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Features of the City and Its Inhabitants

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: 1 Kings 7:1-12; Revelation 21:2,10-12,16,19.

In both of these representations we have that which is symbolic of the place where the Lord delights and purposes to dwell. The "greater than Solomon" is building His house, and a house also for His Bride. The King is building the city where His throne is to be.

If we read carefully these descriptions of Solomon's buildings and of the new Jerusalem, the Holy City, we can clearly discern three outstanding characteristics: strength, beauty and costliness. These are the three major characteristics of that in which the Lord will dwell. He is most concerned for these things and works with deep and patient application to have them, the expression of Himself and His thoughts.

Strength

Very evident in Solomon's building is the element of strength - those mighty, weighty stones and those great cedars of Lebanon. The impression is all of strength. It has taken a long time to secure those stones, and they have a long history. Indeed, it might be impossible to trace the beginning of those stones, of that rocklike substance. It goes back a long way and has a long history. And then those cedars of Lebanon were not planted yesterday. They speak of many a testing storm and many a long year of growth. There is nothing superficial, nothing light and nothing fancy about them, and nothing will be able easily to carry them away. They will stand and they will endure; they are the embodiment of the very principle of patient endurance. There is eternity in their very constitution. They have passed through many a tempestuous testing, and they are here in the house because of that - the king will dwell here because of that testing. They have been exposed to the elements; they

have never been coddled and covered and protected from adverse elements. They have been exposed to all the forces that could destroy. Here is strength!

Look at that mighty new Jerusalem! Twelve thousand furlongs does not convey very much to our minds until we begin to think about it and remember that this is a cube of fifteen hundred miles. I will leave it to the mathematicians to work this out, but, remember, breadth, length and height are equal. I just mention that to emphasize this fact of weightiness: the substantial, the enduring, the strength.

Dear friends, I need hardly say any more, for your minds are interpreting and applying as I speak. Is this not the history of the true people of God? The Lord does not put us in glass houses to grow us to be His trees, and He does not protect us from the storms or the adversities. He exposes us to the bitter winds and scorching suns of adversity and trial, for He is working in us that which is according to His own nature - eternity, that which is enduring and everlasting, which will not be easily carried away. He is putting substance in us. Oh, we fear that today the appeal to become Christians is so often in terms of having an easy or good time, being happy and enjoying yourself. Well, thank God for all divine joy, but that which is true of the house, of the city, is the main thing toward which the Lord is working; He is seeking to work into His people that substantial, steadfast, enduring faithfulness which is according to His own nature. Oh, for substantial Christians who do not need coddling and nursing and running after all the time, being pandered to just to get them to go on or to stand up! Oh, for men and women like the cedars of Lebanon, like the hewn stones, weighty, accountable, responsible, able to carry weight, and all that is meant by strength!

I can only remind you again of what a large place this has in the Word of God... *"Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might"* (Ephesians 6:10): *"Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus"* (2 Timothy 2:1, AV). Think again! If you want to understand why the winds are allowed to blow so fiercely, and the storms to rage, it is to get us away from that natural easygoing-ness, cheapness, lightness, frivolousness, and to make us people of weight and strength, through testing, through adversity; strength to endure. There is much that is going to be carried away in the last great testing, and if therefore trial, adversity, is the only way to deepen us, to put calibre into us, I suppose we must accept more of it as time shortens.

Beauty

I will not stay to say much about this, but it is so evident in these representations, is it not? The Lord is also at work in this matter, for He wants that which is His dwelling-place, the place that He is making for Himself, His own habitation, to be attractive, to be admirable, to be grand, and something to be wondered at. I suppose the one word which covers this whole sphere of beauty is the word 'grace'. If suffering is unto strength, then grace is unto beauty. If you and I have a true apprehension, a real heart appreciation of the meaning of divine grace, there will be something about us that is not ugly, repulsive, but something beautiful, something mellow. Beauty is not fierce, not cruel, not hard. It is, in the right sense, soft - but perhaps mellow is the best word. You and I, as we go on with the Lord, under His Hand, ought to be losing our natural hardness of judgment, of word, of attitude, and taking on more and more of the mellowness of grace.

Look again at these descriptions, perhaps particularly that of the city, and see how outstanding is this characteristic of beauty. It is a mighty thing, and almost overawing in its strength, its power to resist, to endure and stand, and yet one of the wonderful things about the Lord Jesus, and about anything and anyone in whom He fulfils His purpose, is the combination of strength and beauty. There is a balance: it is not all strength and it is not all softness. There is a marvellous balance in the

Lord Jesus. Look at Him! These two things are brought together, and that is what the Lord would have in us.

Costliness

How costly was Solomon's building! There was a great, great cost bound up with those houses that he built. And then the city - *"the foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones"*. There is something very precious, very valuable to the Lord: there is nothing cheap in what is of God. Remember that! Everything that is of God is costly and has a great price attached to it. There is nothing here that is contemptible and mean. These were costly stones. It is the embodiment of suffering.

You notice that *"the wall of the city had twelve foundations and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" ... "The first foundation was jasper"* and a jasper stone is *"clear as crystal"*. Who was the first of the Apostles? Simon Peter - now a jasper stone, clear as crystal. All the mixture has gone out, and he is transparently clear - but what suffering! Look at him! He denied his Lord and went out weeping bitterly; and in his Letters he has quite a lot to say about the fiery trial which is to test us and try us. Peter knew suffering. Yes, but, you see, it produced something very precious, valuable and costly to the Lord. Was it not Peter who said: *"For you therefore which believe is the preciousness"*? (1 Peter 2:7).

If you think again of the Lord's ways with us you cannot fail to see that He is prepared to use a lot of time, energy and money in order to get essential spiritual value. Those of you who have read the life of Madame Curie, the discoverer of radium, will remember the tons and tons and tons of stuff that men would call rubbish which was heaped into her backyard. They collected tons, so to speak, mountains of it, out of which to get the tiniest grain of radium. When it is all reduced there is just this little tiny fragment of radium out of tons of stuff. Ah, but look at the cost of radium in those days! Look at the power and the virtue in it!

The Lord is like that. He is prepared to use tons and tons and tons to get one fragment of this essential nature of Himself: preciousness. Think of its intrinsic energy! There is something about the nature of the Lord which is tremendously potent: the potency of truth, of love.

You and I must look at everything in the light of spiritual value, for that is how the Lord looks at it. Nothing with the Lord is of any value except in so far as it results in something of Himself. You may have your millions - though I don't suppose any of you have! - but with the Lord that is nothing. He says: 'How much does that represent of Me?' On the other hand, you may have your little and have to look at every shilling that you spend, but there may be in your use of that little something of the Lord, for the Lord; and so He looks upon the widow's mite in the light of spiritual value, while He looks upon the Pharisee without one thought or word of pleasure.

It is everything in the light of spiritual value where the Lord is concerned. Think of the matter of time! What a lot of time the Lord takes! How upset we get over this matter of time! It is one of our big problems that the Lord is so slow, waits so long and takes so much time. It is a real trouble with us, and we are always trying to hurry Him. No, if it requires time to get what He is after, He will take a lifetime to get it.

You see, the whole thing that the Lord is after is just real value, the cost of things, and we could speak much about suffering. How much suffering the people of God know! The sufferings of His people are a real problem, but if Paul is right, here is the answer: *"Our light affliction, which is for the*

moment" - and you can only talk like that if you see the rest of the statement! - "*worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory*" (2 Corinthians 4:17). That is the end, the object, the goal. Our 'light affliction' is not light at all. It is very heavy unless we can see what the Lord is after, and then perhaps we can see it in a different way.

So, the Lord is after this true value, and when He gets these characteristics of strength, beauty and real preciousness - costliness - the process will be fully justified.