

NEW CHURCH DAY

Revelation 21:1-12

This lesson is to be used only if you have Sunday school the third Sunday in June. Most of our Sunday schools close earlier. You will find the reason for this name for June nineteenth in the quotation at the end of the lesson. In all classes be sure the class knows the true name of our church and why it was given that name.

Doctrinal Points

The whole world today needs the teachings of the New Church. It is part of our task as New Churchmen to help make the doctrines known.

Notes for Parents

We have had lessons on the tabernacle, on the temple, and finally on the holy city, of which it is said (Revelation 21:22): “And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.” When we are in our early adult years, we are like the Israelites “wandering in the wilderness,” seeking our permanent spiritual home, led about from day to day by the pillar of cloud and fire, an acknowledgment of the Lord only vaguely understood. Our place of worship then is a movable tent, set up first in one place and then in another. If we faithfully follow the pillar until we reach a firm decision, our accepted belief, we build a more enduring place of worship, our temple in Jerusalem, our “possession of peace.” Yet, as we progress in knowledge, we have more and more questions. We seek the answers in the Word of God, knowing they must be there, yet they elude us. Some become discouraged and give up the effort, turning to the worship of the earthly idols of the “nations round about.” But some keep on seeking for true answers.

Such a one was Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), a philosopher and scientist whom the Lord chose to be the instrument of His Second Coming. When the Lord came into the world the first time, taking on from the virgin Mary a body like ours, He came to show man the true way of life, and the first Christian Church was founded on this example. On the cross He said, “It is finished.” He did not need to come in the flesh again. Yet He had told His disciples, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now,” and He had prophesied that He would come again “in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” What was this Second Coming to be?

The “clouds of heaven” picture the letter of the Word. When our earthly sky is covered with clouds, we cannot see the sun but we know it is still there. Just as we are encouraged when the sun breaks through the clouds for a moment, so we are encouraged by those passages in the letter of the Word which give us a glimpse of its internal meaning as, for example, when the Lord Himself explains to His disciples the meaning of the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1-9, Mark 4:14-20, Luke 8:4-15).

In the middle of the eighteenth century the Lord saw that mankind had reached a stage in their earthly learning when they not only could “bear” the “many things” He still had to say to them but needed them to keep from being carried away by worldly science and philosophy. So He opened Swedenborg’s eyes to see the spiritual world in which all of us are inwardly living now and which we shall all see when we put aside our earthly bodies, and in which we shall go on living forever. And He instructed Swedenborg in the inner meaning of the Word so that he could write and publish the information for the use of all mankind. Swedenborg declared himself to be merely the “servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.” His writings are the key which enables us to unlock the puzzling passages of the Word and see the sun shining through the clouds throughout.

We call June nineteenth “New Church Day” because Swedenborg tells us that on that day in the year 1770 the twelve apostles

were sent throughout the spiritual world “to preach the Gospel that the Lord God Jesus Christ reigns, whose kingdom shall be for ages and ages.” So the Lord Jesus Christ Himself is the temple in the holy city New Jerusalem, in which we may all live to eternity if we will.

Primary

Review what the pupils have learned about the holy city and speak of our church as a new church in which the Lord Jesus Christ alone is worshiped and love to the Lord as well as love to the neighbor are taught, and where we have given us by the Lord a wonderful new understanding of the Bible.

This Sunday we are celebrating “New Church Day.” That is because on June nineteenth in the year 1770 the New Church began to come down from heaven to earth. Our chapter tells us about it. John saw it as a beautiful city called the New Jerusalem.

What can you tell about it?

Ask your teacher to read the first verse of our chapter for today.

This vision is a parable.

What is a parable?

The new heaven and the new earth mean a new understanding of the Lord and of what our life on earth is for.

This new understanding was given to the world two hundred years ago by the Lord by means of a man named Emanuel Swedenborg.

Swedenborg wrote and published it under the guidance of the Lord.

June 19, 1770, was the day on which the new understanding, the holy city, began to come down to earth.

Do you remember where Solomon’s temple was set up?

Jerusalem means “place of peace.” Do you know what peace is? It is being loving and happy, not quarreling or scolding, or trying to take things away from other people, not always trying to have our own way. When are you unhappy? Isn’t it usually when you are naughty and have to be punished for doing something you have been told not to do? If we are sensible, we shall try harder and harder every day to do right instead of wrong, to try to make other people happy instead of always trying to have our own way. Then we shall have peace—we shall be living in the holy city.

What is the true name of our church?

This is because it is founded on the new understanding which is called the holy city New Jerusalem.

The new understanding is given through a new knowledge of the inner meaning of the Word of God.

We can study this all our lives with ever-increasing light.

This was the Second Coming of the Lord, prophesied in Mark 13:26.

The clouds of heaven mean the literal sense of the Word, and the power and great glory mean its internal sense.



Junior

Emphasize the reason for the Second Coming, the need of the modern world for the new knowledge given to this New Church, and the great responsibility resting on everyone exposed to this knowledge.

Who had a vision of the holy city?

What was the name of the holy city?

Earlier we have studied some of the details of John's vision of the holy city as they are given in the last part of chapter 21 in the book of Revelation. And we saw that this beautiful city is a picture of a heavenly state in which we may live if we study the truth which the Lord in His Second Coming has revealed to us in His Word in the light of its internal meaning, and try to live as He wants us to live. Today we are celebrating a special day, June nineteenth, which we call "New Church Day" because Swedenborg tells us that on that day in the year 1770 the establishment of the new Christian heaven was proclaimed in the spiritual world, from which the New Church on earth would descend. This is what the first verse of our chapter means.

You all go to school several days of each week. You all know that the things you have been learning in school this year could not have been taught you when you were babies, or even during your first years in school. And you all know that as you go further in school you will learn many more things, things which you would not be able to understand now. It is so with everyone and it was so with the human race. When they were first created, they were simple, innocent people, just as babies are now. The Lord gave

them all the knowledge they needed. As the race grew older and people began to think for themselves, He gave them more instruction and of a more complex kind. And, just as it is with men today, those who chose to learn from Him and to do what He said was right became more and more wise, while those who just wanted to have their own way only made trouble for everybody and were unhappy themselves.

When the Lord was in the world He said to His disciples, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.” Men learned more all the time about the physical world, however, and were finally becoming so proud of themselves and their learning that they would not even listen to the Lord, and the simple good people could not understand the Word well enough to meet their arguments. So finally the Lord came again, not in the flesh, but by showing us the inner meaning of the Word by means of the writings of His chosen servant Emanuel Swedenborg. You have all been blessed in being introduced to this knowledge in your early years. And the Lord has given each of you a great responsibility—to study the Bible in the light of this new understanding and to obey the Lord faithfully so that you may lead others to it and may yourselves dwell forever in the holy city.

Now let us reread our Bible lesson and think what it means in this new light. The holy city, as we have seen, is the New Church coming down from God to be established on earth. Those who truly belong to this Church will love the Lord as a true wife loves her husband (verse 2). The Lord is in this Church as its center (verse 2). We may now live happy, peaceful lives because we can understand how the Lord rules everything (verses 4-7). But if we know these things and do not try to obey the Lord, we shall live in hell instead of in heaven (verse 8). The wall of the city is the letter of the Word, especially that law which He has given to man from the beginning, the ten commandments, but now understood in new light and obeyed from love to the Lord (verses 9-12).

How many gates did the city have?

What were written on the gates?

Intermediate

These pupils are old enough to be given a clear statement of the origin and mission of the New Church and the need for it in the world of today. The teacher may be able to point out some of the temptations which they face, even at their age, in modern times. Stress the duty of each one of us to be faithful to the Lord and His commandments.

We have studied the general meaning of the holy city New Jerusalem, and the meaning of some of its details as described in the last part of our chapter.

Today let us think of the reason why this holy city, the New Church, had to come down from heaven just when it did, for we learn from Swedenborg that on June 19, 1770, the announcement was made in heaven which heralded the fulfillment of the prophecy given in the first verse of our chapter. So we call June nineteenth “New Church Day.”

The letter of the Word has always puzzled people. Yet those who have read the Word for the purpose of learning about the Lord and living as He would have them live have always found shining through its clouds enough light to guide them, as well as the definite and unchanging laws of an orderly life, the ten commandments. This is because the earliest men were simple good people who knew they lived from the Lord and saw everything in nature as the expression of something in Him. With the good, those who chose freely to obey the Lord, this knowledge persisted almost until the time of Abraham, and formed the basis of the Ancient Word, from which the first eleven chapters of Genesis were drawn. But as men began to study and master the world of nature for themselves, they became proud of themselves, forgot about the Lord, and lost the knowledge of the true meaning of the Word. So they became less and less truly wise instead of more and more, until finally those who still wanted to obey the Lord could no longer be sure of the way, and the Lord had to come into the world Himself in a human body—which was called the “Son of God”—to show men the right way to live.

But He knew that even this would not be enough and He promised

to come again in a different way, “in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.” We know that everyone did not acknowledge Him in His First Coming. The proud and selfish who wanted to rule the world rejected and crucified Him. Even the first Christian Church, which had started among the good, soon began to break up into separate groups, each seeking to rule. And as men developed more and more worldly knowledge, through science and philosophy, the time finally came when again the good could not hold to their belief in the Word without more understanding. Then the Lord’s Second Coming had to be made to give men once more the understanding of the inner meaning of His Word so that the good could not be deceived by those who called themselves wise because of their merely earthly knowledge.

This new understanding of the Word of God in the light of its inner meaning is the holy city New Jerusalem coming down to earth from God out of heaven, forming out of all good men and women a new heaven and a new earth. The mission of the Church called by this name is to help people to find and study and live according to this new light.

We see in our lesson for today that everyone will not accept the new light. There will still be those who are proud of themselves and do not want to be governed by the Lord, but for such people there is no place in heaven. Yet the gates of the holy city are forever open to all who sincerely want to live within its walls, within the boundaries of the teachings of the Lord in His Word, shining like jasper from the light within.

Senior

This is an excellent opportunity to warn our young people of the fallacy of assuming that our modern scientists and philosophers and psychologists are so learned that their pronouncements about the Bible and the spiritual world must be always accepted. Many young people are led astray by this idea.

In our study of the holy city we considered in some detail, as a description of the ideal of the Church to which we belong, the

pattern of life given by the Lord Himself for this new age in which mankind is making such great strides in earthly science and philosophy. Why do we need this new ideal? It is because men, whenever they make new advances, are tempted to take credit to themselves, to forget that all their power to will, think, and do comes from the Lord and that, if they want to make good use of their achievements, they must look to Him for guidance and live according to His laws. As you go on through high school and college, you will find that there is so much to learn today about this natural world in which we live that you will often be tempted to forget how short our life here is in comparison with eternity, and how much more important is knowledge of the world in which our souls live. We indeed need knowledge of this world because our field of action for the time is here, and the Lord wants us to enjoy this world and to be useful in it. But we need to make sure that what we do from day to day here is not obscuring the higher plane of our minds which connects us with the Lord and with heaven.

So in the middle of our Bible reading for today, in verse 8, we find a condemnation of those who forget their duty to obey the laws of the Lord. Many people imagine that we can put off thinking about spiritual things until we have achieved what we want in this world, that the Bible is out of date, that it will be time enough to make up our minds about God when we die and find out if there is anything beyond this life. But this is not true. We are forming our eternal character from day to day. What we think and do today affects us and others tomorrow and forever. It is a serious thought, but ordinary common sense tells us it is true. The Lord leaves us free to make our own choices, because if He did not we should be mere animals acting on instinct. But from the very beginning of mankind upon the earth He has given them a progressive revelation of His existence and of His order, so that man would never need to choose blindly.

In our modern age we have more worldly knowledge to study and learn, but we also have more heavenly knowledge to balance and direct it. It will be our own fault if we make the wrong choice

and take the road that leads to hell instead of entering one of the gates of the holy city and drinking freely of the “fountain of the water of life.”

Adult

The need of the New Church teachings in our modern world and the responsibility of each member to study and live these teachings is the important lesson for the Adults. The teacher should ask for questions and answer them as clearly and fully as possible. The Church should be the center of life for all of us and the study of the Word our most important study.

John’s vision of the holy city coming down from God out of heaven is the culmination of the Word of God. We have seen that the whole Word is the gradual revelation to mankind of the nature and will of God, as man developed from his first childlike state to his present state of expanding worldly knowledge. Just as a child cannot be taught everything at once, so man has developed from stage to stage and had to be instructed progressively until he reached his full adult capacity.

Man is different from the animals because he has rationality and freedom of choice. These qualities are what are meant by his being made in the image and likeness of God. The writings tell us that the one thing the Lord must preserve in man at all costs is his freedom of choice; the Lord could not have prevented the development of evils in the world without destroying man. Love which is not freely given is not love.

The final revelation needed by man was made when he reached his fullest mental development, about two hundred years ago. It was the Second Coming of the Lord—not an earthly reappearance, but a coming, as He Himself had prophesied, “in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.” That is, a coming in the internal meaning shining through the clouds of the letter of the Word! Swedenborg tells us that this new understanding from the Word of the rule of the Lord Jesus Christ alone was proclaimed in the heavens on June 19, 1770. This is why we observe the nineteenth of June as “New Church Day.”

We have only to read the philosophies of our day based on men's pride in their own scientific development, and to observe the progressive weakening of the doctrinal bases of Protestant sects and even of Roman Catholic claims to realize how essential the new revelation is to the preservation of knowledge and worship of the Lord in our new age. The mission of the New Church is a very important one and the responsibility of each one of its members is very great. Let us all make every effort to study and live the teachings of the holy city and to lead others to a knowledge of them wherever the Lord has seen fit to place us. The Church on earth is the bride, the lamb's wife. Let us all cleave to the Lord and serve Him first of all.



From the Writings of Swedenborg

True Christian Religion, n. 791: "After this work was finished the Lord called together His twelve disciples who followed Him in the world; and the next day He sent them all forth throughout the whole spiritual world to preach the Gospel that the LORD GOD JESUS CHRIST reigns, whose kingdom shall be for ages and ages, according to the prediction in Daniel (7:13-14), and in the Apocalypse (11:15). Also that blessed are those that come to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Apocalypse 19:9). This took place on the nineteenth day of June, 1770. This is what is meant by these words of the Lord: 'He shall send His angels and they shall gather together His elect, from one end of the heavens to the other.' (Matthew 24:31)."



Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. What special day are we celebrating today? *New Church Day*
- P. Why do we call June nineteenth "New Church Day"? [*see TCR 791*]
- J. For what is our Church named? *the holy city New Jerusalem*
- P. Who first saw the holy city coming down from God out of heaven?
the apostle John
- I. What does a city correspond to? *doctrine*
- I. What do its walls correspond to? *letter of the Word*
- P. What does the word *Jerusalem* mean? *place of peace*
- J. Why did the world have to wait so long for the final revelation?
till men were ready

REVELATION 21:1-12

381

- I. Which is more important, knowledge of this world or knowledge of the Lord and His will? *knowledge of the Lord*
- P. How did the Lord make His Second Coming? *by revealing inner sense of Word*
- S. Why did the Lord have to give man freedom of choice? *love to Lord, neighbor must be freely chosen*
- S. What does this teach us about His permission of evil? *necessary in order to preserve human freedom*
- I. What is the great temptation we face in the world today? *pride of self-intelligence*
- S. What is our duty as members of the New Church? *to help lead others to the Lord by means of the Word and the writings*