

Children's Talk and Sermon Notes  
for Sunday, 7 May

## Children's Talk: Going Up and Coming Down

**Genesis 28:10** Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. <sup>11</sup> So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. <sup>12</sup> Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

**Genesis 28:13** And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: "I *am* the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. <sup>14</sup> Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. <sup>15</sup> Behold, I *am* with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."

**Genesis 28:16** Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know *it*." <sup>17</sup> And he was afraid and said, "How awesome *is* this place! This *is* none other than the house of God, and this *is* the gate of heaven!" (Genesis 28:10-17)

# As in Heaven

A sermon by Pastor Joel Christian Glenn  
7 May, 2023

## **Part 1: As in Heaven**

“Thy will be done, as in Heaven, so upon the Earth.” We have all probably said these words thousands of times. Every time we say the Lord’s prayer we express this wish, this hope, almost this command, that just as His will is done in heaven, it ought also to be done on Earth. But to be part of bringing this about we have to understand heaven; if we don’t understand heaven, then we will not be able to make heaven upon the Earth.

This pattern of raising our minds up from earthly things, to explore heavenly things, so that we can in turn apply those heavenly things to life on Earth is illustrated in the story that we read in the children’s talk: Jacob saw a ladder established on the Earth, with angels ascending up to God at the top, and then descending back down to Earth. Likewise we will raise our minds to spiritual things, and then descend back to Earth; without that descent it might seem pointless to explore heaven; but by the time we end the sermon I hope you will have seen how understanding heaven has great meaning for your day-to-day life in the here and now.

## **Part 2: Ascending into Heaven.**

The teachings of the New Church have a lot to say about the afterlife. For one thing it is a place much like Earth, just far more perfect, in which people go about their daily lives. I’ll share just one passage that drives home the point. It is a description told by spirits newly arrived in the other world, based on what they learned from the Teachings of the New Church:

After death we live on as human beings, just as we had lived in the physical world before. As we used to in the world, we see, hear, and speak. As we used to in the world, we wear clothes and accessories. As we used to in the world, we feel hunger and thirst and we eat and drink. As we used to in the world, we enjoy making love to our spouse. As we used to in the world, we go to sleep and wake up.

In the spiritual world there are landmasses and bodies of water, mountains and hills, plains and valleys, springs and streams, gardens and woods. Just as in the physical world, there are also mansions and homes there, and cities and villages. There are also written documents and books; jobs and businesses; precious stones, gold, and silver.

To put it briefly, every single thing that exists on earth exists in an infinitely more perfect form in the heavens. The only difference between the two is that everything in the spiritual world is spiritual because it has a spiritual origin. It all comes from the sun of that world, which is pure love. (*True Christian Religion* §693)

If you've grown up in the New Church then this picture of heaven as a very tangible, active, real place probably sounds familiar; yet it is actually astonishing compared to the ideas that came before. The official doctrine of many churches of the day, and even now, was that people essentially went to sleep, or were disembodied spirits flitting around in some nowhere space, or were mere sensations basking in God's outpouring love. The idea that heaven is anything more than harps and clouds is revolutionary.

This truth is a powerful one, especially when we think of loved ones who have passed on; although in one sense they have been separated from us, their lives carry on, only more fully and completely than before. They have not lost their personality or quirks that you loved; they are not less themselves; in fact, they are more themselves, their best selves, than ever before! Nor are their lives dreary and uninteresting, but active and lively, filled with compelling pursuits, happy times in community, and work that fulfills their spirits.

I just want to put before you some images that highlight the life of heaven. Now obviously these are pictures of people on earth and so they cannot possibly capture what life in heaven looks like; but fundamentally life in heaven is just like

these pictures show, only more, well, heavenly! It is real, a place that we go after death, to spend a lifetime with people we love, and with the Lord.

### **Part 3: The Lord's Will**

But that does not yet get to the heart of what makes heaven, heaven. What is at the heart and soul of heaven, what is the pinnacle that we ascend to so that we can descend back to earth with something new? At the top of the ladder was the Lord; and so too with heaven, the Lord is at the centre, making heaven be heavenly. The beautiful scenes and activities of heaven are not random, but a gift from the Lord that perfectly reflects the hearts and minds of the angels. What makes heaven is not the (apparently) physical surroundings, but the goodness and truth that an angel willingly accepts from the Lord:

...heaven is not outside of the angel, but is within him, since the interior things which belong to his mind are arranged into the form of heaven, thus for the reception of all things of heaven that are outside of him. These also he receives according to the quality of the good that is in him from the Lord.  
(*Heaven and Hell* §53)

Heaven is not actually a place after all; its reality is a perfect reflection of each individual angels heart and mind, as well as that of the community.

Take for example a beautiful scene of mountain wonder that lifts the heart and inspires awe: the angel who sees it will see that sight because from within, their heart is lifted up and inspired by the Lord's Divine love, and so he sees a reflection of that love in the awe-inspiring mountain. Or the angel sharing a feast with friends in a beautiful garden, i.e. having a braai, one of those braais that leaves you content and happy with life: it is not the food, or the flowers of the garden, or even the physical presence of friends, that brings about his good feelings. Rather his openness to community, to sharing goodness with others, to conversing about the things of life

that matter, these things, residing in his heart and mind, lead directly to the braai and the gardens and the presence of friends. The same is true of everything else that takes place in heaven. It is all a reflection of the goodness and the truth that a person takes in, from the Lord, into his heart and mind.

#### **Part 4: Descending to Earth**

So to emulate heaven, it would not, at least at first, mean changing our surroundings to places of beauty. It would mean changing our hearts and minds to embody that beauty first within ourselves. This is how we bring heaven onto earth. Nor is this simply an analogy or comparison: heaven literally is present within us. Jesus explained that those who looked for heaven outside of themselves would be disappointed:

Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, "See here!" or "See there!" For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21)

Within each of us is where we will find the Lord's Kingdom, and so it is from within that we can make heaven on earth a reality.

The heavenly mind set is one that looks to the Lord, prioritizes other people, and searches for opportunities to be useful. For as long as we are here on Earth we cannot be consciously adopting this mind set 24/7. As we talked about with the children at the very beginning, we ascend at times, and then descend back into our daily lives. But even though we are not always developing a heavenly mind set, we can take something of it down into even the parts of our lives where it seems totally absent. As Jacob said when he awoke from his dream, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." Even when outwardly things appear hellish, heaven is also present; and it is present within us, even if not yet outside of us.

So when faced with what feels like hell, or even what just feels mundane and empty of any significance, we can still first acknowledge that something of heaven is already present. That heavenly thing will be within us, and will have to do with looking to the Lord, prioritizing other people, and trying to be useful. We can raise our minds to find those qualities, and then bring them down into the situation at hand. When all you can focus on is your worldly, mundane desires, there is wisdom and insight from the Lord within you. When you are furious with someone, there is forgiveness from the Lord within you. When you are apathetic to everyone else's needs, there is the ability to serve from the Lord within you.

When we take these heavenly qualities from the Lord into our lives, His will is done, as in heaven, so upon the Earth; and the Earth comes to reflect the beauty of heaven. It is a beauty that is not seen in the landscape or the buildings, it is a beauty that surpasses even the most amazing sunset or the most breath-taking gardens; it is the beauty of love from the Lord, shared with all, and felt as a living, breathing, almost tangible reality; a love that is more real even than the rocks and the rives, more real than the earthly things that we hear and see and feel on a daily basis.

### **Part 5: Heaven and Earth Unite**

We earlier talked about how in heaven, everything that they see and hear and feel is based on their inner loves and thoughts; and as they are angels, their surroundings reflect the beauty of the Lord's love. We've also talked about how, in spite of what our surroundings may be physically, we have, or can have, heaven within us, and so in our minds and hearts be surrounded by heavenly beauty beyond any earthly beauty, regardless of the situation.

In this, we and those who have passed on are united: when heaven is living within us, the angels are present with us, and we with them. The feelings of love, the insights of wisdom, the useful activities, all of them are shared between us. For us much as we are separated by death, we are united in something greater: the life of heaven, that lasts to eternity, and extends to infinity, and binds us together as one heavenly family.