

Children's Talk and Sermon Notes
for Sunday, 15 May

Children's Talk: Letting the Lord Know

Genesis 3:8 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Genesis 3:9 Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where *are* you?"

Genesis 3:10 So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself."

Genesis 3:11 And He said, "Who told you that you *were* naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?"

Genesis 3:12 Then the man said, "The woman whom You gave *to be* with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate."

Genesis 3:13 And the LORD God said to the woman, "What *is* this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

For What Should We Ask?

A Sermon by Pastor Joel Christian Glenn

15 May, 2022

I suspect that most people find themselves asking the Lord for quite a lot in prayer. It's true that prayer is more than just asking the Lord for something. Any kind of speaking to or with God is genuine prayer. But the asking part of prayer is what we will focus on today. The Lord Himself urges us to ask Him for things, and even promises that what we ask will be accomplished:

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. (John 15:7)

Clearly there is great power in making requests of the Lord; and yet just as clearly it must be more than just asking for whatever material desire comes to mind; if that were all it took we would be millionaires. It is important that we give thought to what exactly we ask from the Lord, and also try to get a better understanding of how those prayers are answered. To do this we will focus on the story of King Solomon.

Solomon was the son of David, the greatest king of Israel to date. Early in his reign Solomon saw the Lord in a dream, and was given the chance to ask for whatever he wanted:

Now the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place: Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. At Gibeon Jehovah appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask! What shall I give you?" (1 Kings 3:4-5)

Before we get to how Solomon answered I want to spend a little time on the Lord's statement: "Ask! What shall I give you?" This command/question is crucial in how we approach the Lord. We are invited, even commanded, to ask things of the Lord. We are urged to tell Him specifically what it is that we desire from Him. On one level this seems unnecessary: surely the Lord knows better even than we ourselves what we need, and surely we cannot change His mind merely by asking. These statements are true: and yet the Lord still commanded Solomon to ask the question, and He commanded us to ask Him whatever we desire as well. The reason for this is not for His own sake, but for ours.

The Teachings of the New Church explain that the Lord is consistently shown to ask questions in the Word in spite of the fact that He already knows the answer. He does not ask in order to get new information; He asks so that the one addressing Him has a chance to reflect on what is needed and then consciously choose to receive it from the Lord. Not only that, in reflecting on one's thoughts and feelings, in the presence of the Lord, there is comfort and relief (*Secrets of Heaven* §2693). We benefit immensely from asking the Lord for the things that He was going to give us all along. We should never fall into the trap of thinking that because the Lord is in charge we can be slack in asking for what we need. As Jesus taught, we always should pray, and not lose heart (Luke 18:1).

When Solomon responded to the Lord's question, he did not jump right into what he wanted or needed. He laid out the situation he found himself in and his own place in it:

And Solomon said: "You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You; You have continued this great mercy for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. Now, O Jehovah my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. (1 Kings 3:6-8)

Solomon acknowledged two things here: first all that the Lord had done for His father David, and second just how much he needed the Lord in order to rule as a good king. In our own prayers to the Lord we can acknowledge the same two things: first the things that the Lord has accomplished in our life, and our awareness just how much we need Him in order to face the momentous tasks that lie before us. The first requires trust in the Lord, the trust that as He has been leading us in the past, providing for all of our needs, He will continue to lead and provide for us into the future.

The second illuminates the only mind-set in which we can receive any of the things we ask for: the mind-set of humility. If we go to the Lord with love of self we will have no room in our hearts for what the Lord has to offer. The Teachings of the New Church make it clear that worship cannot happen if there is no humility present:

To the extent therefore that a person acknowledges his own condition he can possess true humility, and when engaged in worship can have real devotion. For all worship must contain humility, and if separated from it no adoration and so no worship at all is present.

The reason a state of humility is vital to worship itself is that insofar as the heart is humbled self-love and all resulting evil come to an end; and insofar as these come to an end good and truth, that is, charity and faith, flow in from the Lord. For what above all else stands in the way of their being received is self-love. (*Secrets of Heaven* §2327)

As we approach the Lord and acknowledge both His power and our weakness, we put ourselves in a position of stepping aside or getting out of our own way so that we can simply ask the Lord in humility and in humility receive whatever answer He chooses to give.

Having acknowledged these things himself, Solomon made his request:

Therefore give to Your servant a hearing heart to judge Your people, to understand between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours? (1 Kings 3:9)

A couple of things to note about this request. First of all, notice that he did not ask the Lord to change his circumstances: he asked the Lord to change his heart. He specifically asked for a heart that could listen in a way that would allow him to be a just king, and that would allow him to understand good and evil. It's tempting to always be asking the Lord to change our circumstances or other people. But the area that thing we have the most right to ask the Lord to change is our own hearts. Regardless of whether the Lord changes our circumstances or other people, He will always work with us to change us.

The change is also one that is not external, but internal, specifically having to do with heart and mind. I was struck by the fact that while Solomon was known for his wisdom, these passages speak not just of understanding and knowledge, but of the heart as well. The most precious things we can ask from the Lord are encapsulated in this imagery: we need the Lord's love and wisdom, partnered together such that our love is wise and our wisdom is loving. We do not just need a heart, we need a heart that can listen and distinguish good from evil; and a mind that does not just assess and judge, but a mind that is bent towards justice and righteousness.

From this sort of wise heart we can discern between good and evil, and choose the good. Ultimately this is the most important thing that the Lord provides through prayer: the ability to repent and regenerate as a person, and so live a good life. We might prefer some other kind of result, such as competence to deal with a task, or profound intelligence on a given subject, or recognition for our efforts, or to be absolved of responsibility, or any manner of other things that would make life simpler and easier; but if we only receive from the Lord the ability to do what is right and good, the rest is relatively unimportant. To live a good life is worth more than any other goal.

And indeed, because Solomon had requested exactly this, and forgone long life or riches or the life of his enemies, the Lord could both fulfil his request and also give what had not been asked:

And the word was good in the eyes of the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. Then God said to him: "Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to hear justice, behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honour, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days. So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days." (1 Kings 3:10-14)

Because Solomon had asked for the spiritual qualities that would guide him as king, the Lord gave what He asked, and indeed gave him external blessings as well. The Teachings of the New Church confirm that when we ask for spiritual and heavenly things in prayer, the Lord does give an answer:

If his prayer springs from love and faith, and if they are wholly heavenly and spiritual things about which and for which he prays, something like a revelation is present within his prayer which manifests itself in the affection of the one praying in the form of hope, comfort, or some inward joy. (*Secrets of Heaven* §2535)

When we pray from love and faith, and for heavenly and spiritual things, in addition to those qualities themselves, we are granted hope, comfort, and inward joy. These are the blessings that come from and through prayer. If we expect to get the external things such as the ones Solomon received, we will miss these spiritual blessings. In

prayer look for what is spiritual, and then you will start to see where and how the Lord is granting spiritual, rather than natural, blessings.

The last admonition that the Lord gave to Solomon was to walk in His ways and to keep His statutes and commandments:

Then Solomon awoke; and indeed it had been a dream. And he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of Jehovah, offered up burnt offerings, offered peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants. (1 Kings 3:15)

Upon awaking Solomon rejoiced before the Lord's ark, the resting place of His Ten Commandments, the ultimate guide to life. We too, when we "awake" from prayer and return to real life, can find that we have a renewed energy to keep the Lord's commandments, and not just energy, but a joy that we have the opportunity to do so. Prayer is not in itself the goal, but rather a means to live a better, more spiritual and heavenly life, one that is active and joyful.

We begin by looking at the Lord's words that whatever we ask in prayer will be done. I'll read those words again, but this time with a focus on the fact that it begins with an "if" statement:

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. (John 15:7)

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you. If we live for those qualities that are from the Lord, qualities of love and faith, heavenly and spiritual qualities, then the desires of our prayers will be done for us. The fact that the response will be a spiritual one is not a limit on the Lord's ability to answer our prayers; it is rather an infinite expansion: there is no end to the spiritual blessings that can come, as we abide in Him, receive love and wisdom from Him, and live His teachings more and more fully to eternity.