

What Does The Lord Do For Us?

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Worthy is the Lamb who was slain
To receive power and riches and wisdom,
And strength and honor and glory and blessing!
Revelation 5:12

In chapter five of the book of Revelation, John describes a powerful scene of rejoicing in heaven. He saw four wondrous beasts, twenty-four elders, and thousands of thousands of angels giving praise to the Lord. Their words represent an acknowledgment in heart and life that all power, all wisdom, and that the tiniest event that happens is overseen by His Divine Providence. It represents a deep gratitude for what the Lord has done is and is doing.

How different are the words of Jacob as he left the land of Canaan. He isn't at all sure the Lord will take care of him. He instead is making a bargain. He will worship the Lord and give a tenth of his newly gained wealth if the Lord will take care of him, and bring him back to his home in peace. Concerning Jacob's vow, the Arcana Caelestia makes the following observation:

"Making a vow" means wishing the Lord to provide. This is because present within vows there is a desire and affection that what is wished for may come about, thus that the Lord may provide it. Within them something of a bargain is present, and at the same time on the person's part something of a bounden duty to keep his side of it, should he obtain his desire. This was the case with Jacob, in that Jehovah was to be his God, and the stone which he placed as a pillar was to be God's house, and he would devote a tenth of everything God had given him, if Jehovah guarded Him on the road, gave him bread to eat and clothing to wear, and he went back in peace to his father's house. From this it is evident that the vows made in those times were particular agreements, involving primarily people's acknowledgment of God as their God if He provided them what they desired, and involving also their repayment to Him with some gift if He did provide it. (Arcana Caelestia 3732:1)

Objectively, many people would say that Jacob's life was greatly blessed. He had a large family. He was tremendously wealthy. His

favorite son provided for him and his family in Egypt during a terrible famine. But when Pharaoh asked him near the end of his life how old he was, his answer doesn't seem to indicate a sense of these blessings. He told Pharaoh:

"The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage." Genesis 47:9

How could it be that all sorts of wonderful things happened to Jacob and yet he feels like things haven't gone very well? Why do some people feel grateful to the Lord for all He has done for them, some people grow increasingly bitter over how their life has turned out, blaming their problems on God, and many feel neither gratitude or bitterness and don't particularly think about it. The issue of God's care or lack thereof doesn't occur to them as being significant.

Given a choice, we would probably all prefer to feel gratitude. All the angels feel this gratitude. But can very many of us say that we always or almost always sense a deep gratefulness for the Lord's care of our lives? It is a state that none of us could have from the beginning of our adult life. The Lord has promised us that while we may enter adult life with the factual knowledge of what the Lord has done and is doing for us, there will be important areas of life in which we will not and indeed cannot see His care as we begin our adult path to heaven.

Starting from our early childhood, each of us experienced many different events and learned many different lessons from what happened in our lives. For some of us, the primary direction of our thoughts led toward feeling and thinking that if there is a problem, it is up to us to solve it. For this group the regular pattern of thought is: "If I try harder, I can make things work out right." For another group of us the primary direction of our thoughts led toward feeling and thinking that if there is a problem, the Lord or someone else is at fault. For this group it is easy to shrug when a problem arises or to get impatient or angry that someone else hasn't fixed it. Neither of these perspectives leads to the gratitude expressed by the angels. Both of them, by themselves can lead to frustration and discouragement because we cannot make life work all by ourselves, and it will not work if we expect others, including the Lord, to do it us without significant effort on our part.

If Jacob's words represent a person who will withhold allegiance to the Lord until He has proved Himself, this proof will never come. The Lord does not have as His primary concern that the external events of our natural lives work out the way that we naturally wish they would. If we are keeping score on this plane of life we may be very discouraged.

People can react remarkably differently to the events of their lives. Imagine a man who has participated in a church congregation essentially all of his life, who daily read from the Word, but who faced a major health problem in his fifties. What if this man's reaction included a deep bitterness that the Lord had failed him. Contrast this state of mind with that of a woman in her sixties who had a multitude of health problems and was in nearly constant dull pain, but who was filled with joy and gratefulness for the blessings of her life. Why does the first person react negatively and the second so positively. As the saying goes, why do some people see the glass half full and some see it half empty?

For a person to see what the Lord has done and is doing, that person has to come to care about the things that the Lord cares about. If we judge the Lord on criteria that He doesn't particularly put much stock in, it isn't surprising that we will sense that He isn't doing enough or is being inconsistent in His efforts.

There is a humorous story about our perspective and the Lord's that has a man asking God, "What is a million of our years like to You." God replied, "Like a second of your time." The man then said, "And what is a million of our dollars like to You." God replied, "It is like a penny of your money." The man asked, "Could You possibly give me one of your pennies?" And God said, "Sure, in a second."

How do we come to care about the things the Lord cares about? There is only one way. That is to receive the benefits of spiritual rebirth or regeneration. Without this fundamental change in the values that we enter adult life with we will never be able to see the Lord as being worthy "To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!"

If Jacob's vow represent a person's commitment to accept the Lord's commandments and His call to the life of repentance and charity in the hope that this acceptance will bring blessings, it will indeed be fulfilled. The leap of faith that every person has to take is to believe that

following the Lord will bring blessings before the person really knows what these blessings will be. Each person needs to be willing to do what is good and think what is right and to shun what is evil and false, even when part of their mind strongly questions whether this will lead to happiness and fulfillment. This part of our mind believes in many false definitions about happiness, responsibility, and what is right and wrong. This part of our mind arises from our natural heredity to love self and the world more than the Lord and our neighbor. Until this natural heredity is conquered, we will never really see the Lord and never appreciate His work.

The Lord has been very clear about what it takes to conquer our natural heredity. He assures us that it will take conscious effort and attention. It will require us to use the truth we initially learn to change fundamental habits in our thoughts, speech, and action. It will require prayer. It will require us to acknowledge to ourselves that we absolutely cannot be happy without the Lord's help. It will require us to acknowledge to ourselves that unless we consciously make the effort, as though by ourselves, to flee from evils in the Lord's name, we cannot be happy.

Forming new habits isn't easy. Have you ever tried to show someone a new way to do a familiar action or process. It can be something as simple as teaching a young person a better way to make a basketball shot or trying to convince someone that she should work at learning to type without looking at her fingers. It can be as complicated as helping someone recognize that his fundamental pattern of fathering needs to change. At first the new method will feel uncomfortable, foreign, and even though it will be fundamentally more effective in the long run, it may actually be much less effective when a person is first practicing it. The same can be true for our efforts to shun evils.

The Lord tells us: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." (Revelation 3:20) Many more times than we can possibly imagine each day, He knocks at the door of our mind trying to bring to our attention what we need to change in our lives, what we could do, what is evil and false, and what is good and true. He has promised that a part of our mind absolutely will not believe what He has to say. It will resist any thought of change and argue that change will cause more trouble than good or just not make any difference.

The Lord absolutely promises heavenly happiness for those who follow what He teaches. He promises "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." (Matthew 7:7-8). It has been observed that if it could be proven that wearing a little blue dot on the back of your hand guaranteed a happier, healthier, more productive life, we would all be wearing blue dots on the back of our hand. The Lord promises that if we are willing to humble ourselves enough to recognize our need for His help, His wisdom, and if we are willing to do our part to follow Him, we will experience a profound change in our lives. We will gradually come to see the world very differently from how we had previously seen it. What we care about in our own lives and in the lives of those around us will become significantly different and the peace of mind we experience, no matter what natural events occur in our lives or those around us, we will feel grateful for what the Lord has done and is doing for us. This is a sure promise yet many do not heed it.

We don't have to earn the Lord's care. He constantly works to lead us to a better life. It is His free gift, a gift from a loving Father. And He knows that we need to freely receive this gift if we are ever going to experience true happiness. May each of us have times when we sense in heart and mind that we are wonderfully well cared for. And when we don't sense this care, may we work to hold onto the thought that it is occurring and that our conscious effort to repent and receive the blessings of regeneration is required before we will see His care for what it truly is. May we more and more come to the state of mind of those who John saw praising the Lord. May we come to echo their words in heart, mind, and life.

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Revelation 5:12 AMEN.

Lessons: Genesis 28:20-22, Revelation 1:8, 3:20, 5:11-13