

The Many-Sided Riches of God's Grace in Jesus Christ

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Book of Revelation is a summary of the Bible and a record of the power, authority, and glory of Jesus Christ in His cross, and it sets forth the many-sided riches of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

Scripture: Romans 2:4, Romans 9:23, Romans 11:33, Ephesians 1:7, Ephesians 2:7, Ephesians 3:8, Ephesians 3:16, Hebrews 12:22-23, 1 Peter 2:1-7, Revelation 21:19

Topics: "Redemption", "God's Grace"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the many-sided riches of God's grace as depicted in Revelation 21:19, where the foundations of the city are adorned with precious stones. He illustrates how God's grace transforms flawed individuals, like Jacob and the twelve apostles, into vessels of mercy, showcasing the unsearchable riches of Christ. The sermon highlights that the grace of God is sufficient for all, regardless of past failures, and serves as a reminder of the hope and redemption available through Jesus. Sparks encourages believers to appreciate the depth of God's grace and its manifestation in their lives.

Transcript

"The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones" (Revelation 21:19).

The following passages are a commentary on that verse:

"Putting away therefore all wickedness, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, long for the spiritual milk which is without guile, that ye may grow thereby unto salvation; if ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious: unto whom coming, a living stone, rejected indeed of men, but with God elect, precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Because it is contained in scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: And he that believeth on him shall not be put to shame. For you therefore which believe is the preciousness" (1 Peter 2:1-7).

"In whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:7).

"That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7).

"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach... the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8).

"That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, that ye may be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man" (Ephesians 3:16).

"Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Romans 2:4).

"That he might make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he afore prepared unto glory" (Romans 9:23).

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgements, and his ways past tracing out!" (Romans 11:33).

Now we have to come back to the first passage, in Revelation 21:9: "The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones."

THAT TO WHICH GOD IS WORKING SET FORTH IN THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION

I think you know that the order in which we have the books of the New Testament is not the order in which they were written. The chronological order would be quite different from the one which we have in our arrangement. The Book of the Revelation was not the last book of the Bible to be written, but there is a Divine order in the arrangement, and this is a very real mark of the government of the Holy Spirit. When the books were put together in the way in which we have them, perhaps the men did not know what they were doing, but the Spirit of God, who inspired the writing, also governed the arrangement, and everybody recognizes that this book of the Revelation is in the right place. It is the summary and consummation of all that is in the Bible, and its dominant note is the coming again of the Lord Jesus. These words stand over every section of this book: 'Behold, I come quickly', and almost the last words are: "The Spirit and the bride say, Come" (22:17). It is the Person of the Lord Jesus who stands supreme over this whole book, in all its sections. He is given various names: The Word of God, the Faithful and true Witness, King of kings and Lord of lords, and other names, all of which only occur once, but there is a name which is repeated again and again, and that name stands over every section of the book from the beginning to the end, and that name is 'The Lamb'. Jesus as the Lamb of God stands over this whole book, so that the book is a record of the power, the authority and the glory of Jesus Christ in His cross. It is His place of supremacy in the Church and in the nations by virtue of His sufferings.

This book is therefore a presentation of what Christ is through His Cross, that is, through His suffering and death, and all that He is through His suffering and death is here, in this book, reproduced in the Church. The Church here, as we have been seeing, is represented in the symbolism of the city, and that city is the Church embodying all the features of what Christ is by His suffering and death.

I only have to remind you of those words in the letter to the Hebrews, chapter 12:22,23:

"But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in

heaven."

You see, the city of the living God is the general assembly of the firstborn, the Church of the firstborn ones whose names are enrolled in heaven, in other words, whose names are in the Lamb's Book of Life. The letter to the Hebrews corresponds to the book of the Revelation.

So this book of the Revelation, and especially these last chapters, sets forth that to which God is working in the Church now. It tells us what it is that God is seeking to do in believers now, and the goal to which He is working, which is a full revelation of Christ in the Church at the end. That statement is a very important statement for us, for it means that if God has got hold of our lives, if we are truly under the government of the Holy Spirit, He is doing a work in us throughout our lives, and that work is that at the end all that is symbolically true of the New Jerusalem will be found true in us.

"ALL MANNER OF PRECIOUS STONES"

Having already considered many aspects of this city, we have at last come to the wall. We have read that "the foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones", so that the wall represents the many-sided riches of God's grace in Jesus Christ. We did not read all these precious stones, but if you will just pass your eye over them you will see how precious they are, and what a variety of preciousness is represented here: the jasper, the sapphire, the chalcedony, and so on, and you will notice that they finish with the amethyst.

There was a little Methodist church in the country in England, and they were having a conference. For the lesson an old farmer read this twenty-first chapter of Revelation, and he came to the part about the precious stones. Everybody saw his face getting more and more excited. He started off: "The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony..." and he was getting more and more excited. "...the fourth, emerald; the fifth... and the sixth... and the seventh... and the eighth... and the ninth... and the tenth... and the eleventh... and the TWELFTH was a METHODIST!" Well, it is something to be excited about. If we could put ourselves into the description of an 'amethyst' it would indeed be something glorious!

We have said that all these stones set forth the many-sided riches of God's grace brought to us in Jesus Christ. It is quite impossible for us to comprehend the many aspects of God's grace, and that is why we read all those passages about the riches of His grace, the riches of His glory, the unsearchable riches of Christ, and also why we read Peter: "For you therefore which believe is the PRECIOUSNESS." But perhaps we can understand this a little better if we take note of two things.

THE GRACE OF GOD FOR JACOB

It says here that there were twelve gates to the city, "and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel" (verse 12), and then it says: "And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (verse 14). Now, you Bible students, don't expect me to exhaust all the meaning of that! But I want to suggest to you just one thing about those two verses.

On the gates were the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Paul tells us, about Israel, that "it is the remnant that shall be saved" (Romans 9:27). While all Israel may now be cast away, a remnant shall be saved. Israel will be represented at the last, but why and how? This is what I suggest to you to be a

meaning: The twelve tribes of Israel sprang from Jacob, and if ever there was a man who ought not to have had the position that Jacob had, it was Jacob. No man of character has any respect for Jacob. He was a deceiver, a man who was always seeking to get his own advantage at the expense of someone else. It did not matter how much others had to lose or suffer so long as Jacob got what he wanted. The earlier years of Jacob's life are a story that is not pleasant to read. You say: What a mean and despicable man was Jacob! And you agree with the prophet when he says: "Thou worm Jacob" (Isaiah 41:14). Jacob had very little naturally to commend him. Why, then, should Jacob come to occupy the great place that he has in the Bible? Why should his name be changed from Jacob to Israel, 'a prince with God'? There is only one answer: Sovereign grace! God took hold of THAT man to make HIM a "vessel of mercy". We know the mercy and the grace of God when we see it taking hold of a character like that! "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgements, and his ways past tracing out!"

THE GRACE OF GOD FOR THE TWELVE TRIBES

But not only the man, the twelve tribes. What a story of tragedy, failure and shame is the story of the old Israel! God's patience was tested to its utmost by that people. There was a time when He said to Moses: 'Stand aside! Let Me destroy them and I will make of thee another nation.' One day Moses himself cried: 'You rebels! Must we bring water out of this rock for you?' Yes, it is a long and a terrible story is the story of the twelve tribes of Israel, but their names are on the gates of the New Jerusalem. Whatever other things this may mean, I am quite sure that it means this: Here you have a wonderful, wonderful testimony to the unspeakable grace of God in Jesus Christ. "For you which believe is the preciousness." A remnant of Israel shall believe and be found in the holy city. So that, whether it be Jacob himself or his twelve sons and the tribes, here at the last is this testimony to the sovereign grace of God.

THE GRACE OF GOD FOR US

Why is this written at the end of the Bible? Just to say that there is hope for you, and there is hope for me. The grace of God for Jacob and the twelve tribes is big enough for us. This Church city is a great monument to the unsearchable riches of His grace.

There is always a note of warning in these things, and the Apostle Paul warned Christians to beware of failing of the grace of God. We read that verse in Romans 2:4: "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long suffering?" It must be a very terrible thing to fail of this grace if it is so great! But let us proceed.

THE GRACE OF GOD FOR THE DISCIPLES

On the foundations of the wall were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Now this means much more than I am going to say, but I am quite sure that it means this one thing.

I read the story of those twelve men before Pentecost, and it is not a very happy story. They were men who were constantly quarrelling with one another, and they all had something of Jacob in them - trying to get an advantage for themselves at the expense of the others. Two of them came round the back of the others with their mother. There has been a little family conspiracy, and this mother was very ambitious for her two sons, and the sons fell into her ambition, so that while the other disciples were not looking (you see, this is Jacob!) they came round to the Lord Jesus and the mother said: 'Master, I want to ask you for something. Will you promise me something?' But Jesus was always awake to anything like that - 'You tell

Me what you want and then I will tell you if I will give it to you.' And so the mother said: 'Master, when you come into your kingdom, will you let THIS boy be on your right hand, and THIS boy be on your left hand? Will you let my two sons have the first two places in the kingdom?' Well, Jesus just said: 'That is not Mine to give. That is for the Father.' But it was not all over then - the story does not end there. When the others knew it they were very angry: 'They tried to steal OUR place!'

Well, I could go on like that about these disciples - and you know how that story ended! The chief one amongst them denied the Lord Jesus three times, most vehemently. When it was said to him: 'You are one of them!' he said: 'I don't know what you are talking about.' And then, when later on it was said to him: 'You WERE with Him,' he said: 'I tell you, I know not the man!' We can hardly believe that the leader of the Apostles should fall so low! Surely, we would say, there is no hope for a man like that, and the others are not much better, because it says that they all forsook Him and fled. All right - their names are on the foundation of the wall! The riches of His grace are at last manifested in them. Peter needs grace in one way - I don't know whether he corresponds to the jasper - and John needs grace in another way - perhaps he corresponds to the sapphire. But they all needed some form of Divine grace in a special way.

And that is true of us all. My nature needs Divine grace in a special way, and everyone here needs the grace of God in some particular way. But the grace of God in Jesus Christ can meet every one of us in our particular way, and right at last, whether it be an amethyst or a 'Methodist', we will be in the city.

We have only just touched the very fringe of the unsearchable riches of grace, but may we from this time have a larger appreciation of this wonderful grace of God in Jesus Christ.

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