

THE GATES OF GAZA

A SERMON

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“And Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put them upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of an hill that was before Hebron.” Judges 16:3

In the time of Samson, the Israelites were in bondage to the Philistines. Samson was raised up as a partial deliverer; he, Samson, was to begin to deliver Israel, so that whatever Samson did was to show that the Lord was mindful of his people, who groaned under their burdens, and longed for the God of the Hebrews, that the Lord would work out deliverance for them.

Now our text this morning is rather a long text, but we can condense it, I think so, simplify it. And if all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable, then this part of the word of God is as much given by inspiration as the other parts, and if it is not profitable, then it is because we do not understand it. I will therefore take, generally speaking, a threefold view of our text. Here is, first, *something that Samson did for the liberty of the people*, that he “took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put them upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of an hill that is before Hebron. Secondly, *the time when he did this*, it was midnight. Third, and last, *its publicity*, he took these doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, bar and all, to the top of a hill that is before Hebron.

First, *the miracle which he wrought*. You observe here that Samson was alone, and that these doors of the gate of the city are an impressive figure of that which keeps us all, while in a state of nature, in captivity to Satan; in a word, that these doors of this gate, posts; bar and all, they all set forth those things which must be removed in order for the soul to be saved. Let us hear what the word of God says about this. Now, then, first of all, it is said of the Savior that he has spoiled principalities and powers. And when a soul is born of God; it then begins to find out the hindrances that must be removed in order for it to come out from the state in which it is into that liberty wherewith Christ alone can make it free. Now, then; Christ has spoiled principalities and powers, made a show of them openly. Take, in the first place, sin, for these doors of the gate are all figures, as I have said, of that which holds us in bondage. Now the Lord Jesus Christ, then, has taken away sin; he has put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; and just as we are led to discover this we come into the liberty of the gospel, into the presence of God, as sinless as Christ is sinless. Here it is that

he has spoiled principalities and powers. And when this is discovered, how completely he has removed this hindrance, and sin certainly is a hindrance; if this be taken out of the way, then all the others we have to mention must follow. Let us, therefore, dwell for a minute or two upon this, because it is that part of the gospel which the enemy does not at all like us to understand; there is nothing that so defeats Satan as a clear apprehension of Christ having taken sin entirely and eternally away; there is nothing so strengthens the soul, there is nothing so endears the Savior, there is nothing so endears eternity, there is nothing so lightens up our path in the world, as a clear apprehension of this, that sin is the gate, the door, that it is the hindrance which he has taken away. Even our natural conscience sometimes will lay sins to our charge which God does not lay to our charge. I cannot find language to describe the blessedness of this part of the work of Christ, that while the doors and bars of sin are, as it were, shut upon us, and we are closed in, Christ has sacrificially put sin away, gone, every particle of it. And the very manner of our text indicates this, for each department, though I should be reckoned fanciful, the doors, the posts, the bar, each department would bear spiritualizing, were we disposed to do so. What I am now aiming at is to show, and desiring that the Lord would impress upon your minds, that if you are brought to see how Jesus Christ has taken sin entirely away, now God the Father views you by what Jesus Christ has done, just as free from sin as Jesus Christ is, and just as righteous as Jesus Christ is, and loved just as Jesus Christ is loved, and held in esteem just as Jesus Christ is held in esteem. Why, it is this that endears the Lord. Now, those of you that are tried upon this matter, you know very well that it is the prevalence of those evils we have in our nature that makes us sometimes rebel and have hard thoughts of God. It is one of the most difficult things in the world, while we feel what poor creatures we are, to believe that the Lord has nothing against us; that every impediment is removed out of the way, gone, and gone forever. Believe you this? Can you give Jesus the honor of having taken away these gates of hell, having thus destroyed sin, removed it out of the way, so that it shall be no hindrance? Can you give God the Father the honor of having done this, of having laid help upon One that is mighty? Can you give the Holy Spirit the honor of having testified of this? You say, Yes, but there is one thing I cannot do, and that is, I cannot believe that he did it for me. Well, my answer to that is, If you know your need of him, and are brought to see that Jesus Christ has done this, and if you can say, really and conscientiously before God, that trembling as is your hope, that weak as your hope is, you have no hope of the mercy of God, you have no hope in the favor of God, you have no hope in the promise of God, and you have no hope of ever seeing his face with joy in any other way, I would say to you there never was such a character as you are lost, and there never will be; for if the Lord intended your eternal condemnation, he never would have discovered to you what a fatal hindrance sin is to you, and that none but Christ could take that hindrance out of the way, and that he has taken it out of the way. And as with Samson there were none of the people, Samson carried the whole himself, of the people there was none with him; so, with Christ, his own arm brought salvation. The Lord help you little ones, that are tried as to your interest in these things, to fasten upon this, and to rest upon it, and to think with confidence, and to comfort yourselves with the thought that for you to die would be to die as none ever did die, for you to perish would be to perish as none ever did perish, And I lay great stress upon this, because it says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," and if you are poor and needy enough to need this wondrous transaction of the dear Savior, then you are interested therein; nothing will do for you but this same gospel; it will be still your hope that Jesus Christ has spoiled principalities and powers.

Then, again, death is another thing which is represented by these doors, and by this bar of hindrance, death. How sweet the thought, that whatever sting there was in death Jesus has endured; whatever bitterness there was in death, Jesus has endured that bitterness; and however terrible was the flaming sword that lifted up itself and demanded life, that sword, having received the life of an incarnate God, disdains to ask for more, so that death is gone, swallowed up in victory! When we can thus see how complete the work is, and how death is thus swallowed up in victory, we shall then, just in proportion as we enter into this, be delivered from the fear of death. Thus, then, has Christ opened the two-leaved gates, thus has Christ broken in pieces these gates of brass, thus has Christ cut this bar of iron in sunder, thus has Christ opened the way into eternal glory. John saw a door in heaven, but he saw no hindrance. Here, then, is Samson, in this department a type of the Lord Jesus Christ, having thus destroyed sin and death. Again, I must take a little notice of one particular clause here; there seems something rather hearty in it, I think, for it says, "He took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all" "bar and all." So that if Satan could have said, "Well, the bar is left, we shall be able to stop them now;" so he has taken away bar and all. It seems so indicative of the completeness of his work. Shall I mention three or four things which this bar of hindrance seems to me to represent? Now it may represent the things I have stated, namely, sin and death; we will not go over that ground again. Now the law of God may be represented by this bar; for the law of God is one hindrance. It stands in the way; for not one jot nor tittle of that law can fail. It does not appear to me in our day that men make the law of God the barrier that it ought to be made. The law of God ought to be turned into a barrier; it ought to be one of the means by which the sinner is stopped and shut up and made hopeless and helpless. Well, say you, but the Lord said to the Israelites he gave them that law to perform. I know he did; but, as we have lately said, they cried out for a mediator, and they could perform that law only by a mediator. And therefore, what is the way in which the law ought to be handled now? In a way to cut the sinner up; to show to the sinner that he is everything the reverse of that law; that that law is spiritual, holy, just, and good; that the sinner is carnal, unholy, unjust, and evil. So that; do whatever you may, you can't please the law; because what you do, you may pray, but then your prayers, apart from faith, and without faith it is impossible to please God, if you pray; your prayers are like yourself, they are carnal; if you perform good works, they will savor of your carnality; and if you live the life of an angel, and so spotlessly and purely that you admire yourself, and wish everybody else to admire you, still it is carnal. Then you maybe in all good conscience, as Saul of Tarsus was; but when the law comes to lay hold of you, you find it is all nothing. Why, you will say, I thought I had performed all the law required, "All these I have kept from my youth; what lack I yet?" Why, you lack what you never possessed yet. You are a rich man, great possessions, and yet you come and daringly say that you have kept all these commandments, and one of the commandments is, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," and yet you are a rich man. Why; you ought to see that your neighbor is as well off as yourself." If you have a thousand pounds, and you have nine poor neighbors by you, you ought to give a hundred pounds to each, and let them be as well off as you are; or else where is your love to the law, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself"? Jesus Christ gave himself for the people, and gave heaven to the people. Jesus Christ did not merely give a part of what he had in order to make the people as well off as himself; he gave all, he gave himself. Well, then, this young man thought he had kept the whole law, and he had not kept a particle of it. He had an empty form, but he had not the spirit of it, he lacked the essential. "Go and sell all that you have, and give to the poor." Now whether he did that or did not I do not know; at any rate he did not do it joyfully, for "he went away sorrowful." He did not seem at all glad of the opportunity of completing his obedience;

and whether he did or did not, that I say nothing about. I only say this, that by every gospel minister the law of God ought to be used to sink the sinner into despair, to cut him up, root and branch. "The law was added because of transgression, that sin by the law might become exceeding sinful." And when a sinner finds out what a barrier the law is to him, then he says, Here is the law, how shall I get past this iron gate? how shall I get past this barrier? Here is a barrier I cannot get past. Why, to know the law, what a barrier it is to our getting access to God, and acceptance with God, and the power of pleasing God, to know this is one of the best means towards knowing the deep mysteries of the everlasting gospel; and the man that does not know; this law as a barrier will not much prize what the Savior has done. I have no doubt the apostle spoke with a great deal of pleasure when he found he had some people to whom he could thus speak, "I speak to them that know the law." And you know how he there represents that law, and how that law is legally dead, and how the people were dead to that; how the barrier was removed. And how was it removed? It was removed by the Savior's obedient life, it was removed by his atoning death; and now you are not under the law, you have nothing whatever to do with the law, except to look at it as that by which as a sinner you stand condemned before God; to look at it as that fiery law that would have breathed eternal and almighty indignation forever into your guilty soul; there would have been no escape from anything you could do on earth or suffer in hell. But by the work of Christ the barrier is removed; here everything is removed out of the way; here you are free; the law asks no more. Thus, then, has Jesus taken away sin, taken away death, taken away the law; not taken away the law unlawfully, he has taken away the law rightfully and properly; and here we are free, and free for ever.

But then you must, of course, expect if you come into such a gospel as this, and give the Lord the honor of having done this, you must expect to be outcast by the world. There is not an evil name which they can call such which they do not. Most of our duty-faith ministers, when they are shut up, or have not got their stories worked up well, then they can occupy half an hour in falling upon the *hypers*, And you will see these duty-faith people will attack, us in a way we never do them. We may have cause to attack them in the way that they have to attack us; for no denomination I know of pretends to be free from faults and infirmities in all respects. But these, duty-faith men, when they attack us, if they would attack us upon doctrine, and, attack us wherein we differ, I should think it fair then, I should not reckon it personal then. But to impress upon their hearers that, all these high doctrine people are drunkards, and profligates, and everything that is bad; that is what these low doctrine men try, to impress upon their hearers; and they say, Why, they do not even hold to obey the law, and they don't this, and don't that, and do the other; I would ask any one, Is that fair? I say, Is it fair? Is it fair, if I am speaking of a Roman Catholic, to try to degrade that man morally because I differ from, him theologically? Is it fair, if I am speaking of a Church of England man, to try to degrade that man morally because I differ from him ecclesiastically? Is it fair, is it just, is it right in the sight of God, if I attack a Wesleyan as regards his doctrine, to try to degrade that man morally, and represent that man, because he is a Wesleyan, as something to be shunned and avoided as a serpent or a mad dog? But so, of old the Lord himself was treated; they could not refute his doctrine, so they sought to degrade him *morally*, think of this, you accusers of the brethren, you slanderers of the saints of God! I would ask, Is such a thing just? And yet this is just the way in which we are by the low doctrine men attacked. Now, some of you low doctrine people, that are here this morning, for I know there are some by the very look of you, when you hear your ministers again, you just watch them, and you will see that instead of attacking us in our citadel, they run away and attack us upon matters wherein we do not differ. Let us beware

that we do not imitate them in this; for “with what judgment you judge shall you be judged; and with what measure you mete it shall be meted unto you again.” Now, then, I boldly declare I am not under the law of God; I boldly declare that I am not under a law of bondage, that I am not under a fiery law. Do you believe that? Ah, then, you are lawless. No, I am not. I am not under the legal law of God, that demands everything, and does not give strength to do anything. You say, What law are you under? I am under the law of the Spirit of God; I am under the law of the preceptive will of God, as declared in the New Testament; and therefore, being under the law of God’s preceptive will, I am as one consequence a Baptist; I feel I ought to obey that precept. I love the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper because it is a precept; and I like to be apart from the world, and to walk in the fear of God and in the love of God, because it is the Lord’s will. So, I am under the law of faith, I am under the law of the gospel, I am under the law of liberty, I am under the law of love, constrained by the love of God to every good word and work. So, then, call me just what you like; I only say this, that Jesus has taken away sin, that he has taken away the curse, that he has taken away the bars of hell, that he has removed every impediment; that we are no longer under the law, that our work is not at Sinai, but at Zion; that our business is not on the burning mount, but in the tranquil tabernacle; that our business is not to meet the demands of a thundering law, but our business is at the throne of grace, there to confess our sin, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help us in the time of need. If you ask, Do you hold the moral law as a rule of life? I answer, that if you mean by the moral law the law of Sinai as a legal rule, then I do not hold the moral law as a rule of life; but if you mean by the term or words *moral law*, if by these words you mean the preceptive will of God as recorded in the New Testament, if this be what you mean, I do hold the moral law as a rule of life to the believer. All this, and a great deal more, when our text is taken spiritually, is fairly implied. The same language is used to describe the deliverance of the Israelites from Babylon. The Lord said he would go before Cyrus, and break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron; and so, the Lord did. So, then, it is your happy lot, I will say so, it is our happy lot, to discover what there was in the way, and that Christ alone could remove these hindrances, that he has removed them, and that faith brings us into the happy consequences of what he has done. And as regards these duty-faith ministers that attack us in the ungodly, and unjust, and wicked, and crafty way in which they do, I only say, the Lord preserve us from following in their spirit. Let them degrade us, but do not let us do so to them. In what we differ let us declare our differences, with our reasons for differing, but do not let us try to reproach them. Reproach will never convince a man; reproof wisely ministered may convince, and do a man good; but reproach will never do so. And therefore, I only say I hope we shall be preserved from the spirit which they from time to time, both from the pulpit and from the press, manifest towards the people of God. And some of you low-doctrine people here this morning, you ought to think over this matter. You ought to ask yourselves, Is there after all, for my minister, my duty-faith minister, professes to love everybody, and professes to be crying his eyes out of his head; I expect to see him come some morning into the pulpit without his eyes, having cried them out of his head for the salvation of souls; professes to be in agony for everybody; but you will or ought to say to yourself, Amidst all this professed love, and agony, and concern, is it so after all that there is a secret enmity against God’s truth, and that that enmity constrains him to degrade the people that profess that truth that he is a stranger to in the vitality of it; he holds it on his tongue, but knows nothing of it in his soul? Is it possible, after all, that my loving minister carries a dagger hidden under his garment, and would stab the reputation of what he calls the *hypers*; instead of aiming to show that they are wrong in doctrine, puts a negative upon their lives? Beware of that; look at it; say to yourself, If I thought my minister’s heart were not a loving one, if I thought that were the

case, I should begin to suspect whether he was not a minister from beneath, instead of being a minister from above. Mind, I don't say he is; I am only saying what you would say. And let me say here what I have said a thousand times before, that the enemy cares not in what way we are deceived if he can but deceive us. Thus, then, friends, as Samson took away the doors of the gate of the city, the posts went away with them, bar and all, and thus opened the way for every captive to rush from under the tyranny of the Philistines, from under the tyranny of the enemy; so Jesus Christ has removed sin, swallowed up death in victory, magnified the law, taken every barrier away; there shall not be any barrier which shall not be ultimately removed. And if this be vile, then I only say I hope yet to be viler; if thus to rejoice before the ark of the immutable covenant, if this be shameless, then I hope to be yet more shameless; if this be base, I hope yet to be baser. I hope I can say I love this glorious gospel of what the Savior has done, and that more and more. Depend upon it, as we draw towards our journey's end we shall rest more and more upon these things.

I will not attempt, for time would not permit, to spiritualize the different parts, which easily might be done, but which I will not do; only just observe, now, here is Samson shut up in Gaza. Ah, the people made sure they had got him. We have got him now; never get out of this. Here is a circumstance! He is shut up now, he is done now, all over with him now. Ah, so you sometimes in soul-trouble; Satan may say, Ah, it is all over with you now; no hope for you now; depend upon it, Satan has got you now; Satan will have you now. Ah, but stop, there is the Lord. Presently up Samson springs. There, Samson, look at those strong doors, look at those enormous posts, look at that tremendous bar; what will you do now? You can't creep under, and you can't get over, they are too high for that; what are you to do? Just goes and takes hold of them, up they come, put them upon his shoulders, and they were only like so many straws. What shall I do with them? Well, I will take them twenty miles; for it was full twenty miles; that is a pretty good step; put them upon his shoulders, and walked off as easily, as possible. Well, how will you get up that hill? Get up very well. They shall have a job to get them back; and there is plenty of time for the people to get free before they get them back again. And so, they were a mere nothing. And just so now; providential circumstances and troubles; ah, you are looking at them; What shall I do? Why, you will take them under your arm by-and-bye, and walk off with them as comfortably as possible. Why, who would have thought it? Why, the word of God has said that "all things are possible to him that believes." Why, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you may say to the doors of this great city, and to the posts, and the bar and all, "Be you removed to the top of the mountain which is before Hebron;" off they will fly; and the gates will almost carry you; instead of your having to carry them. Is there anything too hard for the Lord?" Ah, what soul-trouble is there he cannot carry us through? What gates of brass are there that he cannot break to pieces? what bars of iron, whether in experience or circumstances, that he cannot put sunder? Only we want two or three things, you know, to determine whether we are the persons that will share in such advantages; there must be confidence in the Lord; there must be decision for him; and there must be waiting until he shall come. So, Samson waited until midnight; he waited till the time that the Lord appointed him. I have had many burdens to carry, and, bless the Lord! I have carried them, and carried them to the top of the hill which is before Hebron, that I will come to presently. Thus, then, if I take this circumstance spiritually, it points to the work of Christ; if I take it circumstantially, it points to those dispensations of Providence that should keep us from despair. Oh! what is too hard for the Lord? Read the 11th of Hebrews; see what he has enabled his worthies to do. People may look at us and say, "What do these feeble Jews?" We answer, Nothing; we admit we can do

nothing, only by the Lord our God; through him we shall do valiantly, because he it is that enables us to thrash the mountains.

And I am sure, friends, you will at once see that this middle of the night conveys a solemn idea. When was it Jesus tore up the gates of hell? When was it he tore up the gates of sin and death? When was it that he broke in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron, removed every barrier out of the way, to bring poor sinners up out of their prison, and bring them into freedom? In the middle of the night. Not the middle of the night literally, but the middle of the night mystically. Ah! when Jesus arrived at Calvary's cross, what a dark night, mystically, that was! There was all the darkness of sin, there was all the darkness of the curse, there was all the darkness of death. It was midnight with Jesus. "This is that night much to be remembered;" it will be remembered to all eternity, that solemn night of darkness into which the Savior went. And it was when this darkness had arrived at its *acme*, when this darkness had arrived, at its thickest gloom, then it was that Jesus began to see to the end, then it was that he drew near to the point wherein he said, "It is finished." Immediately the darkness fled, the work was done, his soul was happy, the soul delivered, his people free, and free for ever. That, I think is the idea there meant, in the first place; that is one idea, it is only one. Soul-trouble is midnight; he comes in, opens the prison house, turns the shadow of death into the morning light. A dying hour is a midnight with nature; he comes in, valley of the shadow of death, and turns this dying hour into the morning light. "At evening time, it shall be light." Some of the people of God have found more life, and light, and peace, in their dying hour, than they have found during their whole lifetime before. Thus, then, if I look at the gates being taken away as a figure of what Christ has done; secondly, a figure of the Lord's interposition in his providence, and his dealing with us spiritually as well; and the middle of the-night meaning that the Lord appears just at the time when the world thinks not; he knows when to stir us up, and when to appear for us.

Now "he carried them up to the top of a hill that is before Hebron." The word Gaza, according to Cruden, signifies *strength*; it also signifies *a goat*; and a goat represents the wicked, and therefore Gaza represents the strength of the wicked. And so, the Philistines, by all the strength they had, held the Israelites in bondage; that is the meaning of the word Gaza.

Samson came and proved that God was stronger than this goat, far stronger than Gaza, stronger than all that opposed. And he carried these to the top of the hill, as a figure of the Savior's carrying his triumphs to the very height of perfection. Just so far as he carried these gates, these posts, and this bar, just so far, shall I say, he carried his victory. Now of course it is but a simile, or a figure, or a type; and we must be careful how we handle it, seeing there is but a step from the sublime to the ridiculous; but a step from that that is solemn and instructive to that that is absurd. Now Jesus Christ has reached heaven, and he has carried his victory into heaven; and the saints of God there see the victory, there see sin put away, there see death swallowed up, in a way you and I never yet have, not in such a perfection as they see it; they enjoy the full advantages of it, we enjoy partial advantages, and that is all, as yet, of the victory that Christ has wrought, But what does the word Hebron mean? It has a meaning, and a meaning that very beautifully sets forth the experience of the people of God that realize this victory, Hebron is the place where David reigned seven years; perhaps reigning there seven years to point to the perfection of the Savior's reign. Now Hebron signifies, in, the first place, *society*, *sociality*. And so those who are brought into the victory of which I have spoken, they are brought into the company of God the Father, and the Son, and the

Holy Ghost. Society, fellowship with the Father, and into the company of angels and of saints. We shall never be left solitary. All of us need society on earth; all of us ought to prize our social ties, because they are the gifts of the Lord, and the way in which the Lord blesses us is very often in making us blessings to one another; it is a great mercy where it is so, is it is not? We should always aim, friends, to be a blessing to others, if we can; make ourselves useful; We shall never regret it, never. Now then, society, sociality. And I am sure there is no sociality like that divine and holy sociality which the saints of God have by the victory the Savior has wrought. And secondly, the word, for it rises as it goes on, in meaning, signifies *friendship*. And here we have, in this victory, a friend, Christ Jesus, that loved at all times; here we have a friend that will never leave nor forsake us:

“Here our best friends and kindred dwell,
Here God our Savior reigns.”

And the last meaning, for all this is characterizing the city that saw, the Hebronites saw the victory, and so the people of God see the victory, they see that the liberty is wrought; the last meaning of the word Hebron is that which we can hardly find language to describe. If you use the word *ecstasy*, that will go a little way towards it; if you use the words *exquisite delight*, that will go a little way towards it; if you use the words *rapture almost to madness*, that will go a little way towards it. How significant it is! Here are the people brought from the goat city, the city of the ungodly; here they are now in a position where they have fellowship with the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit; where they have friendship with each other, where they have ecstasy, rapture, infinite delight, and charms almost to madness? I like that, I like it, when the gospel of God makes me so happy, I can hardly contain myself. If I were to give way to my feelings I should go on, and talk, and talk, and you would say, The man is mad. I feel, when I look at the way in which the Lord has done his work, the immutability of his counsel; when I look at the way in which he holds his saints, how he looks upon them as a crown of glory, as his diadem, as his treasure, as infinitely dear to him, and he that touches one of them touches the apple of his eye; when I sometimes look at these things, my soul, before I am aware, makes me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib, and I sing,

“Oh what wonders he has done!”

So, then, here is the victory wrought; here is the solemnity of the night of Christ’s suffering; here are the people, in friendship, reconciliation to God; here are the people in a divine society; here are the people enchanted, enraptured, delighted, and all their sorrows charmed away; sorrow and sighing flee away, and they shall be charmed for ever and ever,