

THE DOOR OF MERCY CLOSED

A SERMON

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“And the door was shut.” Matthew 25:10

I SHALL this morning first assign the reasons that the foolish, thus spoken of in this parable, *were excluded from the wedding*; secondly, *the nature of that exclusion*.

First: The first reason was, because their hearts were not right with God. A sinner, in order for his heart to be right with God, must be brought to feel his need of a perfect substitute; that the law of God is exceeding broad, that it is eternal, that it is infallible; and that by every iota of it, from first to last, we stand condemned; we, therefore, need the Lord Jesus Christ in the perfection of his work. When a poor sinner is brought down to feel that by every iota of the law he is condemned; to feel that not one jot nor tittle of that law can fail, all must be fulfilled; then unto such a one the righteousness that Christ has wrought out is above all things acceptable, that atonement which he has made is above all things acceptable. This is one step towards the heart being right with God. And this great truth, of the perfection of Christ's work must be received as your life, as your hope, and your heart must be conformed to it, for if it be not, then the heart is not right with God's Son, and if it be not right with God's Son, it cannot be right with God himself; for “He that has not the Son has not the Father; but he that has the Son,” in the true character of the work he has done, “has the Father also.” “He that believes (said Christ,) in me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation.” Another step in the heart being right with God is a reception of the discriminating truths of the Gospel. “The Lord separated the sons of Adam;” it was the Lord that took Abel and left Cain; and he took the one because he would, and he left the other because he would. “And he set the bounds of the people,” “When he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.” This then is the second step toward the heart being right with God; there must be a reception of the testimony of what Christ has done; and there must be a reception of the discriminating truth of the blessed God; so as to make the salvation of a sinner, from first to last, all of grace. Here the foolish virgins were, as we showed last Lord's day morning, entirely deficient; proving, as I think we did, clearly, that the oil which they did not take sets forth the gospel of the grace of God, and therefore, not having that, their lamps must go out. Again, the same point of. the heart being right with God is carried out also in the 13th of Luke. One said, “Are there few to be saved?” and upon this enquiry the Lord said, “Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” This strait gate is the same

thing that I have stated, and we have lately given our views of the meaning of that scripture; but it will do us no harm to look at it again for a few moments. The strait gate means the perfect work of Christ; and to enter in at the strait gate means for you to be brought down: all your supposed holiness, and righteousness, and strength destroyed; you must become a poor, helpless, ruined sinner, and be made to feel that if you are saved, it must be by faith, without works; that you must be saved only by grace; it must be narrowed to that one path: there must be the reception of the finished work of Christ, on the ground and after the order of the discriminating grace of God; and this is entering in at the strait gate; and here it is the enemy always opposes. Now many will seek to enter in, not at the strait gate; they are not brought to that. Hence, if you look abroad, you will find very few appreciate highly the substitutional work of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you go over the religious world, you will find that anything and everything almost is their theme and subject except that of the finished, the substitutional work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, to be brought down, and thus made poor, and every path shut up, every hope swept away, and to have no hope left but the Lord Jesus Christ, after that order of things which he has established; that is, to enter in at the strait gate; and for the heart, so far, to be right with God. There are two more things I must mention, in order to prove that the heart is right with God. There may be this conformity to God's truth, there may be this conformity in sentiment, in choice, in taste, and yet at the same time that man may be destitute of those qualities that prove there is a work of grace in his heart, and that he is rightly and savingly united to God's blessed truth. There must, therefore, be purity of motive in addition to this conformity. And hence the purity of motive is called being "pure in heart." I believe with all my soul, I cannot help saying it; I do not wish to say anything wrong, but I must be faithful for the few days that I am spared; I do believe that a great many profess religion, and respect religion, more for the sake of the worldly hope it gives them, than for the sake of anything else. If by being religious, I can get on better in the world, if it gives me a good worldly hope, a good assurance that a kind Providence will watch over me, and take great care of me, then that shall be my chief object. Why, my hearer, such a religion as that, although you may be apparently conformed to God's truth, is no better than the religion of Judas, the religion of Ananias and Sapphira, the religion of Simon Magus, or of Demas; or the religion of any who know nothing at all really of their lost condition, or of God's truth. It is therefore, of essential importance that we should look to the purity of the motive. The Lord has been pleased in different ages to subject a great many of his people to great tribulation for the truth's sake, in order to bring the purity of their motive to light, by enabling them to bear the loss of all things; and that is a pretty good proof that a man does not receive the doctrines of the gospel, does not profess the name of Christ, for the sake of worldly advantage, when, if called upon to do so he will give up his liberty, his property, and even part with his life, rather than part with God's blessed truth. Hence, when the Holy Ghost revealed the impurity of the motive of Simon Magus, Peter said, "Your heart is not right in the sight of God." Now then, if I receive the testimony of Christ's finished work, can I in the presence of a heart-searching God, when, there is none but my Maker noticing me or seeing me, can I say, O Lord, you know that this is my hope for eternity; and that I prize your dear Son not merely because in connection with your truth there are promises of a kind Providence that will watch over me; and we desire to bless the Lord for such promises; but that I prize your dear Son because his blood cleanses from all sin, because his righteousness justifies from all things, and because the promises which he has confirmed show to me the certainty of eternal life, the certainty of eternal glory; and that I desire not to rest in anything short of this; that I desire and seek a better country; and oh Lord, you know my object in going to hear your word is to climb, as it were, Jacob's ladder, and have fellowship with you; you know that my object in going to hear your word, is, that I may

be transformed and renewed in the spirit of my mind; and be brought, if it be your pleasure, into something like the mount of transfiguration, where the disciples were brought, and be able to say, it is good for me to be here. You know that my motive, Lord, is that I am a poor wounded sinner; that I go to hear your word purely from the desire that Jesus name may be as ointment poured forth to heal my wounds; that I may thus walk in that path described in your holy word, where your saints of old have borne testimony of pardon sealed home to the conscience, of diseases healed, of liberty recognized, of triumph realized; and where they could glory in your holy name. Lord, you know that I am not only conformed to the perfect work of your dear Son, and to the order of sovereignty in the salvation of a sinner; but you know that the desire of my heart is the salvation, the eternal salvation of my precious soul, and thereby the eternal glory of your great name. The heart then must be right with God in order to be where God is; for if he has not the heart, he has not any anything; but if he has the heart, he has everything. And therefore, when the Lord comes to one of his children, he says, not in the mere letter of the word, but in the life and power of it, "My son;" he lays that as the basis; my "son;" I have adopted you, I have chosen you, I have made you my son; I have put you into my family; I have made you one of mine; I have redeemed you, I have called you; you are mine forever. And now I want something of you; "My son, give me your heart;" and when the Lord speaks that with power, the reply will be, Lord, you have my heart; it shall evermore be yours; "When you said, seek you my face; my heart said unto you, your face, Lord, will I seek." Now these foolish virgins, then, had neither conformity to the order of the marriage nor purity of motive; for if they had, they would not have been what they were. So it is with the professor; if he has not this purity of motive, then he is not pure in heart and it is the pure in heart that shall see God; it is he that has a pure heart and clean hands; that is, a pure heart and holy faith; for hands there are made a symbol of faith; that where there is this purity of heart, the faith of that man is a pure and holy faith. These are the people that shall ascend into the hill of the Lord; this is the generation that seek you; that seek you face, O God of Jacob. These are two then out of the three main things that I want, to prove that your heart is right with God; there must be conformity to the truth, and purity of motive. Now you must not separate these; they must go together; because you may have sincerity of motive, but then you are not conformed to God's truth; your sincerity, therefore, is of the wrong kind. You may have sincerity or purity of motive in your religion, let that religion be what it may; but if your religion be not right, your purity is a thing of nothing. It must be based upon God's truth; there must be conformity to the complete work of Christ, to the discriminating grace by which a sinner can be saved; and then, when you get upon the right premises, when you get the right object and the right materials, then let purity of motive rest upon this foundation; and you will thus be welcome to all the wondrous advantages of eternal oneness with the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a third feeling I want in this matter; not only conformity to the truth and purity of motive; I want something else; and that is a right fixedness of purpose. If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God; but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavers is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. Let not that man think," though he may be conformed to God's truth, and appear pure in his motive too, yet he is a wavering man; "Let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. For a double minded man is unstable in all his ways." You must be as firm as a rock; the least wavering ought to make you tremble; the least shaking ought to make you suspect that there is something wrong at the foundation or in some of the materials commencing the superstructure. We must be unalterably fixed. Why, say you, I am wavering every day. Not in the sense intended there, if you are taught of God and established in the truth. But say

you, did not the Galatians waver? They did; but it threw a most solemn doubt into the apostle's mind whether after all they had not been deceiving themselves; they had hitherto run well, in conformity to the truth, in purity of motive, but now all at once they are inclined to deviate. Says the apostle, "I stand in doubt of you; having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh?" What then is this fixedness; what does it mean, this firmness and this decision? Perhaps we cannot do better than take the hints given to us by the apostle Peter. The apostle Peter, when speaking of God's eternal Counsels and designs, says, "And account that the long suffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him has written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." Now there were three things that were hard to be understood; and we gather from the epistle to the Hebrews what these things were that were hard to be understood, and which men wrested to their own destruction. They were these three things; the sonship of Christ, the priesthood of Christ, and the covenant of grace; and you will find that these are the three things which the apostle Paul in his epistle to the Hebrews labors to make clear. He commences with setting forth the dignity of the Son of God; that he was heir of all things; then if he be heir of all things, and I am to be heir with him, then eternal life, the eternal kingdom, and eternal glory, is just as sure to me as it is to him; you must invalidate his heirship before you can shake the interest we have in it, or move us. Now, then, to prove that your heart is right with God, you must abide by this. You must not move from it, nor give it up; you must not admit anything that would shake this; stand fast in the sonship of Christ, stand fast in your jointure, in your joint heirship; do not admit for one moment that there is the least shadow or shade of possibility of separation from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus; do not admit a word of it; stand fast. Well, say you, that is not hard to be understood; I can understand it easily. But how can you understand it; can you understand it as needing it to be your security? If so, then you are of a right understanding; and the good ground hearer, understanding the word, stood fast in it. The second thing was that of the priesthood of Christ, the eternal perfection of the priesthood of Christ, after the power of an endless life. The third thing was the covenant of grace; a covenant wherein the Lord puts his laws into the minds of the people, and writes them in their hearts; remembering their sins and their iniquities no more; they are gone and gone forever. Give me the sonship of Christ, the priesthood of Christ, the new covenant, then I have no wavering. I never come into the pulpit wavering as to what kind of gospel I am to preach, never. Now, what say you, my hearer? Can you say that your mind is conformed to the truth? Can you say your motive is simple, and pure, and sincere? And can you say that, the Lord keeping you, you would rather suffer the loss of everything, and be moved from your wife, your husband, your children, your property, your home, rather than be moved from God's truth; because in God's truth we have God himself; he can be a substitute for everything: but what can be a substitute for the absence of the mercy of God, the absence of God? That is one reason, then, they are excluded; because their hearts are not right with God. If I am not conformed to his truth; if I am wavering and hesitating as to whether I shall continue in the truth or go out of it; if I have the spiritual lust of the eye, and am looking after the whore of Babylon, or some of her daughters, and am lusting after them; if I have that idolatrous element in my religion; then I am not truly married to Christ; I shall someday turn my back upon all I now profess. Oh! it is a wonderful mercy to be fixed firm in the truth as it is in Jesus.

Second. But secondly, they were excluded because they were TOO LATE; the door was shut; cannot deny this fact. The Wesleyans are always cautioning people against being too late; only

they are wrong in their explanation of it. It is a fact that they were too late; we cannot deny that; why, we are the last people in the world, I do not mean we, here at the Surrey Tabernacle, merely, but we free grace people, that ought not to shrink from any scripture; because if we have Jesus in his perfection, and God in his eternal counsels, we can understand everything that is essential to our welfare. Well, it is very clear they were too late; is there any doubt about it? They that were ready, whose hearts were right, went in with him to the marriage; the others came too late; you cannot deny that. But then this is merely the declaration; the explanation is to come, after I have given an instance or two. We will suppose that the Israelites were safely housed, the lamb slain, and the blood sprinkled; the angel commences his terrible ministration of the judgment of God; the Egyptians seek to enter in to where the Israelites are, but they are too late. But what are we to understand by being too late? There is a certain order of things, and there is a certain point fixed; and when you go beyond that point, it is too late to seek for mercy; there is no mercy then; the door is shut then; there is no hope then. I showed last Lord's day morning, or at least I stated it as my opinion, that the midnight cry is that of death; that alarmed both the wise and the foolish. And so, we must look at it here. Here is the rich man; the midnight cry comes, takes Lazarus to heaven; his heart was right with God; and he is in time; Lazarus, by grace, sought the Lord while he could be found, and called upon him when he was near. This is only a parable; and as I said last Lord's day morning, we must not expect in a parable to find the very likeness; we can only look for general points of resemblance; and we must not interpret that which is ambiguous in a way that will contradict that which is plain. Now the rich man was too late; he sought the Lord where and when he could not be found; he lifted up his eyes in hell, and saw Lazarus in Abraham's bosom; and prayed that Lazarus might be sent to dip the tip of his finger in water to cool his tongue; but he was too late; he was not a praying man on earth; and therefore, now being in hell, it was too late. And thus, the man that lives and dies in his sin, after that it is too late. But I will never say it is too late all the time, a man is a living man; no, never. As to the old wives' fable that you have sinned the day of grace away, here is the Bible, bless God for it; read it all through; and see if you can find a single instance of a man sinning the day of electing grace, the day of regenerating grace, the day of pardoning grace away. Men tell us so; but the Bible never tells us any such thing; no, no; it would be very poor grace if it could be sinned away. That is a very different story from the idea that Christ put away sin; but according to you free-willers, sin has put him away; and according to you duty-faith men, you say that Jesus Christ invites everybody, and they won't come, and they are damned because they won't come; so that according to your account, their sin has put Christ away, instead of Christ putting their sin away; these men turn things upside down. Being too late, then, means the man who lives and dies ignorant of Christ; and then when in hell, it is too late; there is no admission then; because when the soul is once in hell, it is in hell forever; and when the soul is once in heaven, it is in heaven forever. Come then, let me say this morning, I hope I know how to speak to a sinner as well as to a saint, if I am speaking to some poor creature just beginning to be concerned about his state; perhaps you are far advanced in years; ah, says Satan, it is too late now. Too late! how long have you lived? five hundred years? Ah, you are trifling with me. No, I am not. No, I have hardly lived half a hundred, or not much more. And yet you think that having lived fifty or sixty years without Christ and without God, it is too late. I wonder what in the world you would have thought if you had been an antediluvian, and had lived, 900 years in the way you have now lived about 50 years; what would you think of that? Why, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, really, I was going to say; but however, you do not yet know the Lord; and therefore, do not know how great his grace is. It is not too late all the time you are a living man, up to the eleventh hour. If I visit the dying bed of an ungodly man, and can find half an hour before

he dies that there is a concern in his soul, and can pray with him, and get liberty of soul, it is not too late while the breath is in the body; for all the time the man is out of hell, he is where mercy can reach him, and where mercy does reach thousands. There is no such thing as being too late while a man is alive. In the words of Dr. Watts, though some put a legal sort of twang to them,

“While the lamp holds out to burn,
The vilest sinner may return;”

that is if God turn him, but not else. After death it is too late; but I cannot preach to one this morning who is too late; that is impossible; because you are not dead; could not be here if it were too late. No; the Lord says to a poor sinner, Seek you the Lord while he may be found; that is, while you live. These foolish, then, died in their sins, and were too late; and so, if we die in our sins, we are too late. But the Lord will take care that all his children shall be taught of him; he will take care to search out all his sheep where they have been scattered. in the cloudy and dark day. It is never too late all the time you are living; despair not; there is mercy almighty, love almighty, a Savior almighty, grace almighty: never too late while you are a living man. Bless the Lord for this; I rejoice in this, and bless his holy name. Sinning the day of grace away, shall I describe to you what it is? I make no hesitation in saying that in order to sin the day of grace away, you must annihilate the Almighty; nothing short could, sin away the day of grace; for he has sworn by himself that “In blessing I will bless you.” When you can sin his eternal existence away you have sinned away the day of grace, and not before. Ah but, say some, this is strong language. What cares the devil for weak language? Not a straw; he does not care how hard he hits us, nor how often, if he can get at us; and therefore, God forbid we should show him any quarter; but deal with him as the great deceiver and great enemy of our precious souls.

But the third reason they were excluded was because it was never meant for them. The Bridegroom never intended they should be there. Hear what he says; “I know you not;” when they knocked; “I know you not.” What! die for them, and not know them! Given to him before the world was, and not know them! Ordained by him to eternal life, and not know them! To be his companions, of whom he has said, “For my brethren’s and companion’s sake I will now say, peace be within you,” and not know them! Clearly proving that if Christ did not know them, they were never given to him, never redeemed by him; he was never their Surety; never called by grace; called by natural conscience in the letter of the word, as many are; few are chosen; it was never meant for them; it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared. cannot express, for I still retain it, and I will restrain it as much as I can, my indignation against that doctrine that tells a sinner that he is damned for not savingly believing in the Lord Jesus Christ; whereas such a faith was never intended for such; the kingdom shall be given to them for whom it was prepared. Who was to be Abraham’s heir? Not he whom Abraham and Sarah chose; God said, this shall not be your heir; I do not intend it for him; he shall not have it: but as I do intend it for Isaac, he shall have it. Here are two sons; “Jacob have I loved;” and therefore, he shall come into the kingdom of God; “Esau have I hated;” and therefore, I will leave him to be damned for his sins. It was never meant for them, sir, never. That is the third reason; the sovereignty of God. Ah, then, if it is not meant for them, what is the good of preaching the gospel to every creature? We must preach the gospel to all; God will find out his own, and he will have his own; he never allows men to choose for him. There is one apparent exception to that rule; there is one remarkable instance in which he allowed men to choose for him; they would have a king; well, I will send you one; but he gave a king in his wrath, and

took him away in his anger; God never intended Saul's posterity to fill the throne of Judah; God had chosen his man, he had chosen the person that should do so. David said, God has given me many sons; but of all my sons Solomon is the man that God has chosen to fill the throne. It was not meant for them; it shall be given to them for whom it was prepared. This is a truth essential to our firmness in the gospel. Now there are some apparent exceptions to this doctrine which I must just name. First, it may be asked, was paradise intended for Adam? Yes, sir; yet he lost it, because it was intended for him conditionally; it was never intended for him only conditionally; and therefore, if those conditions failed, he lost it. Was the earthly Canaan intended for the Jews? It was, conditionally; and if they performed the condition, they retained the inheritance; if not, they lost it. Was the gospel dispensation, for the temporal prosperity of the land of Canaan, and the preservation of the Jewish nation, intended for the Jews? Yes, sir, conditionally; if the Jewish nation repent, and receive Jesus Christ in the dispensation of the gospel, then their city shall be preserved, their land preserved; and they might have been a prosperous nation to this day; but the conditions failed, and they lost the inheritance. But, sir, salvation, eternal life, was never intended for any man conditionally; it is the gift of God the Father; it is the effectual ministration of God the Son; for he has said, "You have given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as you have given him;" and the Holy Spirit quickens absolutely the same souls unto eternal life; so that all Israel may be unto the glory of God, as trophies of his grace. It was intended for them absolutely.

I must now make a few remarks, and then close, upon the nature of this exclusion. It is, in the first place, a most fearful exclusion; because there is no other refuge; be deprived of this, there is nothing but hell left for them. Look backward, forward, up and down, east, west, north, south, there is nothing but hell left. What an awful exclusion. What is the circumstance of men excluding us from their society because we love the truth; what are all the out castings that the friends of truth have endured for the truth's sake, in comparison of that terrible out casting? The Savior might well say, "Fear not them that can kill the body, and after that there is no more they can do; but rather fear him that is able to destroy both body and soul in hell." Oh, it is a fearful out casting. On the other hand, what a reception it is! Oh, what a reception; a welcome reception into a fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore. Second, it is a just exclusion. They are excluded as sinners; not only as empty professors, but as sinners in the first Adam, as under the law; all by nature are under the law; and, therefore, are justly condemned. The exclusion, therefore, was just. On the other hand, the reception of the saints of God to glory will be just, because it will be by the mediatorial perfection of God's dear Son. And then, to darken the scene still more on the one hand, this exclusion will be eternal; "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord not everlasting destruction, as some would have us believe, from being; some hold that they will be annihilated, that hell will come to an end; but it does not say everlasting destruction from being, but everlasting destruction from God's presence; taken away out of his presence. They are living in his presence here; that is, providentially; and often the wicked enjoy the world more and get more of it, much more than the saints do. When I say the world, I mean the providential blessings of the world. The exclusion, therefore, is everlasting; their state indicated by weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. The door was shut. So there are two periods when the door of mercy will be shut; one is, it is shut relatively, when a man dies, that is, if he die in his sins; the next is at the last great day; when the Lord shall have brought home the top stone, gathered in the last object of eternal love; then shall the door of mercy eternally close, exclude the one and include the other. These are indeed the weighty matters of faith, mercy, and judgment.