

HIS OWN ARM BROUGHT SALVATION

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“He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him. For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak” (Isaiah 59:16,17).

The Lord’s Word is full of beautiful and comforting truths, but sometimes we just don’t realize how meaningful they are. We tend to let a lot of the Lord’s teachings slide over our consciousness, or even half deny them—not in fact, but in our feelings. Every sentence means something precious to us, and each reading is going to be a new discovery forever.

Let us think about two or three teachings which are a central part of our belief in the Lord, but which we may gloss over when we hear them. The Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church tells us that the Lord overcame evil by His own power on earth: “His own arm brought salvation for Him.” It tells us that because He did that on earth, He can now do it for us, from that time on. And we are warned that we can’t fight evils ourselves, for we have no righteousness of our own; our evils are only removed when we recognize that we need the Lord and turn to Him.

We tend to think that *of course* the Lord overcame evils by His own power. Whose power would He have used otherwise? What is so new about that? And we may not really see the importance of the teaching that because He overcame the hells two thousand years ago our battles are easier today, or that we ourselves play no part in a process which seems to us to involve a lot of struggle. But let us reflect on just one meaning of these teachings.

The Lord came on earth and took on a Human nature. It doesn’t seem at first that He needed to do that. Why couldn’t He have conquered the hells from His omnipotent power? But He did take on a Human like the ones we have, and that human mind allowed the hells to attack Him. He fought the hells, and each time He fought, He used a truth to combat them. He fought them, one by one, and eventually all of them together. As He won each battle, the Lord gained a new power over evil, and that power, called righteousness, was added, bit by bit to His life until He became altogether righteous.

The Lord did this alone. There was no person to help Him. No angel, even, could help Him. They didn’t have the wisdom to fully understand what He was doing—only to get a general idea. In fact, when He was fighting, it seemed to the Lord that His own Divine power had left Him. The Human was “left to itself” in temptations, and this is one reason why He called from the cross, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” So when He had won, the victory was His alone.

As the Lord conquered the hells, what happened was that each truth was used to its full capacity in His mind. It gained a complete understanding of the hells that were trying to oppose it, and of the heavens that could be opened up by it. By that complete understanding (which was a human

understanding, that is, it could be expressed in human language, which is why He took on a body and spoke like a man) He now has complete power over the hells. He knows every trick they are trying to play, every wile they can think of. More wonderful still, He knows every facet of truth, how it counters evil, and how it builds a particular heaven of its own.

What does that mean to us? First, the Lord knows every single state that we can enter into, every trap into which the hells can lead us. Again, we might say, *of course* He knows that. But the wonder of His glorification is that He knows it because He *experienced* it! He experienced every pull of every hell. There's nothing we can feel that He has not experienced.

Let us understand that properly. The Lord never experienced petty anger in the sense of giving in to it Himself. He never knew unreasoning jealousy, in the way that someone who submits to it does. He knew it better, because He had the hells that inspire such things breathing their spirit into Him, but He would not let them win.

We don't understand an evil by giving in to it. Giving in to it produces a degree of blindness, because we are fooled by its allure. But the person who is tempted by an evil and resists it, understands it truly. And the Lord did this with every single evil, and He fought alone, with all the might of the hells against Him. *Of course* He won, but that is not the point. The point is that He can communicate to us, in human terms that we can understand, the true nature of evil, and the allure it arouses. And the Lord can communicate the Divine power of His truths to us, so that we can withstand the attacks of evil. He can do this because He walked that path Himself. He didn't just walk it; He laid it out, and He built it, step by step—a path for each truth, a path for each one of the countless billions who will be born forevermore.

How often do we truly realize this? When we have a feeling or a thought which is truly shameful, do we know that the Lord understands that feeling? Sometimes, we're tempted to turn from the Lord in shame, thinking He must be disgusted with us. We know that He's merciful, but at times we don't feel we can even talk to Him about some of the things we have thought and done. Yet there's not a feeling whose quality He did not perceive while on earth. He perceived them, not as someone in the throes of them, because such a person is not seeing clearly. But He perceived them as one who affirmed and ennobled the truths which shed light on such things.

And how desperately we need that light when evil thoughts and desires attract us! We stumble along on our own, often thinking our own arms can bring salvation to us. We need the Light of the world, the true Light, to put our feelings in perspective and let us know that He who understands everything has got the answer to this set of feelings too. And we need the power that is within the truth that He is showing us—the power that once conquered all the forces of evil which can ever threaten us.

The Lord did this so completely that that conquest lasts for all time. And we are asked to accept this teaching, if we are to know that power in us. After all, it's the truth! We couldn't fight one hell. If we tried to do it from ourselves, excluding the Lord, we would fail immediately. And we are tempted to do this, and the vanity which tempts us is our downfall, because it's completely dishonest. Only the Lord has that power; to pretend otherwise is to deny a basic truth of life.

We can perhaps see this illustrated in our own experiences. Often we see a truth, and its wonderful idealism stirs us. But then we try to use it by ourselves. We think, in effect, "I can build a good life with this truth." And we are tempted to look around us, and say, "Others aren't living according to this ideal; others don't see clearly like I do." And we are tempted to want credit for the ideals we are holding, and we work with that kind of spirit in our minds. What happens? Often, slowly, that ideal becomes dimmed through time, or it is twisted, or it gets neglected, and after a passage of years we find that we haven't thought about it for a long time. It had no power except from the Lord, and we had closed it off from the Lord!

That's what the Lord means when He says that if we try to do good from ourselves we do it always from the wrong motive. The reason is that then the power of truth can't be with us, because we are denying the source of truth. A person on his own is always in evil. But people were never meant to be on their own! We are not born on our own, and we ought not to live on our own, neither on this earth nor to eternity. We are born children of the Lord; we become more His children through repentance and regeneration; and we live as His children in our Father's kingdom.

No person gives truth any power. But to ordinary people it has all power, because of Him who walked as a Man on this earth, and gave to truth its defensive armor, and its ability to uplift and deliver. "His own righteousness, it sustained Him. For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak" (Isaiah 59:16,17).

So when we hear that the Lord came on earth and fought the hells, and that He did it alone, we should not greet this infinite truth with a mere shrug of acceptance. Rather we can think of the Lord building, step by step, the path of truth for every person. We can picture His taking each truth into His Mind, and having it tested in the fire of the hells' venom, and, *of course*, winning the battle each time. The path He hewed out in this way is a path for people like us, for ordinary, human people. He walked that path. He knows each pitfall. He understands the quality of each thought the hells inspire, for He walked away from that same spirit that afflicts us.

The Lord is with us with that power. We can think of Him as a Human God, one with infinite, Divine mercy and understanding, but with an understanding which speaks in our terms. It was for this cause that He came into the world, to give us that understanding, and to uplift us with its power. For this He suffered through all His combats, and this was the zeal which sustained Him. And His work, once done, is done forever. All we have to do is to trust Him and to look to Him through our obedience. "Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:22).

Amen.

Lessons: Isaiah 59:16-21, 63:1-9; *Arcana Coelestia* 1813