

Making Heaven Real

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In New Church belief, the idea of life after death and the presence of angels with us is foundational. It's vital to us to be able to hope for something more than what we see in front of us, especially when what is in front of us is not going well. It is comforting to be able to picture our loved ones who have passed on as alive, active, and present with us in spirit, and to believe that one day we will see them again. And most importantly, it changes everything about how we live our daily lives to believe that this world is not all there is. When there is another world then the possessions and prestige become less important than the choice to be compassionate or the desire to act with integrity in a challenging situation.

A most basic of ideas about angels and heaven is heaven is real, and in fact is more real than this world. One passage says, "This is the reason for the insanity of our times, in that people do not believe that they have a spirit within them which will live after the body has died – yet the spirit is a substance far more real than the material substance constituting the body." (*Arcana Coelestia* 3726:4) What a striking teaching, but one that makes sense. When we don't think of ourselves as spirits, we live for today. When we see that we are spiritual beings we realize that the things that last into eternity are worth far more than wealth or fame or power.

We'd likely all agree with this as we sit quietly. But think for a moment about the last time you were impatient with someone you love. That person kept you waiting in some way and in that time of irritation your present need became more important than the fact that this was someone you know and love deeply. At that time they, as a human being, were not important as your earthly need. And by contrast when someone listens to us as we fumble our way through figuring out some problem we feel so grateful that they saw the real us, the part that was striving to find truth and a path forward. They saw our spirit.

It takes effort to see the things of the spirit. We see the person cutting us off in traffic, but don't see if she's having a bad day and in pain. We see the fancy vacation someone with more means than us takes, but not whether they are truly happier because of it. Even in our own lives we see the tasks in front of us that at times seem dreary or frustrating, and we don't see the work the Lord is doing in our spirits as we choose to do what is right because it is right.

In the story of Lazarus, the rich man was clothed in purple and linen and fared sumptuously. He had lots of good things on many levels and lived for them. Lazarus was poor, which describes us when we know we don't have a lot of spiritual knowledge, but we long for it. Right away we see someone longing for the things of the spirit. The dogs licking his wounds means finding healing by such means as are in our power (*Arcana Coelestia* 9231:3)! None of us would choose to have a dog lick our sores, yet I'm sure you've heard the saying that a dog's mouth is cleaner than a human's. We can picture that an open wound, licked by a dog, would be less likely to fester and cause damage than one left alone. In that unideal situation, it might be the best option.

The question raised by the parable is where we put our focus. We have many good things in this world we can notice and value. But if we can, Lazarus-like, notice the things of the spirit that we don't have and strive for them we lay up for ourselves treasure in heaven. We live as if heaven is real.

Lessons: Luke 16:19-31, *Divine Wisdom* 7:4