

**Notes for Children's Talk & Sermon Outline for  
Sunday, 12 September 2021**

## Children's Talk: Thank the Lord for Rain

- If I offered you a cup of water to drink, you probably wouldn't find it very interesting.
  - Maybe you'd rather have some juice or hot chocolate or cool drink.
    - But those other drinks would be undrinkable if they didn't have water in them.
  - And so today we're going to spend some time thinking about just how important water is.
  
- One way to get a feel for how important water is is to imagine a world without water.
  - There would be no streams, no lakes, no oceans.
  - Everywhere things would be deserts with nothing green living.
  - No clouds in the sky.
  - No rain.
  - No water in the taps.
  
- Also think about how much your body needs water.
  - We know that we get thirsty pretty often.
  - But without water we also wouldn't be able to eat.
  - And our blood wouldn't be able to flow.
  - And our eyes wouldn't work.
  - We have to have water.
  
- Where do you get water from?
  - We're lucky enough to be able to have water that comes out of taps in our houses.
    - There are lots of people who have to spend time every day going to a well or a river to collect and carry the water that they need.
    - For us to have water in our pipes, a lot of work had to happen.
      - Pipes, reservoirs, places to clean the water, *etc.*
  - But all those systems only work if we have ways of getting the water into the places we need it to be so that it can go into our reservoirs and pipes.
    - How does the water get to where we need it?
  
- Let's say you use a bit of water to brush your teeth.
  - That then goes down the drain in your sink.
  - And through pipes eventually into streams and from those streams eventually into rivers.
  - Let's imagine that to get the water back to use it again we had to go down to the Umgeni river in Durban and suck that water into tanker trucks and then drive those trucks up to Midmar Dam and dump the water in there.
  - That would be soooo much work!
  
- How does the Lord get the water back to where it's useful for us?
  - Using evaporation.
  - He uses the heat from the sun to turn that water into water vapour which then blows with the wind inland.
  - And then that moisture eventually forms into clouds and it rains down in the mountains and ends up in the places where we need it again.
  - And one big cloud can hold tons of water.

- When the Children of Israel were slaves in Egypt they had to get all the water they needed by using machines to lift it out of the river, by digging canals, and carrying the water from the Nile river to wherever they needed it.
- And so when they left Egypt and they were about to go into the land of Canaan, Moses told them how it was going to be different.
  - Deuteronomy 11:10-14 (NKJV)
    - <sup>10</sup> For the land which you go to possess is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come, where you sowed your seed and watered it by foot, as a vegetable garden; <sup>11</sup> but the land which you cross over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water from the rain of heaven, <sup>12</sup> a land for which the LORD your God cares; the eyes of the LORD your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year.”
    - <sup>13</sup> “And it shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the LORD your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, <sup>14</sup> then I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil.”
- The teachings of the New Church say that water is a symbol of truth or the Lord’s Word.
  - True ideas about who the Lord is; true ideas about how we should treat other people; true ideas about what’s going to make us happy in the long run; true ideas about what life is like after we die.
  - We are so lucky to have easy access to the Lord’s Word.
    - Whenever we want to, we can pick up the Bible and read it with very little effort.
    - There are lots of people who don’t have as easy access to that truth as we do.
- Every time you have a cup of clean water to drink or every time there’s a rainstorm you can try to remember to be grateful to the Lord for giving us water.
  - And to be grateful to Him for giving us truth to live by.
- *Amen.*

# Strands Through Scripture, Part 2: Precipitation

A Sermon by Pastor Malcolm G. Smith  
12 September 2021

## Intro

- One way that people like to critique the Bible is by saying something along these lines:
  - “People think that the Bible is one book but it’s actually a collection of a bunch of different texts from a bunch of different times. What was included and what was left out is just the result of fallible human beings and politics.”
- And it’s true that the literal text of the Bible is made up of many different pieces.
  - The earliest texts included in the Bible were written thousands of years before the most recent texts.
  - The texts included in the Bible are written in different languages, by different people, in vastly different times.
  - But there is still something that holds it all together.
- You probably remember that Jesus was called “the Word made flesh”.
  - And the teachings of the New Church say that every detail of what was done to *Jesus* was a representation of what people had done and continue to do to *the Word*.
  - Here’s one of the things that was done to Jesus, as recorded in the Gospel of John:
    - John 19:23-24 (NKJV)
      - <sup>23</sup> Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. <sup>24</sup> They said therefore among themselves, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be,” ....
- The teachings of the New Church explain that the outer garment that Jesus wore being torn into pieces was symbolic of how people can tear the literal sense of the Word into pieces.
  - But the inner tunic that Jesus wore was “without seam, woven from the top in one piece” and the fact that it was not torn into pieces symbolises that the internal meaning of the Word cannot be torn into pieces, it’s a seamless garment, woven in one piece (*Secrets of Heaven* §9093:5).
  - One of the ways that we can see this reality is if we take a single strand and trace it through the Bible from beginning to end and see how a given image or theme—although it is used in texts in different languages and from different times and although it goes through many different stories and contexts—it still has a singular and consistent internal meaning throughout.
    - Last week Joel traced the strands of the themes of sleep and wakefulness.
    - This week I was going to trace the strand of weather.
      - But then that was way too much to talk about.
      - So instead we’re going to mostly talk about rain and dew.
- And to keep things fun, I’m not going to tell you upfront what the teachings of the New Church say that these things symbolise in the internal meaning.
  - I’d rather have you get a feel for how this imagery shows up in the Bible first.
- I will give you one hint, though.

- The teachings of the New Church say that almost every image, symbol, or word in the Bible can have a positive or genuine meaning in certain contexts and a negative or opposite meaning in other contexts (*Secrets of Heaven* §§1066, 1834, 4750:2).
  - This is definitely the case with imagery involving rain in the Bible—sometimes rain is life-giving (like when rain comes after a long drought), and other times rain is deadly (like when rain causes a flood).
    - As you're trying to figure out what the symbolism of rain might be, you don't have to try to make it all positive.
      - Sometimes rain will symbolise something positive; other times it will symbolise the exact opposite of that positive thing.

## **Water and Rain in Genesis**

### ***The Creation Story***

- Let's start our tracing of these strands at the beginning of the Bible, in the first chapter of the book of Genesis.
  - Do you know the first time that water is mentioned in the Bible?
    - It's in verse 2, in the introduction to the story of the seven days of creation.
- By the way, the New Church understanding of these early stories in the Bible is that they are very old stories that contain deep and very important truths but they were never intended to be read as literal descriptions of the physical creation of the world.
- Anyway, did you know that, in the creation story, there is water even before anything is created?
- Here's Genesis 1:1-2 (NKJV, modified)
  - <sup>1</sup> In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup> The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was brooding over the face of the waters.
- Did you catch that? Before creation happens, the Spirit of God is brooding over some waters, like a hen brooding over her chicks.
- Then light is created on day one.
- And then on day two, this happens:
  - Genesis 1:6-8 (NKJV)
    - <sup>6</sup> Then God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters." <sup>7</sup> Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. <sup>8</sup> And God called the firmament Heaven.
- Those waters from the beginning have now been divided into waters above the dome of the sky and waters below the dome of the sky.

## ***Mist and Rivers***

- Then we go through the rest of the days of creation and God rests on the seventh day and then we get the beginning of the story of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden, which is sometimes called the second creation story.
- It begins like this:
  - Genesis 2:4-6 (NKJV)
    - <sup>4</sup> This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that Jehovah God made the earth and the heavens, <sup>5</sup> before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown. For Jehovah God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; <sup>6</sup> but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground.
    - There's no rain yet but instead there's a mist that waters all the ground.
  - And once the Garden of Eden is planted, the story talks about the water source for the garden.
    - Genesis 2:10 (NKJV)
      - <sup>10</sup> Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four riverheads.
    - Intriguingly, all the way at the end of the Bible, in the vision of the Holy City New Jerusalem, the water source is again a river—"a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Revelation 22:1)

## ***The Flood***

- After the Garden of Eden story, things go downhill pretty quickly.
  - Adam and Eve eat from the tree that they're not supposed to eat from and are banished from the Garden of Eden.
  - And their descendants get progressively worse and worse until we encounter our next mention of rain.
- Jehovah is telling Noah that it's going to rain for forty days and forty nights and destroy all living things (Genesis 7:4).
- It happens just as Jehovah said it would, and everyone and every thing that's not on the ark dies when the waters from above and waters from beneath come.
- This is not the only story where there is a destructive rain.
  - Some other examples include the story of Sodom and Gomorrah where fire and brimstone rain down from heaven (Genesis 19:24).
  - And, in one of the plagues on the Egyptians, Jehovah rains hail on the land of Egypt, along with thunder and fire (Exodus 9:23-24).
- The story of the flood is the last direct mention of rain in the book of Genesis.
  - Rain still plays a critical role in some of the stories but not by its presence so much as its absence.
  - There are a number of famines (which are presumably due to droughts or lack of rain).

- One of these famines is what brings Joseph's family down to Egypt to get grain.
- This leads to their family being reunited and eventually settling in the land of Egypt.
- And then they are enslaved and are finally let go after the final of the plagues.
- The next major mention of rain that I want to spend some time on comes when they have left Egypt and are in the wilderness.

## **Manna in the Wilderness**

- The people are moaning to Moses and Aaron about how hungry they are; they say, "you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (Exodus 16:3).
- And so Jehovah says this to Moses:
  - Exodus 16:4 (NKJV)
    - <sup>4</sup> .... "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not."
  - So it's a kind of rain that will feed them.
  - Let's read what happened when this promise was fulfilled.
    - Exodus 16:13-21 (NKJV, modified)
      - <sup>13</sup> [A]nd in the morning the dew lay all around the camp. <sup>14</sup> And when the layer of dew lifted, there, on the surface of the wilderness, was a small round substance, as fine as frost on the ground. <sup>15</sup> So when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was.
      - And Moses said to them, "This is the bread which Jehovah has given you to eat. <sup>16</sup> This is the thing which Jehovah has commanded: "Let every man gather it according to each one's need, one omer for each person, according to the number of persons; let every man take for those who are in his tent.' "
      - ....
      - <sup>21</sup> So they gathered it every morning, every man according to his need. And when the sun became hot, it melted.
- I want to talk about some of the details of this but I want to talk about it together with one other passage about rain from the Old Testament that will help us make sense of this passage and see the internal meaning of rain in scripture.

## **"As the rain comes down,... so shall My Word be...."**

- When you're looking for passages to help you understand the internal meaning of a passage, sometimes you find ones like this that just spell it out for you.
- This is from the book of Isaiah.
  - It's a bit longer but it's well worth it.
- Isaiah 55:8-11 (NKJV, modified)
  - <sup>8</sup> "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says Jehovah.
  - <sup>9</sup> "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways,

And My thoughts than your thoughts.

<sup>10</sup> “For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven,  
And do not return there,  
But water the earth,  
And make it bring forth and bud,  
That it may give seed to the sower  
And bread to the eater,

<sup>11</sup> So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;  
It shall not return to Me void,  
But it shall accomplish what I please,  
And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”

- The Lord said, “As the rain comes down.... [and] water[s] the earth.... So shall my Word be....”

- The rain is a symbol of the Lord’s Word.

- Now, if you’re familiar with the teachings of the New Church, you probably guessed that rain meant something about truth because you know that water is a symbol of truth and so rain must mean something about truth.

- That’s what I thought too.

- But the imagery of rain in the Bible is so much richer than just water = truth, rain = truth.

- Here’s what one passage says:

- *Secrets of Heaven* §8416

- “Raining” means a blessing [because]... as rain comes down from heaven or the sky and causes the land to be productive, so Divine Goodness and Truth come down from heaven to a person and cause them to be blessed....

## **Water With a Purpose**

- Rain in scripture is water with a purpose.

- As the Lord said in the passage from Isaiah, “My word be that goes forth from My mouth... shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please....”

- And what does the Lord want His word to accomplish?

- To “water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater....”

- It’s always connected to feeding people.

- The mist that went up to water the whole face of the ground before the Garden of Eden was planted was so that the fruit trees of the garden would be able to produce fruit for the people.

- And the purpose of the dew in the story of the manna was to give people bread from heaven.

- It’s the same with us: the Lord’s Word is meant to produce something good in us.

- It’s not just commandments and teachings and principles to be stored up in the JoJo tanks of our memories.

- That water is meant to be used to grow something new and useful and loving in us that will feed our spirits and feed other people’s spirits.

- In fact, when we receive the Lord’s Word just into our memories, then it doesn’t come down as rain, it comes down as snow.
  - The passage from Isaiah said, “For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven...”
  - When we receive the Lord’s Word just into our memories then it collects like big, cold drifts of snow.
    - *Apocalypse Explained* §644:13
      - “snow” means natural truth, which is like snow when it is in the memory only; but it is made spiritual by love, as snow is made into rain water by heat.
- Until the snow melts, it’s of no use to the plants that want to grow.
- But when the warmth of love for the Lord or love for our neighbour motivates us to use something that we know from the Lord’s Word to do something useful, then that snow melts and it becomes rain water.

## **Hail**

- While we’re on the topic of frozen precipitation, let’s also talk about hail.
- Snow is frozen precipitation but it lands gently—it comes fluttering lightly down and you can’t actually hear it land.
- Hail, on the other hand, you can hear.
  - It comes pelting down and, the bigger the hailstones get, the more damage and destruction they cause when they hit.
  - Hail forms when ice particles inside a cloud are blown particularly high up in the sky and more and more layers of ice form on the hailstone.
  - And then the hailstone comes crashing down to earth.
  - This seems to be a symbol of how we can take a teaching from the Lord’s Word and blow it way up high with our conceit and self-righteousness and then we bring it down to the level of application and we can be merciless in the way we apply “the cold, hard truth”.
    - Sometimes we do this in our judgments of ourselves and often we do it in our judgments of other people.
    - Part of how we can tell whether we’re dealing with spiritual rain or hail is by the effect.
      - Rain helps plants grow; hail destroys crops.
        - We need to think about which one is happening in a given situation.

## **The Symbolism of the Water Cycle**

- The way hail forms shows that the way we elevate truths and then bring them down to application can be done in a damaging way but, when the Lord does it, it’s beautiful.
- Let’s talk a bit about the symbolism of the water cycle.
- The waters are divided in us—we have a higher self and a lower self and we need the Lord’s teachings and love to help to know how to access that higher part of ourselves.
  - “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord.
  - The Lord’s thoughts and ways are like the clouds in the heavens to us—they may have tons of water in them but they are inaccessible to us.

- And so the Lord condenses those higher truths and makes them fall down to our level where we can understand them and use them on a daily basis.
  - *Apocalypse Explained* §273:4
    - “Waters in the heavens” [mean] spiritual truths; “rain” [means] these truths when they descend and become natural....
- But the cycle doesn’t end there; the Lord then elevates those natural truths again.
  - As we read in Jeremiah:
    - Jeremiah 10:13 and 51:16 (NKJV)
      - <sup>13</sup> When He utters His voice,  
There is a multitude of waters in the heavens:  
“And He causes the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth.  
He makes lightning for the rain,  
He brings the wind out of His treasures.”
- The vapours ascending symbolises how the Lord can take those truths of the literal sense of the Word and elevate them for us to show us the spirit and life that they contain (*Apocalypse Explained* §644:19).
  - What causes that elevation?
    - The application of heat from the sun.
    - The more we are open to the inflowing of the Lord’s love, the more we will be able to see the warmth and love in scripture and it will be lifted up towards heaven in our eyes.
    - The warmer the air is, the more evaporation takes places and the more moisture the air can hold.
  - And the cycle will begin again.
    - We try to let the Lord elevate our minds above our selfishness and our worldly concerns.
    - And then we try to bring those higher principles that we believe in down into how we live our daily lives.
    - And around and around the cycle we go, hopefully producing lots of good things to eat along the way.

## **Applications**

- Now, to wrap up I want to mention three ways you might be able to apply or use what we’ve been talking about.

### **1. Collect Manna**

- Go collect manna in the morning.
- It feels like doing good is a lot of hard work and it is—it takes tilling the ground, sowing seed, and weeding, and harvesting, and gathering.
- But goodness is also a free gift that the Lord offers us every day.
  - But we have to get up to go collect it.
  - The truth we need from the Lord doesn’t always come in a big dramatic rainstorm; sometimes it’s just there glistening on everything it touches, like the dew in the morning.

- If we wait till the heat of day to go look for it, it will have melted and disappeared and we won't find anything.
- But if we get up early enough and go out to look for it, we can find miraculous daily bread from the Lord waiting for us like the dew.
- We need to find quiet time in our day to go collect what the Lord has provided to help us get through that day.

## **2. Live the Truth and You Will Find Protection**

- A second application of these teachings is to live the truth because you will find protection in that way.
- I was talking to someone who studies the climate for their job and he was pointing out that a given amount of rain that falls can be seen as a great blessing or a horrendous flood, depending on what people have done.
  - If you have a big dry packed field with absolutely nothing planted on it, then you're going to have a flooding and a big erosion problem as soon as you get a heavy rain.
  - But, if you have a field with a good crop planted, with their roots dug down into the soil, then that rain will be able to be gratefully absorbed and used.
- Obviously the flood story in Genesis was a cataclysmic event but Noah and his family were able to ride it out because Noah did what God told him to.
- And in the Gospels Jesus tells a parable about two houses.
  - The rain descends, the floods come, and the winds blow and beat on both houses and one falls and one does not because one is built on sand whereas the other is founded on the rock.
  - And Jesus says that the house that withstands the storm is everyone who hears His sayings *and does them* (Matthew 7:24-27).
  - It is the application of truths from the Word that protects our minds against floods of falsities and the beating winds of swirling thoughts from hell.

## **3. Pay Attention to the Spiritual Weather**

- The last application of these teachings that I want to talk about is just to encourage you to try to pay attention to the spiritual weather you're experiencing.
- In the Gospels Jesus says this to the multitudes:
  - Luke 12:54-56 (NKJV)
    - <sup>54</sup> "Whenever you see a cloud rising out of the west, immediately you say, 'A shower is coming'; and so it is. <sup>55</sup> And when you see the south wind blow, you say, 'There will be hot weather'; and there is. <sup>56</sup> Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you do not discern this time?"
  - His point is that they know how to pay attention to the signs of what's happening in the natural world but they were not paying attention to the spiritual significance of what was happening at that moment.
    - God Himself was there with them and they didn't realise it.
- We also can be good paying attention to the signs of the natural world.
  - We might check the weather forecast each day, and we try to anticipate what the market conditions will be, and where the economy is going, and how things will develop politically.

- And that's all fine unless that's all that we pay attention to.
  - Unless we're paying attention to those things and not noticing that we're experiencing a spiritual famine or not noticing that our relationship with our spouse is wilting or our relationship with one of our children is getting pelted by hail.
- So look for the strands of spiritual weather in your life.
- And look for those strands running through the Bible and tying it together from beginning to end.
- And do the work of trying to live the Lord's Word and you will experience His blessings.
  - As it says in Deuteronomy,
    - Deuteronomy 28:1, 12 (NKJV, modified)
      - "Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of Jehovah your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today....
      - <sup>12</sup> Jehovah will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand."
- *Amen.*