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Aspects of the City

by T. Austin-Sparks

Transcribed from a message given in March 1960. The spoken form has been retained verbatim.

A few verses from two places, one in the Old and one in the New Testament. In the Old, the first book of the Kings, chapter 7:

"Solomon was building his own house thirteen years, and he finished all his house. For he built the House of the Forest of Lebanon; the length thereof was a hundred cubits, and the breadth thereof fifty cubits, and the height thereof thirty cubits, upon four rows of cedar pillars, with cedar beams upon the pillars. And it was covered with cedar above over the forty and five beams that were upon the pillars, fifteen in a row. And there were prospects in three rows, and light was over against light in three ranks. And all the doors and posts were square in prospect, and light was over against light in three ranks. And he made the Porch of Pillars: the length thereof was fifty cubits, and the breadth thereof thirty cubits; and the porch before them, and pillars and thick beams before them. He made the porch for the throne where he might judge, even the Porch of Judgment; and it was covered with cedar from floor to floor. And his house where he might dwell had another court within the porch, was of the like work. He made also a house for Pharaoh's daughter, whom Solomon had taken for a wife, like unto this porch. All these were of costly stones, even of hewn stones, sawed with saws, within and without, even from the foundation unto the coping, and so on the outside unto the great court. The foundation was of costly stones, even great stones, stones of ten cubits, and stones of eight cubits. And above were costly stones, even hewn stones according to measure and cedar wood. And the great court round about had three rows of hewn stone and a row of cedar beams, like as the inner court of the house of the LORD and the porch of the house."

The New Testament book of the Revelation chapter 21 verse 2:

"And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband."

Verse 10: "And he carried me away in the spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, having the glory of God. And her light was like unto a stone most precious, as it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Having a wall great and high, and having twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel..."

16: "And the city lieth foursquare, and the length thereof is as great as the breadth; and he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs; the length and the breadth and the height thereof are equal."

19: "And the foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones..."

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.

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

Strength! Very evident in Solomon's building, the element of strength: those *mighty* stones, those *weighty* stones and those great cedars of Lebanon. It is all the impression of strength. It's taken a long time to secure those stones, they have a long history, indeed it might be impossible to trace the beginning of those stones. That rock-like substance goes back a long way and has a long history. Those cedars of Lebanon were not planted yesterday, they speak of many a testing storm, many a long year of growth. There's nothing superficial about these things, nothing light and fancy about them, nothing will be able to carry them away; they'll stand, they'll endure. They are the *embodiment* of the very principle of patient endurance. There's eternity in their very constitution. They have passed through many a tempestuous testing; they are here in the House because of that. The King will dwell *there* because of that. They have been exposed to the elements, they have never been coddled and covered and protected from adverse elements; they've been exposed to all the forces that *could* destroy. Here we have strength.

Look at that mighty City. Twelve thousand furlongs does not convey very much to our minds until we begin to sit down and remember that this is a cube. When you sit down and think about it, and I leave it for the mathematicians to work it out; length, breadth, and height – equal. Today, day by day we are impressed, almost shocked, when we read and hear of thousands of millions of pounds or miles... You know, this City if you work it out, runs into thousands of millions of cubits; thousands of millions of cubits! I just mention it in order to emphasize this fact of weightiness, the substantial, the enduring aspect.

Dear friends, I think I need hardly say any more, your minds are interpreting and applying as I speak; isn't this the history of the true people of God? Is it not? The Lord does not put us in glass houses to grow us, to be His trees; the Lord does not protect us from the storms, the adversities; He exposes us to the bitter winds and the scorching suns of adversity and trial. The Lord is working in us that which is according to His own Nature – *eternity*, the enduring, the everlasting God – that which will not be easily or hardly carried away. He is putting substance in you. Oh, today we fear that the appeal to become Christians is so often in terms of having an easy or a good time; being happy and

enjoying yourself; well, thank God for ALL divine joy, but this is true to the House, to the City, that the first thing the Lord is working toward and seeking to work into His people is that substantial, steadfast, enduring faithfulness that is according to His own nature. Substantial! Oh for substantial Christians that don't need coddling and nursing and running after all the time; being pandered to to get them to go on or stand up. Men and women like cedars of Lebanon; like the hewn stones – weighty, accountable, responsible to carry weight – and all that is meant by strength.

I can only remind you again of what a large place that has in the Word of God: be strong, *be strong* in the Lord in the strength of His might, *be strong* in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Think again. Want to understand why the winds are allowed to blow so fiercely... the storms? To get us away from that natural, easy-going-ness or cheapness, lightness, frivolousness and to make us people of weight. Strength – through testing, through adversity – strength... to endure throughout all ages.

There is much which is going to be carried away in the last great testing, and if, therefore, trial and adversity is the only way to deepen us, to put caliber into us, I suppose we must expect more of it as the time shortens.

Beauty, not staying to say much about it but it is so evident in these representations, isn't it? Beauty. The Lord is also at work in this matter. The Lord wants that which is His dwelling place, the place that He is making for Himself for His own habitation, to be attractive, to be admirable, to be grand, to be something to be wondered at. I suppose the one word that covers this whole sphere of beauty is the word "grace". Grace! If suffering is unto strength, then grace is unto beauty.

If you and I have a true apprehension of divine grace, 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. Beauty is not cruel. Beauty is not hard. Beauty is in the right sense, soft. Perhaps mellow is the best word. You and I as we go on with the Lord unto His end, 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 *outstandingly* is this characteristic of beauty.

Beauty! It's a mighty thing, an almost over-awing thing in its strength, its power to resist and endure and stand, and yet it is one of those wonderful things about the Lord, the Lord Jesus, and it's one of those wonderful things about anything or anyone in whom He fulfills His purpose – is the combination of strength and beauty. The balance of strength – it's not all strength and it's not all softness – marvelous balance in the Lord Jesus, look at Him! These two things brought together... and that is what the Lord would have.

And finally, costliness. How costly was Solomon's building, the gold of Ophir! There was a great, great cost bound up with those houses that he built, with the city, the foundation of the walls; all manner of costly stones... something very precious, something very valuable to the Lord. Here there is nothing cheap, there is *nothing* cheap in what is of God. Remember that! Everything that is of God is *costly*. It has a great price attached to it. There is nothing here contemptible, mean; it is the embodiment of suffering – *costly* stones.

Notice that on these twelve foundations were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb and the first was jasper, clear as crystal. Who was the first of the apostles? Simon Peter. Jasper, clear as crystal; all the mixture has gone out – transparent, clear – but *what suffering!* Look at him: "he went out and wept bitterly". Peter in his letters has quite a lot to say about fiery trials to test us, to 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 used that word, "unto you that believe is the *preciousness*..."? If you again think of the Lord's ways with us, you cannot fail to see that the Lord is prepared to use a lot of time and a lot of energy and a lot of money in order to get essential spiritual value.

Those of you who have read the life of Madam Currie, the discoverer of radium, will remember the tons and tons and tons of stuff that men would call rubbish, heaped into that backyard there; collected, collected *tons* of it, you might say mountains of it, out of which to get the *tiniest* grain of radium. When it's all reduced, just this little fragment of radium out of tons. Ah, but look at the cost of radium in those days; look at the power, the virtue in radium! The Lord seems like that, He is prepared to use tons and tons and tons *and tons* to get one fragment of this essential nature of Himself: *preciousness*. It's intrinsic energy, there is something about the nature of the Lord that is tremendously potent; the potency of Truth, the potency of Love, of God.

Now, while the Lord wants us to be scrupulously careful about money, our use of money, our care of money, He would never for a moment be sympathetic toward carelessness in that realm, He himself sometimes seems to draw upon the resources, the material resources and the financial resources, so fully, so deeply in order to turn to account for some spiritual measure and this is what I'm trying to say to you. You and I must look at everything in the light of spiritual value; that is how He looks at it. Nothing with the Lord is of any value only in so far as it results in something of Himself. You may have your millions, I don't suppose any of you have, but if you had your millions, that to the Lord is nothing; He says, how much does that represent of Me? You may have your little and have to look at every shilling that you spend, but there *may* be, in your use of it, something of the Lord, for the Lord and so the Lord looks upon a widow's mite in the light of spiritual value, while He looks upon the Pharisee's plenty without one thought or word of pleasure. It's 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 we get upset over this matter of time... it is one of our big problems that the Lord is so slow, waits so long, takes so much time! That's real trouble with us isn't it? Always trying to hurry the Lord; no, if it requires time to get what He's after, He will take eternity to get it, He will take a lifetime to get it. You see, the whole thing with the Lord is just *real* value, the *cost* of things.

And we could speak much about suffering, much about suffering... how much suffering the people of God know. It's a problem, the sufferings of the Lord's people, but if Paul is right, here's the answer: "Our light affliction which is but for a moment..." and you can only talk like that if you can see the other, the rest: "that worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" *eternal weight of glory!* That is the end, the object, the goal. Our light affliction; it isn't light at all, it is very heavy affliction unless we can see what the Lord is after and then perhaps affliction will be seen in a different way.

So here we are: costliness. The Lord is after this true value and when He gets that, these characteristics, when He gets them - strength and beauty and *real* preciousness, costliness - the process will be fully justified.