

## **The Internal Sense Of The Word Part 4: Daniel in the lions' den.**

My talks in recent weeks have been on the subject of the internal sense of the Word. I have, in other words, been speaking about the Bible, and by reference to some of the outstanding stories in it I have endeavoured to highlight the presence within of a deeper or internal meaning. Many people wonder about the Bible and are at a loss to understand how much of it, particularly in the Old Testament applies to them. Insignificant incidents are recorded there, and in places there are pages and pages of tedious detail which, at least on the surface bear absolutely no reference to us today. Some of the most unfamiliar reading is to be found in the Prophets, in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the others; books which are unfamiliar because, as they stand, they deal for much of the time only with issues, political events and developments, and events of long ago. You may remember my saying in the first talk in this present series, widely revered as it is, and the world's best seller though it remains, yet it is probably true to say that no book is regarded more uncertainly today than the Bible is.

But, and I also pointed out in that first talk, modern man's estimation of the worth and relevance of the Bible, whether of the Old or of the New Testament, overlooks this tremendously important and vital point. Within it there lies a deeper, internal meaning. Important though its stories have been to the religious needs and aspirations of people in times long gone past, those stories contain teaching which clearly applies to the lives of every one of us. The Lord is using the Biblical record, in all its diversity, and with its stories of battles and family quarrels, even the story of His own life and ministry which we have in the Gospels, exactly as He used parables, these always carrying a deeper, internal, or symbolic meaning.

"The Christian world", wrote Swedenborg, "is as yet profoundly ignorant of the fact that all things in the Word (of God) both in general and in particular, indeed, the very smallest particulars down in the least iota, signify and enfold within them spiritual and heavenly things; and for this reason the Old Testament is but little cared for. Yet that the Word is really of this character might be known from the single consideration that, being the Lord's and from the Lord, it could not possibly be given unless it contained within it such things as belong to heaven, to the Church, and to faith, and that unless it did so it could not be called the Lord's Word, nor could it be said to have any life in it." (*Arcana Caelestia* 2).

In the talks given so far I have endeavoured to illustrate the presence of such a deeper, spiritual meaning, by reference to some of the more outstanding stories of the Bible. I spoke of the story in the Book of Exodus of the escape of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt; of David's victory over Goliath, and of the healing of Naaman the leper. Each, in its way, is a parable. Each is used by the Lord as a vehicle for conveying teaching which touches upon the lives of us all. Each embodies an internal meaning.

I have chosen to turn to the book of Daniel and to the best known story about Daniel himself when he was cast into a lions' den. Daniel was a Jew and had been a youth at the time when Babylon conquered Judah, his homeland and native country. He seems to have belonged to his country's aristocracy and, though a captive, was set aside in Babylon for special training and administrative experience. Along with his famous companions, Shadrach, Meschech, and Abednego, he quickly rose to a position of authority never at any time forsaking the Lord or turning his back on his principles. But there came a time when Daniel had to choose. Either he was to forsake the Lord and obey the king of Babylon, or remain loyal to the Lord and face up to what threatened to be the consequences. As we know, he unhesitatingly chose the Lord, and though cast into a den of lions remained unharmed. "Daniel", we read, "was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God". (Daniel 6:23).

Though we shall probably never find ourselves in an even remotely similar situation as that in which Daniel found himself, the story has, indeed, much to teach us concerning loyalty and the inevitably testing experience which will come upon us when a stand is made. The story speaks of the calls and inducements which will come our way to abandon what we believe to be true; not calls and inducements which come to us in an obvious, outward way; but of those which come to us within; and of the need for a decision to be made irrespective of what threatens to be the consequences.

Where it is mentioned in the Word, Babylon represents the love of self which seeks in every way possible to control our lives. It is a force within us which sets itself up and at times even demands our worship. Daniel was faced with a choice between two alternatives. And isn't it true to say that we too are faced with a choice between two alternatives? For we are. And the choice, without question, is always before us.

Do we obey the Lord's teaching or disobey it? Which is it going to be? Do we remain loyal to what we know and believe to be true, or give in to the promptings of our selfishness? Babylon is of course always pressing its claims upon us. Pride and self-centredness (for this is what is meant) constantly beckon to us.

What is certain is that every decision made in favour of the Lord and out of loyalty to His teaching will bring its time of testing. It did with Daniel and it will with us. We can, for example, decide to be forgiving, and loyal to the Lord, but we may be sure that our unregenerate natures will rise up to contest the decision. We may decide to be clean and chaste, at the same time rejecting what is of Babylon; what is unclean and adulterous; but here again evil loves within will contest the decision and threaten our destruction.

The lions, into whose midst Daniel was cast, represent the unregenerate loves, so strong as they seem to be, which surround and would engulf us once a decision has been made in favour of the Lord and upholding His teaching. They are the evil loves which rise up and make us wonder, "Why should I be forgiving?" "Why should I be pure and chaste?" "Why should I be honest?" The Lord, it is said, "was with the wild beasts" (Mark 1-13) at the time of His temptations in the wilderness. Not with actual wild beasts, but with the destructive forces inherent in human nature; the evils and unregenerate inclinations; which they represent. And this too is what is meant where it is written in the Psalms, "My soul is among lions: and I lie among them they are set on fire." (Psalm 57:4). And in Psalm 22, verse 13, "They gaped upon me with their mouth, as a ravening and a roaring lion."

What we remember most about the story is that incredibly Daniel remained unharmed. It was an extraordinary outcome. And yet by means of this we are taught that trusting in the Lord's strength, however much encompassed we may be by unregenerate feelings and evil inclinations, we can and will remain unharmed by them. They will not hurt us.

"Nothing", wrote Swedenborg, "can hurt those whom the Lord protects, even if they should be encompassed by all Hell both without and within." (*Arcana Caelestia* 968). But to come under the umbrella of that protection there is a part which we must play.

For one thing we must genuinely want it. It is only where there is a real and deeply felt aversion to what evil is suggesting to us that the Lord can move and extend His protection over us. As well, we must hold on to what we know is right, and should be done, however reluctant we may be to do so, until the evil subsides and the pressure passes. Once again from the teaching given through Swedenborg "If man were not protected by the Lord he could never be rescued from hell: for with every man there are evilly disposed people from hell as well as angels from heaven; and the Lord cannot protect man unless he acknowledges the Divine and lives the life of faith and charity." (*Heaven and Hell 577*).

Not all that surprisingly, it worries people that those men who accused Daniel before the king and caused him to be cast into the lions' den were, with their families, it is said, themselves cast into the den and destroyed. Daniel Chapter 6, verse 24 reads: "And the king commanded, and those men who had accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions, they, their children, and their wives; and before they reached the bottom of the den the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces."

Babylon, as we saw earlier, represents the love of self. The servants of Babylon, who accused Daniel, represent the arguments and reasonings which favour and support the love of self, the rationalisations of poor behaviour and self justifications. And these must be destroyed, along with everything connected with them. We might wish that this particular detail had been left out of the story. But it is a detail within which something important is taught us. It's the same with what is said in Psalm 137, at the end, verse 9: (where it is talking about Babylon), "Happy shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock." It is the need to be rid of whatever savours, or whatever is born of the love of self, which is pointed to here. These are what we are to try to destroy.

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