

ZION'S GATES AND THE KING'S HIGHWAY

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"Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people." Isaiah 62:10

John, the beloved disciple, when he was in the Isle of Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ, was favoured with a glorious view in vision of "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband". One of the seven angels, which had the seven vials full of the last seven plagues, carried him away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and there showed him that glorious sight, the Bride, the Lamb's wife **Re 21:2,9**. The description which John has given of this glorious city is rather too long for our time and attention this morning, but I will just read one or two verses, which will give you a sufficient idea of its beauty and glory: "And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; and had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel" **Re 21:10-12**.

Now the question may probably arise in your mind, What was this city which John thus saw in vision? Did the Holy Ghost mean to declare thereby that at or after the consummation of all things, at or after the great judgment day, there would

descend from God out of heaven a literal city, such as John saw in vision? Or was it intended as a mere mystical representation? I think if we consider for a few moments the description of the city, as given by the pen of John, we shall see that a literal fulfilment of the prophetic vision was not intended.

Look, first, at the **size** of the city. "And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs; the length and the breadth and the height of it are equal." Twelve thousand furlongs are about 1,500 miles. Here, then, was a city 1,500 miles long, 1,500 miles broad, and, what is more strange still, 1,500 miles high; for its height was equal to its length and breadth. Could such a city exist upon the surface of the globe? Our highest mountains, such as the mighty Andes and lofty Himalayas, do not exceed five miles. But here is a city, a walled city, that reaches up to the heights of heaven, 1,500 miles! Look, again, at the **materials** of which the city was made. It was all of gold, and not common gold, gross and opaque, but clear and transparent, for it was "like unto clear glass". Now conceive the idea of a city, 1,500 miles long, 1,500 broad, and 1,500 in height, and all built of gold as clear as crystal. Could all the mines of the world furnish that precious material in sufficient abundance to construct a city of such magnitude?

So when we look at the **foundations** of the city, the same natural impossibilities meet us. They all were of precious stones, jasper, and sapphire, and emerald, and diamond, and so on. Whence could be found precious stones of a magnitude fit to be the foundations of a city whose walls were 1,500 miles high? for walls and foundations must be proportionate. And look at the **gates**. "The twelve gates were twelve pearls: every several gate was of one pearl." Where

could a pearl be found to construct a gate at least a mile high? for the gates must bear some proportion to the walls.

I mention these things not to cast the slightest doubt on the mighty power of God to work even miracles like this, but to show you, by a comparison of circumstances, that the Holy Spirit never designed to show unto John a literal city. But like other symbols in the Revelation and other prophetic parts of the Scripture, it was intended as an emblem to convey to his mind and depict to the Church a representation of heavenly and spiritual things. Thus, as the "beasts" seen by Daniel in vision were not actual, literal beasts, but mystical representations of the four empires: and as "the woman clothed in scarlet", whom John saw in Revelation, was not an actual woman, but an emblem of the false church, so "the holy city" which the beloved disciple beheld coming down from God was not meant to prefigure a literal city, but was intended as a spiritual symbol.

Having shown you, then, that the city which John saw was but a mystical representation, what do we gather from his description to be the spiritual meaning of the symbol thus presented to his view? We gather, I think, from it that it was a representation of the Church of God in her triumphant state. And this seems plain to me from an expression that I have before quoted, in which John first brings the subject before us: "I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared **as a bride adorned for her husband.**" What is the Church of God but "a bride", the bride of Jesus? And when is she "a bride adorned for her husband"? When she will be a full partaker of his heavenly glory. When the Lord shall appear in his glory and all his saints with him; when the dead shall be raised, and the living changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; when all the elect of God, clothed with their new and

glorified bodies, in union with their happy and perfectly sanctified souls, shall enter into the glory of their Lord, then will be spiritually fulfilled what John saw in vision; for this holy city, new Jerusalem, which came down from God out of heaven, with its pure gold like unto clear glass, with its pearls and precious stones, can but faintly symbolise the immortal glories of the Church in her triumphant state as conformed to the glorified image of her all-glorious Head.

But besides this glorious city, as seen by John in vision, and representing, as I have pointed out, the Church of Christ in her triumphant state, the word of truth sets before our eyes another city—a city of a very different character. "We have", says the prophet, "a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in" **Isa 26:1,2**. Of this city we also read, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King" **Ps 48:1,2**. Now, if we examine what is said of this city, we shall see it is of a different character from that which John saw descending from God out of heaven, for it varies from it in several striking particulars.

1. It is "**a strong city**", having walls and bulwarks, whereas John's city was a **glorious one**, and without bulwarks.

2. It differs from it, secondly, in that the gates of the celestial city are **never closed**, for we read, "And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day; for there shall be no night there." But the gates of Isaiah's strong city are kept **shut**; or to what purpose would serve the command, "**Open** ye the gates?"

3. It differs also in another point, that the gates of Isaiah's city do not lie, as in John's **foursquare**, three gates on each side, so as to admit, so to speak, all comers from all quarters, intimating thereby that the elect of God enter into their triumphant state fully and freely from north, south, east and west. Neither gates nor walls of the strong city resemble the gates and walls of the glorious city; for instead of there being one wall all round, there are "walls and bulwarks", that is, wall within wall and bulwark within bulwark, as in some of our mediaeval cities or fortified towns, all which walls and all which gates must be passed through successively before we can arrive at the dungeon keep, the inner fortress, the royal palace where the King sits and rules in all his grace and beauty, and where he manifests himself to his subjects whom he admits into his gracious presence.

4. There is also another distinction between the glorious city which John saw in vision and the strong city spoken of by Isaiah. The city which John saw had angels at the gates, those heavenly ministrants who "gather the elect from the four winds of heaven" **Mt 24:31**, and who keep watch and ward over the heavenly city that "there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie" **Re 21:27**. But the city which Isaiah speaks of had **ministers**, the sent servants of God, men of like passions with ourselves, standing at the gates, who were to lead the people into it; for it is they, and not the angelic host, who are bidden to "open the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in".

5. If, too, we take into consideration the **context**, we shall see a striking difference between the two cities. The city which John saw is described in connection with "a new heaven and a new earth"; with that blessed and glorious time when God shall wipe away all tears from the eyes; when

"there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away" **Re 21:4**. But the city which Isaiah saw is connected with "the song which is to be sung in the land of Judah"; nor have the new heaven and the new earth yet appeared; for the Lord speaks, "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers and shut thy doors about thee; for behold the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity" **Isa 26:1 Isa 26:21**. Thus I think I have shown you that these two cities widely differ.

Now if we look closely at the words of the text, we shall see in it some allusion to that strong city of which I have just spoken, for we read in it, "Go through, go through the gates." And what are these gates but the gates of entrance into the city, the "strong city" spoken of by Isaiah in the chapter before quoted?

But the question may now arise, What does this "strong city" symbolically represent? I believe that as the city which John saw in vision was a symbol of the Church in her **triumphant** condition above; so the "strong city" spoken of by Isaiah as having walls and bulwarks represents the Church in her **militant**, suffering state here below.

Here, then, at once we have a clue to the spiritual meaning of these cities—that they both represent the Church of God, but in two different aspects; the one representing her in her state of ultimate glory, the other in her state of present grace; the one the Church triumphant, the other the Church militant. It is, then, of the Church in her militant, not her triumphant state, that the Lord speaks in the text, where he says, "Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people."

In opening the spiritual meaning of these words, I shall, as the Lord may enable,

I. **First**, show you the **persons** to whom this message is addressed.

II. **Secondly**, unfold in their order the **contents** of the message.

I. It is evident, from the very language of the text, that a commission is given to certain **persons**, and that they are commanded by the Lord to do a certain work. We shall, therefore, do well to inquire who the persons are who are thus commissioned, for until we can settle that point the message given to them must be covered with much obscurity. The word of God must be our only guide in this investigation; and under its clear, shining light, if we are enabled to see what those bright beams manifest, we shall not be at a loss to ascertain who they are; for I think we shall soon find them to be the servants of the Lord, the ministers of Jesus Christ. Yes, it is to these highly favoured men of God this commission is given, and it is they who have authority and power from him to do the work thus set before them. It was spoken in prophecy of our blessed Lord, "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them" **Ps 68:18**. This prophecy Paul quotes and opens: "Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men" **Eph 4:8**. The gracious Lord bade his disciples "tarry in the city of Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high" **Lu 24:49**; and also assured them that they should be baptised with the Holy Ghost not many days hence **Ac 1:5**. The gift, then, and

promise of the Holy Spirit was that which he received, and which he poured out, as Peter declared **Ac 2:33**.

Now the apostle, explaining the nature of these spiritual gifts which the Lord gave unto men after his ascension, says, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" **Eph 4:11,12**. Apostles and prophets have ceased. They laid the foundation of the Church of Christ, and their ministration then closed. But evangelists, pastors, and teachers still remain for the benefit of the Church of God; for the gospel is still to be preached; the saints are still to be perfected or established in the truth; the work of the ministry is still to be carried on; the body of Christ is still to be edified or built up, for it is not yet complete. Thus in the Church of Christ there still remain some as "evangelists", who simply preach the gospel, without having a settled ministry; some are "pastors", settled over churches, and able to feed and rule them; and others "teachers", to whom the Lord has especially given a gift of instruction to open the truth and establish the people of God in it.

This is their general description; but if we look a little more closely into their character and office, as described in the word of truth, we shall observe them called by several titles, which we shall find perhaps especially applicable to the commission given them in our text.

1. They are sometimes then called "**servants** of God", or "servants of Jesus Christ". The apostle thus describes himself: "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle" **Ro 1:1**. So, writing to Titus, he says, "Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ" **Tit 1:1**. In

the same way, in another epistle, he associates with himself his son Timothy: "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ" **Php 1:1**. Nor would he allow this commission of his to be lightly esteemed: "Let a man", he says, that is, every man, "so account of us, as of the ministers [or servants] of Christ" **1Co 4:1**. Thus a minister is a servant of Christ. He is not a servant of man, for this is expressly forbidden. "Ye are bought with a price; be not the servants of men" **1Co 7:23**. He is a servant of the living God. And though a servant **for** all, he is not servant **to** all or indeed to any one, for he is the Lord's servant, and therefore bound to obey not the commands of men but those of his heavenly Master; for what he does and what he suffers he does and suffers for **his** honour and glory, and not for his own or any other man's. It would be well if the churches would bear this in mind. Too many treat the minister as if he were their servant, and some almost as if he were **their** slave, ordering him about and directing him as if he were to be only the instrument of their will or of their caprice. He is, then, I repeat it, not a servant **to** the church, but **of** the church; for his services are spiritual services, and undertaken at the command of, and in subordination to a Master who has called him to the work, who maintains him in it, and supplies him with wisdom and ability for it; and thus though he labours willingly in the service of God, it is with an eye to his heavenly Master and for the good of his people, and not in slavish obedience to the dictates of man.

2. But the ministers of Christ are spoken of also as **stewards**, and especially "**stewards** of the mysteries of God" **1Co 4:1**. To them is committed the care and keeping of the mysteries of the Gospel. The steward is the highest officer in the household. To his care is committed the management of his master's property; he has a general oversight over the whole house; he keeps the key of

cupboard, pantry, closet, and wardrobe; receives the rents and sees to the state of the farms. So, in a spiritual sense, the servant of Christ has an oversight of the Church of Christ, for the Holy Ghost has made him an overseer to feed the Church of God. This he does ministerially by bringing forth out of the treasury of his heavenly Master things new and old, and as "allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel" **1Th 2:4**, and as having "that good thing committed unto him" **2Ti 1:14**, his office is carefully to guard, vigilantly protect, and, as occasion serves, to bring out for the food and clothing of the household the deep mysteries of heavenly truth.

3. They are also called "**labourers**". Thus our Lord called them: "The harvest is plenteous, but the labourers are few" **Mt 9:37**. So the apostle speaks of himself and his fellow-ministers: "We are labourers together with God;" and bids the Corinthians "submit themselves to every one that helped and laboured with him". And well indeed may the faithful servants of God be called "labourers", for no work is like theirs for hardship and anxiety, and, blessed be God, for reward and profit. They labour in word and doctrine for the good of God's people; they break up the fallow ground, and plough and sow, in hope that the Lord may crown their labours with wished for success, in giving them an abundant crop of souls saved and sanctified as the fruit of their ministry.

4. But in our text the servants of Christ are addressed as invested with a peculiar commission, which we may simply call that of **leaders**; for we cannot doubt that it is to his servants that the Lord here speaks, as he does in other parts of Scripture; as, for instance, where he bids them, "Strengthen ye the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees" **Isa 35:3**; and again, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my

people, saith your God." And this appears especially plain in the case of our text, for we read in a preceding verse, "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night" **Isa 62:6**. Watchmen are evidently ministers, for they watch for the souls of God's people **Heb 13:17**. They are, then, represented in the text as going before God's people, leading the way, showing them the path in which they should walk, clearing away the difficulties which lie in the road, and opening the gates one after another, that the saints of the Most High following in their train, may successively go through each gate, and so entering into the heavenly city, there find rest and peace.

II. But this brings us to our second point, which is the **message** given them, the commission put into their hands, and the work which they have, with God's help and blessing, to perform. I shall, therefore, treat of these various parts of their heavenly commission severally, and open one by one what they have to do in the name and by the Spirit of the Lord.

Their first work is to **"go through the gates"**; and this is expressed in a very emphatic manner. The Lord doubles the command. He does not say merely, "Go through the gates," but, "Go through, go through;" as though he would charge this divine commission more warmly and impressively upon their conscience; as though he would give them more urgent and special directions, and lay more powerfully upon them the solemn duty and privilege of going through the gates that the people might follow as they lead, and enter with them into this blessed city. The servant of God, then, must himself first pass through each gate, and as he passes through, he throws it, so to speak, open, that the people of God may follow him as he goes before them and walk in the path in which he leads and points out.

1. Now what is the **first** gate that he and they must pass through? I have before shown you that the walls and gates of this strong city below are not like the walls and gates of the glorious city above, for the wall of that is foursquare and the gates are open night and day, free admission being given to the glorified saints to pass in. But this city is built upon a different plan. The walls are concentric, that is, circle within circle, wall within wall, and gate within gate: so that each gate in succession must be passed through before you can reach the other.

2. What, then, is the **first** gate which the servant of God has to lay open? The **strait gate**, that of which the Lord himself declares, "Strait is the gate"—that narrow gate which leads to life eternal, the gate of **regeneration**. Now there is no climbing over the wall, or creeping under it, or passing through it, except through the gate. He that climbs over is a thief and a robber; he that crawls under will be rejected as stealing into the city by a forbidden way, "digging through in the dark", like Job's adulterer **Job 24:16**; and the wall is too strong, too thick, too massive for any to break through.

There is only one way, then, into the city which is the strait and narrow gate of regeneration—a gate so strait that no man can pass through it with his clothes upon his back and with sin held fast in his arms. Sin must be laid down in its practice and power outside the walls, with every idol, however loved or hugged to the bosom, yea, and his own righteousness, too, must be stripped off, and he must enter naked, so to speak, for there is no room in this narrow portal for sin and self. Bunyan, in his immortal work, "Grace Abounding," which I have sometimes said deserves to be written in letters of gold, gives us a striking account of a kind of vision which he had when his soul was passing through

deep distress. He speaks of seeing the sunny side of a high mountain on which the saints of God were "refreshing themselves with the pleasant beams of the sun", whilst he was "shivering and shrinking in the cold, afflicted with frost, snow, and dark clouds". But on looking a little closer, he saw that there was a wall round this mountain through which he must pass before he could sun himself with those blessed denizens of the warm mountain side. So prayerfully and carefully he goes round this wall again and again to find an entrance, but sees none. At last he sees a very narrow gap, like a little doorway in the wall, through which he tries to pass; but he finds it so very narrow that all his attempts were vain to force his way in. But at length, with great striving, at first he got in his head, and after that "by a sideling striving", to use his own forcible expression, he got in his shoulders, and then his whole body, till at length he reached the warm mountain side, where he was comforted with the light and heat of their sun.

Now from this vision and the exceeding narrowness of the passage, he drew this conclusion, "That none could enter into life but those who were in downright earnest, and unless they left the wicked world behind them, for that here was only room for body and soul, but not for body and soul and sin." It is, indeed, a strait and narrow gate which none can see but those who have spiritual eyes, none feel for but those who have spiritual hands, and none pass through but those who have spiritual feet. This outer wall separates the city from the world, from sin, from error, from evil. All these, therefore, must be left behind, or we cannot pass through the first gate, the gate of regeneration, without going through which there is neither seeing nor entering into the kingdom of heaven.

2. What is the **second** gate? for our text says, "Go through, go through the gates." Why, the **gate of faith**. Do we not read of "God opening the door of faith to the Gentiles?" **Ac 14:27**. And when was this? When the apostles preached to them the word of life, and God by his Spirit and grace opened their hearts, as he opened the heart of Lydia, to receive it. Thus the apostle speaks of his preaching at Ephesus: "For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries" **1Co 16:9**; and again when he came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel he says, "A door was opened unto me of the Lord".

This door then, or gate, is the next to which we come when we have passed through the narrow gate of regeneration. And I may also add that we can only pass through the first gate by a light shining through the second: for as we are struggling in the very entry, a ray of heavenly light shines from the king, who sits enthroned in the midst of the city, in the very heart of it where his palace is, through each gate, as they are successively opened. Now just see the effect of this beam of heavenly light. Here is the soul, with much ado, much striving and exertion, sticking as it were in the very entrance of the city, half but not wholly through the first gate—the gate of regeneration, which is the gate of life. See the child of grace exercised with unbelief, feeling how strait and narrow the gate is through which he is striving to pass, doubting and fearing, yet longing to believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God, and to receive the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul. Before him stands another gate, the gate of faith, but he cannot pass through it; for it seems shut in his face. Thus he is half in the first gate, and the second is still closed.

But now hear the commission given to the servants of the Lord, "Go through, go through the gates." He himself then

must first have passed through; to him must the door of faith have been opened. He must be a believer himself in the only begotten Son of God, and as a believer, he goes through the gate. Now, standing as if in this very gate which he opens with his hand, he holds up the Son of God as the object of faith, preaching the Gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, and the Lord the Spirit blesses the testimony with unction and power to the heart of this struggling one in the strait and narrow gate. Faith is raised up in his soul; the door of it is opened in his heart; he receives the testimony; the gospel comes not in word only, but also in power; love comes to his aid, for "faith worketh by love"; and, drawn by its gentle cords, he passes through the gate by believing in the only begotten Son of God, and receiving him into his heart as "the way, the truth, and the life".

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3. Now comes another gate which has to be opened; and this is **the gate of hope**. Of this we read in the prophecy of Hosea, where the promise runs, "And I will give her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope" **Ho 2:15**. This door of hope is the same as the apostle calls "a good hope through grace" **2Th 2:16**, and which he declares to be "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil" **Heb 6:19**. But you may say, "Have you not made a mistake this morning? How is it you put hope after faith? Why don't you put hope first? Is not this the way that the Lord deals with his people—to give them first a little hope, and then, after hope is raised up in their hearts to reveal his dear Son, and thus communicate a living faith in him?" No, I think I have made no mistake. I don't like to make mistakes in solemn matters of this kind. I should not be able to go through the gates to open them to the people, if I did not know pretty

well how the gates stand one after another. I should be at best but a blind guide or a sleepy watchman. But as you have asked me one question, let me ask you another. How can we hope in what we do not believe? Faith is "the substance of things hoped for", that is, their foundation, as the word means; but which stands first, the foundation or the superstructure? Does not the apostle say, "Hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" **Ro 8:24**. But faith gives eyes, for it is "the evidence of things not seen". Thus faith is the evidence and hope the expectation. But how can we expect a thing of which we have no evidence that it exists? How can you hope in the goodness of God unless you believe in that goodness? How can you hope in salvation by the Son of God, if you have never believed in the Son of God, through whom salvation comes? Or how can you have an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast within the veil, unless first by faith you have laid hold of him who has passed within the veil, as the great High Priest over the house of God? The apostle tells us in the Epistle to the Romans that "experience worketh hope" **Ro 5:4**. But what experience? An experience of the goodness and mercy of God, which can only come by faith. He also tells us that "being justified by faith", "we rejoice in hope of the glory of God" **Ro 5:1,2**. But this justification must precede any rejoicing in hope; for what have we to rejoice in except what is laid hold of by a living faith? Thus we see we must pass through the gate of faith so as to believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God, before we can pass through the door of hope, there to anchor firmly within the veil.

This gate, too, the servant of God has to open by setting forth the promises of the gospel, and especially by describing and explaining the experience of God's people; for as "experience worketh hope", when they hear their experience described, it works hope in their heart. Thus as he holds in

his hand the gate of hope, swaying it, so to speak, backwards and forwards on its hinges, a stream of heavenly light bursts through it upon their soul, and "a good hope through grace", springing up in their hearts, they pass through it, still pressing forward to the king's palace.

Now, though I say that faith goes before hope, I do not mean to assert that the **assurance** of faith precedes it. In this way, therefore, we may reconcile the difficulty which probably struck your mind when I put the gate of faith before the gate of hope; for we have often a good hope through grace before the Spirit seals on the soul the fulness of God's love.

4. But this brings us to another gate which has still to be opened, and a blessed one it is, for it gives admission to the very palace of the King. This gate is **the gate of love**. Now though we do not find in scripture express mention of a door of love, as of a door of faith and of hope, yet we do read of "a door being opened in heaven" **Re 4:1**; and if a door is opened in heaven, what must flow through that open door but love from him who sits in heaven's citadel, and from those glorious heights sends down his love into the heart? Has not Jesus passed within the veil as our glorious Forerunner? Is not that veil still open? For have not the children of God who enter through the gate of faith "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh?" **Heb 10:19,20**. Are we not also bidden to "set our affections on things above, not on things on the earth?" **Col 3:2**. And is not all this a warrant for me to say that there is a **gate of love** as well as those which I have already mentioned? How can love come down unless there be an open door? How can love go up except through an open door? Martyred Stephen cried, "Behold, I see the

heavens opened." Did no love flow up or down? When "the beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door", was not this the hand of love? It must have been so by its effects, for it made the bride cry out, "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him that I am sick of love" **So 5:4,8.**

We have gone through the gates. There is none beyond the last; for "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" **1Jo 4:16.** Now look, then, at these gates and see how many you have passed through, or whether you have passed through any one of them. Look at the first gate, the **strait and narrow gate**, which leads to eternal life. Have you passed through that? What struggles, difficulties, or conflicts did you experience; what sighs, cries, prayers, groans, tears went up out of your soul as you seemed to stick in that narrow pass; when, as the scripture speaks, you "came to the birth, and there was not strength to bring forth"; that perilous time when death seems to hover over mother and child. Did the Lord then fulfil his promise in your heart, "Shall I bring to the birth and not cause to bring forth?"

Have you passed through the next **gate**—the gate of **faith**? Has the Lord Jesus Christ ever been manifested to your soul or revealed to your heart, so that you can truly say you believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God, by some gracious discovery of his Person and work to your believing eye, whereby you beheld "his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"?

Have you ever passed through the gate of **hope**? Has the Lord the Spirit ever let down a sweet promise into your soul, applied any passage warm to your heart; or as the servant of God went before, and the Lord "spoke comfortably" by him,

did he even open a door of hope in your soul, whereby you felt a sweet persuasion of your interest in the love and blood of the Lamb?

Have you ever passed through the gate of **love**, so as to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ in the arms of faith and affection, and to be able to say, with all sincerity of heart, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee?" Now these gates must be passed through before you can get into the presence of the great King, for in the very heart of the city he dwells, as we read, "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is known in her palaces for a refuge" **Ps 48:2,3**. There he keeps palace; there he sits on his throne of grace, as David sat in his royal palace of Zion, swaying his peaceful sceptre over believing hearts. But these gates must first be passed through: "Go **through**, go **through** the gates." "Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation," God's justified people, "which keepeth the truth"—the truth of God made precious to their heart—may enter in—not stand without **Isa 26:2**. For bear in mind that these gates not only admit, but also exclude; not only give access to his gracious Majesty, to adore and love his holy name, but shut out all intruders. So before you can get into the presence of the King, to see his beauty, behold his glory, and enjoy his love, you must pass through them all one after the other.

But this is not the only work that the servants of God are commissioned to perform. The message to them goes on, "**Prepare ye the way of the people.**"

The "people" here spoken of are the people of God; the people for whom Jesus died; the people whose names are written in the Book of Life; the people whom the Lord has

formed for himself that they may show forth his praise. But these people are represented in a state wherein they require spiritual guidance, as being unable of themselves to find their way to the city. They are thus like the sheep spoken of by the prophet, as "wandering through all the mountains and upon every high hill"; yea, as "scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none to search or seek after them".

Now, for this people as thus "scattered in the cloudy and dark day" **Eze 34:6 Eze 34:12**, the servants of God are bidden to prepare the way, the way that leads to the strong city; for until this way is pointed out to them and made plain before their eyes, through the darkness of their mind, the confusion of their thoughts, and the hard bondage with which they are exercised, they scarcely know where to set their feet, or in what direction the road lies. There is an allusion in the words, "Prepare ye the way," to a practice in Eastern countries, where there are not, as in our civilised land, beaten, well-known roads in all directions. When kings and princes travel there, especially when they move at the head of armies, roads have to be made for them. The deep rivers have to be bridged, the jungle cut through, the woods levelled, the swamps and morasses filled up, and a clear, clean, broad way made, that they may not be stopped on their route by these natural obstructions. Taking, then, this figure, the Holy Spirit commands the servants of God to "prepare the way of the people"

But how do the servants of God ministerially execute this office? How did John the Baptist prepare the way of the people when he went before Christ as his forerunner? He preached repentance to them. So the servants of God prepare the way of the people by setting before them their lost condition by nature. They preach the law in its spirituality and curse; they set before them the wrath of God

due to every sinner that comes into the world under the curse of the original transgression. They tell them they must repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ in order to salvation, as the apostle preached in his day "repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ" **Ac 20:21**. They tell the people there must be a work of grace upon their heart, that a mighty revolution must take place in their soul, wrought in them by the power of God; that Christ must be revealed and formed in them, the hope of glory, before they can be saved.

Thus by setting before the people their ruin and misery in a state of nature, and showing the curse and spirituality of God's law, they prepare their way, for as the word falls with power upon their conscience they listen to it, and flee from the wrath to come. This is as if a marking out of the way before the people's eyes; a setting it out, which is the first thing to be done in making a road. They prepare the way also by levelling the obstacles and difficulties that lie in the path. They tell them there is salvation for all those who repent of their sins, and believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God. They tell them that God is love in the Person and work of his dear Son. They tell them that the sin of all who believe is put away by the bloodshedding of the Son of God; that a righteousness is provided for all who come to him by a living faith; that the Holy Spirit is given to those who belong to Jesus, to lead and guide them in all truth. They set before them the love of God in sending his dear Son, the infinite compassion of his merciful heart, and the way which he devised in the depth of his eternal wisdom of saving sinners, without sacrificing or infringing any one of his holy attributes. But they chiefly prepare the way by preaching Christ as "the way", the only way unto God.

And thus sometimes by thundering the law in their ears, sometimes by preaching the gospel, sometimes by unfolding the lost, ruined state of man, and sometimes by bringing before their eyes the blood and obedience of the Son of God, they prepare the way of the people, and instrumentally and ministerially go before, and lead them in it. Thus they bridge over the deep rivers, drain the swamps and morasses, cut down the thick forests in which the people might lose themselves, run a road across the jungle which otherwise the weak and feeble of the Lord's family could scarcely struggle through; and thus as good workmen who need not be ashamed, they make the way plain before the face of all who are made willing in the day of the Lord's power.

But they have other work to do, and this is expressly enjoined upon them by a reduplication of the command, **"Cast up, cast up the highway."** When they have prepared the way by bridging the rivers, cutting down the forests, draining the morasses, and burning up the jungle, then they are to take the pickaxe and spade, and labour hard to "cast up the highway", that this glorious highway may stand prominently before the people's eyes, that they may plant their feet upon it, walk on it safe from floods, the incursions of wild beasts, and the attacks of enemies, as being on firm, high ground from which they cannot be easily dislodged.

In some of the Oxfordshire and Berkshire villages, and most probably in other localities less known by me, where they are liable to floods, we often see raised causeways of large stones, on which people travel in winter when the roads and meadows are covered with water. So, in a spiritual sense, there is "a highway" a causeway to be cast up to preserve the people of God from the various floods which often threaten them with destruction. Such are the floods of Almighty vengeance which will one day rush down like

waterspouts from heaven's open gates; the floods of sin which sweep over a guilty conscience; the floods of temptation out of the mouth of the dragon, which often threaten to bury them in destruction and perdition. Now the Lord's people want "a highway" on which they may safely travel, raised above all these devastating floods; and this the servants of God are called upon ministerially to cast up.

But how do they cast up this highway? You will observe that it must be an elevated way, that the people may stand and walk on it above the devastating floods. It must, therefore, not be built of mud, or earth, or clay, which the floods might sweep away. It must be of good solid work—sound stones well laid in their places. When, then, the servants of God bring forth the precious, glorious truth of a three-one God—Father, Son and Holy Ghost—in one undivided Essence, and lay this clearly and broadly before the people as the sum and substance of all divine revelation, as the sole object of all their spiritual worship, the life of all their real religion, the solid ground of all their faith, the fulfilment of all their hope, and the ultimate enjoyment of all their love, then they make a sound and good beginning in casting up the highway.

When they bring forth the Deity and eternal Sonship of our blessed Lord, in union with his spotless humanity, thus setting before the people his glorious Person as Immanuel, God with us, and lay this divine truth down before their eyes, it is casting up the highway and making the foundation broad and good, for it is "the foundation of the apostles and prophets", and of every master builder in Zion; for, "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" **1Co 3:11 Eph 2:20**. When they bring forth the "everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure", and hold it up before the people's eyes, as "the volume of the book", in which all the firm decrees of God are written,

showing thereby the security of the saints, and the certainty of every event coming to pass which God has appointed for their good and his glory, then also they cast up the highway, as laying in their right place the solid stones each of which fits into the other, and are thus immovable by all the floods which may beat against them.

When they set forth the atoning blood of the Lamb of God as cleansing from all sin; his spotless obedience as a perfect robe of righteousness; his dying love as a most blessed cordial for a fainting spirit; his meritorious sufferings and death as a ransom from the curse of the law, the power of darkness, the kingdom of Satan, the dominion of the grave, and the torments of hell, **then**, too, they cast up a causeway firm and good—the highway, the King's highway, on which the royal seed travel safely above all the floods of devouring wrath. When, too, they bring forth the promises, all of which are "Yea and amen in Christ Jesus to the glory of God by us" **2Co 1:20**; such as, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" **Joh 6:37**; "All things work together for good to those that love God; He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved;"—I need not, cannot go through them all: but as they bring forth promise after promise, and lay them down one after another close and thick, or pile them up high and strong, what a good and solid road they make—what a firm highway do they cast up.

So when they bring forth the exhortations, the invitations, and the comforting addresses of which God's word is so full, such as, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" or, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth;" and interlace them with the strongest assurances of the faithfulness of the Lord to every word he has ever spoken, **then**, too they cast up the King's

highway and make it broad and good. When also they bring forth the precepts of God's word as well as the promises, and contend for and enforce the power of vital godliness in heart, lip, and life; when they set forth the ordinances of God's house in their due order, and lay them down broadly and plainly by pointing out to whom alone they belong; and when they grout the whole road well from beginning to end with the warm cement of living Christian experience, **then** also they cast up the King's highway with a skilful, firm, and vigorous hand.

See what a highway it is; how raised above the wintry floods, the roaring lions, the howling wolves, and the prowling jackals; for "No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there" **Isa 35:9**. O what a safe and blessed highway! What glorious doctrines, precious promises, heavenly invitations, wise admonitions, holy precepts, gracious ordinances, and the whole built up and cemented together with a living experience! Well may the Lord say to his servants, and double the word, to impress it more deeply on their hearts, "Cast up, cast up the highway."

But let both minister and hearer bear this well in mind, that the King's highway is "a way of holiness", for this is God's own testimony concerning it: "And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein" **Isa 35:8**.

But the servants of the Lord have not yet done their work, nor fully executed all their commission. They have still other work upon their hands. When they have gone through the gates, prepared the way of the people, and cast up the highway, then they have to "**gather out the stones**". This

indeed is back-breaking work, for the stones which they have to gather out are often very heavy, and deeply imbedded in the mud and mire. This work, therefore, especially requires that they should often go down upon their knees, and toil in the mud like any navvy, that they may gather up the stones which otherwise they would not be able to move.

But what are these stones? Not the stones which they have laid to cast up a highway; for to be ever doing and undoing, pulling their own work to pieces, and making the King's highway a confused heap, like a broken-up London pavement, would be but a poor employment; though too many who call themselves labourers, are doing this all their lives. No; this is not the work which the Lord's servants are here called to do; for they are workmen who need not be ashamed, either of their work or their workmanship, their Master or his commission. But these stones which they have to "gather out" are the stumbling blocks of sin, Satan, and unbelief, thrown upon the King's highway after it is cast up, so that they block up the road, or cause the children of God to stumble in it.

That this is the meaning of the command is evident from similar instructions which the Lord has elsewhere given: "Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling block out of the way of my people" **Isa 57:14**. The servants of God, then, have to gather out these stones which impede the road, and over which God's people might stumble or come to a dead stand, finding the way so blocked up that there is no passage. This is often literally the case in mountain roads, on which however well constructed, rocks and avalanches fall from above, making them impassable until they are moved out of the way. Bearing this in mind, let us cast an eye at some of these stones which block the road

of God's people, and which the servants of God have ministerially to gather out.

1. Some of the Lord's people fear that **their sins are too great to be pardoned**. Here, then, they find a stone upon the King's highway which they cannot remove, nor get round, for it is too deeply imbedded and too heavy for them to lift, and too high for them to climb over, so that they often come to a dead stand, afraid to go back and yet unable to go forward. Then the servant of God has to come and gather out the stone. This he does by showing them that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin"; that there is no iniquity a child of God has ever committed, except the unpardonable sin, which he cannot commit, that is not freely forgiven him for Christ's sake. As, then, he holds up the blood of the cross, it is as though he said to their sins, "What art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain" **Zec 4:7**. He thus gathers out the stone, takes it out of the path, and casts it, so to speak, into the depths of the sea, so that when these sins are sought for they shall no more be found **Mic 7:19**.

2. Another stone is one which many tried souls have stumbled over—a fear lest they have **sinned against the Holy Ghost**. The servant of God, then, has to gather out this stone also, by showing from the Scriptures who the characters are who have committed the unpardonable sin and what are its marks, thereby plainly proving that a child of God never can be guilty of it; for if he were, instead of being tried and distressed with the fear of it, he would have been given over to a reprobate mind, hardness of heart, or utter despair.

3. Another stone which the labourer, who labours in word and doctrine, has to gather out, is the **guilty fear** of one

who has **backslidden** from the Lord, either inwardly or outwardly, and who is trembling under the apprehension that this backsliding is a proof there is no grace in his heart. This is a source of many dismal fears, for such a one thinks that had he been a child of God, he could not have backslidden so repeatedly, wandered so far from the Lord, and got into so barren and unfruitful a state. This is a deep and heavy stone against which he stumbles, for he finds that he cannot move it out of the way, or pass over it. Here, then, the servant of God has to come to his aid and point out the cases of Peter, David, and others and show how **they** had backslidden, and yet were forgiven. He sounds too in his ears the invitations and the promises, "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings" **Jer 3:22** . "I will heal their backsliding: I will love them freely, for mine anger is turned away from him" **Ho 14:4**. As the Lord blesses the word spoken by his servant to their hearts, poor backsliders feel that the stone which has so long stood in the way is gathered up, and they move comfortably on.

4. Another stone, which the servants of God have to "gather out", or I may rather call them heaps of stones which strew almost every part of the road, are the **doubts and fears** with which the family of God are, for the most part, so deeply and continually exercised. The servant of God comes and gathers out these stones, by showing from the word of truth, such as the Psalms, Lamentations, the experience of Job, &c., that all God's people are liable to these doubts and fears; that an evil heart of unbelief is ever suggesting them or fostering them; that Satan often produces them by his suggestions or fiery darts; but that none of these chilling apprehensions will eventually prevail; that in the end the Lord, who is "the author", will also be "the finisher of their faith", and that ultimately it will gain the victory over all their unbelief.

Time and opportunity will not allow me to enter further upon this branch of the work of the ministry; I shall, therefore, merely add that the servant of the Lord has, in dealing with the experience of the people of God, to open their temptations, describe their trials, enter into their various and complicated cases, and thus instrumentally gather out the stones which lie in their path, and over which they so cruelly stumble.

And then he has, as the last commission given him, to **"lift up a standard for the people"**. As I have lately preached upon this subject in showing you "the banner" which the Lord gives to those who fear him, I shall not dwell long upon it, as it would be but a repetition of what I have there brought forward from the word of truth. I shall merely, therefore, remark that this standard which the servant of God is to lift up is the standard of the Gospel, the glorious Gospel flag, which he has to hold in his hand and wave on high, that it may be a guide for the people to show them the path in which they are to walk. This standard is lifted up in the very beginning of the way to show where the path begins, and it floats all along the road to the very end of the way to show where the path ends: for Jesus is the way, the whole of the way, and every part of the way; and this as Prophet, Priest, and King. As Prophet, he begins the work and completes it by his own almighty power; as Priest, he lines the whole path with blood; as King, he sways his sceptre over the whole road, for it is the King's highway throughout, of which he alone is Lord and Sovereign.

As, then, the servant of the Lord lifts up the standard of Gospel truth, holds on high the banner of truth and love, it shows the people of God, for whose benefit it is displayed, that this is the way in which they are to walk; for when they

see him going forward with this glorious banner in his hand, they, too, can follow on with some confidence; and as they thus keep step by step in their serried ranks, they are "terrible as an army with banners" **So 6:4**; for they fear no foe, and can put all their enemies to the rout when they see and feel the glorious flag of salvation waving over their heads. When, too, they wander and stray from the path, as the servant of the Lord lifts up the standard before their eyes, it gives them a rallying point once more to bring their feet upon the King's highway; for there and there alone the royal standard floats, and there and there alone do they feel safe under its ample folds.

Thus you see what the work of a minister is, and what is the commission given him by his heavenly Master. I shall not say, my friends, how I perform it, for I am sure I do it very feebly and imperfectly, although I may describe it from the word of God as I see it written as with a sunbeam in the pages of heavenly truth, and as it is commended to my conscience. But I must confess that I see much more clearly what a minister should do than that I do it. All I can say is, that it is my desire to be found faithful in every part of the ministerial work, though I am forced to confess that in this, as in everything else that is spiritual and heavenly, "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" **Ro 7:18,19**.

But I think I may ask us all, what do we know of these heavenly mysteries—of these gates through which we pass successively into the strong city; of this way which is prepared for the people; of this highway which is thus ministerially cast up; of these stones which are thus instrumentally gathered out; and of this standard lifted up on high? Do you not see that the people of God are described

here? that the strong city into which they enter is our militant state upon earth; and that we must all become citizens of this city below before we shall be citizens of the city above? Do you not see that we must pass through the gates in order to see the King by the eye of faith in his palace here, before we have right and privilege to enter the pearly gates of the heavenly Jerusalem, which the glory of God ever lightens, and the Lamb is ever the light thereof?

I desire to lay these solemn things before you in the fear of the Lord, who alone can bless his word and apply it with power to the heart; and in this hope and confidence I leave it in his hands for him to seal it with his own unction and savour upon your consciences.