

“HOPE IN THE LORD’S MERCY” – Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs

SENTENCE: *“All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, to such as keep His covenant and His testimonies.”* (Psalm 25:10).

LESSON 1 – Psalm 33:13-22 (parts).

13 Jehovah looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men.

14 From the place of His dwelling He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth;

15 He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works....

18 Behold, the eye of Jehovah is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy,

19 To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.

20 Our soul waits for Jehovah; He is our help and our shield.

21 For our heart shall rejoice in Him, because we have trusted in His holy name.

22 Let Your mercy, O Jehovah, be upon us, according as we hope in You.

LESSON 1 – Jeremiah 29:10-11.

10 Thus says Jehovah, When, at My mouth, seventy years are fulfilled at Babylon, I will visit you, and raise up My good word on you, to cause you to return to this place.

11 For I know the thoughts that I think upon you, says Jehovah, thoughts of peace, and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

LESSON 1 – Jeremiah 31:16-17.

16 Withhold your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for there shall be a reward for your work, says Jehovah; and they shall return from the land of the enemy.

17 And there is hope for your last times, says Jehovah, and sons shall return to their border.

LESSON 1 – Zechariah 9:9-16 (parts).

9 “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey....

11 I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

12 Return to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope. Even today I declare that I will restore double to you....

16 And Jehovah their God will save them in that day, as the flock of His people. For they shall be like the jewels of a crown, lifted like a banner over His land.

LESSON 2 – Mark 8:31-35.

31 And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

32 He spoke this word openly....

34 When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

35 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it.

LESSON 2 – John 10:11-18 (parts).

11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep....

14 I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own....

15 I lay down My life for the sheep.

16 And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.

17 “Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again.

18 No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.”

LESSON 2 – John 14:1-3.

1 “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.

2 In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

LESSON 3 – Arcana Coelestia 2338.

Temptations involve feelings of doubt regarding the Lord's presence and mercy, and also regarding His salvation. The evil spirits who are present with a person at such times and who are the cause of temptation do all they can to infuse a negative outlook, but good spirits and angels from the Lord in every way disperse that doubting attitude, all the time preserving a feeling of hope and in the end strengthening an affirmative outlook.

Consequently, a person undergoing temptation hangs between a negative outlook and an affirmative outlook. Anyone who gives way in temptation remains in a doubting, and sinks into a negative, frame of mind, whereas one who overcomes still experiences feelings of doubt; yet the person who allows himself to be filled with hope remains steadfastly in an affirmative outlook.

“The eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy.... Let Your mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in You” (Psalm 33:18,22).

- **Introduction**

1. Having hope in the Lord’s mercy is one of the main keys in sustaining us through times of despair, temptation, and trial. Without hope in the Lord’s mercy, there is virtually nothing left to keep us from completely giving up when the going gets tough.
 - a. Think about Easter which we just celebrated. Why were people excited when the Lord rode into town on a donkey? They had hope that He would be the King who would save them from oppression. Why did the women go to the tomb early in the morning? Was there not a slim glimmer of hope that maybe the Lord would rise as He said?
 - b. So what is hope? The dictionary defines hope as: “The theological virtue of desiring and searching for future good. To have confidence and trust that with God it is possible.”
 - c. Desiring and searching for future good and trusting that with God it is attainable. This is not a bad definition of hope, for without the thought that things can get better – that we can improve our lot – that we can positively change ourselves, life would be hopeless!
 - d. The necessity of hope as an integral part of a human being has long been known. Interestingly, the English Poet, Alexander Pope, born in 1688, the same year as Swedenborg, wrote these two verses that speak about the interplay between hope and mercy. “Hope springs eternal in the human breast.” “To err is human, to forgive, divine.”
 - e. So in order to more fully understand the connection between mercy and hope, let’s first look at each one separately.

- **The Lord’s Mercy.**

1. Often when we think of mercy, we bind it in terms of merely human mercy, which we can grasp more easily. But listen to these teachings about the nature of Divine mercy which far transcends a human conception of mercy.
 - a. *“[The Lord] loves the universal human race, and desires to eternally save every member of it” (AC 6495).*
 - b. *“He cannot even turn Himself away from man, nor look upon him with a stern countenance” (TCR 56).*
 - c. *“the Lord's face is Divine love itself, and being Divine love it is the face of mercy since mercy is the expression of love towards the human race set in such miseries.... [Thus His] face is not only mercy but also peace and goodness.” (AC 5585:2-3).*
 - d. *“‘For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed,’ says the Lord, who has mercy on you” (Isa. 54:10).*
 - e. *“Therefore the Lord will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and...that He may have mercy on you. For the Lord is a God of*

justice.... You shall weep no more. He will be very gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you” (Isa. 30:18-19).

- **Hope.**

1. So after hearing those teachings about the Lord’s mercy, they should give us hope, and hope is essential for our regeneration.
 - a. As our third lesson AC 2338 points out, when we are in temptation we have doubt about the Lord’s mercy and presence with us. We doubt that He can forgive us, and save us from our evils and bad choices. Sometimes, when we find that we can’t even seem to forgive ourselves, we wonder how the Lord could possibly forgive us.
 - b. And this is exactly what the evil spirits want. They want us to doubt the Lord’s mercy, they want us to believe that what we have done is so wrong, so evil, that it can never be forgiven or forgotten. They fan that doubt to the point where we are ready to give up.
 - c. However, at the same time, the angelic spirits are countering their attacks by inspiring us with hope. Hope in the Lord’s mercy towards us, hope that He still loves us even though we have erred, hope that He has the power to save us because we realize that we can’t save ourselves. And as long as we cling to hope, we are still in the game, we still hold to the belief that somehow, some way, the Lord will deliver us from the depths of despair.
 - d. So hope is critical to the human condition, because without hope we would give up, and instantly succumb in temptation. For this reason the Lord preserves hope in us, and will not allow us to see into our future, to see whether we will succeed or fail in a particular temptation, because if we knew the outcome before hand it would destroy hope, and along with it the desire to keep on trying. (DP 178). Examples: Lottery, Sports, Tests.

- **The Role of the Prophets**

1. As we think about the situation prior to the Lord’s Advent & Resurrection, look at the critical role that the prophets played.
 - a. Essentially the work of the prophets had three main goals: 1) to provide instruction by teaching the truth of the Lord about how they should live, 2) to urge them to repent when they had strayed from the path, and 3) to give them hope that if they returned to the Lord, He would come to them, have mercy on them and save them!
 - b. Giving them hope that the Lord would come was vital to their survival as they were captive in Babylon.
 - c. *“And there is hope for thy last times, says Jehovah, and sons shall return to their border” (Jeremiah 31:17).*
 - d. *For I know the thoughts that I think upon you, says Jehovah, thoughts of peace, and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. (Jer. 29:11).*
 - e. They did not know the future, but the Lord tirelessly sent the prophets as messengers to give them hope and assure them that He would deliver them. *“It shall be said in that day, Behold, this is our God! We have waited for Him, and He will save us; this is Jehovah; we have waited for Him; we will rejoice and be glad in His salvation” (Isaiah 25:9). “Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9).*

- f. What a tremendous comfort these Prophecies must have brought to them at such a dark time, that the One and Only God of heaven and earth would come down to save them. To have a vision of a God so merciful that despite their many failures, He was personally invested enough in their salvation and happiness to deliver them.
- g. The Lord while with His disciples gave them instructions and prophesy to give them hope. ***“He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again”*** (Mark 8:31).
- h. ***“I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.”*** (John 10:17-18). ***“I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”*** (John 14:3).
- i. These promises about the future were to give hope, and that’s why when the women and disciples remembered His words they were rejuvenated and filled with joy.

- **Don’t Be Fooled by Mercy Alone**

1. Just because the Lord is all merciful and desires to save us, doesn’t mean we don’t have to do anything! We can’t simply hope in His mercy and stay in our sad state.
 - a. We rightly pray: ***“Let Your mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in You”*** (Psalm 33:22). But let us not forget that ***“the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy”*** (Psalm 33:18).
 - b. It is critical for us to realize that the Lord never withholds His mercy and grace from anyone, He never turns His compassionate face away, and He never even looks at anyone with a stern countenance. As He said in Matthew: ***“He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust”*** (Matt. 5:45).
 - c. The Lord gives each of us the same infinite shower of mercy and grace, but we do not all receive the same amount. The difference lies not in the influx from the Lord, but in our reception of it.
 - d. ***“The Lord’s mercy remains constantly with every individual person; for the Lord wishes to save all the people there are. But that mercy cannot flow into them until evils have been removed; for evils, and falsities arising from them, stand in the way and hinder it. As soon as evils are removed however, mercy flows in.... For the Lord’s mercy is universal, that is, is directed towards all people, and is also particular towards those who refrain from evils”*** (AC 8307).
 - e. Notice, His mercy is particular to those who refrain from evils. Why? Because evils prevent His mercy from entering us, even though He would love nothing more than for us to experience it. It is fascinating to think that we have a direct hand in how much of the Lord’s mercy we will receive. His mercy is always present, but when we are engaged in evils of life, we are in a frame of mind where we do not perceive it.
 - f. So when we are in temptation and feeling all hope is lost and that the Lord’s mercy seems absent, we should remember that ***“we are the ones who turn away from the Lord’s mercy; the Lord never turns away from us.”*** (AC 588:3).

- g. However, we can have confidence that if we repent by acknowledging what we did that was against the Lord's teachings, pray for His help, and recommit ourselves to doing His will, that He will have mercy on us and deliver us with a strong hand.
- h. This is how His Mercy works: *"The Divine mercy is pure mercy towards the whole human race, to save it; and it is also unceasing towards every individual, and is never withdrawn from anyone... And yet no one can be saved except by Divine means, which means have been revealed by the Lord, in the Word. The Divine means are what are called Divine truths, which teach how people must live in order to be saved"* (HH 522).

- **Conclusion**

- 1. Failure can cause doubt and negativity.

- a. Often when we neglect the Lord's Divine means, don't follow His truths, and fall in temptation, we are filled with trepidation and shame, thinking that the Lord can not possibly forgive us again. Perhaps we promised to do better shunning this evil, and yet here we are again asking for His forgiveness. The evil spirits jump at the opportunity, to encourage these doubts and make us think that it is indeed hopeless!
- b. But we must remember to allow ourselves to be *"filled with hope"* and remain *"steadfastly in an affirmative outlook"* (AC 2338). All those passages describing the nature of the Lord's Divine mercy are true! He will always forgive us, as long as we are willing to repent. Recognize our evils, strive to shun them once more, and pray for Him to give us the strength, and He will forgive us. To err is human, to forgive is Divine.
- c. The Lord's mercy is such that He will never give up on us ever, so the only way we can lose, is if we give up on ourselves. And so we should have hope in the Lord's mercy, because the Lord's will is to save each one of us and lead us to heaven, no matter how circuitous the route is that we take. This was at the heart of the Lord's coming into this world, conquering the hells, and rising again, so that we could have hope and the confidence that with God all things are possible.
- d. The Lord will always answer our cries for help, so let us never lose hope. As the Psalmist David said: *"The eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy.... Let Your mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in You"* (Psalm 33:18,22). **Amen.**