

Children's Talk and Sermon Notes
for Sunday, 19 June

Children's Talk: New Ideas

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. (John 16:12-14)

I testify in truth that the Lord manifested himself to me, his servant, and assigned me to this task; after doing so, he opened the sight of my spirit and brought me into the spiritual world; and he has allowed me to see the heavens and the hells and to have conversations with angels and spirits on a continual basis for many years now. I also testify that ever since the first day of this calling, I have accepted nothing regarding the teachings of this church from any angel; what I have received has come from the Lord alone while I was reading the Word. (*True Christianity* 779)

The New Church: Stronghold of Truth

A Sermon by Pastor Joel Christian Glenn

19 June, 2022

Today is the 19th of June, a day we celebrate as “New Church Day,” a sort of birthday celebration for the New Church. There are many ways that we could celebrate, just as there are many qualities that we might say we appreciate about the New Church. If we were to have a chance for each one of you to come up and say what the New Church means to you I’m sure that everyone would have a unique answer, just as the Lord shows up to each individual in a unique way. Even so, there would be some common themes: I imagine some would appreciate the deep sense of community; others the personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ; others the encouragement and support in living a good life; others the depth of understanding the New Church brings to faith. And so on. None of these is in any way incorrect. But today our focus will be on one particular quality of the New Church: that of making sense of the stories of the Lord’s Word. Over the years many people have appreciated just how much New Church Teachings make sense to them.

All of the qualities of the New Church are represented in John’s vision of the Holy City New Jerusalem, and “making sense” is no exception. The walls of the city stand for the literal sense of the Word; in other words, they stand for the stories of the Word as we picture them while we read them: the plain meaning of the stories of the Word. But the nature of those walls stands for how the New Church understands those stories:

21:18 The construction of its wall was of jasper. This symbolically means that with people of the New Church the Divine truth of the Word in its spiritual sense shines through every Divine truth in the literal sense. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 911)

The idea here is that the stories of the Word make sense the more that we see in them a spiritual meaning. And in fact, that is what we are doing right now! The story of John’s vision of a massive golden city coming down from heaven is the literal sense. It’s a story about things that we can picture and are tangible. But on a spiritual level we see something deeper: it’s not about a massive city that will descend onto the physical Earth. It’s a story about the nature of the Lord’s Kingdom descending from heaven to Earth, and the qualities that will be present in that kingdom (including, as already noted, the quality of having a clear understanding of the things of the Word, i.e. of things making sense.)

It is delightful to know that for every story in the Lord’s Word, no matter how obscure, there is an underlying meaning that enriches and brings to life the Truth of said story. One of the things that many of us appreciate about the teachings of the New Church is the clarity with which they explain the Word, faith, charity, marriage, the afterlife, Providence, God, and all things having to do with faith. The New Church encourages us and invites us to engage our minds and grapple with what we believe so that we can understand for ourselves and not merely take it on blind faith. In fact everyone is capable of understanding the teachings of the New Church for themselves, as amazing as that might sound. A further passage explaining the meaning of the walls of the city, and their foundation, as the teachings of the New Church, puts it this way:

People who fail to think rationally cannot believe that everything connected with the New Church can be seen in a state of light. But I assure them that it is possible, for everyone has an outer thought and an inner one. The inner thought thinks in the light of heaven and is called perception, while the outer thought thinks in the light of the world....

As long as the intellect is held captive in obedience to faith, or as long as the intellect is set aside so as not to see the church's truths, theology becomes nothing but a matter of the memory; and a matter of the memory alone fades away, like any matter disconnected from a judgment concerning it, and it perishes from its own lack of clarity. People like that are therefore "blind leaders of the blind," and when "the blind leads the blind, both fall into a ditch" (Matthew 15:14). (*Apocalypse Revealed* 914)

Nothing of faith in the New Church need be accepted blindly, nor need it be left a mystery. It is when we actually understand something that it can lodge itself deeply into our minds and hearts, and more importantly, that it can be lived. That is the promise of the New Church.

But in this emphasis on things making sense there is also a danger. The danger is that we become prideful and caught up in a sense of our own intelligence and understanding. There's a reason that people associate high-intelligence with conceit and arrogance. When someone believes himself to be smarter than others he easily falls into thinking he is somehow better or more worthy than others. This could not be further from the truth. Yet it is a danger that people who love the New Church can easily fall prey to. Even as we appreciate and celebrate how much the New Church can make sense and encourages us to study for ourselves what the Word says, we must also have the utmost humility. All our knowledge must be received from the Lord, not ourselves, and it must be directed towards leading a good life.

When the Lord was in the world He taught that He had still had many more things to say, and that in time His spirit would lead people to see and understand those things:

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. (John 16:12-14)

Notice that Jesus did *not* say that they would figure this all out on their own, under the power of their own great intellect. He said that He Himself would send the Spirit of Truth to guide them, and that He would speak to them under His own authority. When we study the Word, and religion in general, we must always do so under the humble guidance of the Lord's spirit. No matter how educated, how intelligent, how learned, no matter how many years we have read and reread the Word, we must, we absolutely must, go to the Lord in humility and ask for *His* guidance in understanding, and adjust our beliefs to match Him. We cannot shape God into our own image; we must allow Him to shape our minds into His.

In looking to the Lord's Word, and striving to understand it, we are also reminded that understanding is not for its own sake; rather it is for the sake of goodness. Consider again the city that John saw, representing the New Church: the walls of course were quite impressive; but they did not exist for their own sake. They

existed both to protect what was within the city, the life giving river of water and the tree of life, and to also allow entry to the city of those who were worthy.

This unity of goodness with truth is represented by the fact that the city was said to be pure gold, like clear glass. The gold represents goodness or love; the being clear like glass represents the clarity of truth or wisdom. When these two are united the New Church exists with a person. The Teachings of the New Church put it this way:

...the city's looking as though it were pure gold means, symbolically, that everything connected with the New Church, the New Jerusalem, embodies the goodness of love from the Lord. Yet because the goodness of love does not exist by itself, divorced from the truths of wisdom, but for it to be the goodness of love must take form and does take form through truths of wisdom, therefore the city is said here to be pure gold, like clear glass. For the goodness of love without truths of wisdom does not have any character, because it lacks form. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 912)

Goodness on its own would be like a city with no walls: no protection, no structure, no boundaries, no clear entryway. Truth without goodness is like a wall with no city: an empty husk. But when truth supports, protects, and points to goodness, then there real goodness can flourish.

In practice this means that we must always seek the good that comes from having a clear understanding of truth. It's no use saying "the New Church makes sense!" if it's just about being satisfied with how much we know. It makes sense, for example, that we have to lead good lives to make it to heaven; so use that truth to lead a good life! It makes sense, that the stories of the Word have a deeper meaning; so use that truth to dig deeper and deeper into the stories of the Word! It makes sense that life in heaven is useful and productive and tangible; so use that truth to lead a useful and productive life here and now! It makes sense that no one is condemned because of their beliefs; so use that truth to love those who believe differently from you! It makes sense that God is one person, not three; so use that truth to build a living relationship with the Lord Himself!

The New Church is a stronghold founded on the Word, a stronghold of truth. But that truth means nothing apart from the goodness and love within. We must push past just a focus on what is true and right, and utilize that truth so that love and goodness can thrive, and so that we can enter more and more into it. We can then live out the promise that in the Holy City we shall be free of all evil, and see the Lord face to face:

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever. (*Revelation 22:1-4*)