

# The Message of the Gates

By Paris Reidhead\*

## Nehemiah, Chapter 3

Jerusalem was in ruins which greatly concerned Nehemiah. The walls were still broken and the gates burned. He had returned to Jerusalem in 444 BC as a civil governor with authority from the King of Persia to rebuild the walls of the city, to make Jerusalem once again a fortified city. It had been a difficult job because of many years of bitter opposition from hostile neighbors.

Jerusalem speaks to us of the habitation of God, the place of His dwelling, the place where His glory was, His city, the city in which He chose to have the Temple erected. This temple of stone that Solomon assembled was a picture, I believe, of that perfected, glorious Church that one day is going to come down out of Heaven. Even today this Church is being assembled, redeemed by His blood, and ransomed by His grace, born of His Spirit.

We read in Revelation (Revelation 21:1-3) that John saw the New Jerusalem coming down out of Heaven, the Lamb's wife, adorned for her husband. So we know that God is now assembling a great company of believers, joined one to another, a habitation of God through the Spirit who will be to the eternal praise of the glory of His grace.

But God is also concerned about His testimony here. In ruins Jerusalem would speak to us of the testimony of modern Christendom. To me there is a parallel between world-wide Christendom and Jerusalem of Nehemiah's day. The walls are broken down, the gates burned, and a strange people have come in and mixed with the rightful inhabitants. They have no part in the covenant. There is nothing left.

Nehemiah is jealous for the glory of God. We read in his prayer in Chapter 2 that God's glory is his primary concern. He wanted nothing for himself. He was comfortably situated in the king's palace, a position of honor and great influence. The measure of his influence is the measure of his authorization to rebuild Jerusalem. This indicated his importance in the royal court. He would gain nothing for himself. There was no ulterior motive in his agonizing, fasting, praying, leaving the king's palace to go back to Jerusalem to be misunderstood and opposed, to give himself to labor, unappreciated, in service that was rejected and hindered. Nehemiah's great desire was for God to get something.

Chapter 3 of Nehemiah is a graphic account of the rebuilding of the city walls and repairing the many gates. To me there is a spiritual significance in the order in which the gates of Jerusalem were repaired. I see the steps of development in the erection as a testimony for the glory of God. And this is the manner in which we shall view it this morning. In Nehemiah 3:1 the priests are rebuilding the sheep gate.

I believe that we can account for the deteriorated testimony of Christendom because the priests (clergy) have let the sheep gate burn and crumble. I clearly believe that God in His grace has given ministers to His body. We find in Ephesians 4:11-16 that He gave some apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers "for the perfecting of the saints." Across the centuries since Paul wrote there has been considerable deterioration. In the fourth century the visible church entered that period which we call "the Dark Ages." Four hundred years ago God used Martin Luther as the human instrument for reformation. Note that the preachers, the teachers, the missionaries and the evangelists were given some responsibility at the sheep gate.

I would submit further that our Lord Jesus established in His words in John 10:1-11 the fact that He is the good Shepherd Who has given His life for the sheep. There is a great responsibility on His part first and then on the part of those who serve Him to see to it that none go through the sheep gate but those that the Father has given Him. Let us turn to John 6:44-47. This portion concerns the sheep gate.

"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me. Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life."

Just the day before the vast company of followers were going to make Him a king. They had eaten of the bread that He has miraculously multiplied and had gone away excited in the belief that here was the long-awaited Messiah. He is the one whom we should have made king. But there were the skeptics in the crowd, that He was from Galilee, a laboring man and a carpenter. I can hear the skeptics say, "Now let's not get excited. It is true He multiplied the bread and the words He spoke were wonderful words, but before we go very much further, we ought to make certain, doubly certain that He is the Messiah. Mistakes have been made in the past. Let's be cautious."

So the next day the Jews sought Him out and demanded proof that he was the One whom they thought He was. "Now we aren't really doubting." (Though they were) "Just perform some miracle. You know, Moses got the people to support him because he made bread come down from heaven. Why don't You do that? Why don't You tell us what You are going to do, and then it will be done the way You have indicated, and we will know beyond any question of a doubt that you are the Messiah."

Now may I just pause to say this, that if your faith stands on a miracle, on some outward demonstration, if your profession today stands upon something which you have seen with your eyes, the only way you are going to have assurance is to have the constant repetition of the things that you saw.

Jesus said, "Oh, you misunderstand completely. I am the Bread of Life, I am the Bread that came down from heaven."

And they replied that they were rejecting Him. His reply was that they were not rejecting Him. To the contrary, He was rejecting them. Read carefully John 6:53-58. What was the response of the Jews?

"We're through with You. If you think we are going to be cannibals and eat your flesh, and drink your blood in some horrible heathen service, you are just mistaken." So they left Him. They all left Him. There was no revelation of the Father to them. The Father had not drawn them. The Jews had been drawn by His miracles, His words. They had been drawn by the fact that He offered them the national security and self-interest that they had been seeking. There was nothing of God's work in their hearts. And the consequence of this; our Lord let them go. He did not do one thing. "All that the Father has given Me shall come to Me, and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37)

Please turn to John 10:1-16. Our Lord is speaking concerning the sheep gate.

(John 10:14) "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again."

Now turn to John 10:25. "Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life."

Jesus said that His sheep heard His voice, that He knew them and that they followed Him. Thus He has established the bars and the lintel of the sheep gate. Who are those that are His? Who are the ones the Father has given to the Son? The ones that hear His voice. What is His voice? "Except you repent, you will perish." Throw down the arms of your rebellion, cease from your warfare, abandon your treason, accept the consequences of your guilt, stand self-condemned in the presence of God, and submit to the justice of His wrath against you. Hear His voice.

Please turn to Matthew 7:21-23. Jesus said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Now turn to John 10:14-16. "I am the good shepherd, and I know my sheep, and I am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."

Let's go on to John 10:25. "Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you."

What is this word KNOW? Jesus did not say that they did not know Him. I never ask anyone if he knows the Lord, because I am confident that this word is easily misunderstood. There are multitudes of people who know the Lord whom the Lord does not know. The word KNOW does not mean "have information concerning a matter". Rather the word KNOW means "to impart by experiential awareness." Note John 17:3, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou has sent." Jesus' sheep know His voice and He knows them. He has imparted His nature, His life to them. He has performed a miracle upon them, making that which was dead, alive. Christ knows His sheep! They are His. The evidence that He has imparted life is "Do they follow Him?" How long do they follow? One week? Two months? Six months?

I have heard people say, "Well, you know so-and-so. For about six months he went on as an earnest Christian. Now I know he is saved. I know he is a Christian."

Friend, you don't know. You may think, but you don't know. Christ said, "I know them." He is the only one who knows those to whom He has given His life. But we do know this, His sheep follow Him. They hear His voice and they follow.

How long? They follow Him into the waters of baptism, and then go their own way? Oh, no. They follow Him.

In reference to our text, Nehemiah 3:1, the sheep gate has to be rebuilt to restore the glory of Jerusalem, so there can be a separation between those who have a name to live and are dead and those who are alive indeed. Jesus, the good shepherd, is standing at the gate to keep them. The sheep gate is essential for the testimony of His glory. The sheep gate has been burned. Sanballat and Tobiah, and Geshem, the Arabian, have infiltrated the city. They have crawled over the crumbled wall and bypassed the sheep gate. They have settled down in Jerusalem, attended the temple worship. They are imposters. They had never come through the sheep gate. This cannot be. Nehemiah was greatly concerned.

Let's return to our text, Nehemiah 3:3. The next assignment was the fish gate. Do you remember what the Lord Jesus Christ said to those beside the Galilean shore? (Matthew 4:19-20) "And He saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed Him."

Just this past week I was privileged to minister in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. A dear brother came to me, "You know, when you were here last time you gave us three evidences of regeneration.

They were a hatred of sin, a hunger for God, and a heart of compassion for the lost." He had a remarkable memory.

I have rarely seen such a concern for the lost in the community. I have returned to New York City rejuvenated and refreshed. I stayed in the home of a young man who had been won to Christ through the testimony and consistent life of an officer in the navy during World War II.

George operated a small sandwich shop specializing in submarines--pungent, spicy concoctions guaranteed to cause heartburn--but delicious and popular. During the time I spent at the Alliance Church in Carlisle, we established a pattern. Several hours during the day while he was at work I sat at a table in George's deli, munching on a sandwich and savoring a kosher dill pickle and sipping a cup of coffee, while conversing with one of George's customers "snagged" off the street by George or one of his staff. All in his deli were "fishermen." If people were hungry, they were fed, physically, without cost, if necessary. George knew his clientele and when need was real. George and his restaurant staff gave out tracts and brought families to the evening service at the church ... and to the Lord.

Oh, it is marvelous to realize that there are people who have a great, consuming, continuing burden to fish for Jesus Christ.

If you have been born of God, you have a desire to share what you have with those who know Him not. I believe one of the greatest incentives for you to seek the fullness of Christ is to discover how difficult it is to fish, in your own strength. Poor Peter who went fishing and toiled in vain all night, was quite prepared to hear the Lord say, "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find." (John 21:3-14)

Let me ask you. Are you His sheep? Has God wrought this miracle in your life? Have you partaken of His life? Then you must have a concern for the lost. If you don't, perhaps you have crawled in over the rubble and have not gone through the sheep gate. Have you followed Him to become a fisher of men? This is as natural as breathing. You can no more silence your voice in witness for Christ than you can cease breathing and live.

It does not mean that you are necessarily going to be compelled to speak to everyone you meet or give tracts to everyone you see. But it does mean that your heart is going to be concerned and burdened. And you are going to go out of the way and open your home, and take time with those who you know are beginning to nibble on the bait of His truth, if you are burdened for the lost. Have you come in by the fish gate?

Referring to Nehemiah 3:12, the next gate we approach is the old gate. Please turn to Romans 7:13-23 to understand the importance of the old gate. Note that both men and women were involved in its repair and rebuilding the adjacent wall.

Paul, in this portion of Romans, is describing a person who had a will to do good, but there was something in him that did not respond.

"Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

Our pilgrim has come in through the sheep gate. No question. And he has gone by the fish gate. But it is not long until he comes to the old gate. And this has been the experience of every one in Christian pilgrimage. It is not long until you discover that there is another law beside the just and holy moral law. It is the law of sin and death.

What is this law? It is the old man; the old nature. And what is the old man and the old nature? It is what I was when I stood outside the cross and pled for mercy. It is I. You cannot assign it to something apart from yourself. It is all that you were when you asked God to forgive you and to pardon you. There will never be a vibrant testimony until we have dealt with the old gate. And this old gate is you. And there is going to have to come a time when you recognize that in you there is a law that is warring against the law of your mind and your will. It is the law of sin and death. You cannot make peace with it. You cannot bridge over it. What are going to do about it?

In our Christian walk we cannot bypass the old gate. You say, "This is the way Paul lived."

No. Not so. Not so. Paul recognized this law, but he did not accept it. For we find that Romans 7 is an illustration of Romans 6. In Romans 6 Paul has established the principle that he has illustrated in Romans 7. Recognition and acceptance are not the same.

Let's return to the text in Nehemiah 3:13. Nehemiah authorizes the rebuilding of the valley gate in a meticulous fashion--painstaking, exact. In the Old Testament there are many accounts of valley experiences. I will list a few references for you to look up at a later time: Genesis 14:3, Joshua 7:24, I Samuel 17:2, Joel 3:12-13, I Kings 21:1-23, and Psalm 23:4.

See the Apostle Paul as he cries out from, the valley, (Romans 7:24) "Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" He is in the valley of defeat, the valley of failure. Oh, there are a lot of people who recognize the old man, but they have made peace with him. They have accepted him. The easiest way to deal with temptation is to yield to it. That's not an acceptable answer! And we hear the Apostle Paul cry out in Romans 7:24: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

He will not consent to accept his nature. He will not consent to be tyrannized by his disposition. He refused to be in bondage to his habits. He will not make peace with his old attitude. Paul is determined to be free. He will have victory. He is prepared to pay any price.

Have you come to that degree of desperation? You and I were woven on the same loom of Adam's making. I know what is in you. You know what is in me. You know the kind of a person you are. I know the kind of a person I am. I know this, that when I came and stood outside the door of grace, there was not one thing in this world to commend me to His love.

It was when I sought to serve Him in Africa that I went to the valley gate. For there was the aggravation of climate, and isolation and homesickness, and illness and overwhelming need, and sinister satanic pressure. I discovered the old gate with all of its death, and was plunged into the valley. Has this been your experience? Are you prepared now to pay any price for victory?

The next gate rebuilt was the dung gate. This gate was used by the "sanitation department." This was where the refuse was removed from the city. All defilement was carried away.

And where do you find the analogy to this? Read Romans 6:6, "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." Outside the city wall there are three crosses set upon a hill, and there on the middle cross is the off-scouring of all things. There are you, in the person of your substitute, in the person of your representative, the Lord Jesus Christ, "made to be sin for us", dying our death.

Have you come to the valley gate? Can you say as did Paul that in you there is nothing good. Turn to Philippians 3:7-11. Paul has just established his credentials, but goes on to say, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yes doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His suffering, being made conformable unto His death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."

Have you come to that place of crucifixion where you count the best you have, the best you are, the best you can do, the best you can bring is nothing but refuse? Or have you been trying to defend and protect and vindicate and justify? There can be no testimony from my life and from yours, and from a church until we have been willing to take ourselves with Christ outside the gate and there to view ourselves as God views us, nothing but refuse. We must experience that place of union with Christ in His death. I urge you to read prayerfully the second chapter of Ephesians.

But we do not stop at the refuse gate. This is not the whole message. For what do we find next? There was another gate, the gate of the fountain of waters. What a glorious truth is Galatians 2:20. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

You will find the fountains of water bursting and springing up in your heart, as you enter into the fullness of the Holy Spirit. You were born of the Spirit, but you were not born full of the Spirit. You were born of Him indeed, but there remained the fish gate, and the old gate, and the valley gate, and the gate of refuse, and finally, Hallelujah, the gate of the fountain of waters!

Read Romans 12:1-2. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

You understand, of course, that Romans 12:1-2 occur after Romans, 3, 4, and 5, where we have Christ crucified for us. Then in Romans 6 and 7 where we find Christ is crucified as us. And then to Romans 8 and twelve where Christ is living in us. Listen to it.

The law is just and holy and good, but it slew me and brought me to the end of myself and prepared me for forgiveness. Then I discovered another law, the law of sin and death. So there is the moral law of God, the moral law of sin and death. Read Romans 8: 3-4, please. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

My friend, unless you have been filled with the Spirit, you are not filled with the Spirit. There has to be a time of beginning. The time of beginning is preceded by a time of death, of union with Christ in death, a time of presenting your body a living sacrifice. You were not born full of the Spirit. You were born of the Spirit. Therefore, we come to the fountain gate. I would like for you to read other Old Testament portions relevant to this subject, namely, Zechariah 13:1; Isaiah 41:18; Joel 3:18.

Is this the testimony in your life? Everything the Bible has to say about the church presupposes the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Every function, every office, all worship, all participation in the church presupposes the fountain of waters.

But there is more! We move on to the water gate. We are to be filled with the Spirit and then walk in the Spirit. Please turn to John 7:37-38.

"In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water." We cannot look back with happiness to a crisis. We have entered into a relationship of fellowship with Him. His life now flows through us. So we see that the victorious testimony of Jerusalem is dependent upon the rebuilding of the water gate.

Has it been true in your life? Have you come in through the sheep gate? Do you know you are born of God? Have you heard His voice? Have you followed Him? Are you seeking every day to obey Him? Is He your shepherd? Or have you been willing to settle down with Sanballat and Tobiah, and make peace with the people, and peace with the land, and peace with the gates burned and rubble of the city, and the absence of the glory of Christ?

Do you want to see your life count? Are you a fisher of men, like my friend George and his submarine shop? Have you come to the old gate, the valley gate, the refuse gate? Have you come to the gate of the fountain of waters? Are you there? Has the gate been rebuilt? The gate of waters? It is not just the fountain that springs, but the constant flow. Has this been true in your life? Are you walking in the Spirit so that out of your innermost being living water is flowing?

This is what His church is to be. This is the testimony that He purchased with His blood. And this was why Nehemiah was concerned. He could not make peace until Jerusalem was restored. Jerusalem is the habitation of the holy God, His city, the glorious church of Revelation 21:1-3. Nehemiah could not rest, day or night, until Jehovah had the testimony. If you are His, you cannot rest day or night until you have the testimony that God wants you to have. For the nations round about make mockery of God when the walls are down and the gates are charred.

Shall we bow our hearts in prayer.

Grant, Heavenly Father, that each of us shall find himself/herself. There may be some who have a profession of faith, but they have never met the Lord. There has never been a revelation of Christ. They have never been impartation of divine nature. They are not following Him. They have never come in through the sheep gate.

So, Lord, apply the message of the gates to our hearts this morning. Let the truth burn in us. Help us to find ourselves, and like Nehemiah of old, give us a burning passion to see the testimony come again and God's name glorified in every Jerusalem that He has owned. We would view our church in New York City as His Jerusalem here, His place of dwelling, His place of testimony of fellowship. Oh, God, build again the gates. Grant that each of us who love Thee may be as Nehemiah was to his day and not rest until the gates are rebuilt. May there be fasting and prayer and witness and labor, and all things needful to get for Thee in this community the testimony that the Lord Jesus deserves. Apply the Word. May it bring comfort, guidance, help, life to each one and to each need. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Let us stand for the benediction. "Now may the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make us perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, to Whom be the glory now and forever. Amen.

\* Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Morning, November 19, 1961.