

The Love of Offspring

a sermon by the Rev. Kenneth J. Alden
(Readings are appended below.)

1. After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.' ...'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.' And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.'" (*Genesis 15:1, 5*)
2. The Word has many stories of parents, and women in particular, longing to have children, but unable to do so.
 - A. This morning we will look at that precious love which leads a woman into motherhood by examining stories in which the desire for offspring is sorely tested.
3. When looking at stories of barrenness, we are immediately struck with the strength of the love of offspring.
 - A. In our story of Abram, we saw him asking God why he was childless in spite of an earlier promise that God would make of him a great nation. (See *Genesis 12:2*)
 - 1 In the chapter after our story, Sarai's desire for offspring led her to give her maidservant to Abram to bear a child in her name. (See *Genesis 16:1-2*)
 - a. When, however, her maid despised her because Sarai was barren, Sarai dealt harshly with her.
 - b. When at last a son of her own was born, we sense in her words the joy that her love was fulfilled:
 - 1) "God has made me laugh, so that all who hear will laugh with me.... Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have born him a son in his old age." (*Genesis 21:6-7*)
 - B. A generation later, Isaac pleaded with the Lord because Rebekah was barren, and his prayer was answered. (*Genesis 25:21*)
 - C. In the next generation, it was Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel, who was unable to bear a child.
 - 1 She, too, gave her maidservant to her husband and later desperately bargained with her sister for her son's mandrakes in hope that she herself could conceive. (See *Genesis 29:31; 30:4, 7, 14-16*)
 - D. In our second lesson, we read of Hannah and her bitterness of soul as she

prayed for a child, unable to be consoled by the love of her husband alone.
(See *1 Samuel* 1:8-9)

4. These and other stories of barrenness tell of a great and good love that leads people to have and raise children.
 - A. To such stories we could add the promise of great blessing that the Lord gave when He said at creation, “Be fruitful and multiply” (See *Genesis* 1:28), and which He renewed again and again as, for example, in *Deuteronomy*:
 - 1 “...because you listen to these judgments, and...do them...he will love you, and bless you, and multiply you: he will also bless the fruit of your womb.... You shall be blessed above all peoples; there shall not be a male or female barren among you.... (*Deuteronomy* 7:12-14)
5. What is this love which is deeply grieved when it goes unfulfilled and which is so bountifully blessed when it bears fruit?
 - A. Behind the sorrow of barrenness is the love of procreation—a love which stems from one of the two universal spheres proceeding from the Lord.
 - 1 The Heavenly Doctrine says of this love:
 - a. “What the love of procreating is like is known from its delight, it being a highly exalted and transcendent one. In such delight is the state of procreating in men, and especially the state of receiving in women. This supreme delight continues on with its love to the offspring, and in it finds its fulfillment.” (*Conjugal Love* 390)
 - 2 Other passages from the Heavenly Doctrine speak of the supreme delight associated with procreation.
 - a. One says that the delight of marriage is more excellent than all others on account of its use which is the procreation of the human race, and thence of the angelic heaven. (See *Heaven and Hell* 402e)
 - 3 In honoring father and mother, we rejoice that they have participated in that love from the Lord which creates human beings and leads them toward heaven.
 - a. Had they adamantly fought that love, as some do, the Lord could not have created us, or instilled as many of those tender affections for heavenly things which remain with us from infancy, nor could He have led us by parental upbringing to our present state.
 - b. It is from the very nature of the Lord’s love that fathers and mothers can love others outside of themselves, will to be conjoined with them

and will to bless them, (see *True Christian Religion* 43), but that love needs to be received and used by human beings as their own for the Lord to express His love most effectively.

- c. The Heavenly Doctrine teaches, moreover, that the love of procreating and protecting offspring is received primarily by women and through them by men, because that love belongs to married love which is also received directly from the Lord by women. (See *Conjugal Love* 393, 223)
 - 1) It is not surprising, then, that in the stories of the Word, the strength of the love of offspring is seen especially in the stories of mothers who faced and were delivered from their barrenness.
- 6. While not every adult experiences the sorrow of being childless, those who do can find it quite painful.
 - A. Since procreating children only takes place on earth as an added purpose of marriage (See *Heaven and Hell* 382b), we can appreciate the anxiety of those who lose hope of ever procreating offspring before they leave the natural world.
 - 1 But although it is an opportunity that presents itself to some people for only a few years in all eternity, we can be sure that the Lord is always providing for the eternal happiness of each one of us.
 - 2 The uses and delights of procreation are very great and a necessary foundation for all spiritual uses, but the uses found in the spiritual world are even greater, for they give spiritual life to natural procreation.
 - a. We can be sure that those who have loved the use of procreation but who have not had that privilege on earth, will nevertheless participate in that use from the spiritual world by communicating their love to those on earth who are having children.
- 7. Whenever we are dealing with stories in the Lord's Word, we are dealing with states of life that affect people everywhere and in every age.
 - A. Even those who are privileged to have children are faced at some time in their life with being unfruitful in some endeavor.
 - B. When the Word speaks of barrenness in a way that applies to all people, however, it is speaking primarily of a spiritual barrenness which prevents love from the Lord from finding expression in fruitfulness.
 - 1 In marriages in heaven, for example, in place of procreating children, couples procreate states of goodness and truth. (See *Heaven and Hell* 382b)

- 2 When we are unable to bring forth spiritual good and truth in our lives, we are in a state of spiritual barrenness.
- C. We see this illustrated in the spiritual meaning of the story of Abram's desire for offspring.
- 1 There, Abram represents the Lord, and his plea that his servant not become his heir represents the Lord's strong desire that the church not consist solely of people in the ritualistic externals of the church. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 1795, 1798)
 - 2 We read in *Arcana Coelestia*, "Out of Divine love, or mercy, the Lord wills to have everyone near to Himself, so that they do not stand outside, that is, in the first heaven. His will is that they should dwell in the third heaven. and if possible not merely with Him but abiding in Him. Such is the nature of Divine or the Lord's love. But since at that time none but external things existed with the Church, He complained of this in the words that occur here - 'Behold, a son of my house is my heir' - by which is meant that in His kingdom there would thus be only that which is external." (*Arcana Coelestia* 1799:2)
8. Spiritual childlessness is a condition in which the life which flows from the Lord into the interiors of the mind is not received in one's outward life.
- A. Only the external things of life are put into practice.
 - B. Spiritual childlessness could exist where someone participates in worship at church and supports a church organization, but does not live by principles of charity toward the neighbor and love to the Lord.
 - 1 Abram's complaint in the internal sense shows distress that there was an external church but no true heir.
 - 2 There were people involved in church organization and rituals which serve like the steward of the house, but there were no actions produced from conscience in obedience to what the Word teaches about charity and love. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 1794-1795)
 - 3 At times we are all spiritually barren in this sense, even when we are naturally fruitful.
 - a. For example, rather than desiring to have children out of a desire to contribute to the up-building of the heavens, a person could want them only because they are cute and cuddly, or because they would have someone to boss around.

- 1) Their ambition could be to raise up children to be images and likenesses of their own principles and passions rather than of the Lord's wisdom and love.
 - 2) Their desire for children of their own could be a selfish desire to replicate themselves rather than the spiritual desire to bless like-minded others with those gifts and blessings that the Lord has given them. (See *Divine Love and Wisdom* 47; *True Christian Religion* 43, 44; *Conjugal Love* 211e)
- 4 From these examples it is plain that it is quite possible for someone to be naturally fruitful but spiritually barren at the same time, whether that fruitfulness and barrenness has to do with having children or accomplishing other uses.
 - 5 It is equally possible for someone to be naturally barren but spiritually fruitful.
 - a. For example, a person could be unable to have children of his or her own, but could love children from a love of leading them toward heaven and could love to live for heaven themselves.
9. As surely as there are many stories in the Word about barrenness, so we can be sure that each one of us will have many times in our life when we are spiritually barren in some way.
 - A. In such states, some spiritual love will be active in us but unfulfilled.
 - B. During these times, our love is tested, and so they are times of spiritual temptation.
 - C. The consolation that the Lord brings after spiritual temptations is what is represented by the Lord saying to Abram, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." (*Genesis* 15:1)
 - 1 The Lord is here offering protection against evils and falsities and promising the accomplishment of His purposes.
 - 2 Since Abram here represents the Lord when He was on earth, the reward here spoken of is a total giving of all His own to others for the sake of their eternal happiness.
 - a. From His love by which He conquered in His temptations, He willed only to give, and to save the whole human race.
 - 1) He willed to have nothing for Himself. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 1789)

- 2) This is the reward that the Lord gives to each of us, as well, when we hold to the love which comes from Him during times when that love is tested.
 - A) As we keep His commandments, He shields us against covetous, angry, motives or feelings of self-pity.
 - B) As we refuse to have reward for ourselves as our end, we are rewarded after temptation with a selfless love from the Lord which finds joy in giving happiness to others.
10. The Word provides a picture of the life of every individual, especially as they follow the Lord to become images and likenesses of Him.
 - A. In the stories of barrenness, we see a fundamental love from the Lord being put to the test.
 - B. On the natural level, it is the love of procreation which goes out from the Lord throughout creation.
 - C. On the spiritual level it is a love of giving one's all to others that stems from the Lord's own love.
 - D. This is a love that spiritually-minded fathers and mothers aspire to, and indeed, that all people who follow the Lord aspire to.
 - 1 But during the progress of regeneration, each of us will face times when that love is barren.
 - 2 Still, the Lord comes to us as our shield and exceedingly great reward.
 - a. Every state of spiritual barrenness *can* be overcome.
 - b. We will find *some* means of expressing heavenly loves, *some* opportunity to shun evils and bring forth the goods the Lord teaches.
 - c. As the Lord said to Abram: 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.' ...'one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.... Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.... 'So shall your descendants be.'
 - d. *Amen.*

Lessons: *Genesis* 13:14-18; 15:1-7; *1 Samuel* 1:1-11; *CL* 386, 387, 389; *AC* 1799:1,2

Conjugal Love 386. (1) Two universal atmospheres emanate from the Lord to preserve the universe in its created state, one of which is an atmosphere of procreating, and the other an atmosphere of protecting what has been procreated....

387. (2) These two universal atmospheres ally themselves with an atmosphere of conjugal love and with an atmosphere of love for little children....

390. The atmosphere of procreating and the atmosphere of protecting what has been procreated are united in a continuous succession, because a love of procreating is carried over into a love for that which is procreated. What the love of procreating is like is known from its delight, it being a highly exalted and transcendent one. In such delight is the state of procreating in men, and especially the state of receiving in women. This supreme delight continues on with its love to the offspring, and in it finds its fulfillment.

Arcana Coelestia 1799. ... 'Becoming an heir' or inheriting means eternal life in the Lord's kingdom. All who are in the Lord's kingdom are heirs, for the source of the life in them is the Lord's life, which is the life of mutual love, and for that reason they are called 'sons'. The Lord's sons or heirs consist of all who have His life in them, for it is from Him that their life comes, and it is from Him that they have been born, that is, regenerated. Those born of another are that other's heirs; and so it is with all who are being regenerated by the Lord, for in that case they are receiving the life that is the Lord's. [2] In the Lord's kingdom there are those who are external, those who are more interior, and those who are internal. Good spirits who dwell in the first heaven are external, angelic spirits who dwell in the second heaven are more interior, and angels who dwell in the third heaven are internal. Those who are external are not as close to or near the Lord as those who are more interior, and these in turn are not so close or near as those who are internal. Out of Divine love, or mercy, the Lord wills to have everyone near to Himself, so that they do not stand outside, that is, in the first heaven. His will is that they should dwell in the third heaven. and if possible not merely with Him but abiding in Him. Such is the nature of Divine or the Lord's love But since at that time none but external things existed with the Church, He complained of this in the words that occur here - 'Behold, a son of my house is my heir' - by which is meant that in His kingdom there would thus be only that which is external. But comfort followed, and a promise of internal things, as described in the verses that follow next....

Through The Week

Recall the Lessons

- ◆ Abram was promised descendants numbering as the dust, but as yet had none to inherit.
- ◆ The Lord, as his shield and great reward, promised Abram his own son and descendants as the stars in number.
- ◆ Hannah was severely provoked because her womb was closed.
- ◆ In spite of her husband's comforting words, she was in bitterness of soul and grief as she prayed for a son.

Reflect on the Message

- ◆ Stories of barrenness help us reflect on the greatness of the love of procreation, belonging to

a universal atmosphere.

- ◆ The uses of procreation are great but the life of those uses is spiritual and available also to those who are childless.
- ◆ Abram's childlessness pictures a spiritual love that is barren because only external, natural life is practiced.
- ◆ The Lord shields us from evil in temptation and rewards us with selfless love, as we hold to His commandments.

Take Action

- ◆ Honor your mother or father for bringing forth spiritual uses.
- ◆ When faced with any kind of barrenness, reflect on what it means for the Lord to be your shield and great reward.
- ◆ As you shun evils, aspire to a love like the Lord's which wills only to give.