

Coming to the City

by T. Austin-Sparks

T. Austin-Sparks explores the spiritual significance of the New Jerusalem as a representation of Christ and His Church, emphasizing the importance of God's glory and the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Scripture: Revelation 21:2, Revelation 21:10

Topics: "Spiritual Transformation", "The Glory of God"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that the New Jerusalem symbolizes the fullness of Christ and His Church, rather than a physical place. He explains that the glory of God is the satisfaction of His nature, which is reflected in the lives of believers as they grow in Christ. The sermon highlights the importance of being 'in the Spirit' to experience this glory and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Sparks encourages a shift from viewing the New Jerusalem as a distant reality to recognizing that believers are already part of this spiritual city, linked to heaven. Ultimately, the message is about the journey of becoming more like Christ and living in the glory of God.

Transcript

Up till now we have been making our way toward the city. Now we arrive, so I want you to open your Bibles at the twenty-first chapter of the Book of the Revelation:

"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 2).

"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, clear as crystal" (verses 10,11).

As we have contemplated this city of God we have been breaking our way through the symbolism to the spiritual reality, and I hope that now we have succeeded in realizing that we are not considering some THING, or some PLACE, but that this is only a symbolic representation of Jesus Christ and His Church. In this presentation at the end of the Bible we see what God is working toward: bringing the fullness of His Son into His Church for final manifestation. That is the explanation of the Christian life, and there is no other explanation. It begins with Christ, it goes on with the increase of Christ, and it ends with the fullness of Christ.

Now I trust that we are quite clear about that. We need to have our minds converted, and that conversion has to be from the imagination to the reality, from the symbolism to the spiritual meaning. You know, in this western world where everything is so practical, THAT conversion is a very big thing! So we are not thinking about some time, some place, some thing, called the New Jerusalem, but about the Lord Jesus Christ becoming more and more full in the Church, until that day of fullness and glory comes when what has been done is manifested in the whole universe.

So we come now right to the city. That is, let me repeat, to Jesus Christ and His Church represented here in the terms of the new Jerusalem.

Now there are four words that we have just read upon which we want to put our finger:

"He carried me away in the Spirit" First, then: "IN THE SPIRIT".

"The new Jerusalem"... and the word is "NEW".

"OUT OF HEAVEN" is the third.

And the fourth: "HAVING THE GLORY OF GOD".

I trust you have those four things. I shall begin with the last.

HAVING THE GLORY OF GOD

What is the glory of God? We know quite well from John's other writings that the glory of God was in His Son, Jesus Christ, and we also know, especially from the Apostle Paul, that the Church is to be the vessel of that glory: "Unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the ages for ever and ever" (Ephesians 3:21). But those are statements of truth. They do not define or explain anything, or tell us what the glory of God is, and it is important for us to understand what it is.

Let us remind ourselves that it is that word 'glory' which governs everything where God is concerned. The one thing that God had in view from the creation, and right through the Old Testament, was His own glory. When we open our New Testament and find God's Son present in this world, we hear the Apostle saying: "And we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father" (John 1:14). Again we ask: What is the glory of God?

The glory of God is the absolute satisfaction of the Divine nature, when God is able to say, really from His very nature and all that He is, 'I am well pleased with that. That perfectly satisfies My very nature.' If you and I were in the presence of that Divine satisfaction we should feel a tremendous joy, and would just exclaim: 'Oh, this is glory!'

Let us consider this in the opposite way. What is it that robs our lives and our hearts of glory? What is it that makes us sing about the great day when "that will be glory for me"? What is it that makes us long for the glory? I can tell you quite simply. The glory in our hearts and in our lives is limited because of our consciousness of how unlike the Lord we are. Oh, how different our natures are from God's! That worries us every day and hides the glory in our hearts. We live so little in God's satisfaction and so much in our own dissatisfaction. We have not yet come to really grasp the great truth of our justification in Christ Jesus, nor have we come to understand that what God is doing with us is to change us from what we are into what He is.

I am going to be very simple for a minute or two. When you first come to the Lord Jesus you have a wonderful sense of glory. You do not understand all the teaching about coming to the Lord Jesus, but you just come and give yourself to Him, and take Him to be your Lord, and something happens almost immediately. A great burden rolls away from your heart. A great cloud is removed from your life and you have to say: 'Oh, this is wonderful! This is glory!' Why is that? Because there is One who knows a great deal more of what it means than you do. The Holy Spirit has come to lead every one of us to that final glory, and this is the beginning. He says: 'I have got him - or her - on the road to glory,' and so He registers glory in our hearts. All the meaning of justification by faith - that is, being made righteous in Christ - is in that first step, and so God the Holy Spirit says at the beginning: 'I am well-pleased.' The heart and the nature of God are satisfied, and, without a great deal of teaching, you just know it.

Glory is just that wonderful sense, or sensation, of God being well-pleased. The pathway of the child of God is intended to be the pathway of glory. The Holy Spirit has taken possession.

IN THE SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit has taken charge. Now, after you have taken the first step and tasted something of the glory, you will come into a situation, or a temptation, where the whole question of the glory is involved. There is something in your life upon which the Holy Spirit puts His finger and says, in effect: 'That belongs to the world you have left behind, so you must leave it behind. Now, what about it? What are you going to do about it? Are you going to hold on to it, or are you going to let it go?' The continuation of the glory depends upon your decision. If you hold on, and do not let go, that glory of the Divine satisfaction will be clouded. A cloud will come over your heart, and people who saw you when you first came to the Lord will say: 'Something has happened. The light has gone out of his - or her - face.' And then you have a big battle, and if you get through it and let the Lord have His way fully, some of the old glory will come back and you will feel: 'Oh, the burden has rolled away.'

Those of us who have gone on with the Lord through the years have had many battles. We have had to come to new positions as to the will of God, and as long as the issue was not settled it seemed as though the glory was lifted up and waiting for something, but when we have fought that issue through and got clear with the Lord, the glory has come back. Perhaps the biggest battles will come at the end - this book of the Revelation says so - but then, through the last and greatest of all battles, we come right through into the eternal glory: that is, we come to the place where God's nature is fully satisfied with His work in us.

Do you understand the meaning of glory now? Glory is a wonderful influence of God in our lives. We shall see that all the way through our meditations, "Having the glory of God". What an influence it is when the glory of God is in our hearts!

You see a little child who is absolutely satisfied and delighted with everything, and don't you like to be where that little child is? That has a wonderful influence upon you! Put it the other way - a little child who is discontented with everything. What a miserable effect that has upon you! I heard of such a little child. It was bed time and mother said: 'Darling, it is time for bed. Put your dolls away.' The little child said: 'I don't want to put my dolls away.' The mother saw that she was going to do nothing with the child, so she said: 'Well, would you like to play with your dolls for a little longer?' 'I don't want to play with my dolls any longer!' Poor mother did not know what to say next! So she said: 'Well, darling, you just do what you want to do.' And the little child said: 'I don't want to do what I want to do!' Poor mother! What a miserable time for her! There is no glory in that! But when God's nature is fully satisfied and we come into harmony with that

nature, there is glory in our hearts. Do you see that the Holy Spirit is trying to produce in us that which satisfies the heart of God?

It is perhaps a hard school. It means much discipline, and much testing of our love for the Lord. It constantly raises the question as to whether we really want the Lord to be well-pleased with us, but this life is the school of those who are to be the sons of God dwelling in His glory.

So you see how two things are joined together: "In the Spirit... having the glory of God." Be out of the Spirit and you are out of the glory, because, as you know, one of the names of the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of glory. That means that the whole purpose and work of the Holy Spirit is to bring us to glory, to the satisfaction of God.

NEW

Now we have two other words left. "In the Spirit I saw the NEW Jerusalem." That is only a symbolic way of saying that you have to be under the government of the Holy Spirit if you are going to see God's new things. One of the characteristic words of the New Testament is this word 'New': 'In Christ Jesus there is a NEW creation... In Christ Jesus there is a NEW man... In Christ Jesus there is a NEW life... In Christ Jesus there is a NEW way of life', and so you lift that word out from your New Testament until you come to the end, and it says: "A NEW heaven and a NEW earth" (Revelation 21:1), and then "the NEW Jerusalem". The word 'new' has no meaning unless there is something old. It is a comparison and a contrast. There was an old Jerusalem, but it has gone. It has been put away under judgment, and when the old is put away, the new is introduced. We have yet to see the meaning of the city of Jerusalem, but for the moment it is just this word 'new' with which we are concerned. It is something completely fresh, and there is something about it that has never been true of anything before.

When you consider the history of the old Jerusalem, what a sad and tragic story it is! And it is a tragic story because of its sin. It had its days of glory, but they were very few. The glory soon departed and the tragedy is written through the Old Testament. The last words for that Jerusalem were pronounced by the Lord Jesus: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,... how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens, under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matthew 23:37,38), and two thousand years have told the story of that desolation.

This NEW people that God is bringing into being is just the opposite of the old Jerusalem. This is something which is called "unto his ETERNAL glory" (1 Peter 5:10). This is something which is not called unto tragedy at the end, but glory; something over which all the powers of evil are not going to prevail, as they did over the old Jerusalem. This is a NEW Jerusalem.

Now I must just very briefly touch on the other thing, upon which we shall enlarge later in the week.

OUT OF HEAVEN

Of course, if you just use your imagination, you do not know what that means. You begin to think of some great object called a city descending out of heaven. Dear friends, we shall not have gone much further before we shall see that that is absolutely impossible. You hold that for a little while I try to explain this, but I shall remind you more than once of what I have just said about the impossibility of it being a literal city.

If this is going to come down out of heaven, it must be there before it can come down. What does this mean? The Apostle Paul tells us that the Church is seated together with Christ in the heavenlies now

(Ephesians 2:6), but we might answer: 'We are not in heaven; we are very much on this earth. Everything down here is much more real than things in heaven.' Are you quite sure that you are right? Is that really true? What is the very first thing that comes into your consciousness when you are born again? It is: 'I do not belong to this world any more. Something has happened to me which has separated me from it. Things in this world are different now, and the things that were once my life are no longer my life. The things which I once sought after I now no longer want. The people who were once my true friends are no longer my true friends. My true friends are now the people of God, and my true family is the family of God. What has happened to me? They say that I am "born again", but when they say that they do not put it right. What the Bible says is "born from above".'

You know, if you have been born, and have spent your childhood, in a certain place, there is a strange link between you and that place in your life. Now, I spent much of my childhood and my schooldays in a certain place, and somehow, through all the years, I have wanted to go back to that place again and again, so, from time to time, I have gone back. But, oh! how everything has changed! All the old friends have gone, all the old scenes have changed, and I do not think they have changed for the better. Sometimes when I have left that place I have said: 'I will never go back again!', but wait a year or two, and I am back again. I cannot keep away. There is some pull inside. Do you see what I mean? If we really have been born from above there will always be a pull away from below. We may have some bad times, and we may be tempted to give it all up, but somehow or other we just do go on.

"I was in the Spirit... and I saw the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven." The most powerful work of the Holy Spirit in a life is to make that life know that it belongs to heaven and not to this world.

I expect most of us know what is meant by this. Paul says: "Our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20), and the Psalmist says: "This one was born THERE" (Psalm 87:4). We do not belong to this world, and we ought to know it. If we can settle down and be satisfied with this world, then we know nothing about the work of the Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit sent down from heaven to link us with heaven.

Well, that is what it means to come to the new Jerusalem. It is not just an abstract idea, nor a symbolic imagination, but a powerful reality in the life. We are not going to the city: we ARE the city.

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