

# Living in the Present

A sermon by Rev. Jeffrey Smith  
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Is time-travel possible? Whether you believe so or not, I hope to convince you today that it isn't ... and also that it is.

Allow yourself to be entertained for a moment by suspending whatever disbelief you might have. What would you do if you were able to go back in time. Would you go as far back as the dinosaurs? Maybe be a witness to certain historic events in history? Maybe you might wish to change an event that has led you to experiencing regrets today.

How about traveling to the future? Would you like to find out who wins the next world series (and maybe put some money on it)? Would you like to know how current efforts of yours will turn out in a job or some other project? Maybe you'd like to check in on someone's future welfare to make sure they turn out all right.

The cinematic world abounds with time travel movies. There are modern movies about robots from the future or a scientist who meets himself in the past, and there are also classic Christmas movies of characters who wish they were never born, and others who get to see what their own dismal future *could* look like.

Where might this fascination with time travel come from? Why do people dream of going back to the future or forward to the past? Whatever happened to just being present in the present and living in the now?

*What!?* What's that you say? You don't dream of traveling in time? You don't have some deep desire to right the wrongs of the past or get a peek into the future? Well, your time travel may not look like the movies, but I would bet that you have some fascination or preoccupation with the past and the future. Let me put it this way: would you describe yourself as enjoying complete, total, and utter pleasantness of life and happiness?

Do you have peace of mind from waking until sleeping? In Swedenborg's *Spiritual Experiences*, he writes "Conjecture about things to come, and the memory of things past, are what take away all the pleasantness of life and happiness. They cause worry, cares, and anxiety" (2190).

Our emotional and spiritual states are very much like spiritual locations, and you can't be in two locations at once. Like the Israelites could either be *in* the Promised Land or *out* of the Promised Land. We cannot be both worrying about the past and future AND have pleasantness of life and happiness.

What does worry about the past look like? Whether it's 10 years ago, one month ago, or five minutes ago. Our worry about the past could show up like any of these: wishing things had happened differently; constant regret over our actions; wishing the present could go back to the way it was in the past; harboring negative feelings or thoughts toward somebody for ANYTHING that happened in the past. All of these things cause us to LIVE in the past, and they take us away from the present. Sure, when things are difficult in the present, it feels nice to spend time in that past state and WISH that the present could be that way again, but living in those memories is no more than a cheaply made bandaid that falls off at the first drop of water.

And worry about the future? *What if this happens, and what if that happens?* Our thoughts of the future have us worrying about all the things we need to do, and about the ramifications and fall out of all of our actions and words from moment to moment. Will there be enough money? What will happen with this job? What will people think of me? What if I fail my kids and my family?

So, again, do you enjoy utter and complete pleasantness of life and happiness?

We concern ourselves with the past and the future because we are trying to ensure our own happiness. We are trying to control the situation, and yet we have no control over these things called *the past* and *the future*. We are trying to extract happiness and peace out of these things that will never be realities in which we can live, and which really only exist as fantasies in our minds.

And that brings us back to one of those matters of which I hoped to convince you today: that time travel is not nor ever will be possible. I don't believe we will ever be able to have this capability in this natural realm due to some spiritual principles. Firstly, and foremostly, the ability to go back and change events of the past would imply that God got it wrong and that His providence is fallible ... and I'm not willing to go out on that rotten limb.

Secondly and also importantly, all of the events of our past are important parts of who we are, and that includes our mistakes and events that we perceive as negative experiences. The Lord doesn't take them away, and neither can we. We want to change events of the past because we think our lives are happy or sad, good or bad because of them. But this is not the case at all. Our spiritual quality is from a spiritual source, not a natural source. Frankly, time travel would be a total waste of time if we intend to use it to become happy.

I did tell you that I intend to convince you that time travel IS possible today ... but you'll just have to wait five minutes into the future for that one.

The purpose of all this time travel talk is really to home in on our story for the day: the daily manna that the Israelites received in the wilderness for 40 years.

I'd like to start with the disposition of the Children of Israel: it was ghastly, it was horrible, it was selfish, it was overbearing and impatient ... it was just like us. "Oh that we had died in Egypt when we sat by the pots of meat." In other words, "Oh that we could go return to the past, which would enable us to escape from this growth opportunity." In the deeper meaning here, it depicts our desire to revert to a place of simply knowing and learning things, and not having to apply them. It's quite satisfying to learn that not murdering means not attacking somebody's spirit, but actually living that principle is quite uncomfortable, because sometimes we think they deserve it. And again, it's satisfying to learn that we ought to trust in the Lord's providence and that He leads all toward a good end, but it's easier in the moment to complain that the Lord, or people, or the world, has ruined one perfect moment or our entire life.

So, what does the Lord do? No, He doesn't smite them. He gives them what they need. He provides them with daily bread and quail. The daily bread is spiritual goodness that nourishes our spirits. It provides us with a sense of fulfillment, pleasantness, and happiness. The quail symbolized the tangible delights and good feelings that the Lord gives us.

The Lord didn't do this for the Israelites just once, or a couple times a year—this was daily, manna in the morning, quail in the evening, for 40 years. This daily bread doesn't simply mean a *daily* provision of goodness, happiness, and pleasantness for us ... it means perpetual provision of awesome wonderfulness – those are my words.

Perpetual. This part means "repeatedly; or, so frequent as to seem endless and uninterrupted."

Can you imagine experiencing seemingly endless and uninterrupted awesome wonderfulness? *#lifegoal*

This is what we get to work toward. This is what we get more and more to the degree that it is not hindered by our preoccupation with the past and future. Every time we say the Lord's prayer, we say the words "give us this day our daily bread", but the Lord is always giving it. We are really asking Him to help us receive that bread.

You see, our ego, our proprium, isn't content with what is provided. It's not content with what it has right now. It *wants* to be preoccupied with the past or look forward to a future when it can get more. It's happy to live in these phantasies that don't exist because it takes us away from the present where loving our neighbor really takes place. But we'll never be happy with what we want until we can be happy with what we have. And the beautiful thing is that, if we become happy with what we have, i.e., what the Lord has provided us, then we will no longer depend on the past or future for our happiness.

By the way, reflecting on the past and thought of the future all by itself is not harmful. After all, the Lord constantly reminds the Israelites of past times when they did (and didn't) follow Him, and how that went. Recall also that the Lord told Pharaoh through Joseph to store up grain for seven years of famine.

And this is where true time travel comes in. You see, time travel is possible—or rather, the purposes of time travel can all be achieved right here in the present. We can actually fix past mistakes, by reflecting on them, seeing what went wrong in us (not out there), and working to amend that in the present. And the future? The purpose of going into the future would be to see that all turns out well, and to see if what we are doing even matters.

The answer is yes, and yes. Everything will turn out fine in the future because the Lord is taking care of things. The more we *trust* in that right now in the present, then the more that will come true for us in all of the future now's. And everything we do always matters, though it might not matter in the way that we expect it to.

The time zone that we live in is very much related to our regeneration. Our efforts in this world are to become more and more like angels, which are people that have no cares for the past or future. It's easy to talk about living in the present, but it's not an easy thing to do. Here are just a few examples of ways that you can practice being present.

Imagine if you could be perfectly and totally content to be right where you are and doing whatever you are doing with your life. Next time you feel a cool breeze or the warm sun on your face, or when you hear the beautiful music at the end of this service, close your eyes and try to imagine that you are experiencing it for the first time ever. Don't name it, or try to qualify it. Just let it affect you. And next time you are with a loved one or a neighbor try to leave behind all the baggage of preconceptions you have about that person, and just be with that person as if it was your first time with them.

Every moment we have a choice. We can choose to live in the past or the future with worries, regrets, dreams, and apprehensions, or we can choose to live right now in the Lord's daily bread—His perpetual, unending, uninterrupted, awesome wonderfulness.

## Exodus 16

And the children of Israel said to them, "Oh, that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not. And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily."

Then Moses and Aaron said to all the children of Israel, "At evening you shall know that the Lord has brought you out of the land of Egypt. And in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord; for He hears your complaints against the Lord. But what are we, that you complain against us?" Also Moses said, "This shall be seen when the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening, and in the morning bread to the full; for the Lord hears your complaints which you make against Him. And what are we? Your complaints are not against us but against the Lord."

Then Moses spoke to Aaron, "Say to all the congregation of the children of Israel, 'Come near before the Lord, for He has heard your complaints.' " Now it came to pass, as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud.

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "I have heard the complaints of the children of Israel. Speak to them, saying, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. And you shall know that I am the Lord your God.' "

So it was that quail came up at evening and covered the camp, and in the morning the dew lay all around the camp. And when the layer of dew lifted, there, on the surface of the wilderness, was a small round substance, as fine as frost on the ground. So when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was.

AC 2493. I have been informed that the more interior and perfect angels are the less do they care about things of the past or think about those of the future, and that this is also the origin of their happiness. The angels have said that the Lord provides them every moment with what to think, accompanied by blessing and happiness, and that this being so they have no cares and no worries. This also is what is meant in the internal sense by the manna being received 'day by day' from heaven, and by the 'daily [provision] of bread' in the Lord's Prayer, as well as by the statement that they must not worry about what they are to eat and drink, or what clothes they are to put on. But although angels have no care about things of the past and are not worried about those of the future they nevertheless have a most perfect recollection of things of the past and a most perfect insight into those of the future, because their entire present includes both the past and future within it. Thus they possess a more perfect memory than can possibly be imagined or put into words.

SE 2188. I was speaking with angels, and at the time I saw in a spiritual mental image that the more inwardly perfect angels are, the less memory they have of things past, and that therein consists their happiness. For at every moment, the Lord gives them what is pleasant to them, and causes them both to think and to feel—so it is the Lord's doing, not theirs. This is the meaning of the passage, "Give us this day our daily bread" [Matt. 6:11, Luke 11:3], and that they should take no thought for the future, what they should eat and drink [Matt. 6: 25, 31], and that they gathered the manna daily [Exod. 16:14-21].