

Counting His Blessings

A Sermon by Rev Donald L. Rose

"How precious are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand" (Psalm 139:17).

The Word speaks to us about counting. In promising blessings to Abram the Lord said, "Look now toward heaven and count the stars if you are able to number them" (Gen. 15:5). Psalm number forty speaks of the Lord's thoughts and says, "...they are more than can be numbered" (40:5).

Our text is from Psalm 139: "If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand."

A time-honored saying or piece of advice is "Count your blessings." We might rather say, "Count the Lord's blessings." Even on the very external plane, there are more than enough blessings to count. We have so much, and the poor farmer or the farmer's servant has measurably fewer things than the king and paradoxically has more as he counts his blessings (see DP 250). We can surprise ourselves if we put a little effort into counting blessings as we start including in the list the people who are dear to us, the loves and virtues the Lord grants to us.

Sometimes a new appreciation of our blessings comes when we see other people less fortunate than ourselves, perhaps due to health or personal difficulty. And it can be occasioned by our own adversities. A sickness that deprives us for a while occasions gratitude for simple well-being to be able to function.

The experience of temptation can result in a new way of looking at our lives. And the Writings say that there is an actual inflow of thoughts from heaven that changes our perspective about blessings. We read,

"Life in the world, which is only for some years, is as nothing compared with life in heaven, which is eternal life; yea, there is no ratio between the time of man's life in the world and the life in heaven that will continue to eternity. Think if you can (and here we are invited to do some counting) whether there can be any ratio between a hundred thousand

years and eternity, and you will find there is none. These with many other thoughts flow in from heaven with those who endure spiritual temptations" (AE 750).

Counting. A miser counts his money. But we sense that the miser is missing out. Does the person who glories in his talents really count his blessings? The prophet said,

"Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom. Let not the mighty man glory in his might. Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord exercising loving kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight, says the Lord" (Jer. 9:23-24).

Imagine making a list of the best blessings of your life and leaving out the Lord's promises about heaven. "Human life from infancy to old age is nothing else than a progression from the world to heaven, and the last age, which is death, is the transition itself" (AC 3016). What kind of a list of blessings is a list that leaves out the prospect, the goal, to which the Lord is inviting us?

There is in the Writings a passage with a dramatic ending urging us to think of something and to keep it in mind. It is probably the most emphatic such urging in the Writings. "Let him who wishes to be eternally happy know and believe that he will live after death. Let him think of this and keep it in mind, for it is the truth"(AC 8939). Notice that it does not say to bear in mind that you are going to die. It says keep in mind that you are going to live.

This striking passage is actually a passage about blessings, unfolding the words in Exodus 20, "I will bless you." It starts out by saying that when people think about blessings, they immediately start to think of things like money and honors. It says they think about things which are relatively nothing. They call them the blessings.

The passage continues,

"That worldly blessing is nothing in comparison with heavenly blessing, which is eternal, the Lord thus teaches in Matthew, `What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his soul?'(16:26) But the man who is in worldly and earthly things does not apprehend this saying, for worldly and earthly things suffocate it, and cause him not

even to believe that there is an eternal life. And yet I can affirm that as soon as a man dies he is in the other life, ... that death itself is a continuation of life but in another world As I know this from the living experience of so many years ... I solemnly declare it. I still speak and I have spoken with almost all whom I had known in the world and who are dead, with some after two or three days from their decease. Very many of them were exceedingly indignant that they had not believed at all in a life which was to continue after death Wherefore let him who wishes to be eternally happy know and believe that he will live after death. Let him think of this and keep it in mind, for it is the truth" (AC 8939).

When we are thinking with this reality in mind, a numbering or counting takes place in our values. To count things in the internal sense is to "give thought to their quality" (AE 453:10). Counting means setting in perspective (see AC 10217). When you count you evaluate, and take some things that were at the center of your attention and move them out to the circumference. And you see things which were at the peripheries and bring them to the center. We ask the Lord to "number our days" that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.

The text is about the Lord's thoughts. The Lord's thoughts are related in this way to blessings: The essence of love is to love others outside of oneself, to desire to be one with them and to render them blessed from oneself. "These same three things constitute the essence of His wisdom; and love desires these three things and wisdom brings them forth" (TCR 43).

The working of the Divine Wisdom the Lord's thoughts is Providence. We know Providence as a word as if it were one single thing, and as we are natural we tend to underestimate it. The Writings refer to Providence in quantity, vast quantity. Thinking merely naturally we "cannot possibly know the innumerable arcana of Providence, which are as many in number as the contingencies of everyone's life" (AC 3833).

Does Providence bear on your own personal life? Listen to what the Writings say: "With every person there is a concurrence every moment of more things of providence than can be comprised in any number. This I know from heaven" (AC 5894).

To count is to think of quality. And the quality in the myriad workings of Providence is a love that is toward us. And so it is said, in the Psalm,

"Many, O Lord my God, are Your wonderful works, which you have done; And Your thoughts which are toward us cannot be recounted to You in order. If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered" (Ps. 40:5).

Amen.

Lessons: Matthew 5:1-12. NJHD 267-269, DP 250, 217 (portions)