

“Heavenly Happiness – Each Angel is the Center of All”

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The form of heaven is of such a nature, that everyone is a kind of center, thus a center of communications, and therefore of happiness from all.... (*Arcana Caelestia* 2057:2)

Picture a smooth pool of water that has just had a stone dropped into it. From the spot where the stone entered the water a series of concentric circles spreads out continuing in perfect form until striking some object or boundary. There is a sense in which each of our lives, many times each day, can be compared to the effect of this stone. Our actions affect those around us and through them can affect a still broader circle continuing out from each of us as a center. The effect of our actions on others can be for good or for ill. If we do something kind or generous for someone else, even a small courtesy, that person will be somewhat more likely to offer a similar kindness to someone else. Likewise if we treat someone else rudely or impatiently, that person will perhaps be more likely to be short-tempered with someone else.

Of course, the effect of our actions will not be absolute. The effect is dependent in part on the basic quality of the people we interact with. A self-centered person will accept a kindness, but perhaps consider the giver a fool to be taken advantage of. He will show a kindness only if he expects to be repaid for his action in the future. A good person, on the other hand, will accept a kindness and feel a gratitude that will show itself in benefits to others with no thought of repayment

Swedenborg relates the story of a man who had recently entered the spiritual world. When he realized that he was in the other life and now had no possessions, such as home, property and all else that he had had in the world, he became anxious, not knowing where he should go or where he would live since he could no longer provide for himself. He was taught that the Lord would provide what he needed, and he had his every need attended to by angels. When he was then left to think alone, from charity he began to reflect on how he could repay so great a kindness (*Arcana Caelestia* 318). Rather than harboring a grudge that he had been deprived of his worldly possessions, he was feeling grateful for what he had recently received and felt indebted to someone for having received it. Because this was his reaction, he was taken immediately into heaven. He was ready to receive and share the blessings that the Lord gives to all the angels.

Heaven is heaven partially because of the way that blessings spread from person to person and are shared by all. Everyone who is in heaven takes delight in serving others. Each angel desires to communicate his or her blessings to all other angels. Each seeks to serve others.

Jesus told His disciples, “Whoever of you desires to be first shall be servant of all” (Mark 10:44). This takes place in two different ways in the life after death. Firstly, those who are evil and seek to rule over others because they love themselves, end up being relatively powerless and miserable evil spirits who do menial jobs of service just to earn food and avoid punishment. They want to be first, but they end up being last. But the first are a servant of all in heaven also. The leader of any community of angels would refer to himself as a servant of the whole community in that he seeks to serve them all (*Conjugal Love* 266). We are told that in heaven, “they who are the greatest there...are servants more than others, because they are in the greatest

obedience, and in deeper humility than the rest” (*Arcana Caelestia* 5164:2). Concerning such individuals we read the following:

Those who in heaven are above others in intelligence and wisdom from the truths of faith, are in such humility that they attribute everything of power to the Lord and nothing to themselves. For this reason they do not place anything of glory and of joy in having dominion, but in serving; and when they are in this state, they are in dominion and also in glory and joy above others; yet not from the love of dominion, but from the affection of love and charity, which is that of serving others. For the Lord flows with power into those who are humble, but not into those who are puffed up, because the former receive influx, but the latter reject it. (*Arcana Caelestia* 9039:3)

In heaven no one regards another person as a servant. Even when they are talking about what the wisest course of action would be there are no directives from one person to another dictating what should be done. We read,

. . . in their conversations there is nothing of command from one to another, for no one wishes to be master and so to look upon another as a servant; but everyone wishes to minister to and serve the others. (*Arcana Caelestia* 5732:2)

It would be hard for many people to picture what the interaction of a group of angels would be like. One of the wonderful images of this interaction that we are given in the teachings for the New Church is that of a choir of angels seen by Swedenborg. We are told that in this choir there were many angels who were thinking and speaking the same thing,

...and what is wonderful though there were many, still they all thought and spoke as one, thus they all represented a single image, and this occurred because none of them desired to do anything from himself, still less to preside over the rest and lead the choir; for whoever does this, is of himself instantly separated from the rest. But they allowed themselves to be led mutually by each other, thus all individually and collectively by the Lord. All the good people who come into the other life are brought into this kind of harmonious agreement. (*Arcana Caelestia* 3350)

One of the wonders of heaven is that because all seek to serve each other and all share in the delights of one another, the joy of all is magnified many times. Each individual is a center from which blessings flow out to all others in heaven and likewise blessings from everyone else in heaven flow into the individual as a center (*Arcana Caelestia* 2872, 3633e, 549, 4225e). A consequence of this heavenly order is that with each new angel that is added to heaven, the happiness of all is increased (*Arcana Caelestia* 549). We are told that the order of heaven that allows for this wonderful and complete sharing of blessings is beyond our comprehension (*Arcana Caelestia* 2872).

While it is a quality of the angels to share their blessings, it is the quality of evil to not only not communicate blessings to others but actually to strive to extinguish or suffocate their joys and happiness (*Arcana Caelestia* 2057:2). Nothing of the wonderful order of heaven can exist in hell. The reason is quite simple. We read, “nothing else works to destroy [the form and order of heaven] than the love of self” (ibid). Those who are dominated by the love of self seek to take

whatever enjoyment flows in from others, take it to themselves, concentrate it in themselves, turn it into the filthiness of self. (ibid). The teachings for the New Church tell us,

Many people place eternal happiness in becoming great after the life of the body, and in being served by others, even by angels; when they may themselves be willing to serve no one, unless for the sake of self, with a hidden view to being served themselves. Their saying that they wish then to serve the Lord alone, is false; for those in the love of self, wish to have even the Lord serve them; and so far as this is not done, they fall back. Thus they carry in their heart the desire to become Lords themselves, and to reign over the universe. (*Arcana Caelestia* 1594:3)

We, of course, neither live in heaven nor hell, but there is much in our lives that are affected by the same rules that govern the life after death. We have many opportunities to share the blessings that we have received, working in harmony with others, with results that are far beyond what an equal number of separate individuals could accomplish. We also have many opportunities to extinguish or suffocate the joys of others, endeavoring to dominate over others by sheer force, with results that are unhappy for all involved.

Our lives are a center of influence for many people. We can be an influence for good or an influence for evil. We have the opportunity to experience something of the same joy that the angels experience as they work together to accomplish the Lord's work. Their ability to have such a tremendous effect comes not from their own power, but because of the Lord working through them. We likewise can be incredibly useful instruments for the Lord's work on earth. But to do so we have to do our part to rid ourselves of the tendencies we have toward a host of bad habits that all stem from considering our own interests as more important than those of others and our own perspective as being the only one that exists. We need to fight impatience in its many forms. We need to fight both the subtle and open methods of coercing others to follow our plans and opinions. We need to pray for the humility that will help us to recognize the many ways in which we can genuinely serve those around us.

Each of us as individuals can work on not speaking, acting or even thinking from those tendencies that stand in the way of heavenly order and each of us individually can receive some of the heavenly blessings that can accompany regeneration. Consider, however, what the accumulated effect of these efforts can be within in the church group that we have here. Each of us has many ways in which we can contribute to the life of our congregation. Each of us can be a center of influence for good in what we say and do. As we seek to serve each other and together serve the church and community in its broader form, each day will bring new delights. Each new member that joins us can increase the potential and actual usefulness of the group. As we individually look to the Lord and try to live a good life, loving one another as He has loved us, the presence of the Lord among us all can increase. Our usefulness as a group will increase. Each of us can be a tremendous influence for good for many others. Each of us can be a center of all, not because we are so important, but because the Lord can be with each of us, His life in ours. And in reality it will be His presence with us that is truly the center of all (*Arcana Caelestia* 1582). AMEN

Lessons: Micah 6:6-8, Mark 10:35-45, *Arcana Caelestia* 2057:2

Micah 6:6-8

⁶ With what shall I come before the LORD, *And* bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, With calves a year old? ⁷ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, Ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn *for* my transgression, The fruit of my body *for* the sin of my soul? ⁸ He has shown you, O man, what *is* good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?

Mark 10:35-45

³⁵ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, “Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask.” ³⁶ And He said to them, “What do you want Me to do for you?” ³⁷ They said to Him, “Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory.” ³⁸ But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” ³⁹ They said to Him, “We are able.” So Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized; ⁴⁰ but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but *it is for those* for whom it is prepared.” ⁴¹ And when the ten heard *it*, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John. ⁴² But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. ⁴⁴ And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

***Arcana Caelestia* 2057:2**

Mutual love in heaven consists in the fact that they love the neighbor more than themselves, the effect of which is that the whole heaven represents so to speak one human being; for by means of mutual love from the Lord all are associated together in that way. Consequently the happiness of all are communicated to each one, and those of each one to all. The heavenly form produced in this way is such that everyone is as it were a kind of center, thus a center of communications, and consequently of happiness, from all; and this in accordance with all the differences of mutual love, which are innumerable. And because those who are in that love perceive the highest happiness in being able to communicate to others that which flows into them, and this from the heart, the communication becomes perpetual and eternal; and on this account, as the Lord’s kingdom increases, so the happiness of each angel increases. As the angels are in distinct communities and homes, they do not think of this; but the Lord thus disposes all things both in general and in particular. Such is the kingdom of the Lord in the heavens.