

When You Have Eaten And Are Full

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"When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you. "Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today. [Deuteronomy 8:10,11]

This, as always, is good advice coming from Moses. He had been giving good advice to the children of Israel for forty long years--as they had wandered the desert in preparation for their entrance into the Promised Land, and the settled life they would find there. It had been a long and difficult forty years. And now, the wandering just about to end, we find Moses rehearsing and expounding the laws the Lord had given them along the way. *His* job was just about finished. So for one last time, he assembled the people, and reminded them to remember the Lord their God.

He knew how it worked when the going got tough: **great attention to the Lord in times of great temptation**; and the desert had been one great temptation after another. The children of Israel knew how this worked too. They were *veterans* of this unsettled life. But Moses was more afraid of what they did *not* know: prosperity and plenty, eating to the full, abundance and power and wealth.. Dangers as lethal as the scorpions and fiery serpents of their desert life. How would they handle these new dangers?

So, as always, we have good advice coming from Moses. And, as always in the Word, good advice is directed to us as well. This is *our* narrative--*our* regeneration story--as much as it is theirs. Let's see what kind of advice the Lord had Moses give.

First of all, Moses knew that paying attention to the Lord is easy, when terrible things are happening all around--when there is the present threat of death and destruction. He knew, just as we do, that "there are no atheists in foxholes;" he knew that repentance comes best and easiest on the death-bed. But he also knew that when the threat had passed, and the fear had subsided, and things got quiet again, promises would be forgotten. He could see the future because he was a keen

observer of the past. Human nature was his business. So he was telling them again. Let's listen in:

"The Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills; "a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; "a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper."

Can you imagine how this would have sounded to those tired, poor *nomads* who had been living hand-to-mouth *in the desert* for forty years? I think it is safe to say that he had their attention, for this last big speech.

So first he reminded them of what the Lord had done. He had led them into the desert to test them (prepare them) for their new life. The Promised Land was a long way from Egypt--it required a different kind of person: obedient, faithful, courageous, and strong. It took *hard training* to forge these "chosen people," and Moses reminded them of the Lord's guiding hand in this ordeal:

"So you should know in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord God disciplines you. Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and fear Him."

Simple: He did it for *you*, now don't forget to return the favor. *Sounds easy*.. But it's *not*. It is the hardest thing they or we could ever do. What did the Lord tell the young man, in our other lesson today? It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for us to remember the Lord when we are in a land of plenty. We'll return to that story: it holds the key to this whole problem. But first, let's see what the internal sense of this ancient narrative has to tell us about *our* lives.

We are told in the Writings that the Promised Land--all its individual characteristics and geographical features--represents the things of the church (AE 30459). The wilderness represents those who are in temptations prior to becoming a church--or those who are becoming this church in least form--you know, you and me. That's *our* wilderness. We wander in it every day. And that's *our* Promised land. And those temptations are ours too, because it is victory in these necessary battles

that make us the church we want to be (AE 73032; AR 546). Why the forty years? Because forty signifies a complete state--in this case "the duration of vastation and temptation (AC 7304)." If you want to get out of the desert, it's going to take you forty spiritual years: you have to finish the job; keep at it till you get it right.

And one more very important lesson, from the internal sense: who do you suppose led those children of Israel out into that desert? The Lord, that's who. Now what are we to think about that? Didn't we just ask Him (about 20 minutes ago) *not* to lead us into temptation? What can this mean?

"And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not."

The Children of Israel were led into the wilderness in order that they might undergo temptations and that they might also represent them, we are told in the Arcana Coelestia (AC 8089). The wording here is very precise. The Lord leads us into the desert--but not into temptation. Our temptations are our own--tailored especially to the specific affections and evil loves we choose to remove at any particular time. No two people are alike in this regard. The Lord leads us into the arena where this great work can happen. He leads us by His truths, and our battles are defined by which of these we choose to wrestle with. Where did the Lord have to go to find His temptation? The desert.

So let's say we make it through the desert, into the Promised Land; from *reformation* into the *process of regeneration*. The children of Israel did, and they certainly weren't perfect when they entered there. They had plenty of spiritual work yet to do, when they crossed the Jordan River. Let's say we become a church, to some degree. It's certainly not impossible. That's what this narrative is all about: regeneration. So what next? What comes next is perhaps the greatest challenge of them all: the "as of self;" the "good life;" the "eye of the needle."

How did that story go? The rich young man came to the Lord and asked what he might do, to assure his eternal life. The Lord said, predictably, to follow the commandments. And in all humility, the young man said that he always had: "*All these things I have kept from my youth,*" he said. "*What do I still lack?*" He had crossed his desert; he was in the

Promised Land, by nature of the life he had lived. He was a good guy. So what was next, for him?

Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

What is the spiritual message for this young man, and for us? Are we to follow the literal sense here, and throw ourselves into poverty? Is the Lord telling us to join the homeless in order to find salvation? I don't think so.

Our lesson from *The Apocalypse Explained* holds the key to this very understandable quandary:

"To sell all that he had" signifies that he should relinquish the things of his religion, which were traditions, for he was a Jew, and also should relinquish the things that were his own (or of the proprium), which were loving self and the world more than God, and thus leading himself; and "to follow the Lord" signifies to acknowledge Him only and to be led by Him.

The Lord is telling us, in Matthew 19 and in the Writings for His New Church, that these "riches" represent the things we love most dearly--luxurious things of the self and the world--and if we cannot "sell them," or get rid of them--put them *last* in order of importance--then despite our lives of external order and confessions of faith, we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. We have to complete the process--put those loves in Divine spiritual order, by "following the Lord:" let *Him* lead us to the desert, let *Him* lead us to the Promised Land, but mainly just let Him *lead* .

What is the problem here? *Great attention to the Lord in times of great temptation* . And complacence and apathy when we're not. Moses knew this. The Promised Land is the land of plenty, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing.. and in this land the urgency of the desert is gone.

Here we find the increasing presence of the natural life--the senses find delight in "a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow

out of valleys and hills." What a beautiful land it is! Is there anything *wrong* with this beautiful land--the delights of the natural world? Of course not. It's a theater representative of the Lord's kingdom! Are these riches somehow bad? It doesn't say so in either lesson. Riches, like all the other things in this natural world, are *neutral* (not to mention relative)--in and of themselves they matter not at all, *if* they are in their proper place. The young man didn't understand. Material wealth is not the danger Moses saw coming for the children of Israel and for us as well. It was the easy life that abundance allows. He knew that in trouble, we look to the Lord. In the land of plenty, we must exercise the self-discipline to continue that practice. And that's not easy. Moses knew. He warned us.

So what can we do? What's the cure for spiritual malaise? For spiritual atrophy? Athletes know. "Use it or lose it," they say, because from their experience with muscles and tendons, and ligaments, this is all too true. And in direct correspondence to this natural model of spiritual development, we find the answer to our question. You stay connected to the Lord by staying connected to the Lord. And staying connected is up to you.

In times of plenty, it is natural to lose our focus on tomorrow, and on the necessity for connection to the Lord, our strength and our Sustainer. But like any wise manager, who budgets his resources, be they time, money, or materials, we have only to plan ahead and practice daily maintenance of the most precious commodity we have: spiritual life from the Lord. How? It's not all that hard--it just takes practice until practice makes a habit, and finally the habit is automatic, and there you are. What are these things we must practice?

Regular worship--with the proper elements of *humility*, *instruction* and *praise*--will keep the lines open for spiritual life--nourishment--to flow in. *Regular active study*, of the Word in its literal and internal senses, and of the Writings for the New Church: a constant infusion of Divine truth, accommodated to our understanding. Individually and in groups, Word and doctrinal study is pure conjunction, for when we read and meditate on the Word, we are told, we are in the presence of whole societies of angels. What else? *Regular prayer* is essential to our connection with the Lord. Prayer doesn't have to be a complicated thing; it is simply conversation with the Lord--Savior and Friend. Learn how to pray, and make it a habit. The Lord would love to hear from you.

Worship, study, and prayer. Three elements of conjunction, that can keep us rooted in the spiritual life, despite the distractions of the land of plenty. Those riches of that land--they are not evil. But they are *powerful* loves, and they must be kept in order, *behind* love to the Lord and *behind* love to the neighbor. In their place they can be the proper delights of life. The rich young man "went away sorrowful," we read today, "for he had great possessions." What are the possessions that are holding *you* back from the promised land? Think about it.. Identify them, confront *their hold on you* (because in truth these possessions *own you*), and put them in their place. Then live life to the fullest.

And when you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you. Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today.

AMEN

Lessons: Deuteronomy 8:6-20, Matthew 19:16-26, Apocalypse Explained n. 934