Sermon by S. H. Froehlich Dated January 1, 1830

Introduction

The following sermon was delivered by Samuel H. Froehlich on January 1, 1830, and is believed to have been preached in the Reformed Church of Switzerland in the Swiss town of Leutwil, Canton Argau. Froehlich was converted in October of 1825 and was ordained as a minister in the Reformed Church of Switzerland in 1827. The date of the sermon indicates that it was spoken during a period of time when Froehlich’s sermons were under close scrutiny by a state church council. About 18 months later, in June of 1831, Samuel Froehlich was dismissed from his ministry in the state church. He later continued expounding the Word of God to seeking individuals and as a result, the Apostolic Christian Church came into being.

This sermon is unique in that it contains the very words that Froehlich spoke. It is not known why the address was recorded or who originally recorded it. Nearly all the Froehlich sermons that are available to us today are in the form of notations which Froehlich wrote in his diary after the sermon was delivered.

The German/Swiss rendition of this sermon was in the possession of a brother in Budapest. It was translated into English during the summer of 2010 and was given to the Heritage Center Library at Fairbury, Illinois. May all who read it be inspired and encouraged by its message.
January 1, 1830  
Samuel Froelich

Genesis 15
1. After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not Abram; I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.
2. And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?
3. And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.
4. And, behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.
5. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.
6. And he believed in the Lord; and counted it to him for righteousness.

One year ago I spoke to you this apostolic word: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

This should serve you as a sure landmark that through the entire year you might know the true and faithful Lord who can lead you as an infallible leader through every circumstance and situation of life; the Shining Star, which can direct your walk through the darkness toward Zion in the fear of the Lord.

We have experienced in the last year, especially those who have directed their walk toward the City of Life, that the ways of the Lord are dim and unsearchable, and that we could not find our way without such a Leading Star. Even if Christ said, “Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know,” still many did not take to heart where Jesus went and how they can and should follow Him there. Some still love the world and its lusts, and others say with Thomas, “Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?” Therefore, this day I would like to call out to you another thought that could give more information about this.

Last year still, some were among us who are not here today, and we do not know which among us in a year will be able to gather with us again. For that reason, it is important that we not only know the right way, but that we might also walk on it, so that we can receive the promise. And which promise? The same promise that Abraham received by faith, as the Lord spoke unto him, “Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.”

When I behold you (among whom, by the grace of the Lord, I have labored the whole year, and I trust in God that my labor and prayers for your souls’ salvation were not completely in vain) I could not bring a more proper illustration for your present state than Abraham’s example in the chapter we read. Abraham is, after all, the father of all believers (and God leads the children like He did their father on the hidden way of faith). Like Abraham had to wait for the fulfillment of the promise, we also must wait—even if we know that Jesus appeared in the flesh—for His spiritual arrival in our hearts. That’s why God leads us on the same path as He did our father Abraham.
This will lead us through darkness, many steps, trials, experiences, and many weaknesses, until God’s pilgrim arrives at his destination, towards which he is hastening.

As we walk through every new darkness, the light must shine forth brighter, and by every new weakness will the experience of God’s power be brighter, and through each new anxiety, doubt, and fear will the faith be stronger, firmer, and purer, like crystal. Therefore, when once all the believers and saints in Christ will be united, then this united power of the faith will shine like the sun in its full glory, as a sea, about which it is told: “the sea of glass mingled with fire.” But before we can reach that, we have to go through fire and water, like Abraham, where our faith will be tested to the greatest measure. So that a Christian, who walks indeed in the faith, considers himself as the most miserable man that is often wavering and doubting in the fear of his heart, that he is no more able to clearly see the way, if it really to heaven leads. In such a wavering, troubled, and restless state, we find Abraham, the father of all believers, about whom it is written here, and who received a new revelation from the Lord, through which his faith had to be lifted again to a higher level.

We shall observe, dear ones, that all new revelation of the Lord in us will be prepared by darkness and a time of great need. If a Christian has a fear like this in his heart, let him consider that this is a forerunner of the strengthening of new faith on the way toward the New Jerusalem.

So we find even Abraham: already three times, four times, the Lord gave unto him this promise, “I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing… and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed… And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered”. So Abraham had to wait for the fulfillment of the promise. He was already ten years a stranger in that land which the Lord had promised unto him and was still alone and the fulfillment would not come. Once again, he had to wait fifteen years. Fear and doubt crept in; the former promises almost lost their power. And then he receives from the Lord a new revelation for strengthening his faith, as we can read, “After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision.”

If it would happen to you like this, my dear ones, namely at this important entry into the new year- where heavy thoughts would come, as anxiety, doubt, worry, and care; when one hoped for a long time, and the Lord still did not reveal- so take an example by the leading of the father of the believers, and see how the darkness came and rushed at him. When could a true and sincere heart sooner be overtaken by fear than at the thought of the future, as on the New Year, when one is thinking about the past and the future and examines himself before the Lord? But what comfort, when one can admit, “Thus far the Lord has helped me and He will help me further more.” I was privileged to have experienced some of his testing in truth—He has let me experience the same great promises as Abraham, the Blessed of the Lord. But even he had to recognize with painful sadness, that things did not go forward according to his wish, and tormenting and doubtful thoughts were alternated with dry days and temptations, so much that he had to ask himself, “Am I still on the right way? Or am I holding on to self-made consolations? Has the Lord forsaken me completely? Has
He forgotten to be gracious? Is it in vain that I am striving and waiting?” Yes, dear souls, it can go that way with us too, for these are Satan’s fiery darts that burn unbelievably. One would rather fast three times a week than go through this inner fasting [struggle]—something that this world does not know. Speaking of worry and doubt that can cause fear, I don’t mean the doubt of the unbeliever, as it is written, “What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or what shall we put on?” These are unchristian, heathen worries. If one doubts whether the Word which is given us for life is truly the Word of God, they are not worries that try the faith and strengthen the soul in the fire, but they are those that choke every gleam of the faith. Blessed is that man who in this drought and severe trial of faith feels himself humbled to hell [dust], and more blessed than those who outwardly are in need, but still don’t seek the Lord earnestly, the Lord, who is spiritually rich. Those who are full do not hunger and thirst after the living God, as also the physically poor, who would do the same if they had more. Does the Word of God not also comfort the physically poor, when the spiritual poverty humbles the soul unto the dust before God? When the desire is vigilant like that of Abraham, then he can reach God’s day of grace, as it is written “Your Father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.” But he could not have seen it, unless he’d been prepared through darkness and testing of his faith. Therefore came the voice of the Lord unto him: “Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.” He was not yet called Abraham, just Abram. And this was decisive above all. He had not yet received the sign of the circumcision as a seal of his justification of faith. Before he could receive the seal of his justification he had to prove his faith, so that his faith was founded on such hard trials. We shall not think we will be sealed before our faith goes through such trials and testing where everything is dim and we must wait long because the waiting is the real school of faith. This is an old rule in the Word of God: one has to suffer before reaching glory. But suffering is a guarantee of God’s grace. Without this, He couldn’t say to us, “Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.” What an exceeding promise this is with which God comforted Abraham, through which he can also comfort and strengthen every pilgrim who is in the pain of the regeneration.

“I am the Almighty God!” What more would you desire, dear soul, who are in manifold temptations, and are able to quench the fiery darts of the devil. If you are distressed, remember that the Lord stands in front of you with His shield to cover you. “Fear not... I am thy shield.”

The children of this world rejoice when someone gives them a gift for the New Year. If you will receive it, I will give you more today than what the whole world is worth. A word from the Lord above who is in the bosom of the Father: “Fear not... I am thy shield.” Whosoever will pick up this shield is mightier than a king of this world. But whoever will not take hold of it has to fear already in this life and much more in the life to come because he who doesn’t have Christ has a bad conscience. “But godliness with contentment is great gain... and profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.” Therefore, the Lord said unto Abraham: “Fear not... I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward,” your shield in this life and your great reward in eternity, that no good thing will be withheld from you. The Lord Himself will be our faith’s reward. Should anyone doubt that it will be a very great reward? But He will only reward those who have kept the faith and have so finished their pilgrimage.
Certainly things often go different than one could imagine, as one would elect his own way for himself; for God’s way is totally against our ambitions or plans. Therefore in this respect, the life of faith is a constant mystery but even a constant miracle. Therefore one cannot bow enough before the will of God and be still. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways, my ways, saith the Lord” for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His thoughts much higher than ours. It takes much grace until one learns to resign himself to the wonderful ways of the Lord without opposition. We also see this with Abraham. His hope became so diminished through the long waiting for the promises of God, that He spoke this way: “Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?... Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.” Often it is so for the children of God too, that they almost feel they are nothing and almost fall into the temptation to regard the children of this world as fortunate. How things go so well for this one and for that one. Why are the ungodly so fortunate? How is it possible that they are so blessed and I must be so miserable-- I, who trust in God? Is not defiance a precious thing when the wicked prosper? Is their violence covered with a garment that they are so happy and rich in this world? Is it for naught that my heart lives blamelessly, for all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning? (Psalm 73). See even great holy men, as David, Asaph, and many others almost stumbled at the stumbling block. Asaph says it this way: “If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God, then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors.”

Therefore, dear soul, don’t be deceived because you must be in the wilderness and the ungodly live in pleasure because “whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth...but if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.” Be terrified of the end if you have never felt the rod of God. You must be lost so that you can be found. You must condemn yourself so that you can be justified. You must die so that you can live forever. Even if things are going badly after the flesh in the world, as long as you have found the Son of God as your shield who will cover you as your great reward that will be kept for you in heaven. “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”

Look at Abraham, how deep he had to humble himself as his faith started to sink and his hope to waver. But how precious was his humility. “Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?” But the Lord told him: “This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.” And later the Lord said unto him: “Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.” Now hear with Sarah’s ear what the Lord is saying: this servant cannot be an heir but the son. Eliezer likewise cannot be an heir as Ishmael, but Isaac is the son of promise. What did He mean by this? The seed of Abraham, the Son of promise, is Jesus Christ. If the Son will not deliver you, you will remain the servants of sin, Satan’s prisoners. If you do not receive the Son into your heart,
you cannot be born again by the Spirit. Is Christ not born in you, so that the streams of the living waters might spring forth from you in words and deeds, that the God of peace might keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus? Otherwise you shall be lost and will not inherit with Christ. The servant cannot inherit. Sooner would God raise Abraham children of stones than a man who is not born again enter into the kingdom of God. The servant will not abide in the house but the son will abide forever. The son is the heir. So now the Son wants to make you free children instead of servants. If the Son "is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption," then you are free indeed and you will remain in the house forever and have part in the inheritance of Christ. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle," than for someone that is not born again to enter into the kingdom of God. And it is certain that the earth and the heaven would pass away sooner than one of the words of promise would not be fulfilled or even shaken. Dear soul, if you were as dead and without strength like Abraham, you will see the day of salvation and revive from the dead. You shall see the Son of God, the Lord of Glory. And if it seems impossible for you, that out of your body will flow the streams of living water, yet it will happen, and you will feel ashamed, and because of that shame, you cannot open your mouth because the Lord can help you and forgive everything you have done because "with God all things are possible." As with the virgin Mary, the Saviour was conceived and born by the Holy Spirit, so must you be born by the same Holy Spirit through God. See the number of the stars in the heavens and their glory: so shall your righteousness be also.

This, dear ones, is my wish for you for the New Year from the Lord, and I know that I don't give you empty and passing words like the world does.

“My peace I give unto you, my peace I leave unto you” says the Lord to the poor, sad, and wretched. “My peace I give unto you.” And that you might receive this assurance, you poor and needy in spirit, you who are looking to Heaven with quiet thankfulness and joy, or even with tears in your eyes, or you whom the Lord wants to lead to knowledge that only He as the almighty Lord in Christ Jesus may become your light and exceeding great reward. What must you do? “Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness.”

Believe in the Lord, even when you don't see His way for you; don't doubt in the verity of His promises. “Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth. Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgement is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faileth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:26-31).