

Blessed are Those who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

Genesis 21:8-21 Hagar and Ishmael are Sent Out

And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing. So she said to Abraham, “Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac.” And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, “Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named. And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring.” So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.

When the water in the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot, for she said, “Let me not look on the death of the child.” And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation.” Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. And God was with the boy, and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

From the Heavenly Doctrines:

AC 2679

'And she went and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba' means a state of wandering from one position to another in matters of doctrine regarding faith. This is clear from the meaning

of 'going and wandering in the wilderness' as a state of wandering from one position to another, and from the meaning of 'Beersheba' as the doctrine of faith, dealt with at the end of this chapter, where it is said that Abraham and Abimelech made a covenant in Beersheba, and Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba.

The present verse describes the nature of the state to begin with of those who are being reformed, that is to say, it is a state when they are carried away into various errors. For they are given by the Lord to think much about eternal life, and so to think much about the truths of faith; but because they do so from the proprium, as has been stated, they cannot do other than wander into this position and then into that both in doctrine and in life. Thus they hold to that as being the truth which has been instilled into them since early childhood, or which is impressed on them by others, or which they think out for themselves, quite apart from the consideration that various affections of which they are not aware exist to mislead them.

These people are like fruit as yet unripe, to which shape, beauty, and flavour cannot be given in an instant, or like tender blades of corn which are unable to flower or to grow ears in an instant. The ideas however which enter in at that time, even though they are for the most part erroneous, are nevertheless such as may serve to promote growth; and later on when those persons are being reformed, such erroneous ideas are partly separated, and partly are of use in imparting so to speak nourishment and juices to the life that follows. These in turn can be adapted partly to the implantation subsequently of goods and truths by the Lord, and partly to serving as the ultimate planes for spiritual things. Thus they serve continuously as means to reformation, which means follow consecutively in an unbroken chain and order. For every least thing with man is foreseen by the Lord and is provided by Him for his future state which continues for ever. This is done for his own good, to the extent that this is in any way possible and the person allows himself to be led by the Lord.

AC 2682

[When Hagar lays Ishmael under a shrub] the subject is the second state of those who are being reformed, which is a state when they are reduced to ignorance, so that they do not know any truth at all, even to the point of despair. The reason they are reduced to such ignorance is so that the persuasive light which shines from the proprium may be extinguished. This light is such that it illuminates falsities as much as it does truths and so leads to a belief in what is false by means of truths and a belief in what is true by means of falsities, and at the same time to

trust in themselves. They are also reduced to such ignorance in order that they may be led through actual experience into a recognition of the fact that no good or truth at all originates in themselves or what is properly their own but in the Lord. Those who are being reformed are reduced to ignorance, even to the state of despair, at which point they receive comfort and enlightenment, as is clear from what follows. For the light of truth from the Lord cannot flow into the persuasive thinking that originates in the proprium; indeed its nature is such as to extinguish that light. In the next life that persuasive thinking presents itself as the light in winter, but with the approach of the light of heaven a kind of darkness consisting in ignorance of all truth takes the place of that wintry light. This state with those who are being reformed is called a state of desolation of truth, and is also frequently the subject in the internal sense of the Word.

AC 2694

The fact that those who are being reformed are brought into a state of not knowing any truth, that is, into a state of desolation, insomuch that they experience grief and despair, and that at this point for the first time they receive comfort and help from the Lord, is something that is not known at the present day for the reason that few are being reformed. Those who are such that they are able to be reformed are brought into this state, if not during this life then in the next, where that state is very well known and is called vastation or desolation, regarding which something has been said in Volume One, where also see 1109. Those who experience such vastation or desolation are brought to the point of despair, and when in that state they receive comfort and help from the Lord, and at length are taken away out of that state into heaven, where in the presence of angels they are taught so to speak anew the goods and truths of faith. The primary reason why they undergo vastation or desolation is so that the things of which they are firmly persuaded, originating in what is properly their own, may crumble, see 2682, and also that they may receive the perception of good and truth, which perception they are not able to receive until those false persuasions originating in what is their own are so to speak softened. And it is the state of distress and grief even to the point of despair that effects this change. What good is, and indeed what blessedness and happiness are, nobody with even the sharpest mind is able to perceive unless he has experienced the state of being deprived of good, blessedness, and happiness. It is from this experience that he acquires a sphere of perception; and he acquires it to the same degree that he has experienced the contrary state, for the sphere of perception and how far it extends are determined by his experience of the two contrary

states. These, in addition to many others, are the reasons for vastation or desolation. Let the following examples illustrate the matter.

AC 2702

'And she saw a well of water' means the Lord's Word from which truths are drawn. This is clear from the meaning of 'a well of water' and of 'a spring' as the Word, also as doctrine drawn from the Word, and consequently as truth itself, dealt with in what follows immediately below; and from the meaning of 'water' as truth. That 'a well' which has water in it, and 'a spring', mean the Word of the Lord, also doctrine drawn from the Word, and so consequently truth itself, may become clear from very many places.

Analysis:

The story of Hagar and Ishmael being sent out represents a state that all of us experience throughout our lives. We want to learn how we should live (i.e. we “hunger and thirst for righteousness”) but we think that we can figure it all out on our own. This is like Hagar and Ishmael wandering through the wilderness from place to place searching for water unsuccessfully.

As we go through this process of trying to figure things out on our own, we will inevitably realize that it is leading us nowhere. We reach the point of desperation, represented by Hagar laying Ishmael down under the shrub so she doesn't have to see him die. It is only after we reach this point that we realize how much we need help, and for the first time we go to the Word and realize that the answers are there.

Notice in the story that the Lord didn't create the well or make it magically appear—it says that Hagar's eyes were opened and she was able to see it. The Lord always gives us the answers we need in our lives, but we aren't always open to learning or accepting His teachings. After going through this process of hungering and thirsting for righteousness, though, we find ourselves finally open to trying out the things that He teaches and we find ourselves “filled” the way that Hagar and Ishmael were, and we feel the Lord's salvation.

Discussion Questions:

Why do you think this state of “hungering and thirsting for righteousness” is so important for our spiritual growth?

- Why do we need to wander in the wilderness before we can see the well that the Lord has provided for us?

Have you ever “wandered in the wilderness” trying to figure out how to live, just to realize that the answer was sitting in front of you the whole time?

- Has this ever happened with a teaching from the Word?

How can we strike the balance between forging our own path and acting as if of ourselves while still remaining open to the guidance of the Lord?

- Or, alternately, how can we adjust the way we support other people, knowing that this is our natural human process that leads us forward spiritually?