

- I. "I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God down out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."
  - A. As we said in our recitation, "Behold I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and joy in My people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying"
  - B. These are images in Scripture of the New Church, a new vision of Christianity and of our Lord that can change the world. They are shining, bright, hopeful
  - C. How does that fit in this world of COVID19, racial prejudice and harm, rioting, mass movement away from religion, bitter rancor in civil discourse, to say nothing of child abuse, greed, and a host of other ordinary evils we see?
  - D. At one level it seems like this glorious imagery is out of place right now. Maybe we should put off thinking about beauty for a while and get out and deal with the murky, messy problems in front of us.
    1. Maybe when there is peace and respect, we can clean off our hands, dirty from hard work, and go back to looking at the beautiful
    2. Maybe what we just sang is more on point: "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem." I know I need peace and respect in my heart and I sure want it in the world around me. Maybe some of you feel the same
- II. But saying let's not focus on this promise of the glorious city is thinking about it backwards. These images of the new Jerusalem are not only what the Lord is calling us to as individuals, as a church and as a world at some point in the future. They also describe important aspects of spiritual reality, and how we can work to bring peace and healing and integrity right now.
  - A. They address how we can end racism and violence, how we can stand for what is good and true, how we can raise children to be better at bringing peace and morality into the world than we are.
  - B. Let's dig into the imagery and see how it applies.
- III. First let's consider the literal imagery. We're taught that there's a deeper meaning in all of Scripture, which is powerful and transforms our thinking
  - A. But the Lord also gives us the essential's for living a heavenly life in the literal imagery of Scripture – the basic message we need even if we don't get the deeper stuff
  - B. The passages I read, and we said in our recitation, along with a few others, are the Old Testament passages that come up again & again in New Church teaching as emblematic teachings about what we are supposed to think of when we think of Jerusalem, and of the kind of church we are called on to be.
  - C. Some themes emerge strongly
  - D. This new Jerusalem is a place of joy: "Behold I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy." Other passages also speak to this
    1. The Lord is trying to create a place in our hearts and world where we will have joy
  - E. Jerusalem is safe: They will fear evil no longer, the gates will be open for lack

of danger

1. I think many of us would like a lot more safety from evil and viruses
  2. The name Jerusalem means city of peace. This is what the Lord is bringing to us and the world if we choose to receive it.
- F. Jerusalem will be a city of holiness. We'll look at that in a bit
- G. The land will be called married, in keeping the image of the Holy City as a bride adorned for her husband. We'll talk about that at the end
- H. And there are many, many, images of truth, of shining light, of justice, of clothing, of a throne. All these are images symbolic of the truth that creates the space in which safety and joy and holiness happen.
- I. Joy, safety, holiness, shining truth. Pretty powerful things we'd like to see more of in this world
- IV. Digging a bit deeper, as we read, the primary symbolism of Jerusalem is of the doctrine because all cities stand for doctrine
- A. The word doctrine literally means "teaching"
- B. The word can seem heady, the kind of thing people out of touch with the unrest in the world might throw around in their ivory towers
1. At times it certainly is used that way, but that's not what the Lord means
  2. The Lord teaches, "there is only one doctrine, namely, that of love to the Lord and of charity toward the neighbor" (AC 3451:4, 2037e, 2231:2)
  3. This means that if we see some point of doctrine and we don't see how it leads to love for the Lord and for the neighbor, then we don't understand it.
  4. This reality is symbolized by the Holy City being made of pure gold, a symbol of love – that city of doctrine was about love for the neighbor and the Lord
  5. Thinking about it this way we can see the relevance of the holy city imagery to today
    - a. Are we, as individuals and a country, using the truth we know to love others, to serve them, to make the world a better place?
    - b. Are we putting others needs at least at the level of our own?
- C. Doctrine is not so much a fortress as it is a beacon inviting us in
1. And when we don't see love for the Lord and the neighbor around us or in our own hearts, this is a call to seek change
- V. From the perspective of a modern city the outstanding feature of the description of the holy city is the amount of time given to the wall and gates, perhaps 2/5 of the whole description is about them
- A. Those walls, beautiful and appealing as they are, stand for the truths of the literal meaning of the Word
- B. Walls are a boundary, what comes in and what goes out
- C. The truths in the literal meaning of the Word focus on this kinds of boundaries
1. Do not murder
  2. Whatever you want people to do to you do also to them
  3. Do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain

4. Do not commit adultery or lie or steal
- D. For us to experience the holy city in our lives we have to find ways to establish clearer boundaries ourselves, both in our actions and in our thinking
  1. Maybe you have recently observed and possibly even participated in social media discussions that would make the angels wince, or feel sad
  2. There is a lack of boundaries there, and it is letting the hells into our city
- E. On a broader scale, we are coming to terms with the fact that we need clearer boundaries in our country around racial issues. What we've done is not enough
- F. And the work of all of our lives is to explore our inner workings and seek to set boundaries against the demons that wreck our peace & cause us to do harm
- VI. Striking about these walls is that they are gorgeous – jasper and precious stones and pearls
  - A. The Lord is not setting before us a dark, ominous city and saying, in effect, set firm, harsh boundaries. Punish malefactors. Look down on those outside from your comfortable place of superiority
  - B. The gates of the city are open wide and the Lord is joyfully inviting all to embrace the boundaries because of the safety they provide
    1. He's not saying lust is fun but you have to give up the good stuff to get in
      - a. He's saying the good stuff comes when we see that lust is ugly and causes pain. Set the boundary and see how good life can be
- VII. Jerusalem is called a holy city
  - A. We know quite well that we are not holy, and in fact we are told that only the Lord is holy:
  - B. "The Lord alone is holy, and consequently whatever emanates from the Lord is holy. To the extent therefore that a person receives good, and with good truth from the Lord, which are holy, he receives the Lord. Whether you say receiving goodness and truth from the Lord or receiving the Lord it amounts to the same thing; for goodness and truth are the Lord's since they come from Him, and so they are the Lord in heaven and in the Church." (AC 10128)
  - C. The New Jerusalem is holy to the degree that it receives the Lord
    1. We become holy by association with the Lord, not because we are holy but because His holiness fills us
    2. This is seen in the description we read of how the Lord was present in the city so much that there was no sun, no temple, no night
  - D. Again, we could ask, is this world holy right now? Is this country holy? Is this community filled with holiness? Are you or I filled with holiness?
    1. I think it is fair to say that each of us could look at ways in which we do not receive what is holy and seek to open ourselves a bit more
- VIII. In the last passage of True Christian Religion we read the following: "After this work was finished the Lord called together His twelve disciples who followed Him in the world. The next day He sent all of them all out through 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 Revelation (11:15); also that 'Blessed are those who come to the marriage supper of the Lamb' (Rev. 19:9)."

- A. The New Church, at root is about those two core messages
    - 1. The Lord God Jesus Christ reigns
    - 2. And blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb
    - 3. We become part of that holy city when we embrace these two central truths
      - a. We turn to the one, visible God for wisdom and love
      - b. And then we marry those two in our hearts and our lives by doing what He says
      - c. Or to put it in the terms our reading used, when we turn to Him in His Word and live it, we become His wife and bride
  - B. Again, thinking about the world right now, all our problems come when we separate goodness and truth
    - 1. The Lord make His coming to oppose the ideology that faith alone could save us
    - 2. Being saved by faith alone means I'm in the club and you're not, and it leads to a mindset focusing on what people know, and by extension if they know the kinds of things I know and look the way I do.
  - C. By contrast, when we unite goodness and truth we come face to face with our flaws and are far less likely to look down on others
  - D. And when we do look at others we look at their behavior, not at what they look like or what they stand for, or how they benefit or don't benefit us
  - E. Last week I quoted this passage, which describes when David was chosen king instead of his more impressive-looking brothers: "Jehovah said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For Jehovah does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but Jehovah looks at the heart.'" (1 Sam 16:7)
- IX. John saw an image of the holy city descending like a bride. The Lord is seeking to descend more and more into our lives and into our world. A new heaven formed inside us and then a new earth around us
- A. One teaching says: "In proportion as this new heaven, which makes up the internal of the church in the case of a person, grows, so the New Jerusalem comes down out of that heaven, and this is the new church. This therefore cannot happen in an instant, but happens as the falsities of the previous church are banished." (TCR 784)
  - B. This is our task. The Lord gives us an image of a gorgeous, glorious holy city
  - C. His promise is that its presence brings peace, joy, safety, and holiness, all when we see the love within His truth and apply it.
- X. We can and should decry evil in the world when we see it
- A. But far more we should look into our own hearts and lives, seeking to invite the Lord's holiness in by living His Word. That is what will change the world
  - B. Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Rev 21:1-4, 22-26; 22:4-5 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God down out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with people, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."...

But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it....

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.

Is 62:1-5 For Zion's sake I will not be silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet, until her justice goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burns. The nations shall see your justice, and all kings your glory. You shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of Jehovah will name. You shall also be a crown of glory in the hand of Jehovah, and a royal diadem in the palm of your God. You shall no longer be termed Forsaken, nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate; But you shall be called Hephzibah [My delight is in her], and your land Beulah [married]. For Jehovah delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

Is 52:1-2, 6, 9 Awake, awake! Put on your strength, O Zion. Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city! For the uncircumcised and the unclean shall no longer come into you. Shake the dust from yourself, arise; sit down, O Jerusalem!...

Therefore My people shall know My name; therefore they shall know in that day that I am He who speaks: "Behold, it is I."...

For Jehovah has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem.

Zeph 3:14-17 Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! Jehovah has removed your judgments, He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, Jehovah, is in your midst; you shall not see evil any more.... He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will be silent with His love; He will rejoice over you with singing."...

Lord 64 Jerusalem, in the Word, means the church in respect to doctrine, because the Temple, the Altar, the offering of sacrifices, thus Divine worship itself were there, in the

land of Canaan, and nowhere else. The three annual feasts were therefore also celebrated there, and every male throughout the land was commanded to go to them. For that reason Jerusalem symbolizes the church in respect to its worship, and so also the church in respect to its doctrine. For worship is prescribed in doctrine, and is conducted in accordance with it. In addition, the Lord was active in Jerusalem and taught in its Temple, and afterward glorified His humanity there.

AR 881:2 The bride's being prepared symbolizes her being attired for betrothal, and the church is made ready for betrothal and then for conjunction or marriage in no other way than by the Word; for the Word is the one and only means of conjunction or marriage, inasmuch as the Word originates from the Lord and is about the Lord, and thus embodies the Lord. It is also called a covenant therefore, and a covenant symbolizes spiritual conjunction. Moreover it was for this reason that the Word was given.