

**Notes for Family Talk for
Sunday, 2 January 2022**

Where Are You Coming From and Where Are You Going?

A Family Talk by Pastor Malcolm G. Smith

2 January 2022

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Intro

- It's the second day of a new year, of 2022.
 - The beginning of a new year is a good time to think about what happened last year and to look forward to what we might do this year.
- Today, we're going to look at a story from the Word about a woman who was asked some questions by the Lord to help her think about what happened before and what would happen next.

A Worksheet

- I've made a worksheet for you—for the kids as well.
- If you can read and write, then you're old enough that it could be useful for you.
- If you get bored while I'm talking, you can write on it.
 - Or you can even draw pictures on it if you can't figure out the right words.
- There are questions from the story on the lefthand side and there's space on the righthand side to write down what the Lord might teach you about what you wrote.
 - You might not be able to think of anything but it can be useful to spend a bit of time thinking about it.
 - Maybe talk to your parents about it.

The Story

- The woman in this story is named Hagar and she was an Egyptian woman who was a servant or maid to a woman named Sarai who was married to a man named Abram.
 - (We know them better by the names they were given later on of Abraham and Sarah.)
- The person in charge of Hagar, her mistress, Sarai, had not been able to have a baby.
 - And that made Sarai very sad.
- And then one day, Hagar conceived.
 - That means that she was going to have a baby.
 - That was a very happy thing for her.
 - But the bad thing was that it says, "when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes" (Genesis 16:4).
 - Hagar despised Sarai.
 - That means that she looked down on her—that she thought of her as nothing in comparison with herself.
- Sarai realised this—she could tell how Hagar was thinking of her and so she punished her: it says, "Sarai disciplined her" (Genesis 16:6).
 - She deserved to get in trouble.
 - It's not OK to look down on other people and treat them as nothing.
 - But Hagar didn't like being punished and so she ran away out into the wilderness or desert.
 - And it says,

- ⁷ Now the Angel of Jehovah found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. ⁸ And He said, “Hagar, Sarai’s maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?” (Genesis 16:7-8)

Why the Lord Asks Us Questions

- Did you hear the questions that the Lord asked Hagar?
 - Where have you come from?
 - And where are you going?
- Do you think the Lord didn’t know the answer? (Of course not.)
 - The teachings of the New Church say that the Lord “knows not only what took place but also the causes and the ends, thus every least intimate detail” (*Secrets of Heaven* §1931).
 - The Lord knows way better than we do what we’re doing and why.
 - But, because *we think* that we need to tell the Lord for Him to know, He goes ahead and asks us these questions.
- And there’s another reason why the Lord asks people questions He already knows the answer to.
 - “An added reason is that people may be helped by being able to express their feelings which usually does them good” (*Secrets of Heaven* §2693).
 - The Lord might already know the answers to these questions but we might not, until we take the time to think about it and try to put into words what’s going inside us.
 - And doing that, usually does us some good.
- So now, let’s look at the questions the Lord asked Hagar and think about how we might answer them.

Where have you come from?

- There are a couple of different ways to read this question.
 - One way is simply to look backward in time.
 - Looking back over 2021 or even beyond that, where have you come from?
 - How are you different as a person now than you were before?
 - For some people it might seem like not much of a difference.
 - For other people it may have been a big year.
 - What does the Lord think about where you have come from?
- Hagar’s answer was, “I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai.”
 - She was trying to get away from something—something she didn’t want to deal with.
 - So this question might be for you, “What are you running away from or trying to get away from?”
- Another way to think of this question is about motivation: where are you coming from in your interactions with other people?
 - Are you coming from a selfish place or coming from a good place?
 - In Hagar’s case she was coming from a place of contempt—a place of looking down on other people.
 - And so the Lord, through His angel, told her what she needed to do—which she probably already knew.

- “The Angel of Jehovah said to her, ‘Return to your mistress, and discipline yourself under her hand’ (Genesis 16:9).
 - It’s interesting, the angel uses the same word that was used earlier to describe what Sarai did to Hagar.
 - Sometimes it’s translated deal harshly with or humble.
 - Sarai dealt harshly with or humbled Hagar.
 - And the angel says, “You need to go back there and deal harshly with *yourself*, or humble *yourself*, or discipline *yourself*, Hagar.”
- When you think about where you’re coming from do you need to go back and discipline yourself and tell yourself that certain things you’ve been doing are not OK?

Where are you going?

- The second question that the Lord asked Hagar through the angel was where are you going?
- And she didn’t really answer that one.
 - Her main focus was on getting away from where she was coming from.
 - I doubt that she had much of a plan of where she was going to go or what she was going to do.
- You might also find that you have more clarity about where you’re coming from but less clarity about where you’re going.
 - These last couple of years have made a lot of us feel like it’s hard to plan for the future when there’s so much that could happen that we don’t anticipate.
- It can be hard to not know where you’re going.
 - Feeling stuck or feeling lost—not knowing which way to turn.
 - This is what’s represented by being out in the wilderness or desert.
- Hagar ended up in the desert twice.
 - In this story when she ran away from Sarai when she was pregnant with her son Ishmael.
 - And then, over a decade later, she found herself in a similar but much worse situation.
 - Sarah had finally had a son—Isaac—and there was a big celebration when he was weaned.
 - But Hagar’s son, Ishmael, had the same problem with contempt for others that Hagar had and he was mocking and making fun of Isaac.
 - And so she and her son had to leave.
 - They ended up in the desert again and soon all the water was gone from the bottle that Abraham had given them.
- And then we get this description of this awful situation that she found herself in where she was convinced that she and her son were going to die and so she put her son under a bush and went far enough away from him that she wouldn’t have to watch him die.
- The teachings of the New Church explain that being in the desert lacking water is a picture of a state that we have to go through in our being reformed by the Lord.
 - It’s a time when we feel like we don’t know what we’re doing.
 - When we’re deprived of all the certainty that we maybe once had.
- The teachings of the New Church describe the good that the Lord can bring out of this.
- One passage says that
 - “[People] who are being reformed are brought into a state of not knowing any truth... to the degree that they experience grief and despair, and... at this point for the first time they receive comfort and help from the Lord....” (*Secrets of Heaven* §2694:2).

- It explains that the “primary reason” why they undergo these things is so that the selfish things that they’re really strongly convinced of “may crumble.”
- The passage gives a couple of examples. One of them is about people who believe that all their evils have been wiped away. Any number of arguments can’t convince them otherwise.
- “But,” the passage says, “when they are brought into a particular state in order that they may perceive hell within themselves, and perceiving this so clearly as to despair of the possibility of their own salvation, that firm persuasion is for the first time broken down and with it their conceit and their contempt for all others in comparison with themselves, and also their arrogant assumption that they are the only ones who are saved” (*Secrets of Heaven* §2694:4).
- Where are you going?
 - If you’re feeling like you just don’t know, there might be a value in that.
 - You might be more ready to take some direction from the Lord.

What’s the matter?

- In that second story about Hagar in the wilderness an angel of Jehovah again helps her.
 - “Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, ‘What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is’” (Genesis 21:17).
 - Did you notice that again he asked her a question?
 - “What ails you, Hagar?” or “What’s the matter, Hagar?” “What’s wrong?”
- This is also a good question to spend some time on with the Lord’s help.
 - “What’s the matter?”
 - Have you ever been feeling a bit off or a bit upset and then the right person says, “Hey, is something wrong?” and then suddenly you’re overcome with emotion or things that you have to say?
 - This is, in some ways, the most direct question.
 - “Where are you coming from” is largely about the past; “where are you going” is largely about the future; “what’s the matter” is about what you’re experiencing right now.
 - And one detail that I really love is that the angel comforts Hagar by saying, “Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is.”
 - The Lord hears us *where we are*.
 - Not where we *should* be or *could* be but where we are.
 - And He asks us, “What’s the matter?” to help us to gain some insight into where we are.

What Hagar Needed Was Right There

- And then the angel of the Lord helps Hagar to figure out what to do.
 - She was despairing—she thought that she and her son were going to die of thirst.
 - And then it says this,
 - “¹⁹ Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink. ²⁰ So God was with the lad; and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer.” (Genesis 21:19-20)

- With the Lord's help she was able to see that what she needed was actually right there.
 - What you need might also be right there but you might only see it if you let God open your eyes to it.
 - In the Bible stories a well as a source of life-giving water is a symbol of the Word as a source of life-giving truth.
 - Sometimes it's hard to see that there's water there.
 - That book on the shelf and the stories in it can seem largely irrelevant to what you're dealing with in your life.
 - But it's amazing how much more you can get out of it when you read it regularly and when you're looking for help with something.
- To get some insight on those questions will take some time thinking about them and maybe writing or journaling about them.
 - I took some time yesterday to do it myself and it took a while to get going.
 - At first I felt like I needed to write, "I don't know" as the answer to all of the questions.
 - But that was useful.
 - And then, what you're supposed to do next is think about what the Lord says in His Word about what you've written about where you're coming from, where you're going, and what's the matter.
 - Until I forced myself to do that, I didn't realise that I hadn't thought that way hardly at all.
 - I have lots of thoughts and feelings about this year but it had not even crossed my mind that the Lord might have some useful teachings in His Word about what I'm thinking and feeling.
- You might get some insight right away that you wouldn't have gotten if you hadn't taken the time to remember that the Lord might be able to teach you something relevant.
 - Or you might not get anything for a bit.
 - Sometimes we have to wrestle with things for months before we really gain perspective on them.
 - You might need to wander in the desert for a while before the water that you brought with you runs out.
 - But if you keep the questions in your mind and keep reflecting on them and maybe try reading the Word a bit each day, I think you'll eventually make some connections.
 - When you give God some time to open your eyes, He will help you see the well that's right there in front of you.

Conclusion

- Where have you come from?
- Where are you going?
- And what's the matter?
 - The Lord asked Hagar these questions, all those years ago.
 - And He asks you these questions today because He knows that you may be helped by having the chance to express your feelings.
 - And He asks you these questions because He loves you and wants to help you navigate whatever all happens in this new year.

- *Amen.*

Questions the Lord Asks Us

Where have I come from?

Where am I going?

What's the matter?

**What does the Lord say
about that in His Word?**