

"I have seen, I have heard, I have felt."

Secrets of Heaven 68

A New Church Day Sermon

by Rev. Derek Elphick

INTRODUCTION

Imagine trying to watch a movie at a movie theater without the soundtrack...

Or trying to watch the movie with the soundtrack but no picture...

Or imagine coming home after a long day, tired and hungry, and the smell of fresh baked bread is filling the house...

but you are denied a slice of that delicious bread!

Only when our senses are fully engaged do we experience the fullness and richness of life...

It's one thing to read about a famous...

- town or battlefield
- or piece of art
- or architecture
- or scientific achievement
- or different culture

but it's an entirely different thing to actually *go* to that place you've read about and see it *first-hand, in-person*

- where you can walk around, explore,
 - talk to people...
 - ask questions

...and touch and feel

...and taste and smell

The difference between reading or learning about something...

and going the next step to...**actually experiencing it...**

is that you're getting a full and dramatic confirmation of whatever it is you learned or read about.

1. A UNIQUE ABILITY

This was true for Emanuel Swedenborg in his role as a revelator.

The Lord could have simply told Swedenborg what to write down about...

heaven and hell
 about angels and devils
 about the spiritual sense of the Word
 or the life of charity and faith
 about the doctrine of use or marriage or providence or free-will...

But instead, Swedenborg was fully immersed in the spiritual world where he could gain...

first-hand *confirmation* of all the doctrines he was learning about...

And Swedenborg received this first-hand confirmation of incredible things

by seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, and tasting

[PAUSE]

Well, tomorrow we celebrate June 19th, New Church Day, in the form of a pageant

- we will watch scenes from the Book of Revelation acted out

- it will be a powerful display of sights and sounds depicting the birth of the New Church and her heavenly doctrines...

Today presents us with an opportunity to consider the unique *ability* the Lord gave His servant, Emanuel Swedenborg...

- an *ability* that no other prophet or revelator from Old Testament or New Testament times was ever given...

namely the ability to be awake, alert, active, engaged in this world and the next...

...simultaneously while writing the pages of this new revelation.

This is how Swedenborg describes it:

The Lord chose to manifest himself to me and assign me the task of presenting the teachings that will be a part of His new church, which is meant by the New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation. For this purpose, He opened the inner levels of my mind or spirit, *which allowed me to be in the spiritual world with angels and at the same time in the physical world with people.* This has gone on for twenty-seven years now.

True Christianity 851

Again, the Lord could have simply dictated to Swedenborg all the necessary facts and information of this new revelation but...

...instead, Swedenborg spent decades, 27 years, there, as a *resident* living and breathing the sights and sounds of the spiritual world!

Why was this necessary?

How does this special feature of the Lord's new revelation affect us?

Is there some kind of parallel lesson we need to know about?

And why was Swedenborg so adamant in *defending* this particular ability that was given to him by the Lord?

In our reading today, Swedenborg said...

I foresee that many people who read [these accounts] are going to believe that I fabricated them out of my own imagination, but I assert in truth that they were not

made up. I truly saw and heard those things. And I did not hear or see them when my mind was in some sort of sleep state; I was in a state of full wakefulness.

True Christianity 851

And from the passage which contains our text:

I am well aware of the fact that many people will say that nobody can possibly speak to spirits or angels so long as they are living in the body, and that many will call it a delusion...but none of this deters me; for ***I have seen, I have heard, I have felt.***

Secrets of Heaven 68

2. THE PURPOSE OF REVELATION

The purpose of Divine revelation is, obviously, to *reveal* truth...

- educate us about spiritual things
- teach us how to live good, honorable lives in service to the Lord & our neighbor

This has been the purpose of all Divine revelations...

Old Testament

New Testament

Writings for the New Church

(throughout the millennia it's also been a process of the Lord revealing or uncovering more and more "*interior truths*" [see AE 948:3] - uncovering deeper realities about life in this world **and** the next)

In the pages of the Writings, the Heavenly Doctrines, many *new truths* have been revealed (this is why we celebrate New Church Day).

But here's the challenge for us...truths are not just "facts"

- not just useful bits of "information," knowledge like any other knowledge

Truths, Divine truths, reveal or "expose" spiritual *causes*...

This is an important first step in understanding Swedenborg's statement, "*I have seen, I have heard, I have felt.*"

We live in a world of *effects* (or symptoms) - things happen to us and unless we go in search of answers by "looking behind the curtain," so to speak, we will continue to get pushed around by what appear to be random events and circumstances

- and our lives will appear to have no particular purpose or direction

But the truths of revelation open our mind, connect our mind, to spiritual causes...

- to a completely different realm, the spiritual world

Through no fault of our own, we can slip into a sort of "detached," theoretical approach toward the pages of revelation...

- partly because it's knowledge and information we've grown up with, that we're very familiar with, known about, often since childhood...

Most of this "good news" we celebrate on New Church Day is news we already know about...

e.g. heaven, hell, angels and devils, internal sense of the Word, faith and charity, repentance, providence, etc.

Another reason we might slip into this "detached" approach toward revelation is because there are negative, evil forces at work that want us to join the skeptics, the doubters, which try to convince us that these truths...

- don't have the *power* to change our lives

And so our faith and trust in the Lord can be challenged and tested.

This is why Swedenborg says...

To prevent this negative attitude - especially prevalent among people who have acquired a great deal of worldly wisdom - from infecting and corrupting people of simple heart and simple faith, it has been granted me to be with angels and to talk with them person to person. I have also been enabled to see what is in heaven and in hell...

Now I am being allowed to describe what I have heard and seen, in the hopes of shedding light where there is ignorance, and of dispelling skepticism.

The reason this kind of direct revelation is taking place today is that this is what the Coming of the Lord means.

Heaven & Hell 1

3. A DIRECT REVELATION

Isn't that a curious phrase, "***direct revelation***"?

The fact that Swedenborg spent 27 years living and breathing the sights and sounds of the spiritual world makes this revelation the most...

direct
to the point
unambiguous...

revelation ever given!

Take, by way of illustration, some of the title pages to the published books of the Writings.

We usually refer to these books by their abbreviated title, but the full titles underscore the fact that these books are this "direct revelation"...

coming from the Lord, *directly* from the spiritual world...

Full Title: *"Arcana Coelestia - the Heavenly Arcana contained in the Holy Scripture or Word of the Lord Unfolded beginning with the book of Genesis **together with wonderful things seen in the world of spirits and in the heaven of angels.**"*

Full Title: *"Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell **Drawn from things heard and seen.**"*

Full Title: *"**Angelic wisdom** regarding Divine Love and Divine Wisdom."*

Full Title: *"**Angelic wisdom** regarding Divine Providence."*

Full Title: *"**Delights** of Wisdom Relating to Married Love Followed by **Pleasures of Insanity** Relating to Licentious Love."*

And so the point of this *direct revelation* is that it "pulls back the curtain" in a way that's never been done before...

revealing "wonderful things," namely the "delights" and "pleasures," the "angelic wisdom" connected to the truths revealed or uncovered by the Lord...

- as well as the *pleasures of insanity* connected to evil and falsity that are also uncovered or revealed by the Lord

4. EXPERIENCING HEAVEN AND HELL

"I have seen, I have heard, I have felt."

Perhaps now we can see a little bit more why this statement is so powerful, so profoundly important.

The Lord *uncovers* the truths of this new revelation (including their point of origin) so that **we** may "see, hear and feel"

Just as it would be *unsatisfactory* to watch a movie without the soundtrack or smell fresh-baked bread out of the oven but not get to eat it...

so would it be *unsatisfactory* to be told about heaven and hell without knowing how those realms get played out in our lives here on earth (and what we can do about it)

We all experience "heaven" and "hell" here on earth but the question is, what are we learning from these experiences?

Do we understand how these delights are affecting our choices?

Goodness and truth, evil and falsity, remain abstractions until we *experience* them in our lives.

- It is only by seeing, hearing and feeling the *delights* and pleasures of evil that we become...

- shocked, appalled, totally turned off by these delights and pleasures

In the spiritual world, evils like revenge and deceit and hatred emit gross smells and take on grotesque, monstrous forms.

Swedenborg "saw, heard, and felt" these shocking delights first-hand.

He also witnessed first-hand the incredible, indescribable beauty of angelic loves like compassion, empathy, forgiveness, mutual love, and the desire to be of service to one's neighbor and these delights emitted fresh, fragrant aromas and smells, and took on beautiful forms.

CONCLUSION

And so the lesson here today, is that Swedenborg's experiences in the spiritual contain a parallel lesson for us.

The pages of the Heavenly Doctrines offer a rich, *visceral* experience. They engage all our senses because this is how truth works...

- it exposes, uncovers, the wonderful things of angelic life
- and it exposes, uncovers, the frightening things of hellish life

Only when all our senses are fully engaged do we experience the fullness and richness of life. And choosing the path toward heaven becomes more and more obvious because we have seen, we have heard, and we have felt. **AMEN**