

## THE END OF JOHN'S VISION

*Revelation 22:8-21*

Certain great simple lessons are grouped together in the closing verses of the Bible and should be impressed upon all classes: (1) It is possible to all of us to become angels. (2) The Lord's truth is offered freely to all. (3) We must not from our own will and intelligence tamper with the Word as the Lord has given it. (4) To study the Word and obey its commandments is the way to heavenly happiness. (5) The choice is ours, but it must be made here and it is not changed after death. (6) Jesus Christ, risen and glorified, is the only God, the God who speaks to us in the Word, the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

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### Doctrinal Points

*The Lord has opened the seals and revealed the inner meaning of His Word, for all who will to see.*

*The organized New Church is as necessary to the existence and growth of the inner church, as our bodies are necessary to the growth and regeneration of our souls.*

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### Notes for Parents

In this closing chapter of the Bible is summed up all the teaching of the Word. We remember that the first verse in the Bible is: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," and now the same God identifies Himself plainly as Jesus Christ and calls Himself "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last."

The heaven and the earth which He created in the beginning are not only the physical world but the heaven and earth in our souls, the heavenly and the earthly part of us. We all develop the earthly part in order to live in this world, but we are not always so careful to develop the heavenly part. And yet if we do not begin to develop

it here, we cannot begin after death, as the Lord plainly tells us in verse 11.

Near the beginning of the Bible we have the story of the Garden of Eden, watered by its great river and with the tree of life at its center. That is a picture of the beautiful state in which the people of the first church on earth lived, before they listened to the reasoning of the “serpent” (our sense appetites) and turned from the Lord to self. In the course of our lessons we have seen how far from the Lord they traveled and how the Lord in His mercy followed them down, teaching them and trying to save them from themselves, until finally He came into the world Himself, as the Word made flesh, to live out divine truth before men’s eyes and so show them how to recognize and conquer their evils. His coming turned the tide.

Now in the closing chapters of the Bible we find the “river of water of life” and the tree of life again, this time in the holy city New Jerusalem, which was seen “coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” This prophecy has been fulfilled. The Lord has now opened the seals and revealed the inner meaning of His Word. The holy city is the New Church which is developing as a result—the “woman clothed with the sun” of whom we have read. The Second Coming of the Lord which was promised in our chapter took place some two hundred years ago, and our church takes its name from this holy city New Jerusalem.

Let us not be of those who refuse to drink of this living water, or of those who try to add to or take away from the divine truth by their own selfish reasonings. Let us rather take or stand with those blessed who “do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.”

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### Primary

The little children will be deeply affected by the beautiful picture of heavenly happiness and the possibility of becoming angels themselves. The lesson of

the importance of their daily choices of right and wrong follows naturally. The teacher should have in mind the six points suggested at the beginning of the lesson.

The last vision that was given to John was of a beautiful city, which was called the holy city New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven. You should always remember that our church is named for it: the Church of the New Jerusalem. This city is a picture of the heavenly life which the Lord gives us if we love and obey Him.

Our lesson today is from the very last chapter of the Bible. The chapter begins with a description of a river—“a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal”—on whose banks grew the tree of life, which bore twelve kinds of fruit. An angel had been showing John all these things, and now John tells us how his vision ended.

Do you remember another place in the Bible where we read about the river and the tree of life?

Do you remember how the Lord told the woman at Jacob’s well that if she had asked Him, He would have given her living water?

“Living” water is pure truth from the Lord which comes to us in His Word.

What did we learn not long ago about bearing fruit?

Now read verse 14 and verse 17.

Does everyone enter the holy city?

The Lord invites us all, but some people refuse the invitation.

Can you think why?

What did John’s angel guide say about himself?

The angel told John that he himself had been a man on earth; so we know that we may all become angels if we do right. We must learn the Lord’s commandments and keep them so that we may “have right to the tree of life and enter in through the gates into the city.” For although the gates of the city are always open, everyone does not enter.

You would think, wouldn’t you, that everyone would want to live in that beautiful city, but you know some people really like to do wrong—sometimes we do ourselves—and that means that they like ugly and bad things better than beautiful and good ones. Which are you going to choose?

We can all be angels if we choose.

But we must learn the Lord's commandments and obey them.

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### Junior

With this class the lesson may be taken up a verse or two at a time. Impress upon them the comparisons between the beginning and the end of the Bible, calling attention to the fact that in the last verse God is specifically called "our Lord Jesus Christ."

Now we come to the end of John's vision, which is also the end of the Bible. We have studied chapter 21 and parts of chapter 22. If you do not remember them, you should read them over, for they tell of the beautiful vision of the holy city New Jerusalem—for which our church is named—coming down from God out of heaven, and of the "pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb," beside which grew the tree of life, "which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month." Perhaps you remember that the river and the tree of life were both in the Garden of Eden in the beginning of the Bible story. You want to put this away carefully in your memory, for it has a very deep meaning.

The holy city is a picture of the New Church as it is in heaven, the river is the truth which comes to us from the Lord, and the fruit of the tree of life is genuine goodness of all kinds. This city is descending to earth as fast as men and women on earth are willing to receive the truth and form their lives according to it; so it is symbolic of the true New Church on earth, to which we are all trying to belong.

An angel had been showing John all these things.

In verse 8 what did John do?

What did the angel tell him?

This is one of the verses in the Word which tells us plainly that the angels were once men and women on earth, so that we may know that we shall become angels if we live as we should. Notice that John was told not to seal this book as the books of the Word before

had been sealed. This was a vision of the time when the Lord would open the Word so that anyone who really wanted the truth might understand it. And the next verse tells us that we are free to choose whether or not we will live the beautiful life the Lord wants us to live and be in heaven when we die. We must make our choice here in this world, for we do not change our essential character after death.

The Lord several times calls Himself the alpha and omega. These are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet and, as we are told here, it means that He is “the beginning and the end, the first and the last.” Do you remember the first four words of the first verse of the Bible? Now read the last two verses of the Bible. Jesus Christ is God, the first and the last.

Who have right to the tree of life?

Who may take the water of life?

In verses 18 and 19 what two things are we told not to do?

Do you remember how the Lord told the woman of Samaria at Jacob’s well that if she had asked Him, He would have given her living water? In the Word, divine truth is offered freely to everyone and we are told plainly the conditions on which we may attain heavenly happiness. If we choose not to believe the Lord and not to learn His commandments and obey them, it is just because we do not want to. To add to the Word and to take away from it mean to think our own ideas are better than the Lord’s as to what is right and wrong and what will bring us happiness. Whichever of these things we do, we shall suffer unhappy consequences, because the Lord is both all-loving and all-wise and His way is always best.

You have all learned the first verse of the Bible. You can easily learn the last verse because it is one you have heard so frequently in church. *Grace* means “acceptance,” and so, as we begin with the acknowledgment that God created all things, we end with the prayer that what we make of the lives He has given us may in the end be found acceptable to Him. This is the real object of our whole life.



**Intermediate**

The lesson should be used to re-emphasize our individual responsibility for our own spiritual progress and also for the development of the New Church in the world.

We complete our study of the Word with a lesson on part of the last two chapters of Revelation, John's vision of the holy city New Jerusalem, which he saw coming down from God out of heaven "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." The holy city is the New Church in heaven, by means of which the New Church is being established on earth. You remember that the first verse of the Bible tells us that, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," and that this really means the heaven and the earth in us, the heavenly and the earthly part of us. And in the Lord's Prayer we say, "Thy kingdom come, as in heaven so upon the earth." We have to have goodness and truth in our hearts and minds if we are to do genuine good on earth. The holy city, which is "the bride" of the Lord, and "the woman clothed with the sun," comes down from heaven to earth only as fast as individual men and women on earth learn the truths revealed by the Lord in the opened Word, live according to them, and come to love them.

This is our responsibility as New Churchmen. The New Church organization is necessary to the existence of the New Church in the world, as our bodies are necessary to our souls while we live here, but it is the true New Church only as it obeys the truth which comes down from God out of heaven.

Our lesson for today emphasizes this fact. In the beginning of chapter 22 we read of the "pure river of water of life" which John saw, on whose banks grew the tree of life—the same tree which in the beginning was in the center of the Garden of Eden. The tree of life is the Lord as to His divine love, and its fruits are genuine good works. The river is truth from the Lord coming to us in His Word—the same living water of which the Lord told the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well. Read verse 14 of our chapter. Unless we learn the Lord's commandments and do them, we are not really living in the holy city or doing genuine good here on earth, nor will we live in

the holy city and eat the fruit of the tree of life after we die.

You notice that the angel who had been showing John the holy city and its wonders was careful to prevent John from worshipping him, and told him that he was a mere man like John himself, who had kept the commandments of the Word. You will find that some churches teach that the angels are not men who have lived on the earth, but are a higher creation of the Lord's. This idea is apparently based on a single verse in the King James version of the Scripture, Psalm 8:5, which says of man: "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels." We should know that this is a mistranslation, for the Hebrew word translated "angels" is *Elohim*, which means "God." We are all potential angels.

When we read in verse 10 that "the time is at hand" and in verse 12 "behold, I come quickly," we know that it is the Second Coming of the Lord that is meant. This is why John is told not to seal the book. For we know that in His Second Coming the Lord opened the Word and revealed its inner meaning. We wonder sometimes why our church is so small—why everyone does not see what wonderful things the Lord has revealed. The rest of our chapter shows us the reason.

Whenever we see a truth clearly and acknowledge that it is true, we become responsible for living according to that truth. Many people would rather remain blind to the truth for this reason. You remember what the Lord said to the Pharisees after He had opened the eyes of the man born blind. The Lord knew that the opening of His Word would not immediately change everyone. That is what verse 11 means. Each one of us has to choose for himself whether he prefers to be guided by the Lord or to follow his own will. The invitation which is given in verse 17 is addressed to everyone. The truths of the Word are available to all who want them. But in verses 18 and 19 we are warned that we must take them as the Lord has given them to us. The moment we begin to add ideas of our own or to reject some things the Lord says because we do not want to obey them, we are putting self before the Lord, and the Lord can no longer keep us safe and lead us to heaven. If we do

not attain heaven, it is our doing, not the Lord's. The Lord once said to His disciples (John 12:47-48): "And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."

*Basic Correspondences*

tree of life = the Lord as to divine good  
its fruits = genuine good works  
the river = truth from the Word  
angels = messengers of the Lord

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**Senior**

The effort should be made in this lesson to impress upon the young people how this final chapter of the Bible brings out the three principal doctrines of the New Church: belief in Jesus Christ as the one God, belief in the inspiration of the Word, and belief in obedience to the commandments as essential to heavenly life.

We may think of the verses we have for today as the Lord's final charge to mankind. Although the Second Coming of the Lord did not take place until nearly seventeen hundred years after the time this book was written, it is foretold here, and the way in which the world would receive it is also foretold.

Our lesson contains statements which should encourage us as well as solemn warnings which we should heed. The Lord had said to His disciples: "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." Each one of us who has been brought up in the New Church or led into it has been chosen by the Lord. This does not mean that we are better than other people, but that the particular abilities with which we are endowed can be made useful to the Lord in the development of His New Church. Each of us has his own work to do for the church, and if we study its teachings and constantly look to the Lord in His Word for guidance, we shall be given wisdom and strength to carry out this work. It is perfectly possible

for us to refuse to accept this responsibility. The choice is presented in verse 11 of our chapter. The Lord knew that many would not receive Him in His Second Coming. He does not force His truth upon those who do not want it and neither can we. Swedenborg tells us plainly that the New Church will grow slowly, that for a long time it will be with only a few.

This suggests one of the temptations to which New Churchmen are subject. We may become discouraged because our church is so small. And this discouragement brings with it another temptation, against which we are warned in verses 18 and 19. We are tempted to set up for ourselves objectives—such as large numbers, external activities, publicity, the praise of men—which have nothing to do with the spiritual church the Lord is trying to develop. This is a form of idol worship and may lead us to modify and interpret the teachings which the Lord has given us in the effort to make them more acceptable to our idols. When we do this, we are no longer New Churchmen at heart: we no longer worship the Lord Jesus Christ as our only God or look to His Word as divine truth or seek to obey His commandments. We worship self and the world instead.

In verse 13 the Lord says again, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.” Our course takes us through the Word from beginning to end. In the beginning we have the ideal set before us: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,” the heavenly and the earthly natures in man, and developed them to the Garden of Eden state. A great river watered the Garden of Eden and the tree of life was at its center. But man chose to turn away from the Lord to self, departing further and further from the heavenly state, and the Lord’s truth followed him down to lower and lower levels, until finally “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” to turn back the tide of evil which threatened to destroy mankind. Then the slow, upward climb began and continued until in John’s vision of the holy city New Jerusalem “coming down from God out of heaven” we again find the “pure river of water of life” and the tree of life.

In these last verses of Revelation we are left in no doubt as to

who it is that we are to worship and obey. The angel guide whom John felt he should worship, told John at once that he was but another man, and in verse 16 we find that it is Jesus who sent the angel, and from there on the name of Jesus alone is used, so that at the end we have the response of all those who are of the church: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" and the final benediction so familiar to us all: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

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### Adult

Several distinct discussion topics are outlined in the notes, any of which may be developed according to the interest of the class. The teaching of these last verses of the Bible is impressive and should be of deep concern to us all.

In the twenty-first chapter of Revelation we are told of the vision of the holy city New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." We have already had the New Church pictured as a "woman clothed with the sun." In AR 533 we read that by this woman the church is signified "because the church is called the Bride and Wife of the Lord" and further that she was seen clothed with the sun "because the church is in love to the Lord, for it acknowledges Him and does His commandments, and this is to love Him." But we are told many times in the writings that love gets all its "quality" from truth. So the final picture of the church is of a city, for a city signifies doctrine. And in the beginning of the twenty-second chapter John sees the "pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." This river, like the river which watered the Garden of Eden, is divine truth from the Lord. On its banks grows the tree of life, the same tree which in the beginning was in the center of the Garden of Eden, "the Lord as to the Divine love," whose fruits are "the goods of love and charity," and whose leaves, which were "for the healing of the nations," are "rational truths therefrom, by which they who are in evils and thence in falsities are led to think soundly, and to live becomingly." (AR 926)

The final verses of chapter 22, which are the subject of our lesson for today, should be carefully studied and fixed in mind by all of us who profess to belong to the New Church, for they summarize the fundamental teachings of the Word, which are the basis on which the New Church rests, and also show us clearly certain important implications of these teachings which we are prone to forget.

First there is the incident of John's impulse to worship his angel guide and the angel's rejection of this worship. A similar incident is recorded in verse 10 of chapter 19. We know that we have angel associates from whom many of our thoughts come and we know that we can all help each other spiritually in many ways, but angels and men are all finite, and make mistakes, and each of us must himself study the Word constantly for his guidance in life.

In AC 5432 we read: "They who have arrived at maturity, and still more they who have arrived at old age, and have not viewed with their own eyes the truths of the church, which are called doctrinal things, and seen whether they are true, and then been willing to live according to them, retain them merely as they do all other memory knowledges; they are in their natural memory only, and thence on their lips; and when they utter them, they utter them not from their interior man or from the heart, but only from the exterior man and from the mouth. When a man is in this state he cannot possibly believe that the truths of the church are true, although it seems to him that he so believes. The reason why it seems to him that he believes them to be true, is that he relies on others, and has confirmed in himself the teachings of others. It is very easy to confirm things taken from others, *whether true or false*; for this needs nothing but ingenuity." For the New Churchman the sole authority is the Lord speaking in His Word.

This leads to another interesting and important lesson presented by our assignment. When one attends churches other than the New Church, one is struck by the frequent use of the Epistles sometimes rather than the Gospels, and when one examines the basic doctrines of these churches, one finds that they rest on the Epistles and on the decisions of men at the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325. The

apostles and early leaders of the Christian Church had a feeling that the Lord was God, which came out occasionally in their writings, as in Paul's statement in Colossians 2:9 that "in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." There are those in churches dating back to the first Christian Church today who have and occasionally express the same "feeling." But without the rational basis provided by the opening of the Word—the leaves of the tree of life—their minds remain clouded by natural concepts. Read the Epistles of John. John was the beloved disciple, apparently closest of all to the Lord. Yet from his own letters there is constant evidence that he habitually thought of God as other than Christ. In his Gospel—under inspiration—he recorded the words of the Lord to Philip: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," but when he wrote from himself, the thought of the Messiah as the Son of God—the mediator in the sense of a go-between—persisted. When one looks to the ideas of men—even of the apostles—for doctrine, one is not looking to the Lord. But in the book of Revelation under inspiration John recorded (21:5-6) that he that sat upon the throne said, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end," and in our chapter these words are repeated by the same speaker who says, "I Jesus," and the response to the promise in verse 20 is: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Another thing which is told us clearly in our chapter is that man has freedom to choose whether he will believe and follow the Lord or not, and that no presentation of the truth in this world or the next will reverse his choice. All do not enter the holy city, though its gates are open and its living water is offered to all.

Finally we have the solemn warning against adding to or taking from the book. This warning is spoken specifically to those who acknowledge the truth as coming from the Lord—those who profess to belong to the church—and it applies most of all to those who have accepted the Lord in His Second Coming. "Blessed are they who do His commandments." For those of the New Church "His commandments" include all that He has revealed of the way of life by the opening of the Word. Yet our selfishness and worldli-

ness are constantly prompting us to misinterpret what we read in the Word and the writings so that it may teach what we want to believe. We are told that verse 18 signifies “that they who read and know the truths of doctrine of this book, now opened by the Lord, and yet acknowledge any other God than the Lord, and any other faith than in Him, by adding anything whereby they may destroy these two things, cannot do otherwise than perish from the falsities and evils, which are signified by the plagues described in this book.” And essentially the same is said of those who “take away” from the words of the book. We should realize that worldly success and public approval may be “other gods” and must not be sought for ourselves or for our church organization at the cost of spiritual compromise and disobedience. When we begin to look to men instead of to the Lord for direction, we turn our steps away from the holy city. As the angel said to John: “See thou do it not . . . worship God.”

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#### From the Writings of Swedenborg

*Apocalypse Revealed*, n. 954: “*I am the Root and Offspring of David, the bright and morning Star*, signifies that it is the Lord Himself who was born in the world, and was then the Light, and who will come with new light, which will arise before His New Church, which is the holy Jerusalem. ‘I am the Root and Offspring of David,’ signifies that He is the very Lord Himself who was born in the world, thus the Lord in His Divine Human; from this He is called ‘the Root and Offspring of David,’ and also the Branch of David’ (Jer. 23:5, 33:15), also ‘the Rod out of the stem of Jesse, and the Branch from his roots’ (Isa. 11:1-2). ‘The bright and morning Star,’ signifies that then there was light, and that He will come with new light, which will arise before His New Church, which is the holy Jerusalem. He is called ‘the bright Star’ from the light with which He came into the world, wherefore He is likewise called ‘Star,’ and also ‘Light,’ ‘a Star’ (Num. 24:17), and ‘Light’ (John 1:4-12; 3:19, 21; 4:5; 12:35-36, 46; Matt. 4:16; Luke 2:30-32; Isa. 9:2; 49:6). And He is called ‘the morning Star’ from the light which will rise before the New Church, which is the New Jerusalem, from Him; for by ‘star’ is signified light from Him, which in its essence is wisdom and intelligence, and by ‘morning’ is signified His coming, and then the New Church.”

**Suggested Questions on the Lesson**

- J. In our lesson today what did John think about the angel who showed him the vision? *that he should be worshiped*
- P. What did the angel tell him? *worship God*
- J. What do alpha and omega mean? *first, last*
- P. Who have right to the tree of life and the right to enter the holy city? *those who obey*
- P. Who is the Lord God? *Jesus Christ*
- J. What invitation does He give us? *come unto me*
- J. What does He warn us not to do? *add to or take away from words of book*
- P. For what is our church named? *holy city*
- I. Why is it so important for us to learn and do the Lord's will in this world? *because we make our eternal choice here*
- S. What do (1) the river, and (2) the tree of life, represent? *(1) truth of Word, (2) divine love*
- J. Why is the last verse of the Bible so familiar to us? *benediction*