

NEW CHURCH DAY

Revelation 22:1-14

“New Church Day” presents a good opportunity to emphasize man’s fundamental need of recognition and worship of the Lord, constant study of the Word in the light of the writings, and the daily effort to live as the Lord teaches us to live instead of from our own selfish ideas of what is best. Try to keep this major objective in mind as you teach the various classes. None are too young to have it impressed upon them.

Doctrinal Points

Our first responsibility is to acknowledge the Lord and our complete dependence on Him.

The heavenly doctrines are the “key” to the eternal lessons for life to be found in the Word.

Notes for Parents

The New Church thinks of June nineteenth as a very special anniversary and calls it “New Church Day” because Swedenborg tells us that on that day in the year 1770 the proclamation was made throughout the heavens that “the Lord God Jesus Christ reigns, whose kingdom shall be for ages and ages.” This meant that the time had arrived when the final revelation had been made by the Lord by His coming “in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory,” that is, by the opening of the inner meaning of the Word of God so that the light of a true understanding might break through the clouds of its literal sense.

In earlier lessons we have seen how the first Christian Church perverted the teachings on the basis of which it had been started by the apostles. We have also seen how each dispensation of the Church from the beginning of man has declined by similar perversion. Man must always be free to reject the Lord’s teaching if he so

chooses and to use his reason to support his own selfishness and pride, for without freedom and rationality he would not be man.

Many people today ask, “Why is it so important to acknowledge the Lord and the Word? Is not the really important thing to love others and do good works?” The answer is really very simple. If we do not acknowledge the Lord, we take credit to ourselves for any love of others we may feel, and if we do not study the Word of God to find out what the Lord teaches is good, our deeds are directed by our own ideas and there are as many different ideas of good as there are people. Left to ourselves we all make many mistakes even in trying to do good.

The Lord has now given mankind all the knowledge of Himself and His will that He needs to give. The New Church in the world is founded on the recognition of this gift. All of us who belong to the New Church have the obligation to study the Word of God in the light of its inner meaning, to examine ourselves in this light, and to seek to live from day to day as this light directs. If we do this, although as finite human beings we shall still have differences of opinion, we can discuss our differences in a loving spirit and work together as brothers and sisters, all looking to one all-wise Father for guidance. If we do this, we shall not only live to eternity in the beautiful city described in our lesson, but even in this world we shall be eating of the tree of life, drinking the living water, and walking the golden streets. Our life in this world is successful only if we view it constantly in its relation to eternal life. May we all make the wise choice.

“Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.”

Primary

This is the age when it is hardest for children to understand why they cannot always have what they want. The picture of the holy city may give them a new idea to help them begin self-control. Emphasize the effect of selfishness and disobedience both in this world and in the next.

Today we are celebrating a very special day for our Church, June nineteenth, which we call “New Church Day” because it was on that day in the year 1770 that it was announced to the angels that all was now in order for the establishment of the Lord’s kingdom, which would last for ages and ages. This was what the apostle John prophesied in his vision of the beautiful city coming down from God out of heaven.

The picture John gives us of the holy city New Jerusalem is a beautiful picture, isn’t it? We all think we would like to live there, don’t we? And we all can live there if we try. Verse 14 of our chapter says: “Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.” You see, there is one requirement: we must “do his commandments.” We do not get to the holy city all at once or without some effort. Isn’t that true of most of the good things we have? We have to get up and dress ourselves in the morning before we can have our breakfast and go to school or out to play. We have to take care of our toys if we want new ones. We have to be kind and pleasant to other people if we want them to be kind and pleasant to us.

If we want to be able to enter the gates of the holy city, we have to do all these things, and as we grow older we shall find more and more to learn and do, and the longer we study the Bible the better we shall understand it. We shall love the Lord better the better we come to know Him. And we shall be more and more happy in doing His will the longer we practice it. The only thing that can hinder us and keep us out of the holy city is selfishness—always wanting our own way instead of the Lord’s way.

This means that we ought to study the Bible all our lives.

When people will not study the Bible, it is because they do not really want to know about the Lord and what He wants us to do.

Why do you think anyone would feel this way?

Are you ever selfish?

Are selfish people happy together?

You can see then why selfish people will not be able to live in the holy city.

Can you repeat Revelation 22:14?

This tells us what we must all learn to do if we are to enter the holy city.
Why not begin now?

Junior

See how much the class remembers about the holy city and try to impress them with the importance of reading the Word and learning more and more of its internal meaning in order that they may live the true life of the holy city.

In verse 10 of our chapter for today the angel tells John that “the time is at hand” when his prophecy of the descent of the holy city would be fulfilled, and we have learned that this was to come about by the opening of the inner meaning of the Word so that everyone might see, if he would, that the Lord Jesus is the one God of heaven and earth. This would be the Second Coming of the Lord. And Swedenborg tells us that on June 19, 1770, the twelve disciples who had followed the Lord in the world were sent out to proclaim throughout the spiritual world that “the Lord God Jesus Christ reigns.” This is why we call the nineteenth of June “New Church Day.”

What is the full name of our Church?

From what does it take this name?

Do you remember any of the details of this city as John saw it in vision?

What did the wall represent?

In our worship services we say together what we call “the Faith of the New Church.” Can you repeat it? This is a statement of the doctrine or teaching which the Lord has given us to be the wall of our holy city. We find all these teachings in the letter of the Word of God, but in order to understand them we need to see the light from within shining through. Read verse 18 of chapter 21. Jasper is a beautiful clear stone through which light can shine.

What man did the Lord choose to give us the information which will enable us to see this light?

Do we become New Churchmen by merely saying we believe these things?

The Lord gives us the answer to this question in verse 14 of our lesson for today. In order to live in the holy city both here on earth

and forever in heaven we have to study the Word daily and, as we grow older, also study the writings of Swedenborg which enable us to see the light within, and we have to try day by day to live according to the teachings we find in this way. It may seem hard at first, but so does the acquisition and use of any knowledge. And the knowledge which we shall need forever is the most important knowledge of all.

Intermediate

With this class review the description of the holy city, stressing the correspondence of the river, the tree of life, the golden street, the gates, and finally the wall and the foundations, thus leading into the special lesson for today.

In our lesson on “The Woman and the Dragon” we learned why the nineteenth of June is called “New Church Day.” This special lesson is written to help us keep that day in mind and realize more fully what it means to us.

Our lesson begins with the words, “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” This beautiful river is a picture of the pure truth as it comes to us from the Lord if we see and acknowledge that He is our king, the ruler of all the world. This new understanding of what the Lord says to us in His Word is the great gift which He has given to us in His Second Coming.

Throughout your study of the Bible in our Sunday School lessons you have been given glimpses of the light which makes the river clear as crystal, but you can see more and more of it only as you make it your own by continued study of the Word and of the writings of Swedenborg, the “servant of the Lord Jesus Christ,” the man whom the Lord chose and prepared to be His agent in publishing the necessary knowledge so that all who sincerely wanted it could find it.

You are just beginning this study, as you are also just beginning the study of the material knowledges which will make you useful and successful in this world. You need both kinds of knowledge,

but never forget that the knowledge of the Lord and His will is the knowledge which will determine your usefulness and success to eternity. The material world is all around us. It is easy to become absorbed in it and to close our eyes to the light that comes from the Lord. But that is really a very stupid thing to do, isn't it? For the spiritual world is all around us also. Our souls are living in it now. And true happiness for us in this world as well as to eternity can come only from receiving the Lord's truth in our minds and so living in obedience to Him that we may also receive His unselfish love in our hearts, which is to eat of the fruit of the tree of life.

Senior

Since for this class earlier lessons have brought out many of the points which are important for this special day, the teacher may give most of the lesson time to a review of these points, merely emphasizing the reason for the name given to this day.

We of the New Church call the nineteenth of June "New Church Day." You will find the reason for this in *True Christian Religion*, n. 791.

The first verse of the Bible reads: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." And the first verse of John's final vision reads: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away." Mankind in his beginning was like a newborn baby: he possessed a soul and a body but knew nothing of himself until he had been developed and instructed by the Lord. He was a man, however, not an animal. He was from his very beginning distinguished from the animals by the possession of two faculties, rationality and freedom of choice. The first chapter of Genesis teaches us how he was developed to full manhood and instructed directly by the Lord, and the second chapter describes the beautiful state in which he was able to live until he began to use his free choice to set himself up in place of the Lord.

Our lessons on the Bible have showed us how again and again the human race declined because of the many who chose to eat

the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil—the exaltation of their own intelligence—instead of keeping the tree of life in the center of their garden. Each time a crisis was reached the many had to be destroyed or dispersed and a new beginning made with the remnant of faithful people by means of a new revelation of truth in a form suited to their state. When the Lord came into the world in a human body, mankind had reached its lowest state and the good could not have been preserved in any other way.

But you may remember that the Lord said to His disciples, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now,” and in another prophecy He promised that at a future time they would see Him coming “in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” The Lord has now made this Second Coming by opening the inner meaning of the Word, so that anyone who will may now understand the many things He has to say to the men of this new age. It is His final revelation of Himself to man. How foolish we are if we in this age choose to be of those who imagine they know enough to live without God instead of learning of and living in the new heaven and the new earth!

Adult

The best lesson for the Adults is to help them to realize that the most important use they can serve—not only to their Church but to the world—is to study steadily and seriously the Word of God in the light of the internal meaning, to which the writings of Swedenborg are the key, and to try to live their daily lives in this light and be ready to help others from it as opportunity offers.

In our world today we face many frightening conditions: wars and rumors of wars, race hatreds, poverty and disease, lust for power, rebellious youth, drug addiction and insanity, business and political dishonesty, sex offenses and murder, decline of the churches. Many good people are staggered by these facts, completely discouraged, even sure the end of the world must be at hand. Many who believe in God fall into the temptation to blame Him, saying, “Why does God permit such things?” Others are drawn into

so many kinds of external “good works” that they have no time to read and think, and fall into the habit of blaming everyone who does not do just the same things they do.

Yet the answer has been given us from the beginning: “And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” Man from his beginning was man, not an animal, because from his beginning he was given rationality and freedom of choice, the power to think above the level of this earth and so to recognize God, and freedom to choose on which level he would live.

If we study the history of mankind in the light of the Word of God, we can see that the decline of mankind from the first happy state to their present state has been the result of man’s choice of self-intelligence and love of dominion in place of love to the Lord and the effort to learn of Him and do His will. Our reading for today repeats the fact of our freedom and points out the consequences of the selfish choice. But it also points out to us clearly that in this new age of ours the pure river of truth is still available to quench the thirst of all who really seek it, and the tree of life still grows in the holy city New Jerusalem, yielding fruit to satisfy the needs of every hungry person; and we are told plainly in the vision that “the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”

The gates of the holy city are open. Let each of us honestly examine himself and face up to his own individual responsibility in the place where the Lord has seen fit to put him, remembering always the last verse of our lesson: “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.”

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Revealed, n. 940: “And there shall be no night there, and they

have no need of a lamp and the light of the sun, for the Lord giveth them light, signifies that there will not be any falsity of faith in the New Jerusalem, and that men there will not be in knowledges concerning God from natural light which is from their own intelligence, and from glory arising from pride, but will be in spiritual light from the Word from the Lord alone.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. What special day do we celebrate today? *New Church Day*
- J. Why is it so named? *[see TCR 791]*
- I. Who tells us this? *Swedenborg*
- S. Of whom was Swedenborg the agent? *the Lord in His Second Coming*
- P. What did John see in the holy city? *river, tree of life*
- J. Where did we first read of the tree of life? *Genesis 1*
- I. What other tree was in the garden of Eden? *knowledge of good and evil*
- J. What were men told about the two trees? *not to eat of latter*
- P. What must we learn to do if we want to live in the holy city? *obey commandments*
- P. Why must we study the Bible? *to learn how to live*
- P. What is our other name for the Bible? *the Word*
- I. What is the river of water of life? *pure truth coming from the Lord*
- I. What is the only way to true happiness? *receiving the Lord's truth, living according to it*
- S. What is our special duty as New Churchmen? *to learn and live the truths of the Word in the light of the heavenly doctrines*