Two Witnesses

A Sermon by Rev. Joel Christian Glenn

14 June 2026

Children’s Talk: Lamps

Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. (Revelation 1:12-13)

“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)

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Every June we celebrate "New Church Day," which is officially the 19th of June. What exactly are we celebrating though? This community here in Westville is a New Church community; and we belong to a larger New Church organization called "The General Church of the New Jerusalem." But when we talk about and celebrate "The New Church" we should be thinking of something even broader. The New Church began in the 1700s when the Lord called Emanuel Swedenborg to write down the so-called "Teachings of the New Church." The publication of these books represented a momentous spiritual shift: according to Swedenborg it coincided with a Last Judgment in the spiritual world and the fulfilment of Christ's Second Coming. Going forward a new kind of Christianity was possible, one in which people would sincerely worship the Lord God Jesus Christ and take seriously His commandments as essential to salvation. When we talk about "the New Church" most broadly, we are thinking of that broad, spiritual movement in Christianity. Today we are going to think about the two most basic principles that define this New Church.

Measuring the Temple

To explore these two principles, we turn to chapter 11 of the book of Revelation. Revelation is a strange book: it consists of wild visions filled with beasts and monsters and angelic beings of great power and glory, set in a raging battle. It's hard to follow and make meaning out of; but in most cases the spiritual sense has something to say about the New Church. In this case we will follow two witnesses and the process they go through, and what that process can tell us about what it

means to be part of the New Church. We begin with an angel telling John to measure the temple:

> Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood by, saying, "Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months." (Revelation 11:1-2)

The invitation to measure the temple represents an invitation to explore the quality of the New Church. Specifically, it is an invitation to explore the New Church as it exists in its purity in heaven. The outer court of the temple represents the church on Earth, as it then existed. The fact that it was given to the gentiles and trodden down represents the falsity and evil then flourishing in the church (*Apocalypse Revealed* §§485-487). John measured only the temple itself to indicate that everything that follows is about the ideal, heavenly state of the church, not the earthly state.

There is a lesson for those who identify themselves as "New Church" people in this detail: what we are about to talk about is the church as it exists in heaven, in its purity, free from all our worldly flaws and selfishness. The church on earth, that is, the church as we live it every day, is messy, limited, and fallible. It's so easy to take a look at what the Teachings say about how great the New Church is or ought to be, and smugly think, "that's us!" Well it can be us; but only to the extent we live up to it. And it can be millions of other people as well, all those who sincerely worship the Lord and keep His commandments. This isn't about "us." This is about an aspiration that we can strive to come close to.

The Two Witnesses: Olive Trees and Lampstands

So what is the essence of the New Church? What makes the New Church the New Church? The answer to these questions is represented in what the angel then starts to tell John, about two witnesses:

> "And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth."
> These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. (Revelation 11:3-4)

A witness is someone who can testify to the fact that something really happened or is actually true. As a spiritual symbol then, witnesses represent the characteristics that identify an individual or a group as truly belonging to the New Church. In this case the Teachings of the New Church indicate the following as the two core, essential characteristics of the New Church:

> This symbolizes those people who confess and acknowledge from the heart that the Lord is God of heaven and earth, whose humanity is Divine, and who are conjoined with Him by a life in accordance with the Ten Commandments. (*Apocalypse Revealed* §490)

Those two principles may sound abstract, but they aren't supposed to remain that way. Something practical is symbolized in the description of the witnesses as two olive trees and two lampstands.

Olive trees stand for love or charity (*Apocalypse Revealed* §493). Both witnesses are called olive trees because both essential elements of the New Church are born from and supposed to lead to love. Worshipping the Lord alone as God, and keeping His commandments, should always be about how to become more loving and good. The goal isn't to just believe the Lord is God but to love Him as our God; the goal is not just to go through the motions of obedience to the commandments but to actually love the wellbeing of others more than self.

Lampstands stand for intelligence or faith (*Apocalypse Revealed* §493). Both witnesses are called lampstands because both essential elements of the New

Church are born from and supposed to lead to faith. Worshipping the Lord alone as God, and keeping His commandments, are a path to living wisely. Wisdom isn't just doctrine, it's real insight into how to live and actually carrying out that insight into life. The wisest person is the one who knows how to live well, not the most educated person. The goal is to apply ourselves to understanding God better and learning to more usefully carry out His teachings. Living our faith is a skill that requires hard work, insight, and awareness.

Conflict and Self-Destruction

One way of getting to the heart of why these two principles matter so much is by thinking of what happens when they are rejected. In Revelation, the witnesses go on to be persecuted and attacked, but were also given power to defend themselves against their enemies:

> And if anyone wants to harm them, fire will proceed from their mouth and devour their enemies. And if anyone wants to do them injury, he must be killed in this manner. These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire. (Revelation 11:5-6)

The Lord does not punish anyone for their beliefs or even for their way of life, no matter how false or how evil it may be; but falsity, and especially evil, does bring destruction. The destruction dealt out by the witnesses represents the harm caused when people oppose and reject the two essential elements of the New Church. This is not talking about people who intellectually disagree with them, which many good people might do; but when at heart a person rejects the underlying reality of the two essentials. When that happens, the door is opened to the love of self and pride in one's own intelligence becoming dominant (*Apocalypse Revealed* §502).

Take the first essential, that the Lord is the God of heaven and Earth, and His humanity is Divine. When a person rejects the idea that the Lord is God, and, for example, only accepts Him as a decent moral teacher, no different from any other person, it opens the door to putting oneself in charge, spiritually speaking. It allows someone room to say, “yes I generally believe in the Lord; but in this particular case, getting my own way is more important.” For instance, sure the Lord says not to take revenge; and generally that’s a good idea. But in this moment, my need for revenge matters more than what the Lord says. Even when we do what is right and good, a rejection of the Lord as God can lead to pride; it allows one to say, “I’m the author of my own goodness. I deserve credit and praise for my generosity and fairness.” When we don’t treat the Lord as God, we make self God.

Or take the second essential, that the Ten Commandments ought to be kept. When a person rejects the idea that he has to keep the commandments, he loses the measure that should guide his life. We can find ourselves saying, “God is merciful and forgiving no matter what; so it’s ok if I break His rules, surely He will forgive me!” For instance, as a husband, “if I indulge in a little flirting when I’m away on business, the Lord will understand. He loves me and wants me to be happy, and it will all be forgiven. I’m still a good husband!” We cannot wilfully break the Lord’s commandments but then turn around and claim to still be faithful Christians.

Resuscitation

When we live these ways, not treating the Lord as our God and allowing ourselves to freely ignore the commandments, we bring spiritual destruction on our heads. It cause hardship and pain, which in turn extends to the people around us. Returning to the two witnesses: this is not only represented in the punishment meted

out by them; It is also represented in the fact that the witnesses' enemies succeed in killing them, and they rejoice over their death. But that is not the end:

> But after the three and a half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them. (Revelation 11:11-12)

The resuscitation of the witnesses represents life from the Lord enabling the two essentials to be lived. Even if we have rejected the Lord and broken His commandments, He gives us the power to be restored. That restoration comes through the very basic, simple, ideas we have been discussing: the Lord is God; His Commandments are to be kept. No matter how far we have fallen from these ideals, the Lord can restore them to life in us.

It is true that you can hold the two essentials of the New Church intellectually and remain a selfish person; but you cannot sincerely practice them and remain selfish; the practice of the two essentials is diametrically opposed to selfishness and pride. They are the antidote as it were to the poison of self-love. The whole point of believing in the Lord is so that you can allow yourself to be led by Him; the whole point of knowing the commandments is so that you can keep them. That is the path to being freed from selfishness (*Apocalypse Revealed* §502).

Bearing Witness

What then makes someone a "New Church" person? It is not that they belong to New Church Westville, or the General Church of the New Jerusalem, or even any other New Church organization. Nor is it that they have read Swedenborg's Writings and agreed with them. What makes someone New Church is that they live a life with the Lord God Jesus Christ at the centre, and that they daily strive to keep His

commandments. Those are the essentials of the New Church, and that is what we celebrate on New Church Day.