be there and that the Lord wanted them as part of the revelation for the New Church.
  - Why?
    - We can find part of the answer in a passage from *Married Love* where Swedenborg is explaining that people live as people after death, males are still males, females are still females, people still have a love for the opposite sex and married love.
    - And then he says this:
      - *Married Love* §39
        - ...these points I have so far endeavoured to establish by the sort of arguments that appeal to the intellect and are called rational. But from early childhood people have acquired the belief... that a person will not live as a person after death until after the day of the Last Judgment.... Because of this, and because many people have placed this question among matters to be accepted on faith and not with the understanding, it has become necessary that these same points be attested also by the affidavits of an eyewitness.
    - He's saying that rational arguments aren't going to be enough to convince people.
      - They need eyewitness accounts.
- And you can find a variety of eyewitness accounts of life after death.
  - Various books have been written by people about their experiences—some of them probably written by people just trying to make money; some of them probably genuine.
  - It's interesting that many of them seem to be in line with what Swedenborg describes of the spiritual world.

- And it makes sense that we want eyewitness accounts about the spiritual world because we want them about other places that we might go.
  - If you were going to take a trip to Mongolia you wouldn't just want to know about its history and its political structure and GDP and the demographics of its population; you would want to talk to someone who'd been there or you'd want to read some travel guide written by someone about what it was like for them to go there.
  - You would want to see pictures.
    - The stories that Swedenborg tells don't include actual pictures but they do sometimes include vivid descriptions and so they have been compared to "illustrations in a book" ("Memorable Relations" Rev. Erik Sandstrom. *New Church Life*, 1964. p.401).
    - One person wrote,
      - "Skipping over the narrative accounts would be like picking up a coffee-table book and reading the text but ignoring all the large, glossy photos" ("Why Should I Read the Memorable Relations?" Rev. Derek Elphick *New Church Life*, 1999. p.249).
- You might like the stories.
- You might find they make you uncomfortable.
- You might not be sure what to do with them or whether to believe them or not.
- If you want to read more analysis of them, I've put together a collection of articles about them on the church website ([newchurch.co.za/memorable](http://newchurch.co.za/memorable)).
- You might just need to read some more of them to figure out what you think about them.
  - I'm going to read a slightly abridged version of one of these stories and you can think about what a story like this does for you.
- The story for today is about a person who had recently died and so arrived in the world of spirits.
  - Next week Joel will read you some stories from heaven and from hell.
- You'll see confirmation of some of the things we talked about two weeks ago—like that the world of spirits is a place with influences from heaven and hell.
- Like that people make their way through the world of spirits, associating with different groups and gradually finding people who are like themselves.
- So this eyewitness account will confirm some of those ideas.
  - But I find that it also gives me a very different impression than I would get from just the structural explanation of how things work.
  - For example, we talked two weeks ago about how there are three states that people go through on their way to heaven or hell.
    - We can see evidence of those three states in this person's story but they're not as distinct as I would have thought.
    - The person moves from one to the next in a much more natural and organic way.
- Anyway, enough preamble, let's get reading.

## **A Story of a Spirit Who Had Recently Arrived in the World of Spirits (*True Christianity* §570; *Married Love* §461)**

On one occasion I had a conversation with a recently arrived spirit. While in the world, he had meditated a great deal on heaven and hell. ....

As soon as he came into the spiritual world he resumed meditating on heaven and hell. When he thought about heaven he felt happy; when he thought about hell he felt sad.

When he realized that he was actually in the spiritual world, he immediately asked, "Where is heaven and where is hell? What is heaven, what is hell, and how are they experienced?"

"Heaven is above your head," [the spirits] replied, "and hell is under your feet. You are now in the world of spirits, which is midway between heaven and hell. What heaven is, what hell is, and how they are experienced, however, is not something we can describe in a few words."

Because he had a burning desire to know, he threw himself to his knees and prayed devoutly to God to be taught.

An angel immediately appeared at his right hand. The angel lifted him up and said, "You have prayed to be taught about heaven and hell. *Investigate and find out what delight is, and you will know.*" Upon saying this, the angel was raised up out of sight.

The recently arrived spirit then said to himself, "What is this? 'Investigate and find out what delight is, and you will know what heaven is, what hell is, and how they are experienced'?"

Soon he left there and traveled around. When he encountered people he asked them, "Tell me, if you would, please, what delight is."

Some said, "What kind of question is that? Who doesn't know what delight is? It is joy and happiness. Delight is delight...."

Others said, "Delight is the laughter of the mind. When our mind is laughing, our face is cheerful, our speech is full of jokes, our gestures are playful, and our whole self embodies delight."

Others said, "I'll tell you what delight is! It is dining and eating delicacies, drinking and getting drunk on vintage wine, and then chatting about various topics, especially [love and sex]"

Annoyed at this the new spirit said to himself, "These answers are crude and unsophisticated. The delights these spirits mentioned are not heaven and are not hell either. I wish I could meet some people with wisdom."

He left the people he was with and asked around to learn where he might find people with wisdom.

An angelic spirit noticed him and said, "I can sense your burning desire to know what the universal attribute of heaven is and what the universal attribute of hell is. Since the answer is

*delight*, I will take you up onto the hill. There is a meeting every day there between spirits who conduct research on results, spirits who survey means, and spirits who investigate purposes. The spirits who conduct research on results are called spirits of the academic disciplines, or abstractly, Knowledges. The spirits who survey means are called spirits of intelligence, or abstractly, Intelligences. The spirits who investigate purposes are called spirits of wisdom, or abstractly, Wisdoms. Directly above them in heaven there are angels who see means in terms of the purposes behind them, and see results in terms of the means that lead to them. From these angels the three groups receive their enlightenment.”

The angelic spirit then took the newly arrived spirit by the hand and led him up the hill to the group of spirits who investigate purposes; they are called Wisdoms.

“Forgive me,” the newly arrived spirit said to them, “for coming up to join you. .... An angel appeared beside me and said, ‘Investigate and find out what delight is and you will know [what heaven is, what hell is, and how they are experienced]’ I did investigate, but have learned nothing. I ask you then, if you would, please, to teach me what delight is.”

“To all individuals in heaven,” the Wisdoms replied, “delight is the most important thing in their lives; and to all individuals in hell, delight is the most important thing in their lives. Those in heaven take delight in what is good and what is true. Those in hell take delight in what is evil and what is false. Delight is always related to love, and love is the underlying reality of our lives. How human we are depends on what kind of love we have. Therefore how human we are also depends on what kind of delight we feel. When our love is active, it causes us to feel delight. A heavenly love becomes active with the help of wisdom; a hellish love becomes active with the help of insanity. In either case the activity causes the person to experience delight. The heavens and the hells have delights that are opposite to each other, however. The heavens love what is good and therefore take delight in benefiting others. The hells love what is evil and therefore take delight in harming others. If you know what delight is, you will indeed know what heaven is, what hell is, and how they are experienced. But investigate and find out more about delight from the spirits who survey means; they are called Intelligences. As you go out, they are on your right.”

So he left there and came to the next group. He stated the reason he had come and asked them to teach him what delight is. They greatly enjoyed being asked, and said, “.... [E]verything that happens in the soul and mind of angels, spirits, and human beings is set in motion by the Lord through an inflow that comes from Him—an inflow of love and wisdom. This inflow is the movement that causes the whole experience of delight, which at its point of origin is called blessedness, good fortune, and happiness; and in its derivation is called delightful, pleasant, and pleasurable. In a universal sense it is what is known as *good*. The spirits of hell, however, turn all things upside down within themselves. They turn what is good into what is evil and what is true into what is false. The only thing they retain is the sense of delight, because if delight did not continue, they would have no will and no sensation, and therefore no life. This should clarify the nature, experience, and origin of the delight felt in hell, and the nature, experience, and origin of the delight felt in heaven.”

Upon hearing that, the newly arrived spirit was brought to the third group, the spirits who conduct research on results; they are called Knowledges. They said, “Go down into the lower

earth and go up into the higher realm. In them you will perceive and sense the delights of heaven and of hell.”

At that point, however, the ground suddenly yawned wide at some distance from them. Up through the chasm came three devils, who were visibly lit up by the delight that comes from what they love. The angels who were accompanying the newly arrived spirit perceived that it was not by coincidence that the three devils had come up just then. The angels called out to the devils, “Don’t come any closer, but from where you are, tell us something about what delights you.”

“It is important to know,” they replied, “that all people, whether labeled good or evil, have their own delight. The so-called good people have theirs and the so-called evil people have theirs.”

“What do you take delight in?” the angels asked.

“What is delightful to us,” they replied, “is whoring, taking revenge, cheating, and speaking blasphemy.”

“What are those delights like for you, exactly?” the angels asked.

The devils replied that their delights were sensed by others as resembling the stench of excrement, the reek of dead bodies, and the smell of stagnant urine.

“Are those things actually delightful to you?” the angels asked.

“Most delightful,” the devils replied.

“Then you are like the filthy little creatures that live in those substances,” said the angels.

“If we are, we are,” the devils said, “but those things give our noses intense pleasure.”

“Do you have anything further to add?” the angels asked.

“Yes,” they replied. “Everyone is allowed to have their own delight, even if it is of the ‘most unclean’ kind, as others call it, provided they do not attack good spirits and angels; but because our delight makes it absolutely impossible to resist attacking them, we are thrown into workhouses where we suffer many hard things. Being restrained and withdrawn from our delights causes the so-called torment of hell, which is profound inner pain.”

“Why do you attack people who are good?” the angels asked.

“We can’t help it,” the devils said. “A kind of rage comes over us every time we see any angel and sense the Lord’s divine sphere around that angel.”

“Then you are also like animals,” we said.

Soon afterward, when they noticed the newly arrived spirit with the angels, a diabolical rage came over them, which looked like a burning fire of hate. Therefore to prevent their doing any harm, they were thrown back into hell.

After that, other angels appeared in a shining white light. They were... the angels in the heaven directly above the three groups. That shining light rolled downward through spiralling turns, carrying a ring of flowers and placing it gently on the head of the newly arrived spirit. Then a voice came to him from above: "This wreath of honour is given to you because you have meditated on heaven and hell since you were young."

## Conclusion

- I hope that this one person's experience in the world of spirits was fun for you to hear.
- It's just one person's experience and there are countless other people who have all had their own experiences.
- And I hope that it helps you imagine what your loved ones who have passed away may have experienced or may currently be experiencing in the world of spirits at the moment.
- And I hope it's useful for imagining what you might experience there one day.
  
- We're going to end with Psalm 84 which beautifully expresses the longing to be with the Lord in heaven one day.
- Psalm 84:1-5, 10-12 (NKJV)
  - 1 How lovely is Your tabernacle,  
O Lord of hosts!
  - 2 My soul longs, yes, even faints  
For the courts of the LORD;  
My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.
  - 3 Even the sparrow has found a home,  
And the swallow a nest for herself,  
Where she may lay her young—  
Even Your altars, O LORD of hosts,  
My King and my God.
  - 4 Blessed are those who dwell in Your house;  
They will still be praising You. *Selah*
  - 5 Blessed is the man whose strength is in You,  
Whose heart is set on pilgrimage.  
....
  - 10 For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand.  
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God  
Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.
  - 11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield;  
The LORD will give grace and glory;  
No good thing will He withhold  
From those who walk uprightly.
  - 12 O LORD of hosts,  
Blessed is the man who trusts in You!
- Amen.