

Our Connection to Heaven, part 5
The Heavenly Life

A sermon by Rev. Michael Gladish
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“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field . . .”
(Mark 4:30-31).

Today in our series about our connection to heaven we have come at last to the topic of heaven itself – what it is, what it’s like, what people do there, and how our lives in this world can be more heavenly, thus connecting us with the angels.

In the Old Testament the word, heaven, comes from a Hebrew term that means “things heaved up,” or in old English, “things heaven up.” So it refers literally to the stuff in the sky: clouds, rain, stars, planets and so on. In the New Testament we find much the same idea but a little more refined, referring to the sky or air. No wonder, then, that when the Lord spoke of Himself in John as “the bread that comes down from heaven”, or that when Matthew predicted the second coming of the Lord “in the clouds of heaven,” or when we read of the New Jerusalem “coming down from God out of heaven” people have often thought of some literal descent from the sky.

But that heaven is much more than this, and not physical at all, is clearly suggested in many of the parables, or analogies that the Lord used to describe it – as for example when He said “the kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed” (Matt. 13:24), or “like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts . . .” (Matt. 18:23) or “like a householder who went out early in the morning . . .” (Matt. 20:1). *It’s not about a place, it’s about living and doing.*

True, the Lord also said that the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, or leaven, or hidden treasure, even like a dragnet for fishing (Matt. 13), but in all these illustrations what He was really describing was the **development** of the heavenly life, and its **value** to those who seek it. Actually, it’s a curious fact that for all the references to heaven in the Word there really isn’t much in the way of descriptions of it – except for the book of Revelation, where the fantastic things we read about are clearly symbolic and do not relate to normal life at all but to a state of spiritual judgment. To learn the details of ordinary life in heaven we must turn to the teachings given for the New Church – which we’ll do in a minute.

But first, let’s reflect on those parables in Matthew 13. Counting the parable of the sower casting seed on the four kinds of ground there are 7 in all, and every one describes a process rather than an actual place. They are about *growth and providence, sorting and prioritizing to gain things of real value*, and so on. Similarly in the parable of the king whose servant owed him 10,000 talents (Matt. 18) and the parable of the householder who hired laborers at different times of the day (Matt. 20), the story is really about *a way of life that includes compassion, forgiveness, and respect for people’s intentions*, not just their works. Even the parable of the wedding feast, where someone is thrown out for not wearing the appropriate clothing (Matt. 22) is really about the Lord’s open invitation to heaven, and the sad fate of those who try to enter on their own terms.

Now then, turning to the heavenly doctrines, in a summary teaching about heaven and hell, we read that “The love of good and the faith of truth from it constitute the life of heaven.” And

again, “Love to the Lord and love towards the neighbor constitute heaven; and likewise faith, but only so far as it enjoys life from the above loves.” Thus “Heaven with everyone is according to his reception of love and faith from the Lord,” and “Those who receive heaven from the Lord are they who have heaven *in themselves*” (NJHD 230-233).

All this ties in perfectly with the teaching in Luke 17, where we read, “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,*” or in Matthew 18 where the Lord said, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles Himself as [a] little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one little child like this in My name receive Me.”

Okay, so it is understood that heaven is a state of mind and not a place in the usual sense of the word. Still human minds do not exist in a vacuum. Even when the physical body dies the human mind is still clothed with a spiritual body, and the whole Bible affirms that angels and other spirits retain the use of all their senses: sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell (see Luke 16:19-31 about the rich man and Lazarus for a good example). So what are the angels actually DOING from day to day that brings them all the peace and blessing we read about?

Well, for one thing, we know that they are all occupied in useful services for one another. It is a fundamental principle of human life that we are happiest and most fulfilled when we feel useful. Of course we need our times of rest and recreation, but as the doctrines point out, these are for the sake of returning to our uses with renewed vigor and perspective (Charity 190-196). In short, we should NOT work for the sake of our time off; we should take time off for the sake of our work, as this is what gives us our sense of purpose and makes us feel good about our lives.

We are definitely NOT going to be sitting around literally “resting from our labors” while servants wait on us hand and foot. Such a life would be utterly selfish. Rather, the “labors” from which we will rest are the struggles to rise up out of our selfishness.

That said, if we are doing useful things for one another, what tools or materials are we using? A man in the carpet business in Australia once told me that he couldn’t imagine what he would be doing in heaven – assuming he “made it” – because he knew the teaching that everything anyone needs in heaven is simply given, provided by the Lord. So what about builders, contractors, or even architects? What about car dealers, bankers or investment brokers? Is there money in heaven? What about lawyers? What about farmers? After all, if everything is provided by the Lord, *who needs all these occupations?*

The trouble with this line of thinking is that it works backwards – from the natural to the spiritual, rather than from the spiritual to the natural. The thing we need to ask is WHY we enjoy doing what we do, or why it is such an important part of us that we would want to keep on doing it in the next life. Take the honest car salesman, for example (and yes, there is such a thing): like most honest salesmen – or tradesmen or miners or manufacturers – what he/she really does for a living is solve people’s problems or provide for their needs in some specific way. He will do his best to match his product to the customer’s specifications – and if he can’t do this he will frankly recommend some other provider.

Think of it this way. Yes, the Lord provides everything – free for the taking! After all, nobody

paid for the world to be created. But He has given us all unique abilities to USE the things He has created, to sort and organize them, to bend and shape them, and to facilitate their use by others. Take iron ore, for example. There it is, free for the taking; but oh, wait, it's underground, and it requires smelting to produce steel, and that requires shaping to serve a use. So although the Lord has all power and could make and do all things entirely by Himself, He leaves a lot of work for us to do so that we can feel happy and fulfilled serving one another (see AC 6482). And it's the same in heaven! We read,

“...in everything generally and specifically done by Him the Lord acts both directly from Himself and indirectly through heaven. He acts indirectly through heaven not because He needs their help but in order that the angels there may have functions and duties, and therefore life and happiness in keeping with the duties and services they perform” (AC 8719).

But is there iron ore in heaven? Why yes; yes there is. It's just made of spiritual substance, not the physical stuff of this world. As we noted here two weeks ago everything in the natural world comes into existence as the natural form or expression of something spiritual, in other words, something on the spiritual level that performs the same use or function as that natural thing. So are there carpets in heaven? Are there rivers, lakes and mountains? Do people build houses or apartments there and live in cities or “out in the country”? The answer is yes; yes to all of this (see HH 394). Everything natural has its spiritual counterpart, which we see, hear, taste, touch or smell with our spiritual senses in exactly the same way as we do with our natural senses. The only difference is that in heaven everything exists in its own proper order, and the angels support that order by being completely devoted to serving one another, rather than themselves. As a result no one suffers any lack, no one feels neglected or useless, no one seeks to dominate or control anyone else, and *everybody* has a good time.

That said, let's suppose for a moment that your whole career and interest has been in the military, or a police force. You love that work and you would feel strange doing anything else. Why would either of these services be needed in heaven?

Well, it's probably the same as it is for lawyers and judges. It's not really all about catching bad guys or making bad people pay for their mistakes, it's about solving problems and maintaining order. The thing is, even in heaven, though all do love the Lord and the neighbor, some are wiser than others, and so there is a need for people – angels – with special skills in law, diplomacy, and the appropriate use of power to maintain that order; - *not power to hurt but power to help, guard, guide, protect and save even from unintended harm* (see TCR 694:3-4 or CL 207:3-4).

Or let's suppose you love gardening, landscaping or caring for animals. Will you be able to do these things in heaven? What about painting, sewing or making pottery? OK, what about car repairs? If you think about it you will see that every one of these occupations involves an expression of some love and some sort of wisdom directed to a pleasing or helpful outcome, not just for yourself but for those with whom you share that work. The medium you use, that is, the kind of materials or the nature of the thing itself you produce is really secondary to the main point of expressing that love and wisdom in some creative way suited to your unique abilities.

And here's the thing: the variety in what you can do is infinite! We read,

“...there are in heaven more functions and services and occupations than can be enumerated. In the world there are few in comparison. But however many there may be who are so employed, they are all in the delight of their work and labor from a love of use, and no one from a love of self or of gain; and as all the necessities of life are furnished them gratuitously they have no love of gain for the sake of a living. They are housed gratuitously, clothed gratuitously, and fed gratuitously” (HH 393).

Note, this does not mean that nobody builds their houses, makes their clothes or prepares their meals. It means that people *don't have to work for these things*; rather they work for the love of the uses they perform, and their food, clothing and shelter are then provided for them freely, as the expression of *other people's loves* and abilities to be of service. What a fabulous world – a world truly free of worry and full of mutual support. What's more, all the physical limitations that stand in our way in this world – limitations of skill, health, time or money, genetic traits, even social or psychological concerns – all of these essentially pass away with the natural body itself and are buried or consumed at cremation, leaving the will and intentions completely free.

Essentially, the uses in heaven are all about the relationships between people. So in a brief and very general catalog of occupations, the book, *Heaven and Hell* cites the care of little children, “teaching the simple good from the Christian world,” protecting people from infestations by evil spirits, restraining spirits who are in the hells, and facilitating the resurrection into the spiritual world of people who have died (HH 391). But lest there be any doubt that angels are also involved in forensic work of all kinds, including making things with their hands, we read, “There are administrations and ministries there, and courts of justice, higher and lower, *and also mechanical arts and handicrafts*” (CL 207:3). Another translation renders these last words “trades and employments.” Either way, the work is all correspondential, and it is all about joyfully cultivating or producing something of value for others.

In conclusion, it seems fitting that this is Labor Day weekend – an occasion to recognize the work we do every day for a living by taking a break and... doing what? – typically work around the house or yard, or even some recreation that may involve strenuous effort: the point is they are *things you want to do* but ordinarily don't have time to do. But let's be clear, doing isn't always physical. Reading is doing something useful for your mind; visiting is doing something to connect with other people; playing games can build useful skills. Older folks should never despair about being useless, for their experience, thought and affections connect this world to heaven.

So... are you ready for heaven? Are you confident that you can make it? Why or why not? Remember, it's not about the past; *it's about who you ARE and what you love*. All that the Lord requires of us is that we honor Him to the best of our ability, striving every day to grow in self-discipline, wisdom, compassion and generosity, shunning evils, seeking the Lord's forgiveness for our past sins as we forgive others, and learning to serve them as our way of serving Him. Therein lies true fulfillment, peace, blessing, and, to adapt a phrase, mutually assured *prosperity*.

Amen.

Lessons: *Matthew* 13:24-30; children's talk on preparing for heaven.
Psalms 103
Conjugal Love #207:selections