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Suitability for the Glory of God

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:14).

"And he called unto him his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of disease, and all manner of sickness. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot... These twelve Jesus sent forth, and charged them" (Matt. 10:1-5).

"And I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18).

"...being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone" (Eph. 2:20).

The Wall of the City

Reverting to the 21st chapter of the book of the Revelation, I want to say something about suitability for the glory of God. You notice that, in the vision given to the Apostle, the vision of the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, the city is said to have the glory of God. The

foundations of the wall, as a part of the city, bear the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. We understand that this city, as seen in the vision by the apostle John, is a representation of Christ fully manifested in the Church. This is the fulfilment and realization of the words so familiar to us in Paul's letter to the Ephesians - *"He put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all"* (Eph. 1:22,23). And again in the third chapter of that letter - *"Unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever"*. That is fulfilled and realized in the city, the fulness of Christ in the Church.

The wall of the city is that which speaks of its character and its strength. You would rightly determine the significance of a walled city by looking at its wall. If the wall were a poor thing, broken, unrepaired, dilapidated, you would at once pass a poor judgment upon the city behind it. If the wall is a great wall, a mighty wall, a wall which evidently bears marks of care, you would say - 'There is something behind that wall that is great'. You would say that it betokened the character of the city. And so it is here. This is a wonderful wall, a glorious wall, a mighty wall, and it speaks of the character and the strength of the city - in other words, of the Church, of Christ manifested in His Church at last.

The Twelve Names on the Foundation of the Wall

The twelve apostles whose names are on the foundations of the wall are a representative figure. Twelve is always representative. The twelve stones in Jordan and out of Jordan represented all Israel. The twelve stones of Elijah's altar at Carmel represented all Israel. Twelve represents Christ in fulness in His Church. The twelve Apostles represent the Church. And what is here in these foundations is representation of Christ in the Church by those whose names are here. It is the testimony to Christ. You notice Matthew 10. He chose twelve, He sent them forth: they were those who testified of Him, who went before Him to bring Him into every place. They spoke of Him; they had the mark of the King; where they went He was portrayed. That, at least, was the thought. So they, the twelve apostles, represent Christ in fulness at last in a full Church. They testify to Him. One, who proved unsuitable, was eventually changed for another who came in after prayer and fasting.

"The twelve apostles of the Lamb". How that name governs everything in this book! Here all that we will say about it, as it comes in finally, is that everything is recovered that was lost. The Lamb has overcome, the Lamb has prevailed, the Lamb has redeemed: the Lamb has done it all, and all is recovered unto God that had been lost to God. And here is the testimony in the Church that all is recovered, there is full recovery. That was the principle in the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem by Nehemiah. The wall had been broken down and destroyed and burnt. The rebuilding of the wall was that in the Old Testament which portrayed the recovery of the full testimony of Jesus. Recovery - and it is all recovered. The Lamb has done it. Throughout this book it is the Lamb in action in a many-sided way recovering everything to God.

So in these fragments of the vision, in representation, we have this whole matter of suitability to the glory of God, suitability to the end which God has in view - that is, the manifestation in fulness of the character of His Son.

Now, most of these twelve apostles have dropped from our view. We know little or nothing about the majority of them. Their names are mentioned here at the beginning. They are mentioned again, with Judas having fallen out, in the first chapter of the book of the Acts; another is incorporated; but

we know nothing more. There are traditions, plenty of them, but, so far as Scripture is concerned, the majority of them have just gone out of our vision. Yes, that may be so, but their names are preserved in heaven. What they represent is never lost. They represented Christ, and let the men on the earth pass out and be forgotten, but that which they represented is maintained in heaven and reappears at last in the final manifestation of Christ. Remember that! We may not signify very much in ourselves upon this earth, amongst men, but if there is anything of Christ about us, that will appear again, that is preserved in heaven, it will be found at the last. So you begin with the mention of their names at the beginning of the dispensation, and then for the more part you know little or nothing about them, and then they are all there at the end. That is how it is. Every fragment of Christ, in any part of the Church, preserved eternally, is represented by this representative number.

Peter and James and John, of course, are the most outstanding ones, and they seem to be always representative of the rest. I think we can truly take them as that. You notice in Matthew 10 - "First... Peter". It is put like that. "The first... Peter". And it does not mean that he just came first in number. Peter always was first. He was given first place by the Lord; that is, he took a position which was a first position. "First... Peter". Well, we hardly need talk much about Peter here. We know very well we could not say much that was new about Peter. He stands there, a full-length portrait; we know him - I mean as he was before Pentecost, in those days when the Master was here. James and John: we do not know so much about them by record of their behaviour. But we know one thing about them that they were called "Boanerges, the sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17). I wonder how you have interpreted that? I think that the interpretation which is the true one is that they were men of very strong temper. There are indications of that. Their reactions were never moderate reactions; they were always very positive, very strong. When they were present there was no mistaking that they were present. "Sons of thunder".

How the Lord Gets Suitability for His Glory

Now then, these men, in some way, have got to be found suitable for the city of God, for the foundations of the wall of the heavenly Jerusalem. Peter has got to be suitable for the glory of God; James and John and all the others have got to go through some handling by the Lord to bring them to this final position: where the city having the glory of God is revealed as the expression of Christ in fulness in the Church, and representatively by these men.

That sets the ground for a great deal of most profitable consideration, far beyond our time and scope at present. But note some things. He chose twelve - their names are given; He sent them forth, gave them power, and said, "As ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of the heavens is at hand". They were precipitated into something that as yet they did not understand, about which they knew nothing experimentally. They were called upon to move out into something, which had yet in a future day to become a reality to themselves. What did they know about the kingdom of the heavens? Very little indeed! If they had known about the kingdom of the heavens as they later did know, how differently they would have behaved, and how they would have been delivered and saved from the awful subsequent tragedy of their denial, of their forsaking and fleeing and leaving their Master alone. They were precipitated into this - and that is one of the tactical movements of the Lord to get suitability. How often the Lord has to precipitate us into something of which for the moment we know nothing - but by being forced into that position, a very practical basis is laid down for our coming to understanding. You note this movement.

The kingdom of the heavens - what does that mean? Well, to begin with, it surely does mean *heavenly-mindedness*, a heavenly mentality: that is, a heavenly conception of things, a heavenly standard of things, a whole realm of things which is not of this creation; different, utterly different; a mentality which no natural-man possesses, which is only created by the operation of the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. *Heavenly-mindedness*. But they were earthly-minded. When He, their Lord, had been crucified, their world was gone, was shattered in pieces. They had had such an earthly, worldly-minded conception of the kingdom that when He was gone they had nothing left. Heavenly-mindedness: it is what we call spirituality; that is, God's thoughts about things, as other than man's thoughts; the mind of the Spirit of God, as differing from the mind of man - the natural mind, to which Paul gives so much attention in his first letter to the Corinthians.

Patience - these were the most impatient of men. They could not wait, they were always urging to some precipitate action to bring in this kingdom. Right up to the end, even after His resurrection, it was "Lord, dost thou *at this time* restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). That was their disposition. 'Let us hurry this thing'. They knew little about patience.

What did they know about the heavenly nature of the kingdom as a universal thing? They were Jews, wrapped up in Jewry, and it was a terrific thing that happened when at last heaven broke in and showed them that Israel was not the sum of God's redemptive purposes, that Gentiles also had a place in this city. It represented a tremendous upheaval in their whole mentality and acceptance and tradition - the universality of the city lying four-square, with its gates open in all directions. These twelve here were not like that, not at all!

And what about the great principle of subjection to Christ's absolute Lordship and Headship; complete subjection, as was later brought out so fully and clearly by the Apostle Paul? They knew nothing about that. They were not at all subject, they were assertive. Well, this is not suitable to the glory of God. This will not give them a name upon the foundation of the city. Something has to happen - but, praise God, it happened, and their names are there. It is a great declaration and testimony to the fact that something has happened in these men that they should be there in that capacity as the glory of God. No one listening to Peter denying his Lord with oaths and curses will say that that is for the glory of God. Something had to happen, and it did happen, and they were made suitable. And we are not thinking only of them. As I have said, they are there as representing the whole Church, and what was true of them has to be made true of the whole Church: for it is the whole Church that is here set forth in this city and this wall, and it has to be true of us.

You see, they were made suitable firstly by a very *practical* method. They were not made suitable by just sitting at their Master's feet and hearing His teaching. They heard it all - His long discourse on the mount at the beginning, His ultimate discourse in the upper room, and all between: they heard it all. It did not change them. We can be here; we can listen; we can attend a Bible School, and get all the teaching and all the theory, and it does not make us any more suitable for the glory of God. It may serve a background purpose of showing us the way, but it does not do the thing. God's methods are *practical*. Do lay hold of this. People do not like to lay hold of it, but we shall not get anywhere unless we do. God's methods of making us suitable are never theoretical, they are always practical, deeply and drastically practical.

And how does He do it? He does it by contrast with ourselves: I mean by contradicting us, putting us into situations and circumstances where what we are naturally just cannot stand up to it. There is something so completely contrasting with ourselves that we are altogether out of our element in

this realm. You see, the kingdom of the heavens is that realm where we have naturally no capacity or functioning power to exist. We are just not fit for it. I often wonder how these men did feel and what they did say privately and in secret. Peter, for instance. I think when the Lord had been speaking about the Cross and Peter had rebuked Him and said, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto thee" (Matt. 16:22), and the Lord turned to him and said, "Get thee behind me, Satan", it must have gone home to Peter badly. I think when he got away quietly, if not on the spot, he must have said, 'Look here, Peter, that was wrong, you were wrong this time'. A little later something else happened, he came up against the Lord, and Peter might have spontaneously said, 'Wrong again, Peter!' On the mount of transfiguration - "Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, I will make here three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. And there came a voice, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matt. 17:1-8). I can hear Peter saying, 'Wrong again, Peter!'

How often it goes like that, so that we begin to mistrust ourselves altogether. We have constantly to say, 'There you are, you are wrong again, you have put your foot in it again, said the wrong thing again, done the wrong thing again', until in the end we cry, 'Can we ever be right?' *That is the important thing with the Lord.* Peter was so right that it had to be proved that he could not be right at all in the realm of the kingdom of the heavens. Before he could be right, he had to be proved incapable of being right in himself. There is another realm, standard and order of things, and this practical application of the principle of being translated out of one kingdom into another is a very ruthless thing, and it does bring us down, so that we "have no confidence in the flesh". That is Paul's way of putting it (Phil. 3:3). These men were self-confident, they thought they knew, that they could do it, that they could go through with it, and again and *again* they had to turn to themselves and say, 'Wrong again!' and in the end I think they despaired of ever being right at all - and the Lord took them up there. Here on the one side is the man who says, 'I will' - "I will lay down my life for thee" (John 13:37) - and he has to be shown that he cannot; that is, the 'I will' man has to be translated into another kingdom where his 'I will' is of another order and not his own. It is not the 'I will' of natural strength, but of Divine strength. Peter was no less an 'I will' man after Pentecost, he was a far greater 'I will' man; but he was in another realm, his 'I will' was of a different order.

On the other hand, there is the man who said, "I will not" - Thomas. "*Except I see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe*" (John 20:25). Thomas seems to be the man who is always holding back like that: he will not commit himself. Thomas had to go through exactly the same process in a practical way. He had to become a man who in another realm would say, 'I will not' - but that is of a different order. It is right to put back our own disposition, under the government of Christ and by the Holy Spirit, so that we are not carried by our impulses, our own disposition, our own way at all.

If we are naturally of the 'I will' type, that is brought so completely under the Holy Spirit's government that there is brought about another kind of 'I will' man altogether. We do not become jellyfish without any will at all, under the hands of God, but another kind of 'I will'. On the other hand, if we are naturally of the 'I will not' kind, we are made 'I will-ers' under the Holy Spirit; but also we become those who are of very great value in the Church, who are not just carried away by any whim, emotion, idea, but who are making very sure of the Lord. That is a good thing provided it is not my stubbornness, not my pigheadedness, not that I must have a sound argument before I move. That can be in the flesh, it can be nature; it may hold us back, keep us out of much, as it did Thomas. These men went through a practical school. We have to be undone in one realm. We may be all agog, too ready to take hold, to take the lead and be masters of the situation - it may be nature or

training. It has to be emptied out in the realm of nature. It will come back in another realm. I believe that Paul was translated, with a great deal that the Lord could use in his make-up, translated into another realm. It came under the power of God, and that is the thing.

So Pentecost saw these men taken up by the kingdom of the heavens, and they understood then the nature of the kingdom of the heavens, and still the work went on, and at last their names are found on the foundations of that which sets forth the glory of God in Christ in the Church. *"Unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever"*. The Lord has us in hand in a very practical way, and if sometimes you get to the place where you wonder if any good thing can come out of you, if ever you will be right, and not always wrong, just understand that that is a way to another positiveness, another value. These men did serve positive values in the kingdom of the heavens. But see the way they came to it. The Lord has us in hand, and our bad times are just His practical way of bringing in that which is of Christ to supplant that which is of ourselves.