

Lesson 1: THE IMAGINARY HEAVENS
Conjugal Love 2-10

2 weeks

NOTE: This project takes two weeks, so take your time!

INTRODUCTION:

There are lots of things that make heaven a wonderful place to live. But the main thing that keeps angels happy in heaven is doing jobs that they love to do, and that help other people. This is what the Writings mean when they talk about being *useful*.

Today we'll hear about a scene Swedenborg saw in heaven, about some people in the World of Spirits who had some wrong ideas about what heaven was like. Let's see what happened when they were allowed to try out their "imaginary heavens".

READING:

Adventures in the Imaginary Heavens (based on *Conjugal Love 2-10*) retold by Rachel Cranch. (This book is out of print, but we have enclosed the text of this story.)

DISCUSSION:

See if the students can tell you any of the imaginary heavens:
Write the six imaginary heavens on the board.

People thought heavenly happiness would be:

1. Just getting to heaven
2. Talking and friendship with angels
3. Feasting with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
4. A beautiful paradise, like the Garden of Eden
5. Living like royalty, with great riches and palaces
6. Worshipping God in church

Remind the students that all of these things can be *part* of the happiness of heaven, but ask them, what is the main thing that makes heaven happy for the angels?

**True heavenly happiness is from being a good and useful person
who has fun doing jobs that help others.**

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PROJECT: POSTERS

Supplies:

one poster board
4 sheets white construction paper
other colored paper
crayons or colored pencils
letter stencils (optional)

Procedure:

Have the students each pick a scene to draw out of the six imaginary heavens, or a scene of true heavenly happiness. Give them each a half sheet of white construction paper. In each imaginary heaven scene, have them draw a person or people who were miserable after trying out that “heaven.” In the *true* heaven scene have them draw a person or people happily working at a job. (Leave a two-inch space on the right hand side of each picture, to write on next week.)

Some can also work on tracing and cutting letters for two titles:

IMAGINARY HEAVEN

THE REAL HEAVEN

Adventures in the Imaginary Heavens

Adapted from *Conjugal Love 2-10*

Retold by Rachel A. Cranch

Introduction

In the New Church, we know that Emanuel Swedenborg wrote the Writings so that people on earth would be able to find out the truth about the spiritual world. The spiritual world includes heaven, hell, and a place in between called the world of spirits, where people who have died live until they have decided whether they want to live in heaven or hell.

One of the ways the Lord taught Swedenborg about heaven was to let him actually visit different parts of it and see and talk to angels. These visits are written down in the Writings and are called Memorable Relations. One of these Memorable Relations is the story of the imaginary heavens. This story takes place in the world of spirits and it is told in the book *Conjugal Love*.

What Is Heaven?

Once when Swedenborg was visiting the spiritual world, he saw an angel coming toward him from the eastern heaven. The angel blew a trumpet, so Swedenborg asked him what was going on. The angel replied that he had heard a sad story and was calling together people from the world of spirits who could tell him whether the story was true or not. The angel had heard that not a single Christian person on earth knew what heavenly joy and eternal happiness were. Of course this was terrible news. The angel thought that it could not possibly be true, so he was calling together Christians now living in the world of spirits to ask them what they thought heaven was.

Swedenborg and the angel waited for the people to arrive. Soon six groups of spirits came to them. There were two groups from the north, two from the west, and two from the south. Also, a group of angels came from the eastern heaven to hear what the spirits had to say. They were so bright with love and wisdom that the other people could not even see them.

When everyone had arrived, the angel with the trumpet spoke, saying, "The reason I have called you all here is to ask you a question. In our heaven we have heard some terrible news, and we must find out if it is true or false. We have been told that no Christian living on earth knows what heaven really is. Therefore the question we ask you is 'What is heaven?' Please discuss this and we will hear your ideas. In this way, we will know whether your ideas of heaven are true or not."

After the angel from the eastern heaven finished speaking, the six groups of Christian spirits talked among themselves, and a little while later they were ready to share their ideas of what heaven is.

The first group from the north said, "We believe heavenly happiness is the same thing as being allowed into heaven."

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The second group from the north stated, “Heavenly joy and eternal happiness come from talking and friendship with angels.”

Then the third group, from the west, said, “Heavenly joy and eternal happiness come from feasting every day on delicious food and drink with Abram, Isaac and Jacob.”

The fourth group, also from the west, said, “What else is heaven but a paradise where there are fruit trees and beautiful flowers, and where it is always springtime, as it was in the Garden of Eden?”

The fifth group of spirits, who were from the south, stated, “Heavenly happiness is living like royalty, having riches and dwelling in palaces.”

And finally, the sixth group of spirits, also from the south, said, “We think heavenly joy and eternal happiness come from continually worshipping God in church.”

The Imaginary Heavens

When all the groups finished speaking, the angel with the trumpet said to the Christian spirits, “Follow me, and I will take you into your heavens.” Leaving the first group aside, the angel went to the second group. These were the spirits who thought that heavenly joy came from talking with angels all the time. The angel led them into a house where everyone was in separate rooms talking and laughing about many different things. He left them there and went to get the next group of spirits.

He took the spirits of the third group, who thought heaven was continual feasting, to a huge picnic area, where there were tables for Abram, Isaac, Jacob, and the 12 disciples. All of the tables were heaped with delicious foods, and shortly the hosts came and invited the spirits to eat with them.

The angel repeated this process with each group of spirits, taking them to places that matched their descriptions of heaven. Each group of spirits was now in its own **imaginary** heaven.

After a few days, the angel guide and Swedenborg went back to check on each group in its imaginary heaven. First they came to the house where many people were talking about different things. The second group, who had thought heaven was conversation with angels, were no longer happy in that house. They complained, “We have been here for three days and we are so sick and tired of constant talking that we can hardly stand to hear it anymore! Please let us out of here! We do not want to stay here forever!”

When they were let out of the house, the group wanted to know what heavenly joy really was, and the angel answered, “The joy of heaven is the delight of doing something which is useful to oneself and to other people. In heaven, we have wonderful talks, but these are only pleasing to us because we have

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been useful first.” After this, all the spirits in the group ran back to their homes with new understanding.

Then the angel and Swedenborg came to the third group, who thought heaven was one huge feast with Abram, Isaac and Jacob. When they arrived at the feast, they saw many of the spirits lying on the ground sick from too much food. The group who had thought this was heaven did not think so at all anymore. They cried, “We are filled past our limit, and the thought of food is awful to us and its taste is dry! Please let us go away from here, for we cannot bear this feasting anymore!”

After the angel took them away from the feast, this group also wanted to know what heavenly happiness actually was. The angel replied, “Everyone in heaven has joy from doing his own use. We have feasts with famous people, but these things are only fun to us because of the uses we do before them.”

The angel and Swedenborg then went to the fourth group from the west, who thought heavenly happiness was being rich and living like kings. Here, the group had been served like royalty and had sat for hours on thrones. Now they were ready to leave the palace. Only this time, they had already been taught that they were foolish and that their idea of heaven was false. Other angels had told them that they were acting just like statues, sitting there on thrones waiting for their castles to be built. The angels had reminded the group to think about what true kings and princes were like. The angels had said, “To be kings and princes in the Lord’s kingdom means to be wise and useful, because the Lord’s kingdom is a kingdom of uses, and uses are good.”

After hearing this, the group had tossed away their crowns and left their thrones. The angels continued, saying, “In heaven there is tremendous wealth and there are positions of power because we have governments as you have on earth. But the people who are in these positions are the ones who love more than anything else to serve others.” After this, the spirits went back to their homes wiser than when they had left them.

Swedenborg and the angel then came to the fifth group, from the south, who believed heaven was a paradise. When they arrived at the lovely garden where the group was, they found the spirits sitting and weeping, and crying out, “We have been here for seven days now. When we first arrived here, we thought it was lovely, but after three days we began to get tired of it. Now we are without hope because we must stay here forever and we cannot stand it! Please take us away from here!”

After the angel led them away from the garden, he spoke to them about what heaven really is. “In heaven there are beautiful gardens. But heavenly joy comes not from external paradise, but from internal paradise, which is joy of the soul. This joy comes when we are useful.”

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Swedenborg and the angel then came to the sixth group, from the south, who thought heaven was worshipping God all the time. They found this group of spirits yawning and sleeping in the church, for they were not allowed to think or speak anything but worship. The group had been there two days

listening to the preacher, and they were fed up with it. They finally called out to the priest, “End your preaching! Our ears have become deaf to your voice and we cannot even stand the sound of it anymore!” And having said this, everyone in the church jumped up and ran toward the gates of the church, bursting out of the building.

Then four true priests from heaven came down and taught the group. They said, “To glorify God really means to do your work faithfully and with love, because this is the best way we can love the Lord.”

The Truth About Heaven

At last the angel and Swedenborg went back to where all the spirits had gathered together. The angel wanted to speak with the first group from the north. These spirits had thought they would be happy just by entering heaven. The angel asked the group of spirits to wait while he sounded his trumpet.

In a little while, nine angels wearing flower garlands came to the group to talk to them about heaven. These angels said to the group, “We once thought as you do about heaven. We thought we would be happy as soon as we were allowed into heaven. We will tell you what happened to us so that you do not have to go through it yourselves. Just as all of your friends have been allowed to experience their false ideas of heaven so that they could see what heaven really is, we also were allowed to do this.

“We were taken into heaven, since that was what we thought we wanted. Only when we got there, we were not happy because we were not like the other angels.

“In fact, some of us even felt sick there! You see, each of us thought that heaven was an unreal place somewhere up in the clouds. But the truth is that heaven is a real place that begins in your mind. When your mind is full of love and wisdom and you do good and useful things, then the Lord can prepare a place for you in heaven. Because we did not know this, we had to stay in the world of spirits in order to be properly prepared. We found out that without such preparation, we could not be happy in heaven and did not even want to be there!”

After hearing the nine angels, the first group of spirits admitted that they, too, had thought of heaven as an unreal place and were happy now to know the truth about it.

So all the Christian spirits who had come to describe their ideas about heaven went back to their spiritual homes knowing the truth about heavenly happiness and eternal joy. The Lord instructed Swedenborg to write down in the Writings what the spirits had learned so that people on this earth

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could read and understand it too. And the truth he gives us about heaven is this: *If we are good and useful people, we will feel the joy of heaven in our hearts.*

Almost everybody entering the next life is ignorant of what heavenly blessedness and happiness are, for people do not know what internal joy is, or the nature of it. They gain a conception of it solely through bodily and worldly delights and joys. Consequently that of which they are ignorant they imagine to be nothing, but in fact bodily and worldly joys are by contrast worthless and foul. Therefore so that upright persons who do not know what heavenly joy is may come to know and recognize it they are taken first of all to the gardens there, which surpass anyone's entire imagination. . . . These persons now suppose that they have entered the heavenly paradise, but they are taught that even this is not true heavenly happiness, and so they are then given to know about the inward states of joy that enter their inmost being. After this they are brought into a state of peace that reaches to their inmost being, at which point they declare that no part of such experience could possibly be expressed in words or even conceived of. Finally they are brought into a state of innocence, and this too reaches their inmost feelings. In this way they are given to know what true spiritual and celestial goodness is.

Emanuel Swedenborg, *Arcana Coelestia* 540

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1100 Cathedral Road, P.O. Box 743, Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania 19009