

A Residue In The Land: Readings

Genesis 45:1-15: And Joseph could not hold himself back before all who were standing over him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from with me! And no one stood up with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And Joseph wept aloud; and the Egyptians heard, and the house of Pharaoh heard. And Joseph said to his brothers, I am Joseph; does my father yet live? And his brothers could not answer him; for they were vexed before him. And Joseph said to his brothers, Come near to me I pray. And they approached. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be grieved, neither be incensed in your eyes, that you sold me hither; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For these two years the famine has been in the midst of the land; and there are still five years in which there will be no plowing and harvest. And God sent me before you to put for you a residue in the land, and to make you live for a great deliverance. And now it is not you who have sent me hither, but God; and He set me for a father to Pharaoh, and for lord to all his house, and I rule in all the land of Egypt.

Arcana Coelestia 560: “A person cannot live without remains; for it is in the remains that the life of a person is superior to that of animals. From remains, that is, through remains from the Lord, a person is able to be human, to know what is good and true, to reflect upon matters of every kind, and consequently to think and to reason; for in remains alone is there spiritual and celestial life.”

Arcana Coelestia 561: “But what are remains? Remains are not only the goods and truths that a person has learned from the Lord's Word from infancy, and has thus impressed on his memory, but they are also all the states thence derived, such as states of innocence from infancy; states of love toward parents, brothers, teachers, friends; states of charity toward the neighbor, and also of pity for the poor and needy; in a word, all states of good and truth. These states together with the goods and truths impressed on the memory, are called remains, which are preserved in a person by the Lord and are stored up, entirely without his knowledge, in his internal man, and are completely separated from the things that are proper to man, that is, from evils and falsities. All these states are so preserved in a person by the Lord that not the least of them is lost....When states of evil and falsity recur...then these states are tempered by the Lord by means of the good states.”

Arcana Coelestia 5897: “A person is continually among evils and falsities, and is held in captivity by them. Evils and falsities are what are in the Word signified by the ‘nations.’ The external man, when separated from the internal, is altogether in these, and therefore unless the Lord were to gather up the goods and truths which as occasion offers are insinuated into a person during the progress of life, the person could not possibly be saved, for without remains there is salvation for none.” (Ibid 5897)

Arcana Coelestia 571: “Let it be known that when a person is of such a character that he immerses the truths of faith in his insane desires, he then profanes the truths, and deprives himself of remains, which although they remain cannot be brought forth, for as soon as they are brought forth they are again profaned by things that are profane for profanations of the Word produce as it were a hard skin, which causes an obstruction, and absorbs the goods and truths of remains.”

A Residue In The Land

A sermon by Rev. Matthew Genzlinger

“And God sent me before you to put for you a residue in the land, and to make you live for a great deliverance.” (Genesis 45:7) The Old and New Testaments are filled with beautiful stories where the Lord is preserving even small amounts of what is good. In the story we read earlier, Joseph is sent by God to preserve a residue of goodness in the land during seven years of famine. Whenever the Children of Israel turn away from Jehovah or are taken away by an enemy, the Lord preserves a few of the good and faithful. When the Lord was born into this world, even thou the human race as a whole has spiritually hit rock bottom, there was still a remnant of people that the Lord was able to sustain: Mary and Joseph, Zacharias and Elizabeth, the wise men, the shepherd, some of the disciples.

On a more general level, these stories of the Lord preserving even small amounts of what is good, remind us that the Lord is always providing for his church on earth. The church is like the heart and lungs in the human body. The church brings spiritual light and freedom to people. The church on earth acts as a foundation for the heaven and conjoins heaven to the human race. And so, in His Divine Providence the Lord is always persevering a remnant or a residue of a true church on earth, even if it exists among a relatively few. (AC 4060 & SS 104)

On a more specific level, these beautiful stories of the Lord preserving good things, represent something called remains or remnants that the Lord is preserving inside of you.

Throughout our lives in this world, the Lord is continuously working to store up states of goodness and truth within us. And He does this in a variety of different ways. These states of goodness and truth are stored up within us as we learn truths from the Lord through our parents, teachers and our own reading of the Lord’s Word. However, these states of goodness and truth – again, called remains or remnants – are also being stored up within us in ways that we are not as consciously aware of. For example, the Heavenly Doctrines teach us that when a new born baby is simply being held and touched by his or her parents, states of the Lord’s Divine love are being instilled within that infant. When young children love their parents or innocently play with other children, states of love and charity – remains – are also being introduced secretly by the Lord. Worship is another example of this. When people choose to come and humbly worship the Lord, we are told that even thou they are not aware of it, they are being, “Gifted with states of holiness...which states of holiness are preserved in them by the Lord for the use of eternal life.” (AC 1618)

Because these remains or remnants that are implanted within us are states of the Lord’s goodness and truth, and not our own, the Heavenly Doctrines explain in many places that these remains are not only holy, but they are the Lord’s very dwelling place with us. And one place we see this represented is in the spiritual meaning of tithing. Some of you may remember that as the Children of Israel were preparing to enter into the Promised Land they were told that a tithe, or a tenth, of all their wealth had to be offered to Jehovah in various ways. Well, interestingly, the number ten – and so in this case the tithe or tenth - represents these remains of goodness and truth that the Lord implants within every person. Because these remains of goodness and truth are the Lord’s with us, we read in the book of Leviticus that, “All the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is Jehovah’s.” (Leviticus 27:30) Elsewhere we are also taught that it is through remains that the Lord causes us to be human, and instills a spiritual life within us.

So we know that these remains exist within every single one of us. However, the Lord also wants us to know that we have the choice to respond to them in one of two ways. We can either cover them over; or we can allow the Lord to draw them forth.

Throughout the Scriptures we find rather depressing stories that represent people who have chosen to cover over these beautiful states of goodness and truth that the Lord has worked so hard to implant with them. People like this are represented by the Nephilim and the other wicked people who existed just before the flood, and of whom we read in Genesis chapter five, “And Jehovah saw that the evil of man was multiplied on the earth, and that all the formation of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the day.” (Genesis 6:5) Some of the wicked nations that existed in and around the Land of Canaan represent people who have chosen to cover over their remains. And at times, the Child of Israel themselves actually represent people who have done this. In Jeremiah the Lord says to Israel, “Why do you commit great evil against your souls, to cut off from you man and woman, infant and suckling, out of the midst of Judah, so that I shall leave you no remains.” (Jeremiah 44:7)

Now, of course, an important question to ask ourselves is, what causes the remains, or these states of goodness and truth, to be covered over within us? And the answer to this question is simple: Evils or sins. Everybody knows that a large part of living a spiritual life and preparing for heaven involves making the effort to shun evils as sins against the Lord. We need to avoid living a life that will prevent the Lord from leading us to a state of eternal happiness. As obvious as the need to shun evils is to most people, it can be very useful to reflect on this teaching that when we indulge in evil behaviors what is actually happening is the evils that we are indulging in are covering over our remains. Think about that image. When we choose to break one of the Lord’s commandments, when we choose to foster the hellish lusts of anger and revenge, when we make choices that go contrary to the Lord’s teachings about marriage and the special relationship between men and women; in general, when we do anything that causes us to step outside of the Lord’s Divine order or that goes against His Word, we are covering over all of these states of goodness and truth that the Lord has implanted within us over the course of our lives. And, the Lord often makes the point that it is not just the evils we will and even do that cause our remains to be covered over. This happens especially when we make excuses or rationalize our bad behaviors. If we are purposefully doing evil things AND justifying our disorderly behavior, we are as it were, “Producing a hard skin, which causes an obstruction, and absorbs the goods and truth of remains.” (AC 571)

While there are many rather depressing stories in the Word about people choosing to live a life that causes their remains to be covered over, there are also plenty of stories in the Word about people choosing to allow the Lord to not only preserve but to draw forth their remains. We see this in part in the story we read earlier where through Joseph the Lord brought forth a residue in the land to feed the people. Despite their numerous mistakes and their propensity to be taken away as captives to strange land, we see a wonderful image of the Lord drawing out people’s remains in the accounts of the Lord leading a remnant of the Children of Israel back to Jerusalem. And in Jeremiah we read these beautiful and hopeful words: “And I will bring together the remnant [or remains] of My flock out of all lands whither I have driven them, and will return them to their homes; and they shall be fruitful and multiply.” (Jeremiah 23:3)

Now how do we allow the Lord to draw forth our own remains? Especially when we have perhaps covered them over in the past.

One of the first things to remember is that these remains, or the states of goodness and truth that the Lord has implanting within you, are always there. Even when we do make mistakes and do something that goes against the Lord's Word, those remains that exist within us may be covered over, but they are still there. This is a very powerful and important teaching. Because what this means is that no matter what anyone has done, no matter how many times they have turned away from the Lord, there is still hope; because the Lord is still protecting these remains, waiting for an opportunity to draw them forth.

Knowing this, the way we give the Lord the opportunity to start drawing these remains forth, is simply by recognizing and shunning the evils that have been covering them over. They are there. We just need to cooperate with the Lord by removing the obstacles.

Now, here again, the Lord reminds us time after time that if we want to rid ourselves of the evil loves, the false ideas and the disorderly behaviors that are covering over our remains, one of the most important things we need to do is stop making excuses for them. If we want to uncover all of these states of goodness and truth that exist within us from the Lord, then, knowing that the Lord loves us and wants to help us, we need to be bold and courageous about dealing honestly with our mistakes. When we have gone off the path that the Lord lays before us in His Word, we need to recognize that we have done this, fess up to it, and then instead of trying to excuse it or justify it, ask the Lord for help in shunning the evils we've gotten tangled up with, and starting a new life.

While the meaning may be a bit obscure upon first glance, in the book of Isaiah chapter eleven, there's a good representation of our need to stop making excuses if we want to allow the Lord to draw forth our remains. In this chapter, Isaiah is prophesying about a time when the Lord will lead the Children of Israel back from captivity; specifically, out of Assur, which was the capital of the Assyrian empire. Well, interesting "Assur" in the Word is often used to represent perverse reasoning, or the ridiculous and false arguments that we will sometimes use to justify or excuse our own evils. And so, what does Isaiah prophecy to the Children of Israel concerning Assur? He says, "And Jehovah shall gather the outcasts of Israel, and the scattered of Judah shall He bring together from the four wings of the earth....And there shall be a highway for the remains of the people, which shall be a residue out of Assur." (Isaiah 11:12-16) Again, this is an image of our own internal states of goodness and truth being called back or drawn forth by the Lord, out of Assur, or away from the evils that we have been excusing and justifying in the past.

This week reflect on the fact that from the moment you were born, the Lord has been working to implant within you states of His goodness and truth. He does this in miraculous ways, many of which we are not even consciously aware of. These remains, these states of goodness and truth are the Lord's dwelling place with us; and the Lord protects these heavenly states, preventing any harm from befalling them. On one hand it's inspiring to just remember that the Lord is doing this, and that these remains always exist within us. But this week we can also reflect on how we are choosing to respond to these remains. If we're being honest with ourselves, in what ways might we be covering over these remains. What choices are we making, what behaviors are we practicing, what kinds of thoughts and selfish loves might we be permitting within our own hearts and minds that are acting like a hard skin, preventing the

Lord's states of goodness and truth from really affecting us and allowing us to move forward spiritually. And also reflect on the incredible sense of hope we can have, knowing that the Lord is always working to draw forth these states of goodness and truth that He has been implanting within us. And with just a little bit of cooperation on our part, He can easily achieve this, proving us with a new freedom, a new sense of peace, and a new life as He draws us closer to Himself, forming us into the people He created us to be. Reading again from the book of Jeremiah: "And I will bring together the remnant [or remains] of My flock out of all lands whither I have driven them, and will return them to their homes; and they shall be fruitful and multiply." (Jeremiah 23:3) Amen.