

'A Wall Great and High'

by T. Austin-Sparks

T. Austin-Sparks explores the symbolic significance of the wall in the Holy City, emphasizing God's nature, the exclusivity of Christ, and the importance of having one's name in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Scripture: Matthew 9:21, Luke 8:46, John 1:29, John 10:10, Philippians 3:20, Hebrews 12:22-24, Revelation 20:15, Revelation 21:3, Revelation 21:10-14, Revelation 21:27

Topics: "The Lamb of God", "God's Nature"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of the 'great and high wall' of the New Jerusalem as a representation of God's nature and the boundaries that define His Church. The wall symbolizes protection from evil and delineates what is acceptable to God, highlighting that only those who embody the nature of Christ can enter. Sparks explains that the wall's height and the number twelve signify divine governance, while the foundation of the wall rests on the apostles' testimony of Jesus as the Lamb of God. He stresses that true entry into God's presence is based on the measure of Christ within us, rather than human-made barriers. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deep appreciation of Jesus Christ as the Lamb, which is essential for being part of God's eternal kingdom.

Transcript

"And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and shewed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: her light was like unto a stone most precious, as it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal: having a wall great and high; 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: on the east were three gates, and on the north three gates; and on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb... And he measured the wall thereof, a hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. And the building of the wall thereof was jasper" (Revelation 21:10-14,17,18).

We remember that this city, and all connected with it, is a symbolic representation of Jesus Christ and His redeemed Church. Everything here is a representation of the spiritual characteristics of Jesus Christ, and of those characteristics to be expressed in the Church; and here we are in the presence of the foreshadowed fullness of the realization of that.

WHY A WALL?

We now come to the wall of the city: "Having a wall great and high." The measurement of the wall is given - one hundred and forty-four cubits, or twelve by twelve. Just keep that in mind for a minute. I suppose one hundred and forty-four cubits does not mean much to you, but if I tell you that the height of this wall is seventy-two metres (216 feet), you will realize that it is a pretty high wall, and the fact that this city should require such a high wall has a very real meaning. I said that it was twelve multiplied by twelve, and in the Bible symbolism of numbers twelve represents government. We are going to come upon the number twelve quite a lot of times in this connection.

So when we contemplate this wall we are contemplating that which governs everything. It is what this wall represents that governs what can come inside and be a part of the city. Why do you put up a wall? Why do you have walls to your houses and around your ground?

A BOUNDARY

The answer is that a wall represents a boundary. It demarcates an area. People may come toward your house, but your wall will limit their progress. The wall says 'So far, and no farther. What is outside may be yours, but what is inside is mine.' So it is with the wall of this city. It determines what is of God and what is not of God. Presently you will be told what is outside the city, and if you look at those things you will see that they are all things which are not at all acceptable to God. In our last chapter we spoke about the lie, and it is said that that which makes a lie cannot come into the city. So, in the first place, the wall is a boundary between what is of God and what is not of God; and when you examine this wall and see what its foundations are - "all manner of precious stones" - then you are seeing, in a symbolic way, the character of God in its many aspects.

So the wall is a testimony of God; firstly, the testimony to what God is like, and then the testimony that only that which is like God can come into this Church.

PROTECTION FROM EVIL

Then the wall is "great and high". Like the city, it is very substantial, and you are not going to get through, or over, this very easily. If you try to get into THIS Church of God in a way that is contrary to Him, you are going to meet God. We are told in this connection that this is where God dwells. The tabernacle of God is here, and it says: "He shall dwell with them" (21:3). Therefore, anything that tries to get in where God is has to meet God.

I think we are too careless in our language about going to heaven. If you ask anyone if he, or she, is going to heaven, they will say: 'Well, yes, I hope so.' You all hope to get to heaven, but there is a great and high wall round heaven and we have to get through that wall to get in where God is in order to dwell with Him. Again I say: it is a "great and HIGH wall". This wall is not an easy thing to negotiate.

The wall is nothing other than the nature of God. That is why I mentioned twelve times twelve. It is government twelve times repeated, and it is the government of the very nature of God.

So we come to the second thing about a wall: A wall is for protection, to keep out all things that are harmful and dangerous. That is what the nature of God is - a defence and protection against everything evil.

HOW DO WE GET THROUGH?

Now I am coming to something very practical in this. You know, men put up walls around the Church. They have put up thousands of walls around it. There is the wall of denominationalism, which men have put up, and the wall of certain men's names, such as Lutheranism and Wesleyism, and I could go on with a lot of other names that you know, and if you want to come into the Church you have to come in under one of these names. Sometimes it is the wall of a particular kind of teaching, and if you do not accept that teaching you cannot come into the Church. Sometimes it is a technical system of 'how it is done', and if you do not conform to this particular way of doing things, you cannot come into the Church. Well, I could go on like that. The walls that men have put up are so many, but I have studied these verses about the wall and I don't think I have made a mistake - I cannot find what is of man as defining this boundary.

What can I find on this wall? All I can find is the nature of God manifested in Jesus Christ, and that is the only exclusiveness that God recognizes. You will get in here without any trouble if the nature of Jesus Christ is in you. There are twelve angels at the twelve gates, and when you come to a gate no angel will ask you: 'What denomination do you belong to? What particular line of teaching do you hold?' The angel will look at you and at me, and everyone who wants to get in, and angels do not have to ask questions. They know at once without asking any questions, for the only thing they want to know is: 'Is Jesus Christ in your life? How much are you like Him? How much of Jesus Christ is there in you?' That is the only standard of judgment for being where God is. Have you received the Lord Jesus Christ into your life? Since you did that have you been allowing Him to possess you more and more fully? Has there been a continual increase of Christ in your life? That is the basis of Judgment, and that is the thing which determines whether we can come in or whether we stay out.

Do you think that that is mystical and abstract? Well, let us be very practical. When you travel about this world, as I do, you meet many people. Then one day you meet a certain person. It may be that he or she gets into a train where you are, or it may be in some other place. There are other people there, but there is something about this person that makes you say to yourself: 'He is a Christian, I am sure', or 'I am quite sure that she is a Christian.' No word has been spoken, and up to that point you have not said anything, but presently you begin to ask questions, and it is not long before you discover that you are right. This is another child of God! You say: 'I knew you were!' 'Oh, how did you know I was a Christian? I never told you I was.' 'You did not have to tell me. There is something about you that tells me that you belong to the Lord, something quite different from the other people.'

Now that is very simple, but is it true? Why, you can tell in a meeting like this who are really the Lord's people, and anyone who is not the Lord's. That will be what the angels look for at the gates.

Of course, that is only an illustrative way of putting it. We are speaking about dwelling with God in time and in eternity, but it is only possible to dwell with Him if His nature is in us.

I just want to repeat one sentence: That is the only exclusiveness that God recognizes. We are in, or we are out, according to the measure of Christ in us.

VALUING JESUS CHRIST AS THE LAMB OF GOD

That leads us to one other thing before we close. We are told that this wall rests upon the foundation of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. It does not say that the twelve apostles are the foundation, but the foundation is the foundation of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The apostles were the 'sent ones' by the Lord, and when they were sent out into the world what did they preach? What was the foundation of all their preaching? It is all gathered into this one word: the Lamb. You know that when the Apostle John, who

wrote this book, wrote his Gospel he very soon wrote: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29), and in different ways all the Apostles who preached Jesus Christ preached the Gospel of the Lamb of God. In this book of the Revelation the words 'the Lamb' occur twenty-six times.

To begin with, the Lamb means the taking away of sin. That is the very beginning of everything which is going to come into God's presence - the taking away of our sin. That is the foundation of this wall.

Then, not only the Lamb of God which takes away sin, but in this book another phrase is used: The marriage of the Lamb. Of course, that is strange language, but what does it mean? What is a marriage? It is a covenant made between two parties, a covenant of love, and the marriage of the Lamb just means that, by the blood of the Lamb, a covenant is made which unites us with the Lord Jesus. It is the covenant of His eternal love for us, and our covenant with Him, because of His sacrifice, to love Him for ever. The marriage of the Lamb is a covenant of love between Christ and His Church for ever, and it is only those who have entered into that covenant who will be found abiding in God for ever.

And when you come to the end of this book it is: The Lamb's book of life. What is that? Again it is only a figure. I do not think that when we get to heaven they are going to open a literal book. Of course, we have hymns which say that, such as our little children's hymn:

"Is my name written there

In the book grand and fair?"

In the First World War I was out in the Mediterranean with the troops, and on Sunday nights we had a great gathering of soldiers for a service. There were twelve hundred men who had come back, wounded or sick. We used to say: 'Now, boys, what shall we sing?' Do you know what they chose every time as the first hymn? "When the Roll is called up yonder, I'll be there"! Well, the idea is all right, but the Lamb's Book of Life just means the record of those who have received that eternal life by faith in Jesus Christ.

Now that again is very practical. There was a day, when the Lord Jesus was here on earth, that a great crowd gathered around Him, and in it was a poor woman who had had an infirmity for twelve years. She had spent all her living on physicians and no one had been able to help her. She stood on the outside of this great crowd and began to wedge her way through the people. She was pushing this way and that way, and the man who wrote the Gospel tells us that she was saying to herself: "If I do but touch his garment, I shall be made whole" (Matthew 9:21). At last, after a lot of trouble she got behind Him, reached out her hand and just touched the edge of His garment. Immediately she was made whole. But Jesus turned round and said: "Who touched Me?" The disciples said: "Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?" But Jesus said: "Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me" (Luke 8:46, A.V.). 'Virtue' is another word for 'life', and life had gone out of Him into that woman. The woman saw that she could not hide herself, indeed, this new life meant so much to her that she came forward and fell on her face before the Lord and confessed. Jesus said: "Daughter, thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace" (R.V. margin).

Being in the Lamb's Book of Life just means that life has come out from Him into us by faith in Him. You know, the Lord Jesus knows when life has gone out from Himself into someone else. He knows when anyone has touched Him in faith and received His Divine life. He said: 'I came that they might have life' (John 10:10). And when, by faith in Him, we reach out to Him and receive His life, that is recorded in heaven.

When the disciples came back to the Lord Jesus from a mission they said: "Master, even the demons are subject unto us." But He said: 'Don't rejoice in that. Rejoice that your names are written in heaven.' The greatest thing is to have our names written in heaven, and that depends upon our having received the life of the Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God who gave His life for us. I hope that everybody here has his or her name written in the Lamb's Book of Life! There are no physicians who can heal you of the disease of sin. but the gesture of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ can do it, and it is those who have made it who are in the Lamb's Book of Life.

This is what determines whether we belong to the Church and to Jesus Christ, and, in this pictorial language, it is this that decides whether we can enter through those gates and into the city - it is just how much we value Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God. That is why we sang:

"Tis the Church triumphant singing

Worthy the Lamb!"

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