

THE WORK OF HIS MINISTERING SERVANTS

Preached at the Zion Chapel, Calne, Anniversary Services on July 20th, 1862.

"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." Isa.62:10

Two cities are spoken of in Scripture, both alluding, to the church of God; one in her militant state, the other in her triumphant state. The description in Revelation 21 & 22 of the New Jerusalem shows the state of the church triumphant; that in Isaiah 26:1-3, the city for which God hath appointed salvation for walls and bulwarks, represents the church militant. The New Jerusalem, seen in vision, had three gates on each side, which differed from the gates which the church militant has now to enter. These gates are now entered consecutively. First, as in ancient citadels, the barbican, which admits into the outer court; then the second; then the gate into the citadel.

This Scripture is a voice. To whom? "Ye that make mention of the LORD" (ver.6). By whom addressed? Addressed by God to his ministering servants, whom he has sent to go before his flock, and instrumentally to lead them into green pastures. To these he gives five commands, which I shall speak of as laid down in the text. I. "Go through, go through the gates." How emphatic this repetition by the Lord, showing how necessary that ministers should have themselves proved the reality of the truths they bring before their hearers! They must go through before they can lead others through. Who would trust his life with a captain who did not understand navigation? Who would trust a pilot to pilot him up mighty Thames unacquainted with its

meanderings? Who would trust his life in a train with an amateur for a driver? So no one can truly ministerially obey this Scripture who has not himself experimentally passed through these gates. No human education or advantages will help a man through. I had my share of them; but Oxford could not teach me my religion, nor could aught short of God the Holy Ghost.

The first gate, then, that both preachers and hearers must through is *Regeneration*, which is indeed a strait gate. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way" (Matt.7:14). This is illustrated, among other illustrations, by Bunyan's dream of the desirable state of the saints at Bedford, and the strait narrow space he had to squeeze through; so that at last, after much squeezing, he sidled in, as he graphically expresses it. The next gate is *Faith*. This reflects light on the first gate, and is intimately connected with it.

The next is *Hope*. You will say, "Should not hope be placed first?" No! How can we hope for what we do not believe? How can hope enter within the veil unless we believe in Jesus there entered? The next is *Love*. The door of faith, the door of hope, and the strait gate are spoken of in Scripture; but love is not directly spoken of as a door; yet it is entered. John saw a door opened in heaven, and the God of love, and the objects of his love there. And experience proves that when new life, faith, and hope are realized, love also will be known and felt. And this will be manifested by a deliberate, advised, and affectionate aim to keep his precepts. This important part of the gospel, the precepts, I am grieved to say, is so little dwelt upon by preachers; yet the keeping of them is the proof of love.

II. "Prepare ye the way of the people." This is another work God gives his servants ministerially to do. Jesus is the Way,

the Truth, and the Life. To prepare this way is to set him forth as the sinner's only hope, his only salvation, his All and in all, as the Scriptures testify of him, and as the Holy Ghost reveals him to the soul of the poor and needy self-destroyed sinner who is drawn to him; showing from the Scriptures the work of Jesus, what he came to do; describing the characters, and the characteristics of those for whom he came to do this mighty work, in dying the just for the unjust; and showing that *sinner*s need just such a Saviour, and he is just suited to such sensible sinners. This is preparing *the*, not *a*, way for the people.

III. "Cast up the highway." We see in wet lands and muddy roads, in Wiltshire and in Berkshire, a way made higher than the muddy wet roads, in order that travellers may travel with comfort. And it is the same in many places referred to in the Bible. This requires spade and mattock, with persevering strength and assiduity. This has its parallel in the third work God sets his ministering servants to do. It is done by showing that, though the road lies through much perplexity, much temptation, felt failures, fouling one's garments, and many and heavy troubles, yet the everlasting love of God, the watchful care and providence of God, and the restoring power of God, are still in exercise on the behalf of both great and small, who are really in the way, or passed through the gates; in showing that his everlasting love will surely carry on and perfect what he has begun; in inciting to filial confidence in him, by scripturally and experimentally showing his watchful care, his everlasting love, and his wondrous display of it in the Person and work of his Son, in the promise and possession of the Holy Ghost, in his continuous leadings, and in his precious promises; this is casting up the highway. Ministers must show the everlasting love, watchful care, and unalterable purpose of God to bring his redeemed ones safe to glory. Though the way is rough, yet all the promises are

Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus (2 Cor.1:20).

IV. "Gather out the stones." That is, ministerially expose errors and heresies. Some roads have large stones; yea, some, in some countries, have boulders in them. To gather out these requires Herculean strength, levers, bars, &c.; but they must be gathered ministerially out of the way of the simple. On our knees we must use the lever, pickaxe, &c. Love would make me alight, as well as duty, from my carriage, to endeavour to remove the boulder, lest my dear wife and children should be capsized. Some men (nay, demons, I call them), have put stones on the railway lines to send numbers into eternity. But, shocking as this is, what is this diabolical act compared to that of those who propagate errors, such as deny the Godhead of Jesus, and his eternal Sonship; God's everlasting love to his people, and their certain enduring to the end; the chastisement of God's people for their sin, &c.? We must get on our knees effectually to use the lever of God's Word, so as to root up these boulders, and thus make a plain path; and then fill up the hole left with truth in the love of it.

Other stones are difficult and perplexing Scriptures, and knotty and seemingly contradictory experiences. To explain these, as God enables us, in the light of other parts of the Word, and one's own experience of God's delivering hand, comparing spiritual things with spiritual, is to instrumentally gather out the stones. And as literally, sometimes, where Macadam is not followed, the obstacles are weighty, so are the stones hinted at. God help you to remove them.

V. I cannot say much about lifting up the standard for the people. I will only say that a standard is used as a rallying point. It has other uses, which I cannot now enter into. The banner or standard is love. I appeal to you who are ministers. Have you passed through the gates of

regeneration, faith, hope, and love? Are you preparing the way of the people? Are you casting up the highway? Are you gathering out the stones? Are you lifting up the standard for the people? If so, as of the ability that God giveth, God bless you in your deed. I claim no authority over you, though I thus appeal; but, being a fellow-labourer who has long been in the way and ministry, and having in my own soul proved these things, I in love exhort you and stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance. God bless his Word.