

# Coach House Church BEACONS

## LOCKED AND BOLTED

23RD JUNE 2020

In November of the year 446 BC a man called Nehemiah was troubled. His heart was heavy because he had just received some bad news. Now at this time Nehemiah was living in Susa, Persia, and was working as one of the Kings most important servants. He was living in one of the most desirable places to live and had access to all the most modern conveniences but his heart was somewhere else. You see Nehemiah was a Jew, descended from one of the Jews taken into captivity some 140 years previously.

During that period the exiles, as they were called, had kept safe all the books about their history which Nehemiah had read and fully understood. He knew that there was but one God and that He had chosen his people to worship Him. He knew that they had gone the wrong way, that they had chosen to do their own thing, and not followed Gods laws properly. But he also knew that God had designated Jerusalem as His home here on earth and that God loved the city.

***Psalm 78 says "On the Holy mountain stands the city founded by the Lord. The Lord loves the gates of Jerusalem more than any other city in Israel. O city of God, what glorious things are said of you"***

Unfortunately when Nehemiah's brother arrived he was unable to say anything glorious about Jerusalem. Nehemiah knew that some of the exiles had been allowed to return to Jerusalem 93 years previously and wanted to know how things were going.

***Nehemiah's brother said "Things are not going well for those who returned to the province of Judah. They are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down, and the gates have been destroyed by fire"***

When Nehemiah heard this he sat down and wept, then he mourned, fasted and prayed for a period of 4 months. Now the story of Nehemiah has many important lessons, today we are see what we can learn from the re-building of the gates.

Gates are generally used to control access. If your sole purpose was to keep people out then you would just build a wall, but a gate allows access or egress. It allows you allow in what you want, it is under your control and it is your choice when it is open or closed.

Now Nehemiah's job was to restore the walls and the gates of Jerusalem. The walls and the gates represent the glory of God as we saw in our reading from Psalm 87. We see this also in Psalm 48 where it says

***“God himself is in Jerusalem's towers, revealing himself as its defender”.***

In chapter 3 of the book of Nehemiah we read the account of the rebuilding work and within this we see that there are 5 gates which specifically mention the repair of the bolts and bars. Through these we can see the journey we take as Christians, from broken and useless to restored and functioning.

First we look at the Valley gate. The Valley gate was at the lowest point of the wall and was repaired by people who came into Jerusalem from Zanoah, some 13 miles away, to do this work. It is also the point from which Nehemiah started his initial inspection of the wall. We often come to God when we are at our lowest point.

***Proverbs 3:34 says “God opposes the proud but favours the humble”***

In our walk with Jesus we can only start from where we are, but He will always guide us upwards.

From this point we must ensure that we bolt the gate afterwards so that there is no chance of returning to old ways.

The wall from the Valley gate led to the Dung gate. The people took their waste out through this gate. This reminds us that we have debris in our lives to get rid of. Our past is filled with the waste of sin. A city which has human waste in the streets will be a terrible place to live, it must be thrown outside the city. If we try to hang on to our sinful ways it will have the same effect.

***1 John 1:9 says "If we confess our sins to him, he is faithful, and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all wickedness"***

This gate must be left open. As you grow you may find more waste to get rid of. Do it quickly so as not to give you a nasty niff.

The next gate was the fountain gate. This gate was near to the pool of Siloam, where the blind man was healed. Clean flowing water in the bible is always associated with the Holy Spirit. When we are away from God we are blind to his ways, maybe even to his very existence. When we come to him God gives us His Spirit and we are healed of our blindness. We leave this gate open so that Gods Spirit can always come in.

Next is the Old City Gate. This gate, of course, led to the new part of the city. It was a link between the old and the new. You must leave the old behind and lock the door firmly behind you. You cannot serve God by staying in your old ways, you must become new in order to serve Him faithfully. In Pauls 2nd letter to the Corinthians chapter 5 he wrote

***"Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new creation, the old life is gone, a new life has begun"***

The last gate is the Fish gate. This gate was one of two that protected the northern approaches to Jerusalem and was heavily fortified. It was one of the towers referred to in Psalm 48 from which God himself defended Jerusalem. This is perhaps the most important tower as it represents normal daily life. Many merchants would come in and out of this gate all day long. We have a daily interaction with others. Information in, words and deeds out. So the gate is open most of the time. But we must be prepared to close this gate when needed. We cannot allow our city to become defiled by what comes into it.

Things we see, things we look at, the people we listen to or even places we go. We must be prepared to shut these out when they are clearly going to defile us. Likewise what goes out. If we recognise something coming out from us that is not giving God glory then we must take steps to prevent it getting out. Close your gates to both incoming and outgoing threats.

***The apostle John wrote in his second letter "Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked so hard to achieve. Be diligent so that you receive your full reward"***

It would have been a waste of time if after repairing all the walls Nehemiah had just left the gate open and unguarded. His enemies would have walked straight in.

From what we have seen about these gates we can see that there is a time to open or close the gates in our life but we can also see that we must remain vigilant. However it is important to remember that we are not alone in this task. Jesus is our eternal watchman.

When we give our lives to him we also give Him authority to close the gates. This does not take away from our responsibility to keep our own watch, but take comfort from the one who has the greatest authority being there to guide you.

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Let Him guide and protect you and your city will be always be clean and safe.



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