

The True Water of Life

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Picture a paradise, a place of beauty, a setting of peace and tranquility that delights the mind, and sets it free to function most fully.... Did water enter your picture—a stream or fountain, a lake or pool, a waterfall or ocean? What would a paradise be without water? A paradise without water is inconceivable!

So, as John stood watching the Holy City come down from God out of heaven, he heard the voice of “Him who sat on the throne” saying “I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts” (Revelation 21:6). And later, as he was examining the City more closely, his angel guide showed him “a pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and the Lamb” (22:1). Then, toward the close of his vision, John records: “And the Spirit and the Bride say ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take of the water of life freely” (22:17).

This theme of the “water of life” which runs through the last two chapters of the Apocalypse says something about the New Church, which is prophesied there. First, the “water of life” is a *promise* to the New Church—“I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely....” Second, the “water of life” is a *reality* of the New Church (a river of it flows from the heart of “the City” and nourishes the “tree of life” and makes it fruitful). And finally, the “water of life” is given to those who thirst for it and “come”—that is, to those who desire it and take of it freely.

What is this “water of life” that is the promise and reality of the New Jerusalem? The answer is “truth.” The “water of life” is truth flowing from the Lord. But what is truth? Does truth seem as living and vital and beautiful to us as water does?

It is hard for us to appreciate what truth is and what it does for us. Even if we have it in large measure, it’s easy for us to take it for granted. Like water, truth is such an integral part of us. It is part of the fabric of our mind. It molds our very outlook and response to life.

The truth that does this for our spirits is not the truth of words. The truth of words is a more external expression of inner truth. Truth falls into words so that we can grasp it in some measure and respond to it, so that we can “have a say” in making it a part of our life. But in itself, the truth is something more dynamic and complex than words.

The “water of life” stands for *living truth*—truth that has become a part of our mind and life.

The Lord in His second coming in the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church promises us that we may drink freely from “the fountain of the water of life.” The Lord has revealed truths to us that can become a part of our mind, a part of our outlook, a part of the way we respond to life. The truths about heaven and hell, about judgment after death, about marriage and its connection with religion, about the internal sense of the Word, and so forth—these truths enable us to understand the Lord and respond to Him as never before.

But the promise is not to possess these truths as words, as books, as learning. The promise is that

they *can* become living with us. This happens when we believe them, affirm them, internalize them—when we live our lives with the conviction that they are so.

The Holy City, New Jerusalem, pulses with a *river* of the “water of life.” This river feeds the tree of life, which grows in the midst of its golden street and stands on either side of the river, bearing twelve fruits, each yielding its fruit every month, its leaves having the power to heal the nations. The “water of life” courses through this tree, the fruits and leaves. The “water of life” is at the center of the City’s fruitfulness and healing power. Living truth—truth lived—is what makes the New Jerusalem perceptive, fruitful, healing.

The image of the river in the Holy City deliberately recalls numerous Old Testament prophecies—prophecies of when a river would flow out of the Temple in Jerusalem. The prophet Zechariah wrote,

And in that day it shall be
That living waters shall flow from Jerusalem,
Half of them toward the eastern sea
And half of them toward the western sea;
In both summer and winter it shall occur.
And the Lord shall be King over all the earth.
In that day it shall be—
“The Lord is one,”
And His name one (Zechariah 14:8-9).

And Joel prophesied:

And it will come to pass in that day
That the mountains shall drip with new wine,
The hills shall flow with milk,
And all the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water;
A fountain shall flow from the house of the Lord
And water the Valley of Acacias (Joel 3:18).

These glad words tell of the day when a truth would spring from the heart of the Lord’s church, which could touch all states of life. Picture the water plunging down the steep valleys, from Jerusalem down to the Dead Sea, thousands of feet below sea level. Ezekiel, in His vision of a new temple, saw this (chapter 47). He saw the fresh water flowing out of the Temple down to the Dead Sea (dead to all life, because of its salt content). He was told of the waters being healed so that a great multitude of fish could live there. He was told of the fishermen who would stand on its banks, from one end to the other, spreading their nets.

The water from the temple, flowing down and bringing the Dead Sea to life, pictures the truth of the New Jerusalem touching the most external states of our life and healing them, bringing them into harmony.

When we view the truths of the New Church as mere words and ideas, we may doubt how much

healing they can bring. Their form is so humble and awkward to those who look from without. But let us view them, not from without or from their form, but from their *spirit*. Let us reflect on their use, their function as they live in the mind—defending us from evil; sensitizing us to evil’s subtle, poisoning influence; nourishing us with workable standards of goodness, with wholesome joy, with insights into the meaning of our life; providing us with a sense of direction. It is this living truth that flows from the new temple, from the New Jerusalem. It is this living truth that can touch all the states of our life.

The truths of the New Church are quite basic and simple to live. They become difficult when they are viewed merely intellectually. They become “spirit and life” only with those who thirst for living truth.

The Lord promises the “water of life” to those who thirst, to those who desire. In the spiritual sense, we’re told, “thirsting” means “to desire for the sake of some spiritual use” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 889). Those are given a spiritual thirst, who seek truth with the end “to serve the neighbor out of love to him, to consult the good of their souls and that of their own, thus [who desire truth] on account of the Lord, the neighbor, and salvation” (*ibid.*).

In short, no one can drink of the “water of life” flowing in the New Jerusalem, unless he or she lives for others. Those who live for themselves have no thirst for living water. The interest in others’ salvation, in seeing them happy, awakens in us a longing to know what is real and best. This interest and longing is the key to gaining light from the Lord. All who have such love have light. And the promise to the New Church is that we may have a clearer, more accessible fountain from which to draw.

“Let him who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let him who thirsts come, and let him who desires take of the water of life freely.” These words, we’re taught, contain a prayer. They mean that a person

who knows anything about the Lord’s coming, and about the New Heaven and the New Church, thus about the Lord’s kingdom, should pray that it may come; and that he who desires truths, should pray that the Lord may come with light; and that he who loves truths will then receive them from the Lord without his own work (*Apocalypse Revealed* 956).

Let this be our prayer and hope as well, that the New Church may grow in our hearts, that its truths may be living and vital in us, bringing us satisfaction, beauty and joy. Let us pray that we may live not for ourselves alone, but rejoice at the outpouring of waters from the New Jerusalem and stand with the fishermen along the Dead Sea, in the hope of seeing others raised to life by its wonderful truths. May we be a part of this desire for human salvation. For in having this at heart, we will come to know a genuine thirst, a thirst that the Lord Jesus Christ will quench with eternal joy.

Amen.

Lessons: Ezekiel 47:1-12; Revelation 22:1-2, 16-17; *Apocalypse Revealed* 954-956