

# **THE CLOSED AND THE OPEN GATE**

## **A SERMON**

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**“Likewise the people of the land shall worship at the door of this gate  
before the Lord in the  
sabbaths and in the new moons.” Ezekiel 46:3**

WE have here evidently from the 40th chapter down to the end of this book a representation of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. Though much of what is said is said in Levitical figures, yet at the same time they have a Christian meaning. “Expression,” as one says, “is the dress of thought;” and the Lord has dressed the meaning of the truths of the gospel with a great variety of tangible imagery, hereby to instruct us into the mysteries of eternity. And if there were nothing else to prove that this vision represents the kingdom of Christ, the summing up of the whole at the last, I think, would demonstrate it, when it is called a city; “And the name of the city from that day shall be Jehovah-shammah, the Lord is there.” Now just mark, this cannot be said of any other dispensation that we know of. It could not be said of the Edenic dispensation; sin sinned that away. It could not be said of the antediluvian dispensation that the Lord should continue there, for sin ended that. It could not be said of the postdiluvian or patriarchal dispensation that from that day the Lord should be there, for that ended; and it could not be said of the Levitical dispensation that the name from that day should be “The Lord is there,” for that sin also ended. But the Christian dispensation ends sin, instead of sin ending that; therefore as we have in this Christian dispensation the end of sin, we have the eternal abiding of a holy God; we have the eternal dwelling of the blest Jehovah in those near and dear and covenant relations in which he reveals himself to his people. See how nicely this accords with the eternity of Christ's kingdom, of his work, of the covenant, and with the declaration, “I will never leave you, nor forsake you.” Nor ought we perhaps to pass by the very beautiful and emphatic way in which the prophet describes to us how he became acquainted with the eternal things intended in this vision. He was brought into these things in their manifestation to him that he might declare them to others, just as any saved man is brought into God's truth. And if you read the beginning of the 40th chapter, and are at all acquainted with its meaning, you will see in it your own personal experience, how the Lord began to bring you spiritually to where the prophet was brought. He says, “The hand of the Lord was upon me” the hand of the Lord there means the power of the Lord, “and brought me thither.” Now go to the 1st chapter of the Romans: “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto

salvation to everyone that believe; to the Jew first” preached to them first to show, as John Bunyan says, the gospel could save the worst of sinners, “and also to the Greek” to take out of the Gentiles a people for his name. “For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” Now every saved soul believes by the power of God; that is, you are irresistibly convinced of your need of the mercy declared in the gospel, and you are irresistibly convinced of the great truth that Christ is able to save unto the uttermost; for each sinner awakened to a knowledge of his condition thinks his own case the worst, and therefore needs that scripture. I have never yet met with a Christian that wished that scripture out of the Bible, namely, that “he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him.” And unto all that are thus brought savingly into an acquaintance with the gospel the Lord says, “My grace is sufficient for you.” Thus, then, it is the power of God, not the power of man, because man cannot open the eyes, man cannot change the will, man cannot renew the soul, nor implant in the heart an incorruptible seed. “The hand of the Lord was upon me, and brought me thither.” And then mark the great emphasis laid upon that description. What is the next step? Why, just what you have realized in your own soul’s experience; and those of you that are strangers to it, it is just because your religion is not real; but those whose religion is real, who have this saving faith, they will have this irresistible conviction. Then notice, “In the visions of God brought he me.” Now visions mean revelations. So those who are brought to believe by the power of God, what follows? “The visions of God,” that is, the revelations of God. His everlasting love will be revealed to you; you will see it, and be attracted by it; his gracious choice of your soul to salvation will be a revelation, a vision that you will see, and the perfection of the Savior will be a revelation that you will see, and the footsteps of vital experience, which those who have gone before have trodden, as marked in the Old and New Testaments, you will see, and the glory yet to be revealed you will get at least a distant, as it were, glance of. Now, then, “In the visions of God brought he me into the land of Israel.” Is it not so? Has it not brought us into the land of the gospel, flowing with milk and honey? Has it not brought us into the land of the living, the holy land, the pleasant land, the peaceful land? And now mark, “And set me upon a very high mountain.” Why, friends, what is that high mountain but the Mount Zion? and what is that Mount Zion but that which the Lord has founded? and what is that that the Lord has founded but an everlasting kingdom? and what is that kingdom but a very high mountain, exalted above death, and above sin, and above hell, and above all the powers that may stand opposed? And this high mountain will mean not only the exaltation we now have, being raised up together by Christ Jesus, but will stand as a kind of signal of that eternal glorification yet to be realized in its perfection. “By which was as the frame,” that was all he saw, and that is all that we can any of us see, the frame, the outline; the filling up must be when we get to glory, but the filling up will entirely accord with the outline. “By which was as the frame of a city.” And that is all I know. Many years I have known the Lord, yet I know only just the outlines of the gospel, that is all; I must get home to have the filling up. We have got the outlines of it in our soul’s experience, but there is a great deal to be filled up yet, and we can form but a distant idea of what the charm, the beauty, the glory will be when the filling up shall come. And mark the position of the city: “on the south.” Now the old Jerusalem stood, where it still stands of course, on the north side of Mount Zion, and the north side of that city was always the weak point. All foreign nations that came against Jerusalem always fixed their camps on the northern side of the city, because that was the weak point. There the Assyrians came, because they saw that that was the weak part; but then they forgot the Lord; the Lord sent a blast upon them, and destroyed them. Now Ezekiel sees a transfer of the city from the north to the south; ah, from a broken covenant to a covenant that can never be broken. So that while the old city had its weak part, the new Jerusalem has no weak part;

it has not one weak foundation, and there is no weak part in any of its walls, for the Lord shall appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks. The enemy may go around about, and complain if they are not satisfied, and of course they are not satisfied to see this city so well walled, so strongly built, that there is no weak part; there is no penalty, no sin, gone forever; the enemy is not satisfied to hear the people sing, "This God is our God for ever and forever, and will be our guide even unto death." Here, then, is the position of the city in the south, in contrast to the north; the south standing there as the symbol. of everything that is paradisiacal, fragrant, and pleasant; as Watts nicely sings:

"There everlasting spring abides,  
And never-withering flowers.

Now what is the next testimony? "And he," the Lord, "brought me thither;" that is it, the Lord himself at last. That is just the Christian's experience. First the power of God, then the visions of God, and then comes God himself: "himself my heaven, himself my joy;" "all my springs are in you." See the Christian, first removed by the power of God; secondly, attracted by the various revelations of God, and then comes God himself. Ah, could the dear Redeemer have redeemed us to anything so great, so good, so glorious, as that described by the saints in heaven? "You have redeemed us to God;" brought us to God. God is to be our all and in all. And then he says the messenger of the covenant there appeared unto him, a Divine Person, as I take it, in human form, Jesus Christ himself. And now mark the emphasis, just to show that my text is not a Bible curiosity, for the Bible has no curiosities; not in the idle sense of that word; that my text is not a fanciful figure, but that that is worthy of all the powers of the immortal soul. I know very well that some say we ought not to take such texts as this. Dr. Young says of such divines,

"The dark passages they shun,  
And hold their midnight taper to the sun?"

Now, then, this divine messenger of the covenant said to Ezekiel, "Son of man, behold with your eyes;" look earnestly, look prayerfully, and look believingly, and look lovingly, and look decisively, and look exclusively, at what I am about to say. "And hear with your ears;" here is that which infinitely concerns you, and that will concern men to all eternity. "And set your heart" your eyes to see, your ears to hear, "and set your heart upon all that I shall show you; for to the intent that I might show them unto you are you brought hither." Just so the Christian. Well, then, I am justified in taking my text; "for to the intent that I might show them unto you are you brought hither; declare all that you see to the house of Israel." Thus, you have at the end of this book an assurance of the Lord's eternal dwelling with his people; you have at the beginning of this book a beautiful description of Christian experience.

Now after this rather long introduction, which leaves room for a very short sermon, I now come at once to notice our text; and though I have taken the whole verse as my text, I suppose the gate here spoken of will occupy all, or very nearly all, the time that we have. We have in our text, then, first, *the meeting-place*, "Likewise the people of the land shall worship at the door of this gate." Secondly, we have, shall I call it, *the employment*, they "shall worship." Thirdly, *the times of that worship*, "in the sabbaths and in the new moons."

First, then, we have the meeting-place, the gate. Now we must view the temple here as a literal temple, at the same time remembering it is a mystical temple, God himself in reality the temple, and the Lamb the temple therein. Nevertheless, we must view the literal in order to get at the spiritual. You must view this temple, then, as facing the east; and there is a court, in immediate proximity, connected with entrance into the temple, and in the face of the temple there is a gate, the east gate; then you go on further towards the east, and there is another court, and another gate, the east gate; so that there were two east gates, the outer and the inner east gate. I am particular here, because you will not understand what I am going to say unless you can form a clear idea in your minds of the locality of these two gates, the inward, leading immediately into the temple, and the outward, that stood at the entrance of the first court. Now this may appear at first sight a very simple matter; but there is an infinity, I may say an eternity, of importance in the matter of these two gates. Now the first, the outer gate, was shut; and shut forever, never to be opened again; and the reason assigned is because the Lord had entered in by that gate; and yet the prince should enter in by that gate, and the prince should eat bread in that gate. Now all this appears at first sight perhaps a little ambiguous; but the Christian, or many of you, perhaps, will at once perceive the meaning. What was that gate by which Jesus Christ entered into the temple not made with hands, by which he entered into that house that is eternal in the heavens? what was that gate by which he entered into the presence of the Lord? It was the gate of the law. He was the only person ever since the foundation of the world, he was the first, and he will be the last, that ever entered into the presence of God by his own personal worth; for he was made of a woman, made under the law, in conformity, yes, to the magnifying of that law. He entered into the presence of God, and putting away sin by his wondrous atonement, he entered by his own personal worth and by his own personal work into the presence of God. He is the only person that ever did do so; he is the only person that ever will do so. Abel entered into the presence of God by the excellency of another; all the Old Testament saints (for "to him gave all the prophets witness," and of course the saints who were their hearers) entered into the presence of God by the worth, and work, and perfection of another. The apostles entered into the presence of God, and are in the presence of God now, by the worth and worthiness of another. And you and I, if we ever enter into the presence of God, it must be by the worth and worthiness of another; it must be by a righteousness imputed to us, it must be by a ransom found for us, it must be by a surety that has stood for us, and that still stands for us. Now, then, this gate was closed; so, the gate of the law is closed for ever.

Thousands, and ten times ten thousand, have tried to enter into the presence of God, and to gain the favor of God and acceptance with God by the law; but that gate is closed forever. But it was closed before this in another sense. I will presently notice the different respects in which the law is closed as a way of access to God. It is closed as a way of access to God in its purity and in its stability, for wherever sin is found, there the law in the spirit of it condemns. Hence there is the flaming sword; Adam cannot return to Eden by his own works; he has to meet the flaming sword that would cut him down. But Adam can enter another and a better Eden by the work of another. The Israelites cannot come up into the presence of God, or converse with him, at Mount Sinai; the door is shut. But a tabernacle is erected, and a mercy-seat is established, and then, by the high priest and sacrifices appointed, the Israelite can come into the presence, and have the approbation and blessing of the Most High. So that the law in this sense is closed against men, that it condemns everything that they may do. They that are in the flesh cannot please God; and the apostle said, "That no man is justified by the law in the sight of God it is evident." And how evident is it? Just mark what the apostle mentions as an evidence that no man is justified by the works of the law. I

have often been struck with the words. When you read the clause I have just quoted, "That no man is justified by the law in the sight of God it is evident," you would stop, as it were; and supposing you knew not the words that followed, you would perhaps say to yourself, Now I wonder what the apostle brings as evidence? He was a man, no doubt, well taught in the law of evidence; I like to see our judges and counsellors well versed in the doctrine of evidence, to know what is evidence and what is not. Now the apostle brings that to which every Christian must subscribe. "It is written, the just shall live by faith." But if this condemnatory sense, if this sense the language in which is, "Cast out the bondwoman and her son," cast them out from all hope in God, cast them out of this life, cast them into hell, which is the language of the law ultimately, if this were the only sense in which that gate was closed, then, friends, there would be no advantage, in setting it forth. But there is another and an infinitely better sense in which the gate is closed, and that is this, that Jesus Christ entered heaven by the works of the law. And now, as in ancient times, judicial affairs were conducted at, and decided upon, and settled at gates, we must take this view of it, Jesus Christ has come to this gate, he has taken up our cause, he has paid our debts, he has redeemed our souls, he has brought in eternal redemption, he has made himself and all for whom he died infinitely pleasing to God; and now the court is at an end, the court is closed, there is no judge there, no counsellor there, no scribe there, no lawyer there. I don't say there are no ministers there, just to give people a little information. I like to be a sort of porter at that gate, and just speak to people and give them a plain answer when they ask me, tell them all I know, tell them that that gate is closed, and tell them the way in which they can get in, which, if time permit, I shall have to do with you presently. Now here is a poor sinner coming towards God; he comes to this gate. Ah, here it is the sentence will be pronounced, and I shall be bound in everlasting chains. Are you afraid of that? Yes, I am. There stands the porter; he says, You see the gate is closed. Why, how is that? A Surety has paid all your debts, taken away all your crimes, your sins are all forgiven. They are? Yes; no one can lay anything to your charge. There is no court to come to; there is no court open to try you. Satan may desire to accuse you, but there is nowhere for him to do so. Where shall I go to? he will say. Nowhere; the gate is shut, everything is settled, all is done. And then the convinced sinner will go around to the north gate, or else to the south, and get access to the inner eastern gate; and when he gets access to the inner eastern gate, then he will realize the blessing which he heard of at the outer, when he heard that the court was closed; he will hear that another court is open, and open forever, and the court that is open is the court of mercy, the sacrificial court. And every poor sinner that is brought to tremble at his state, and see how Christ is the end of sin and the curse, so that the court is closed, how will such a one rejoice when he comes into the inner court! He there finds that the gate of the law is closed, because its end is answered. The end of the law is perfect love; Christ has brought that, and settled that. The end of the law is perfect righteousness; Christ has brought that. The end of the law is the maintenance of the honor of justice; Christ has given himself a sacrifice, and done that.

Well, but it says the prince shall enter by the porch of this gate. I cannot understand that at all, says one; that is very difficult indeed. Well, it may be like a foreign language, difficult at first, but easy enough afterwards, when you come to study it and understand it. Can you not, friends, see the meaning of this? We have forfeited our right even to the bread that perishes. And can you not understand that we are going, that is, if we are not Christians, to that place where there is neither bread nor water? lifting up his eyes in hell for a drop of water. We have all forfeited our right; we have no right, by any worth of our own, to the bread we eat, the raiment we wear, the shelter we enjoy, and the many mercies that uphold us. But Jesus Christ never forfeited his right, therefore he

can eat bread on the ground of his own personal right to it; he can eat bread on law grounds, on the ground of his own personal holiness, righteousness, and perfection. And as he still retains his right, he has made his blood and his righteousness the right of his people to the bread of everlasting life. Thus, then, everything is settled; the court is closed forever. And if you make any hesitation in receiving the testimony that the “Lord God” here spoken of is the Lord Jesus Christ, let me say that he is Jehovah, Jehovah our righteousness. And who is our righteousness? Christ. Jehovah our righteousness. And who is righteousness? Christ. “Feed the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood.” And who redeemed the church of God but Christ? Christ is Jehovah, Christ is God, the Lord God. Here is the deity of Christ brought in. And then here is the prince, Christ, the Prince of Peace; showing, I think, beautifully his complexity. And if the prince entered this eastern gate, then he went farther east than the people did. So, Jesus Christ did; and he went farther north, and farther west, and farther south, than any of the people did. Now we shall take these four cardinal points in respects different from those in which we took them last Lord’s day morning. Did I say that the Son of God went farther to the east than any that preceded him, or that succeeded him? If we take the east to mean light, the sunrising, who ever went so far into the light of God as Christ did? He went so far into the light of God, and embodied so much of the light of God in himself, that he said, “I am the Light;” no darkness in him. And the people of God are called “the kings of the east,” kings of the sunrising, because they are brought into the light. Also, the Savior went farther north than any of us have done. Ah, I would not irreverently or improperly use our own proverb, “That man is pretty shrewd; he comes from the north.” Now, then, was the Savior ever at a loss? Quiet, humble, pacific, universally kind, unpretending, not lifting up his voice in the streets, nor will he quench the smoking flax, nor break the bruised reed; yet under all that there was a wonderful quickness of mind, quickness of thought; “The Spirit of the Lord shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord.” All the questions that the most shrewd, that had been a long way north, I suppose, put to him, he had his answer for them; and his answer was always like Aaron’s rod, swallowed up their questions; and they were astonished, when he was only twelve years old, at his understanding and answers. But there is another sense, take the north to mean suffering, he went farther in suffering than any man. I do not wish to enter upon a learned controversy with Greek scholars, but I never can look down my Greek lexicon, and Greek concordance especially, without thinking of that scripture where it is said, “He tasted death for every man,” the Greek word *uper*<sup>1</sup>, there translated “for,” from which we get our word “hyper,” is the same word which signifies “above” and “beyond.” And I, for my own use, of course you can read it your way, I read it my way, I read it my way for my own use, that “he tasted death above every man;” that “he tasted death *beyond* every man;” that no man ever tasted death as Christ did. He embodied or included in the bitter cup both the first and the second death. Thus, he tasted death beyond and above every man. And as he went farther north in suffering, so he went farther west in dying; take the west as the symbol of death. Why, in his death he went down to the lowest regions of the damned, and conquered the whole. In his death he did not leave a single devil unconquered; he did not leave one particle of Satan’s policy that was not overturned. So, in his

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<sup>1</sup> As you can see in the following reference, Wells is correct in his rendering. 5228. ὑπέρ *hupēr*, hoop-er’; a primary prep.; “over”, i.e. (with the gen.) of place, above, beyond, across, or causal, for the sake of, instead, regarding; with the acc. superior to, more than:— (+ exceeding, abundantly) above, in (on) behalf of, beyond, by, + very chiefest, concerning, exceeding (above, -ly), for, + very highly, more (than), of, over, on the part of, for sake of, in stead, than, to (-ward), very. [In composition, it retains many of the above applications.]

death he rose to heaven, he reached to heaven; in his death he reached down to the end of time, never to be forgotten. Then if the south be the symbol of exaltation, he has gone farther south than any other. He must always be at the height of exaltation, at the height of glory, always be the highest, must of necessity be so.

Now think not these remarks simple, or at all trifling; they may seem a little unusual in their form; but stop, I have a word to say upon them. I have taken advantage of the east gate and the outer gate to present in few words the wide range of the mission of Christ. Now mark, when an immortal soul is brought from death to life, it is done by the Holy Ghost, and the Holy Ghost does it by the whole range of the mission of the Savior. "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." Breathe in the luminosity of the Savior, the wisdom of the Savior, the sufferings of the Savior, the death of the Savior, the exaltation of the Savior. The Holy Spirit lives in the whole range of the Mediator's mission, and takes up that mission, and concentrates its powers upon that dead soul. And you are well aware how beautifully the result is described, that they stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army. And if you trace that 37th of Ezekiel out, you will see that those same people were eternally saved and eternally safe. The whole range. Does not this accord with the words, "They shall come from the east, the west, the north, and the south"? Oh, what a religion true religion is, when compared with the puerile doings of Puseyites, Papists, Pharisees, and formalists! Why, their religions are but toys, card houses; I would not trust myself in them on a fine day, much less on a stormy day. But the religion of the Son of God is like God himself, there is a wideness of range, a majesty, a command, a power, a reality, a blessedness, a glory in it that there is in none other. And so, by this wide range of the Savior's mission, as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people henceforth and forever. Job understood this wide range of the Savior's mission; he knew that his covenant God was in all the four quarters; he knew he was there, but he could not see him. "I go forward;" in the Oriental language forward means the east; the left hand means the north, the right hand means the south, backward means the west. Well, says Job, I go to all the quarters, but I cannot see him. He is there, Job. Yes, I know he is there. I look to the east, the sun rising, and I know he is there; I look to the north, because I know he is there in his sufferings, in what he has done ; I look to the west, because I know his death is there; and I look to the south, because I know his exaltation is there. He is there, but I cannot see him. Is it not just so with us, friends? Range the Bible over, range the great wonders of eternity over, yet we cannot see the Lord himself; cannot realize in the same any power, any consolation, any preciousness. He hides himself, and we cannot find him. Well, we must do as Job did. Job says, "He knows the way that I take." Well, don't you know yourself, Job? I hope I am right, but he knows; and when he has tried me, he has not tried me enough yet, or else he would leave off, I shall come forth as gold. He is in one mind, and I know that he once loved me, therefore I know that he loves me still. I once washed my steps with butter, and in his light could walk through darkness, and:

"If Jesus once upon me shine,  
Then Jesus is forever mine."

"He is in one mind, and who can turn him?" Thus, then, the Holy Spirit takes the wide range of the mission of the Savior to bring the soul from death to life. Christ's finished work is the strait gate. "Strait" there means that that is difficult; and plain as it is to you now, there was a time when this strait gate was quite invisible to you, and you met with all sorts of opposition within and

without. "And narrow is the way," which is Christ himself; and if you come to stand before the angel of the Lord, and expect to be acquitted by Jesus Christ, Satan will stand at your right hand to resist you; but the Lord will rebuke him.

Now those that came to this outer east gate, and saw it was shut, that was good tidings. Well, then they were going to the north gate, or else to the south gate; but that I must leave to another time. Just one word upon the inner gate. Well, says one, I am come to the inner gate, I am all right now. Well, how are you come? Oh, I have been very good; I have said a great many prayers, and behaved myself very well indeed. He looks up; Why, dear me, the gate is shut; what is the good of my coming here? It is shut, and this gate is shut too; I cannot get on at all. Just ask the porter. Porter, how is it this gate is shut? Oh, he says, it is shut the six working days. As long as you are a worker you can't enter there; it is contrary to the law of the house. "To him that works not, but believes on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith," without works, "is counted for righteousness." "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed." Again, the Lord has said, "I will leave in the midst of you an afflicted and poor people;" not "a poor and afflicted people," mind; but the affliction first, if you please, and then the poverty afterwards. Now there is a man, a working man, legally, as we all are by nature. Presently he is so afflicted he cannot work; he has not a halfpenny to help himself. Ah, he says, I can't work; my heart is fearful, my hands weak, my knees feeble. See how feverish my tongue is, and I am become deaf; I am afraid I am going to die. What will become of me I don't know. Well, two or three believers meet with this man, and take him up to the gate. We have brought a man here. Is he a working man? No; he is so afflicted he can't work, and so poor he hasn't a halfpenny to help himself. Just so God afflicts, God wounds, God brings us down. Saul of Tarsus shall leave off working, and be in believing; he shall leave off saying prayers, and begin to pray; he shall leave off his enmity against Christ, and be brought into reconciliation to him. Thus, when the working days of legality are ended, when you shall cease from your works, you shall enter into rest, find that the Lord is on your side, and then you will be prepared to join in that free-grace song, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."