

Our Book of Life

"And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books."

Revelation 20:12

A Sermon by Rev. Derek Elphick

INTRODUCTION

We often talk about life as a book...

"...I'm so glad that chapter of my life is over..."
or, *"She's an open book..."*
or, *"...You need to read between lines..."*

We even talk about "diving" into a good book

or "devouring" it
or getting "lost" in it, as if we and the book are somehow one!

The Scriptures strengthen the *tie* between books & people, especially when it comes to the Word of God...

...since what is written by the Lord needs to eventually be "written" on our hearts

This morning we recited together the words of the prophet Jeremiah:

Thus says the Lord, "I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jeremiah 31:33).

PUT IT IN WRITING

Think for a moment how important writing is...

When we want to organize our thoughts or clear our head, we often put pen to paper.

When we want to make sure everyone understands an agreement or contract, we put it in writing.

For e.g. we wouldn't dream of letting the deed to our house or our financial investments float out there as a "verbal agreement" - we expect important things to be written down in fine print, recorded, & stored somewhere safe so there's no confusion or ambiguity as to proof of ownership.

Also, if we don't believe something someone is saying, we say, show me your source, show me where you got that idea from.

There's also a *precision* to writing things out...

- when we want to write something, a memoir, a poem, a short story, an article, letter or a book, we sit down and collect our thoughts...

- What do I want to say?
- How am I going to say it?
- What's my point?
- What should come first, next, last?

This brings us to one of the most important uses of writing

- there's an *intentionality* to it...

- **when we write, we move from the realm of uncommitted thoughts and feelings to carefully selected words and phrases we are prepared to stand behind.**

When we write we "go on record," as it were, either to ourselves privately or to the world at large.

This helps explain why the Scriptures draw our attention to things being "written."

A common phrase in the Old Testament - "Is this not written...?" or "are these words not written?" and then goes on to refer to the source - the Book of the Law, Ten Commandments, etc.

Or the words of the Lord Himself, "*these are the commandments which I have written*" (Ex. 24:12).

Why would the Lord not simply say, these are My commandments?
Why draw attention to the fact that they're written - isn't that obvious?

We see the same thing in the New Testament. John, in the Book of Revelation, is repeatedly told to "Write":

"Write the things which you have seen..." (Rev. 1:19)

"To the angel of the church of Ephesus write..." (Rev. 2:1)

"To the angel of the church in Smyrna write..." (Rev. 2:8)

"To the angel of the church in Pergamos write..." (Rev. 2:12)

During the Lord's temptations in the wilderness (Mt. 4), He responded to the devil each time by saying:

*It is written...*man shall not live by bread alone

*It is written...*you shall not tempt the Lord your God

*It is written...*you shall worship the Lord your God, and Him alone you shall serve.

THE BOOK OF LIFE

This brings us to the *spiritual* reason why our life is likened to a book and why we find ourselves using it as a metaphor.

We do indeed have "chapters" cataloging our life.

Just like a family photo album or a memoir, our life can be divided up into chapters - our childhood and youth, our adult years, senior years; we have happy chapters, sad ones, our working years, retirement years, chapters in which we grow and mature, chapters seems like we stall out or go backwards...

The Scriptures give us a name for this "book," the Book of Life.

It's only mentioned by name in the Book of Revelation (7 times) although other parts of the Word allude to it a book that has our life recorded in it.

And so our text for today says the dead will be judged "according to their works, by the things written..." in their book of life (Rev. 20:12).

WHAT IS IT?

We're taught that our Book of Life is our *interior* memory.

It's like the hard drive in a computer - records everything in our life.

It's what we take with us to the other side, remains with us to eternity (AE 199).

In our reading today we learned that our Book of Life

- is a collection of every thought, word, deed and experiences we've ever had in this world, all stored and catalogued in our interior memory
- nothing is ever lost or erased
- and it's "opened" in the next life and used by the Lord and His angels to review our life and determine our place in the spiritual world

So the question we're considering today is this:

Since our Book of Life is reviewed after we die and is the "playbook" (so to speak) we will use to conduct our future life in the next world...

...doesn't it make sense that we'd want to work on becoming as much an "open book" now while living here on earth?

THE LIFE REVIEW

You are all probably aware of the well-documented cases of Near Death Experiences - every nationality, religious, non-religious, children, adults, men, women - clinically "dead" - brief glimpse of the afterlife.

Many people report going through a "life review" in which thousands of scenes from their life flash before them. These scenes are reviewed at an incredibly fast pace, almost like holding the fast-forward button down on a TV remote, and yet it isn't rushed - they even report it being a pleasant experience, not a scary one because the people involved in their life-review do it so gently and kindly, letting the person undergoing the review make the judgments about their life.

Remarkable because this is what the book, Heaven & Hell reports:

"All of our deeds and all of our thoughts are written on our whole person and seem as though they are read from a book when they are called out of our memory..." (HH 463).

And notice who is in charge of the review - done "as often as the Lord permits" and "before angels" (AC 2474).

PURPOSE OF THE LIFE REVIEW

Expose our shame?

Embarrass us?

Get a true confession out of us once and for all?

No, the purpose of the review is to confirm what's important to us, what kind of person we are trying to be, what we stand for, what we want to do, what interests us, how we want to help people.

*Important: almost w/out exception, those who report a NDE say it literally changed their life, meaning they viewed the *purpose* of their remaining time on earth differently, not to be wasted.

Our Book of Life is a spiritual DECLARATION of who we are.

We are encouraged not to be afraid, especially if we have nothing to hide.

But everything is brought out into the Light with those who "deny wrongdoing" (claim innocence)...

For criminals and anyone who thinks they can get away with their "crimes" such people have the "tape," so to speak, played back frame by frame so there can be no denying what they did.

Those who...

- deceived others with malicious skill and had stolen from them
- taken bribes
- lured virgins and violated their chastity
- thought nothing of slandering others
- defrauded a relative of their inheritance
- one who secretly poisoned a neighbor (see HH 462b).

Every scene, every detail is brought out into the light - private diaries opened, private letters read out loud, the victims themselves are shown, where they were at the time, who said what and when, what happened next, etc.

OUR NEXT CHAPTER

What is the value in knowing about this life review and our Book of Life?

Since our Book of Life will be reviewed in the next life, logic dictates that we'd want to work on becoming as much an "open book" as we can...

How? There are practical steps.

We can do this...

- by letting go of pretenses
- by being completely true and honest with ourselves and others
- by letting go of hidden grievances and annoyances
- by bringing out into the open positive, helpful acts of service

That sounds difficult to do, something I'm not sure I'm prepared to do...

e.g. Think back to when you were a child and told a lie. You broke your Mom's favorite vase and insist it wasn't you. Remember how much work it took to keep the lie protected. We had to pile one lie on top of the next to make sure Mom or Dad didn't catch on to what we had done.

The point is, holding onto angry thoughts and feelings takes *work!* It takes *work* to feed and nurture a grudge or unforgiving spirit and we have to ask ourselves at some point - is this worth it?

Now it's true, when it comes to how our life unfolds, we can certainly feel like victims of our circumstances.

- I don't have any control over the things that are happening my life
- new chapters seem to added to my book, seemingly with or without my cooperation or input
- Sense of it being too late - I am who I am - not much is going to change.
- Feel stuck in our patterns, stuck in our choices

Freedom of choice is a powerful thing.

We are, of course, free to let

- resentment
- or grudges
- or disappointment or an unforgiving heart....bleed over into the next chapter of our life

But we are *equally* free to

- change the plot
- add new characters
- and write a new and different *next* chapter!

How do we want the next chapter of our life to be written?

The Top Five Regrets of the Dying by Bonnie Ware

1. *I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me (unfulfilled dreams, putting things off)*
2. *I wish I hadn't worked so hard (how much was missed)*
3. *I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings (in order to keep the peace)*
4. *I wish I'd stayed in touch with my friends*
5. *I wish I'd let myself be happier (not realizing that happiness is a choice)*

This fits with what we're taught in the New Church...

When people transition to the other side they often express surprise, astonishment, even embarrassment, that they hadn't believed the things they had been taught in church about heaven, angels, the afterlife.

LET THE LORD WRITE IN YOUR BOOK

We've talked about how writing is an *intentional* act.

When we put pen to paper we wish to "go on record."

We're making a statement, either to ourselves privately or to the world.

The same is true for how our Book of Life gets written.

The point is - we have much more control over the next chapter of our lives than we think

Yes, everything we have ever thought and done is "written" into our Book of Life but not everything in it gets broadcast to the world.

The point of the life review is not to embarrass or shame.

Only what we have done and thought *intentionally* (freely chosen), matters, because these are a declaration of

- what we want
- how we wish to be
- what we want to stand for

The Lord is always waiting by our side ready to help us write the next chapter of our life.

He desires nothing more than to put His law in our mind and write it on our heart.

So that He can be our God, and we can be His people.

AMEN