

## Seeing in the Light of Love and Wisdom

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June 14, 2020

So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it. But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals. *Revelation 5:4-5*

The book of Revelation is special to the New Church. When its symbolic language is understood it presents a vivid picture of why and how the New Church came into existence. It presents a picture of what we, who aspire to be members of that church, need to look to in what we care about, what we think and what we do. This sermon will focus on the opening of the seven seals, the sounding of the seven trumpets and the pouring out of the seven plagues described in the middle chapters of the book of Revelation.

The whole book of Revelation, when properly understood, helps us to see the Lord as a loving God who is reaching out to people, calling them to Him. It helps us to see the importance of understanding what is true and good. It helps us to see the nature of evil and the influence it has had on supposedly religious people. And it helps us to see the way the Lord's kingdom can be, in heaven and on earth.

Understanding the book of Revelation is not a matter of knowing about a single historical event, the Last Judgment. The spiritual dynamics of that event, which the New Church asserts has already occurred, have a direct counterpart in our daily lives. The better we understand how the Lord showed His loving care for all people through His role in the Last Judgment, the better we can see how He can care for and lead us.

One of the great false ideas about God is that He is angry at people who do evil and punishes them. If the book of Revelation is understood on a merely superficial basis, it seems to support this point of view. The opening of the seven seals, the sounding of the seven trumpets and the pouring out of the seven plagues described in the middle chapters of the book of Revelation, obviously coming from God, are related to numerous disasters, and much destruction. It seems that God causes this destruction as a punishment for the wicked. This is not how God expresses His infinite love. Many people nevertheless act from the idea that it is justified to be angry at people who do bad things and that it is right and good to cause them pain, real or psychological, and loss. For example, we know that certain kinds of gossip can tremendously harm a person's reputation and ability to be useful, but there is a part of faulty human nature that sees "out of step" behavior as bad and wrong, thereby justifying our destructive discussion of it and sharing it far and wide. It's a secret and indirect punishment for the person who has broken some principle of accepted behavior. If this kind of gossip is widespread it can poison at least a segment of a social group and produces an environment in which no one feels safe or able to trust that they won't be the next victim of general criticism, shared disapproval, and subtle social sanction.

The book of Revelation describes a condition in which many things are not what they seem. Many things, which on the surface look good and useful, are actually empty and lifeless and because they don't look this way they are evil and destructive. If we could accurately discriminate between fantasy and reality we would make better decisions. For example, how can a middle aged man contemplate abandoning his wife, family and social connections to marry a much younger woman? He does so because he thinks he will find more happiness with her than with his whole previous

life. Typically he is unhappy with his life and believes that the solution is a new relationship. He looks at his previous married life and sees dreariness and unfulfilling effort. He looks at his new relationship and sees freshness and excitement, something that is more spontaneous, here is a new woman that he wants to go out of his way for and who seems to appreciate him more. His adultery looks like heaven and his marriage looks like a dreary hell. He, perhaps unconsciously, pictures that his new relationship will have none of the flaws of his present one. He is pursuing a fantasy. If he makes his decision on this fantasy he will be hurt and so will his wife, his children, and in a sense so will all the people whose lives interact with his. His opting out of his marriage vows will tend to further erode their sacred quality and binding nature, making it easier for others to be seduced by a similar fantasy.

Fantasy can also exist on a much smaller and more mundane level. Take for example, a woman who is regularly late or who regularly fails to fulfill her commitments, and yet when she is called to account, she always has reasons or accuses as to why it isn't her fault. Someone else caused her lateness or some natural thing failed, like her alarm clock--even though she set it properly, or it was just bad luck. Rarely is anything her fault and consequently she takes little or no responsibility for remedying the situation or trying to change. She sees the problem as entirely outside of herself. Things just happens. When she looks at herself she sees a picture of blameless decisions and actions. She sees a fantasy, which if it remains unchanged, will cause herself and others inconvenience and harm. If she is going to change, her eyes need to be opened.

It is the Lord's desire that we see what is real. By seeing reality, we can make better decisions. When we base our decisions on fantasies or misperceptions, we hurt ourselves and others.

The book of Revelation specifically describes a condition when reality had been twisted. This occurred in a place that is part of the life after death. After a person's natural body ceases to live, the person's spirit awakes with a new body in a place intermediate between heaven and hell. This place is called the World of Spirits. Here at least initially, as in this world, good and evil people are all mixed together and can live side by side. When a person's true nature shows itself and he or she is given a choice of good and true things or evil and false ones, there is a spontaneous and natural judgment separating that spirit from those who react differently. The saying, "birds of a feather flock together," describes this separation. But this separation can only take place if reality is seen, only if the light of heaven shines into the World of Spirits. The book of Revelation describes a time when that was not occurring. Instead the spirits of people who had chosen evil things as their primary goals kept their true quality hidden. They made it appear as though they were among those blessed by God and that they were already in heaven. They created a false world of cities, trees, rivers, and so forth--all of them beautiful but in reality they were fantasies of evil and false things.

John, the narrator of the book, describes seeing a scroll sealed with seven seals and weeping because no one could open it. This scroll represents how the Word of God had been so twisted and obscured by human invention, that its fundamental truth was hidden. Historically, traditional Christian explanations of God as three persons, and subsequent explanations of salvation based on earning heaven by attending the right church and doing the right things or salvation entirely by an intellectual faith apart from what a person cares about, thinks and does, had so clouded the fundamental message of obedience to God, and love and service to the neighbor that they were lost.

The opening of the seven seals by the Lord represents the initial step necessary for genuine truth to once again be seen. The Word of the Lord needs to be a present in our minds and understood before

we can possibly see through the fantasies that our own unenlightened eyes would show us. The horses and riders seen as the first four seals describe the progressive loss of true understanding and concern for what is good that can occur in a person's life or the life of a church. The fifth seal was opened and John describes seeing a vision of souls at the foot of an altar mourning their state. These souls represent people who were good but unable to recognize the fantasy of evil. In our own lives they are like the good motives and concerns that can get linked to evil ones and false ideas. Until they can see their proper place they are stuck where they are and change would destroy them. For example, righteous and angry punishment is often connected to something true or good. If the destructiveness of the anger is pointed out to the person, he can respond, "So, are you saying I just shouldn't care about the bad thing she was doing?" It seems there is no choice but to either be destructively angry or decide there is no problem. But this is not reality. The Lord preserved the souls under the altar until the real truth could be seen and their goodness could be preserved. This is also the meaning behind the sealing of the 144,000. It represent a preservation of goodness that is initially too weak and obscure to remain unmixed and untainted by evil and false ideas. Children and teens often show this faulty mixture in their attitudes and decisions. They can simultaneously mix high ideals and short-term, self-centered, and natural thinking, such as in their unwillingness to tell the truth if it will get a friend in trouble. Attacking the flaw can sometimes seem to them to attack the ideal of friendship and loyalty.

The sounding of the seven trumpets represents an exploration and opening up what is real. As the light of truth once again showed forth in the World of Spirits the fantasy that had been accepted as reality were revealed to be quite different. The Lord wants each of us to see through similar fantasies within our own lives. We tend to excuse and even value goals, habits of thought and actions that can be terribly destructive to our own long-term happiness and terribly hurtful to others. This destructive life that seems so natural is what the Lord referred to when He said, "He who saves his life shall lose it and he who loses his life for my sake shall find it." (*Matthew 16:25*)

The pouring out of the seven plagues represents that the evil fled out of the World of Spirits and found their proper place in hell. Genuine evil cannot take the presence of goodness and truth. Either it wants to control it, destroy it or get away from it. The Lord didn't have to cast anyone into hell. He just needed to have something of His love and wisdom draw near to the evil in the World of Spirits and they could not stand to remain in its presence. The Lord hadn't done it earlier because the good who had been mixed with the evil would have been hurt also.

In our own lives, when we see things as they really are, decisions are easy. When we see and acknowledge that a course of thought or action will hurt us and others it isn't hard to turn from it. Evil has its greatest power by appearing to be different from what it really is. It wants to seem beneficial or at least harmless. When seen for its true nature, this fantasy falls away.

May we pray for the light of truth in our own lives. May we seek a knowledge of the Lord's Word and not just a collection of facts that can be used for intellectual discussion, but a living set of ideas that we use in daily life. May the Word be an open book for us. May we use it to reflect on our thoughts and intentions. May we use it to examine the courses of action that we contemplate. May the light of truth reveal the fantasies of evil so that we may with strength and conviction turn from them and to the Lord and the life of heaven. AMEN

Lessons: Psalm 18:13-18, 27-28, Revelation 6:1-11, *Apocalypse Revealed* 320-322

### **Psalm 18:13-28 (NKJV)**

<sup>13</sup> The LORD thundered from heaven, And the Most High uttered His voice, Hailstones and coals of fire. <sup>14</sup> He sent out His arrows and scattered the foe, Lightnings in abundance, and He vanquished them. <sup>15</sup> Then the channels of the sea were seen, The foundations of the world were uncovered At Your rebuke, O LORD, At the blast of the breath of Your nostrils. <sup>16</sup> He sent from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters. <sup>17</sup> He delivered me from my strong enemy, From those who hated me, For they were too strong for me. <sup>18</sup> They confronted me in the day of my calamity, But the LORD was my support . . . <sup>27</sup> For You will save the humble people, But will bring down haughty looks. <sup>28</sup> For You will light my lamp; The LORD my God will enlighten my darkness.

### **Revelation 6:1-11**

<sup>1</sup> Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, "Come and see." <sup>2</sup> And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer. <sup>3</sup> When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come and see." <sup>4</sup> Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that *people* should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword. <sup>5</sup> When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come and see." So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. <sup>6</sup> And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine." <sup>7</sup> When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come and see." <sup>8</sup> So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth. <sup>9</sup> When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. <sup>10</sup> And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" <sup>11</sup> Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they *were*, was completed.

### **Apocalypse Revealed 320-322**

"So I looked, and behold, a pale horse." (6:8) This symbolizes an understanding of the Word destroyed as to both goodness and truth. A horse symbolizes an understanding of the Word, and paleness symbolizes a lack of vitality. The Word lacks vitality for people who are without goods of life in accordance with doctrinal truths. For the Word in the sense of the letter is not understood apart from doctrine, and doctrine is not seen without a life in accordance with it. That is because a life in accordance with doctrine drawn from the Word opens the spiritual mind, and light from heaven flows into the mind, enlightening it and giving it the ability to see. The reality of this is not known by one who is acquainted with truths of doctrine, and yet does not live according to them.

"And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hell followed with him." This symbolizes the extinction of spiritual life and thus damnation. Death here symbolizes spiritual death, which is the extinction of spiritual life. And Hell symbolizes damnation, which results from that death.

Everyone from creation and so from birth has, indeed, spiritual life, but that life is extinguished when the person denies God, the sanctity of the Word, and eternal life. He extinguishes it in his will, but it remains in his intellect, or rather, in his ability to understand.

And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill. This symbolizes the destruction of all the good [motivations, thoughts and actions] in the church. Since death means the extinction of a person's spiritual life, and hell his damnation, it follows that to kill here means to destroy the life of a person's soul. The life of the soul is spiritual life. A fourth of the earth means, symbolically, all good things of the church.