

## Fullness of State

A New Year Sermon by Rev. Jeffrey Smith  
Preached at Bryn Athyn Cathedral on January 1, 2023

Happy New Year, my friends. The New Year is a time of hope—it's an opportunity to look forward to a coming year of good things. Despite failings and hard times of past years, people yearn for happy times in their relationships, a fulfilling job, and even some progress on their journey toward being an angel.

Not everybody approaches a new year—or *any* turning of a time cycle, for that matter—with hope. There are people who count the days and minutes of a job or relationship, and don't look forward to it continuing. Today, I pray we can find some hope in 2023. For this is what the Lord offers us all throughout His Word. Hope in Him, and hope for our life-not-yet-lived.

Why should we have this thing called hope? Why should we believe that life is going to get better? After all, the circles of life sure can feel like this Hula Hoop. Imagine this Hula Hoop as a year. It's made up of a variety of activities ... we have a section for work, maybe for school, one for relationship, and let's have a section just for eating, and then ... it seems to repeat .. work, school, relationship, eat. Well, we are at a new year ... a fresh start. Oh dear ... work, school, relationship, eat. Well, maybe let's try another year ... You can see where the repetition comes in.

The thing is, that God actually made the circles. He made the Earth to turn to give us days. He made it go around the Sun to give us years and the moon phases to give us months. But, why? Why did He give us these seemingly endless repeating cycles of time. These cycles drive home and even seem to create these repeating patterns in work, relationships, and spirituality. These cycles—like a wheel rolling in the mud—seem to get us into quite the rut.

Don't worry. Here comes the hope. The circles and cycles are an appearance. The repetition and monotony exist because we cannot YET see *through* the appearance. Even what seems to be a two-dimensional path around sun is an appearance. As the earth goes around the Sun, the Sun goes around the Milky Way Galaxy so that our path through the universe is more like a spiral or a helix. We are never physically in the same place that we were before.

Neither are we ever in the same spiritual place. In *Heavenly Secrets* we read “It is astonishing that one state never is or ever will be exactly like another.” (Pick up Hula Hoop spiral) In our Hula Hoop example, we could insert spiritual states instead of those earthly activities we put forward. One way to think of states is that they are like spiritual skill levels. If we get stuck on one skill level for a while, then life might start to feel two-dimensional like a circle. When we are caught in this unfulfilled zone, it is easy to lose our awareness of the reality that our lives are always growing from one moment to the next with the Lord always pulling us toward heaven.

When things feel repetitive, it's like Someone hands us a brick. Not knowing what to do with it, we put it down. Then we get another, and another. If we are unaware, it seems that we are just collecting a pile of bricks and it can become an overwhelming mess. Yet, as we gain awareness, what we thought was just a pile, the Lord has actually mortared together beautifully into a wall. What seemed like one failed experience after another, was actually the Lord providing one *learning* opportunity after another until that course of bricks is full. You see, our natural memory is a tool the Lord gives us to look back at the past ... not to live there, and not to be full of regret and anger ... but to learn. How did I get to where I am now?

Where did I go wrong all those times that has left me feeling stuck? Where can I let a little more love and light into my life?

We can avoid this circular feeling by leveling up and advancing to a higher state. But like a roof that can't go on half-built walls, we cannot progress to the next state until this one is full.

So, how does one level up? How does a state get filled? A state is full when the goods and truths of that state are conjoined. In other words, when you are doing good things for the right reasons. For example: instead of being upset that you have to drive the kids to school because of your spouse's poor time management, you might recall that there is no time in heaven, and so your spouse is simply exhibiting an angelic quality. Thinking positively about those around us is one practice that could help to lead to a full state.

You may be wondering what full states have to do with Israelite offerings. Well, the Israelites were often commanded to bring one-year-old animals as sacrifices to the Lord at certain times of the year, like the first month of the Jewish year that we read about today. This was because those one-year-old animals—as well as various completed time cycles—are symbols of full states. Just as the Israelites brought yearling animals to the Lord, a *full state* is something that *we* bring to the Lord. Our job is to see spiritual blockages—the ego-driven false ideas that get in the way—and then ... get them out of the way. We present these full states as offerings to the Lord through prayer in order to acknowledge that He is the One who wins the battle against our egos ... not us.

The Israelite new year was in March, and the Roman calendar that ours is based on also used to start in March. Around 40 years before the Lord was born, Julius Caesar inserted the months of January and February, with the new year beginning in January. So, instead of our new year coinciding with the first season of spring, it now comes in the middle of winter. Providentially, it's quite appropriate that the completion of the yearly cycle, which also symbolizes a full spiritual state, comes just one week after the celebration of the Lord's birth into this world.

January got its name from the god Janus, a two-faced deity, with one elderly visage looking back, and a young one looking forward. As we arrive at a new year, it's an opportunity to see what experiences and ways of thinking the OLD us had, and to look forward with hope for what changes the NEW us can accomplish.

True change happens only with the Lord's help. In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter five, there are six times that the Lord offers us hope in a new way of living. He tells us that our old way of understanding things can be better. Our focus today is not on the finer details of the internal sense of each of those six invitations, but rather on the Lord's call to us to understand and live His Word better going forward than we did in the past. Hope, after all, is not a helium balloon that floats around in the air. When our hope is in the Lord, it is a source strength that we can actually build our lives on.

As a preamble to the six invitations, the Lord assures us as His audience that His purpose is not to undo or cancel anything in His Word. "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill," says the Lord. To fulfill the Law means to bring our egos and our hearts into alignment with the Lord's heart, that is, to bring them into order; and by doing this, the Lord prepares us for heaven.

The Lord begins each invitation with the words "You have heard that it was said" This is where we are. This is our old self of the past. We hear things through the various forms of media that we consume. We

hear them from our loved ones. The Lord meets us here, right here, and then leads us forward to a happier life with words that fulfill our spirits.

We have heard that it was said ... that murder only applies to a person's natural body. But the Lord says to us that expressing and acting on our less-than-heavenly emotions can do damage to the ones we should otherwise be loving.

We have heard that it was said ... that adultery is merely a physical act, oh, and marriages can be dissolved on a whim. But the Lord says to us that marriage is something amazingly special that we should respect not only with our actions but with our thoughts and words as well.

We have heard that it was said ... that our words only matter when we make promises, but the Lord says to us that we are accountable for all the words that come from our hearts and leave our mouths and fingertips.

We have heard that it was said ... that it's ok to get even with somebody who has wronged us and also to hate them. But the Lord says to us to live a life of forgiveness—one in which we pray with mercy and love for the happiness of the person by whom we feel hurt or offended.

The Lord's words are a door to a new spirit. The Heavenly Doctrines tell us that a regenerated person's spirit is *completely* different from what they were before. This new year is a chance to take a look at our thoughts and the things we care about. Are we ready to become "completely different"? If we don't believe we are regenerate, are we ready and willing for those thoughts and loves to become completely different? Are we willing to let go of what we heard said ... and hear what the Lord says to us now?

This is just another year, another circle ... and yet, it's not just another year. This is the year that we spiral into a new state of life. This is the year that we become aware of what the Lord is leading us to. This is the year that the Lord fulfills His Word in us, leading us to a life of goodness—not just of truth—leading us out of a life of judgment and into a life of forgiveness. But all of this, only if we push ourselves to do good things for the right reasons, allowing us to level up our state. Acknowledging the Lord's hand in all of this is then what breaks through the appearance of seemingly endless two-dimensional cycles and ushers in the Lord's peace, that He directs all things, and provides all things, and that He leads to a good end.

This is the year that the Lord has made, we WILL rejoice and be glad in it.

Amen.

Readings:

Exodus 12:1-11; Matthew 5:17-48

Arcana Coelestia 7839. A son of a year shall be for you. This signifies a full state, as is evident from the signification of "a son," as being truth; and from the signification of "a year," as being an entire period from beginning to end, thus a full state.

A state is called "full," when the good is such that nothing is lacking for the reception of the influx of innocence. The truths of faith conjoined with the good of charity cause good to be full; for spiritual good receives its quality from the truths of faith. This is here meant by the "full state" which is signified by the "son of a year."

But the state is not full when truths have not as yet qualified good, so that this can receive the corresponding states of innocence. This state first becomes full when truths are regarded from good; and it is not yet full when good is regarded from truths. In this latter state are they who are being regenerated, but in the former are they who are regenerated. The former are in truth leading to good, but the latter are in truth which is from good; or the former are in obedience to truth, but the latter are in the affection of doing truth; and therefore the former are men of the external church, but the latter of the internal church. As by the "son of a year" was signified a full state, therefore it was so many times commanded that a lamb or a kid "a son of a year" should be sacrificed.