

The Gospel in the Gates of Jerusalem

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When the Lord Jesus Christ rode into Jerusalem to proclaim publicly His right and title to kingship, the multitudes shouted the hosannas. This so enraged the religious rulers that they attempted to silence the voices of praise and, failing, demanded that the Lord rebuke and silence them. But He, with biting satire, answered them saying, “If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out” (Luke 19:40). With bitter irony He sent them back to the ABCs written in the walls of Jerusalem, for those very stones and walls were proclaiming the gospel message and the gates were fairly shouting, “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in” (Psalm 24:7). Those stones had been giving a message for centuries, and they are still speaking today.

A Broadcast Through the Ages

John the Baptist had been silenced, the apostles would be silenced and scattered, and the Lord Jesus Christ had not actually lifted up His voice, but the stones in the walls of Jerusalem were singing the “Hallelujah Chorus.” The gates were hymning a psalm of praise. They are still crying out in the inky blackness of sin. There is a continuous song in the night – a psalm of praise and a golden voice singing a song of deliverance. It is a trumpet of jubilee to slaves of passion and pride; a loudspeaker calling out above the din and melee of the day; a harmonious chorus in the babel of this world’s confusion. It is a foghorn across the ocean of life; a siren in the night of sin; an SOS from the sinking ship of civilization; it is a broadcast that never goes off the air.

Shakespeare was using poetic license when he wrote, “Tongues in trees...Sermons in stones,” but, my friend, the Word of God proves this to be accurate. And so we come to the gates and walls of Jerusalem and listen to their paean of praise, “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.”

Nehemiah Meets the Task

In chapter three of the Book of Nehemiah, Nehemiah and his helpers have undertaken to repair and restore the walls of Jerusalem after the return from seventy years under Babylonian captivity. It was a most arduous task, for in conquering the land the Babylonians had leveled the walls and debris had settled over the area. The report of reconstruction given to us in that chapter of Scripture is as dry as an engineer’s report. It’s just about as interesting as any great city’s report on the repair and maintenance of its streets and freeways.

But we become fascinated as we make this tour of the walls of Jerusalem with Nehemiah. We want to stop at the gates and listen to their music. There are ten of these gates, and they form an instrument of ten strings from which vibrates heaven’s harmony. As we stand back to better examine the massive stones of the walls, they begin to speak. They have a message for us, for you and I are building walls – spiritual walls, if you please – with the same gates and having the same message. Today God has given us a subcontract that you and I might build these walls of Jerusalem in our own hearts and lives.

The Tour of the Gates

The Sheep Gate

So let’s begin our tour. The first step is taken in verse one:

Then Eliashib, the high priest, rose up with his brethren, the priests, and they builded the sheep gate; they sanctified it, and set up the doors of it. (Nehemiah 3:1)

The Sheep Gate in Jerusalem was near the temple; it was where the sacrificial animals were brought in to be offered on the altar. It is in keeping that the priests should build this particular gate, for it speaks of Christ and His work upon the cross for us. That is exactly what the prophet had said:

...He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. (Isaiah 53:7)

If there be any doubt whether or not the prophet was referring to the Lord Jesus, all we have to do is turn to the incident recorded in Acts 8. There we read about the Ethiopian eunuch who, with a great retinue of servants, was crossing the desert and reading this particular section in Isaiah, though he had no notion what it was all about. Philip was called by the Spirit of God to join himself to that chariot, and as he did he asked the eunuch the specific question, "Do you know what you are reading?" Now, I am afraid that this man gave the answer that a lot of folk would give were they to tell the truth: "How can I understand? I haven't the slightest idea, and how could I unless someone helps me?" As he read about the person being led as a sheep to the slaughter, the Ethiopian eunuch had this question: "I don't quite get it. Is the prophet speaking of himself, or is he speaking of some other man?" Philip explained that he was speaking of another man, and he "...began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus" (Acts 8:35).

When John the Baptist marked Christ out for His ministry he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Personally, I think the Lord Jesus came in at the Sheep Gate every time He entered the city except at the Triumphal Entry. We can't be dogmatic about it, but we do know that on one occasion He came in through the Sheep Gate to the Pool of Bethesda. It was there that He healed the blind man. That act was symbolic of the fact that He came as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. And the poor man whom He healed is a picture of every sinner who, if willing to come to the cross of Christ, will find deliverance from sin.

Christ not only came *in* through that gate, but also when He was arrested and was led out to be crucified, they took Him *out* through that gate. The Sheep Gate was the place of judgment, and it tells us that He bore the judgment of our sin. It is at this gate that we must begin with God. He is not prepared to meet us anywhere but at the cross.

It is of interest to note that "next unto him the men of Jericho built" (Nehemiah 3:2). Jericho was the city of the curse, and the men of Jericho were building right next to the Sheep Gate. That is not by accident, for Christ bore on the cross for you and me the awful curse of sin. Paul, in writing to the Galatians, said:

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree. (Galatians 3:13)

Freedom from the curse of sin awaits us at the foot of the cross.

The Fish Gate

And the fish gate did the sons of Hassenaah build.... (Nehemiah 3:3)

Standing before this gate we hear, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). We believe that the Fish Gate was next in line to the Sheep Gate. You will recall that the first thing the Lord did with those whom He saved was to send them out immediately to witness for Him. Examples of this are the woman at the well and the poor possessed man among the tombs (see John 4:5-38 and Mark 5:1-20).

But at the time of Nehemiah’s record, the Fish Gate was in disrepair. That is like so many Christians who, day by day, month by month, year by year, make no attempt to win anyone to Christ. Though this is true, still I am encouraged. Lately I have seen more people turn to Christ because someone was “fishing” than at any time in my ministry. There are many Christians who are fishing; sometimes they do not catch anything. Half the time when I’ve gone fishing I haven’t gotten even a bite, but there is one sure thing: You will never catch a fish until you try! He is calling us to be fishers of men. Today is the hour of the layman, it is the hour of the average believer, because all around you today there are hearts that are hungry. The child of God has a marvelous opportunity to fish.

For your encouragement, let me give you this “fish story.” Many years ago when I was teaching the Book of Revelation in my church, there was a little lady who began coming to the studies and, as a result, she accepted Christ as her Savior. Before we finished the study of Revelation, she, her husband, and her family moved to a nearby town where she became connected with a great industry. On Good Friday I was invited to speak to the Christian Fellowship Class of that company. After I had spoken to the class, its president said to me, “That lady is, without doubt, one of the most effective instruments for Christ we have here, and the reason is that she has made a business of it; it is the object of her life. She rejoices in her own salvation and tactfully talks with others.” In a few moments she joined us and, expressing thanks for the message, explained that she had to rush over to the telephone company where they were just beginning Bible classes. That little lady was doing all of that in an effort to win souls.

Jesus said to His disciples, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” He is giving us the same message as we stand before the Fish Gate.

In contrast to the above account, we find an interesting note:

And next unto them the Tekoites repaired; but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord. (Nehemiah 3:5)

I should hate to be a member of that group. Think what it would mean to be recorded on God’s eternal page that, when the opportunity presented itself to put your neck to the work of the Lord, you were a shirker and fell down on the job! They were right next to the Fish Gate. Scripture says, “He that withholdeth grain, the people shall curse him...” (Proverbs 11:26). Today some are withholding grain (the Word of God) from those that are hungry.

The Old Gate

Moreover, the old gate repaired Joiada, the son of Paseah.... (Nehemiah 3:6)

The Old Gate is one of intense interest to me. In Jeremiah 6:16 we find this statement:

Thus saith the LORD, Stand in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk in it, and ye shall find rest for your souls.

My friend, we are living in a day when we are interested in the “new” thing – the latest model in an automobile, the latest styles in fashion, and the latest gadgets for the house. A man once remarked to me, “My, you have an old place, haven’t you?” That struck me as strange. I thought that I had a new home; it was only seven years old at the time. But in Southern California, it was already an old house. Thus it was borne in upon me that we are living in a day when things are changing radically and rapidly. The conditions under which our grandfathers proposed to our grandmothers are vastly different from those under which the young folk of the present day deal with the matter.

Beloved, things may change around us, but the human heart remains the same. The constant search for something new is the thing that is leading us to frustration. We need to ask for “the old paths.” Jeremiah said that when we do we will find rest for our souls. We need to restore the old virtues for the pattern of living today. Although the human heart is the same as it has always been, its needs are greater because of the mechanical and technological life in which it is couched. We need to ask for the old paths and walk in them that we might find rest for our souls.

As we continue reading, we find another interesting comment:

Next unto them Uzziel, the son of Harhaiah, of the goldsmiths, repaired. Next unto him also repaired Hananiah, the son of one of the perfumers, and they fortified Jerusalem unto the broad wall. (Nehemiah 3:8)

The stones of the walls of Jerusalem are tremendous. If you have seen pictures of them or have stood by them in your travel, no doubt their size impressed you. To see the truth taught here, you must note the difference in the size of the stones with which the goldsmith normally worked and that of the stones of the walls. And you must contrast the duties of a perfumer with the work he had to do on the walls. For these two groups of men to do such heavy labor must have caused much physical suffering due to strained backs and blistered hands. It was harder for them. The Spirit of God recorded that the goldsmiths and perfumers were faithful in a work not in their line, and God took note of it.

How many Christians are in hard places today! If you find yourself in a difficult place and feel you are not cut out for the thing you are doing, perhaps God has you there so that He can make record of it for you. He will take note of the fact that it is difficult for you. Perhaps it is grueling and hard to go through and you think that nobody cares, but someday you will find that God’s record of your labor will stand (see 1 Corinthians 15:58).

The Valley Gate

The valley gate repaired Hanun, and the inhabitants of Zanoah.... (Nehemiah 3:13)

The Valley Gate led out of the city of Jerusalem and down into the valley. It is the gate through which many of us are called to go. I think of the valley of the shadow of death, and all of us will have to go down that way sooner or later if the Lord tarries.

But there is a very practical lesson for us at this gate if we will listen. I think it is the gate of humility, the gate of humbleness. God must often lead us through that gate even though it is sometimes difficult for us to follow Him there. There are many of us who are fundamental in our faith, but we forget what the Scripture has to say. In Philippians 2:3 it is “lowliness of mind,” and Colossians 3:12 calls it “humbleness of mind.” Humility is something you cannot cultivate. You cannot put it on; it must come from the inside.

A man said to a friend of his, “You know, I have been trying to be humble, and at last I have succeeded.” The friend said, “Well, I know you are proud of that,” and he said, “I sure am.” We must learn that the very minute we feel we have succeeded in becoming humble, that is the moment we have lost it because we have become proud.

The story is told of a young minister in Scotland who was just out of seminary and had never preached to a congregation. Because of his wonderful record in the seminary, he was invited to preach at a certain church. He went into the pulpit with great pride. But when he got up before the congregation, to his confusion he found that, while a sermon was easy to work out on paper, it was quite another thing to deliver it to the people. So he became frightened and forgot everything he ever knew and left the pulpit at the close of the sermon in great shame and humility. As he went down, a little lady who had watched every moment of his actions, from his entering the pulpit and his giving of the sermon to his leaving the pulpit, went up to him and said, “Young man, if you had only gone into that pulpit as you came down, you would have come down like you went up.”

How God has to school us in humility! According to Galatians 5, it is a fruit of the Spirit – the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, and humbleness or meekness. It is one of the fruits that you and I cannot work up. He alone can produce it in our hearts and lives. Many times He takes us down through the valley that He might teach us this great lesson which we as believers must learn, for pride is something that twines itself into our thoughts and slides into our prayers. Therefore, this Valley Gate is a “must” in the life of every Christian.

The Dung Gate

And the dung gate repaired Malchijah.... (Nehemiah 3:14)

This is the gate out of which the garbage and filth of the city was taken at night. Not much is said about it, but it was certainly a most necessary gate to the health of the city of Jerusalem.

My friend, whether we say anything about it or not, that is the very thing all Christians must face up to in their hearts and lives – that which must be taken out through the Dung Gate.

Having, therefore, these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Corinthians 7:1)

Paul, in practically all of his epistles, dealt with sin in the Christian’s life. How important it is! I am of the opinion that in the present hour, sin is one of the things holding back revival.

My friend, isn't it a strange thing that in this day when there is more interest in religion than there has been in the entire history of the world, for some reason there is no revival? What is holding it back? I believe that when Christians will deal with sin in their lives, revival will come. This is the gate that we do not like to talk about, but ignoring this gate is causing the Christian witness to smell to high heaven!

A little girl was working with her mother out in the yard. These little folk have a way of asking some very interesting questions, and she asked one. She said, "Mommy, what is it that makes the flowers grow?" Her mother, thinking rapidly to formulate an understandable answer for that sort of question, was turning around to reply when the little girl helped her out by saying, "Well, I guess it's because they want to get up out of the dirt."

My friend, every genuine child of God wants to get up out of the dirt. That is the reason we are given a desire to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Him – that we may get up out of the mire of life.

For the last ten years, though it hasn't happened yet, I have been expecting some young man to come along and rally other young men around a movement as did John Wesley. It would not be a revival in and of itself, but it would lead to revival. That movement would be one of holy living, a surge of desire to live for God. My friend, when that takes place, perhaps revival will come as it did in Wesley's day. It is possible that it will come to us when we meet that kind of condition.

The Gate of the Fountain

And the gate of the fountain repaired Shallun.... (Nehemiah 3:15)

The Gate of the Fountain refers to the same thing the Lord was speaking about when he said to the woman at the well,

But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. (John 4:14)

Again the Lord made this statement at the Feast of Tabernacles, "He that believeth on me...out of his heart [inmost being] shall flow rivers of living water." And John explains this figure, "This spoke he of the Spirit, whom they that believe on him should receive..." (John 7:38, 39). Also, Paul wrote that "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Romans 8:9).

The Gate of the Fountain, therefore, teaches the fact that every believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and that a fountain of living water – not just a well (that is not the translation), but a *fountain* of living water – would be gushing up into life everlasting.

The Water Gate

Moreover, the Nethinim dwelt in Ophel, unto the place opposite the water gate toward the east, and the projecting tower. (Nehemiah 3:26)

There is no mention made of the repair of the Water Gate. I think the reason is obvious – water is the picture of God’s Word. Later on, when Ezra put up a pulpit and read from the Word of God, he put the pulpit at the Water Gate (see Nehemiah 8). This was no accident. The New Testament makes it very clear that water is a picture of God’s Word. Jesus said to those who were His own:

Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you....Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth. (John 15:3, 17:17).

And Paul told the Ephesians:

...Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word. (Ephesians 5:25, 26)

This teaching is of major importance. I believe there is cleansing power in this Book, the Bible; it has a supernatural power. If you will read it and study it, it will cleanse your life.

The Horse Gate

From above the horse gate repaired the priests, every one opposite his own house.
(Nehemiah 3:28)

The Horse Gate speaks of warfare, for it was through this gate that the army went out to battle. King David reviewed his troops at this gate as they prepared to engage the enemy. This gate speaks to us of “soldier service.” It tells us that we must “endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Timothy 2:3).

The Christian life is not an easy thing. If you live for God, it will cost you something – I am confident of that. Let’s not deceive anyone; let’s not tell them that if they will become Christians it will eliminate all problems and that life will be a bed of roses. Not so, beloved! A good soldier endures hardness.

Paul admonishes us to put on the whole armor of God. The trumpet is sounding, there is an enemy of God to be overcome! There is a battle to be fought! There is a victory to be won!

The East Gate

This is the gate which thrills and floods our very souls.

After them repaired Zadok, the son of Immer, opposite his house. After him repaired also Shemaiah, the son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the east gate. (Nehemiah 3:29)

The East Gate was the first gate to be opened each morning. The question would be asked, “O watchman, what of the night?” And what a thrill it was when the watchman on the wall would say, “The dawn is coming. I see light on the horizon and the sun will soon be up.” The city was safe after the long night of watching, waiting, and wondering if there was danger from an enemy in the darkness. It brought joy to hear the watchman say that the night was almost over, that a rosy stream of light has broken through, routing the black of the night with its eerie company.

The creaking of the hinges of the East Gate was the fanfare of a new day as the sun came up over the horizon.

Friends, the East Gate reassures our hearts that one of these days the night of sin will be over. One of these days the Lord Jesus, who is to us the bright and morning star, will appear. That star of living brilliance, which appears before the sun comes up, writes across time's span of civilization that He will appear to take those who are His own out of this night of sin. The East Gate is very important.

The Gate Hammiphkad

At last we come to the tenth gate.

After him repaired Malchijah, the goldsmith's son, unto the place of the Nethinim, and of the merchants, opposite the gate Hammiphkad, and to the ascent of the corner.
(Nehemiah 3:31)

"Hammiphkad" means review of registry. When strangers came to Jerusalem, they had to have "visas" and were stopped at this gate for the purpose of registry. It was a gate of review, for the army returned through this gate from battle. It was here that David welcomed his soldiers returning from battle. How he loved them, and how they loved him! Most of them would have gladly laid down their lives for him. As they came under the arch, he was there to thank his battle-scarred men for their unselfish loyalty and daring.

We are told that when the Lord calls those of His own out of this world, there is to be a gate of review:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. (2 Corinthians 5:10)

But Paul tells us that if we would only deal with our sins and judge ourselves down here, then we would not have to have Him deal with them up yonder. He says, "So, then, every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). In other words, my friend, everything that is in a Christian's life is to pass in review – not for salvation, but to determine rewards. I do not think anything will be hidden. I believe that your entire works – all of them – will be there, and a Christian should live in the light of that particular fact. Salvation is not in question. That was settled at the cross. What will be in question is whether the things we have done merit His "well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21).

Completing the Tour

In starting upon our journey around the walls of Jerusalem, we learned that there were just ten gates. But there is still one leg of the journey left. The last verse of Nehemiah 3 holds this before us:

And between the ascent of the corner unto the sheep gate.... (Nehemiah 3:32)

We have been around the walls of Jerusalem and have come once more to the Sheep Gate. We started there and we end there because, my friend, everything in the life of a Christian is done in the light of the cross of Christ. Paul said,

But God forbid that I should glory, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. (Galatians 6:14)

Everything in light of the cross!

Let us stand here before the Sheep Gate as we examine an incident in the ministry of a great Bible teacher named Dr. MacKay. He was preaching in one of the great suburban areas of London. Night after night, the thousands attending were going away richly blessed. But one young man spoke to Dr. MacKay after the service and said very candidly that while he wanted to understand, he plainly could not and therefore could not become a Christian. He asked Dr. MacKay if he would take a few moments and talk with him.

The doctor told him that he had to catch a train back to London, but if he would walk with him they could discuss the barriers and problems in the matter of his salvation; and so they talked it all out. When they had reached the station, Dr. MacKay turned to the young man and said, "Is it all plain to you now?"

The young man shook his head and replied, "I am sorry, but I cannot seem to feel that I understand savingly."

Then that great servant of God asked him to take his Bible and turn to Isaiah 53:6. The young man said, "But I do not have a Bible," and with that the train was coming into the station. Dr. MacKay said, "Well, here, take my Bible and turn to Isaiah 53:6. You read that, and when you read that first 'all,' you bend down low and go in right there. And then when you get to the last 'all,' you stand up straight and come out."

Dr. MacKay pushed the Bible into his hand and was gone. The young man was puzzled at the strangeness of the turn his inquiry had taken and went over to the streetlight and hunted the passage. Reading it, "All we like sheep have gone astray," he said, "Well, that fits me; I am a sinner and I have certainly gone astray. I shall certainly have to bend down low in acknowledging that." Then he wondered what were Dr. MacKay's next instructions, and they came to him. "He said I must stand up straight when I get to the last 'all.'" So he continued to read, "...and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." He repeated the passage in its entirety:

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Then in amazement he said, "I see it now. 'All we like sheep have gone astray.' I am a sinner and I do bend down low. But 'the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all,' and now I can stand up straight and come out. My sins are forgiven."

The next night Dr. MacKay got to the service a little early and sat on the platform during the song service, watching the aisles for the young man who had his Bible. Finally, the young man entered and the minute he did Dr. MacKay knew something had happened. He went down to meet him and said, "Young man, did you do what I said? Did you read Isaiah 53:6?" And the young man said he had. Then he asked what he had done when he read the first "all," and the

young man said that he had bent low. So the doctor asked what he had done when he came to the last "all," and he said, "I stood up straight."

Then Dr. MacKay asked, "What happened?" The young man said, "Well, I know now that Jesus is my Savior."

We begin at the Sheep Gate; we end at the Sheep Gate.