Nehemiah 3  “Lessons from the Gates of Jerusalem”

Intro. How many of you like to travel? Well I want you to know that today we are going to travel back in time to the city of Jerusalem as it was being rebuilt under Nehemiah. We will go around the city counter-clockwise with special attention upon the ten gates that are mentioned, and draw some lessons from the meaning of their names. I believe there are some wonderful truths that are pictured in Nehemiah chapter 3.

If you have been with us on Sunday mornings you know that Nehemiah has been called to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls and the gates. After investigating the situation, he presented his plan to the leaders and workers, and they agreed to support the project. So as we move into chapter 3 we see how the project was completed with different people taking responsibility to complete part of the project. In our next message from Nehemiah we will study how chapter 3 shows us how to work together to get things done. That will not be the focus of today’s message. Instead, we will see how the gates of Jerusalem give us a progressive revelation of a person’s walk with God.

Some of us have had the privilege of going to the city of Jerusalem. To this very day it still has walls and gates. Much of the old city was rebuilt in the 1400s. In fact, look at this picture. I was standing at one of the gates or entrances into Jerusalem.

I preach this message today with some hesitation. Normally I seek to make sure that there is a clear connection between the text and the points in my message. I want my preaching to have textual authority, and that’s one of the strengths of expository preaching. But today’s message is going to be different. I will use my text not as a direct basis for spiritual truth, but as a picture or illustration of spiritual truths found elsewhere in the Bible. Jesus often talked to people using parables as pictures of spiritual truth. That is similar to what I will be doing today. As you go through the message, I believe you will agree with me that the order of the gates presented here must have been providential, for they picture spiritual truth in a progressive way.

Now let us begin our tour of the old city of Jerusalem, over 400 years before the time of Christ. I think it is significant that the first gate to be rebuilt was:

I. THE SHEEP GATE

We read in v.1, “Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests and built the Sheep Gate; they consecrated it and hung its doors....” The sheep gate is where the sheep were brought into the city of Jerusalem to be taken to the Temple to be sacrificed to the Lord. This is the only gate of which it is recorded that it was “sanctified,” that is, dedicated to God in a special way. We read about the Sheep Gate years later in John 5:2.

The Old Testament tells us about the sacrificial system and as we move into the New Testament, we understand why God commanded that sheep and other animals were to be sacrificed to the Lord. When John the Baptist saw Jesus one day, he said, “Behold the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). The sheep gate reminds us of Jesus the Lamb of God. Every sheep that came through that gate was a prophecy of the coming Savior.

The sheep gate is where we begin our tour, and it is where you begin with God. If you want a relationship with God, you must acknowledge that you have sinned against a holy God.
Your sin has created a barrier between you and God. But God provided a way for your sins to be forgiven. Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, shed His blood to pay the penalty of your sin, so that you could be forgiven. So to have a relationship with God and go to heaven, you must come to Jesus and place your faith in Him. Jesus said in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

So they began at the sheep gate. Then as you move down to v.3 we read about the construction of:

II. THE FISH GATE

V.3 says, “Also the sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate; they laid its beams and hung its doors with its bolts and bars.” The Fish gate¹ is where fishermen would come to Jerusalem and sell their fish. Since it was on the north side of Jerusalem, perhaps the fish were primarily brought from the Sea of Galilee. They certainly could have come from the Mediterranean Sea as well. If you wanted to meet someone who was unfamiliar with Jerusalem, you would just tell them to meet you at the fish gate. They could smell their way to it!

What does the Fish gate remind us of spiritually? Well, once you become a Christian, you have an important task. As Jesus was calling His disciples, He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Mt. 4:19; cf. Mk. 1:17). We need to tell others about Jesus, and what He has done for us.

Will you become a “fisher of men”? I believe you should have a part in getting out the Word of God, & seeing people saved. One way you can do that is by inviting family and friends come to S.S. & church with you next Sunday. Tell them it’s Family and Friends Day. You can also pray for unbelievers by name. Can you say that you are truly following Jesus if you are not a fisher of men?

Now let us move on to v.6 where we read about them building:

III. THE OLD GATE

There we read, “Moreover Jehoiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the Old Gate; they laid its beams and hung its doors, with its bolts and bars.” Nehemiah is the only book of the Bible where this gate is referred to by that name (see also 12:39). Perhaps this was one of the original gates of the city of Jerusalem back in King David’s time. On two occasions the Hebrew word translated “old” is contrasted with what is “new” (Lev. 26:10; Song 7:13).

What does the old gate remind us of? Look at Jeremiah 6:16, “Thus says the LORD: ‘Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls.’” We are living in a generation that is always looking for something new [though that is really nothing new (Acts 17:19, 21)]. Who still uses an iPhone 1 or 2? Now, most people with an iPhone 4 want to replace it with the iPhone 5. In politics there are many who want to set aside the Constitution, and develop a new world order. I received a promotional advertisement for an upcoming conference entitled, “This Is Not Your Parents’ Church.” In other words, they are actively promoting casting aside the old ways, and introducing people to the new ways of doing church. Many folks find that quite appealing.

¹ This gate was probably also called the Ephraim Gate (8:16; 12:39; 2 Kgs 14:13) and the Middle Gate (Jer 39:3). It is thought to have been near the location of the present-day Damascus Gate. – Breneman.
Even though I do believe it is perfectly fine to adapt to what is new in culture and technology when these things are morally & spiritually neutral, I do not believe we should cast aside what is old just because it is old. In the book of Daniel God is called, “the Ancient of Days” (7:9, 13, 22). Are we going to replace God just because He is ancient? In Mal. 3:6 God says, “For I am the LORD, I do not change.” There are fundamental truths and principles that apply to every generation, and we would do well to cling to the old ways of the Christian faith. If we do, God says “you will find rest for your souls.” If you are going to follow Jesus you must remain faithful to the old ways of the Word of God.

Now we move to the fourth gate in v.13:

IV. THE VALLEY GATE

There we read, “Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate. They built it, hung its doors with its bolts and bars, and repaired a thousand cubits of the wall as far as the Refuse Gate.” There are valleys especially on the west, south, and east sides of Jerusalem. The Valley gate points to humility. As you go through that gate it takes you into the Valley.

Even so, as you follow Jesus Christ, He will work to cast out the sin of pride, and lead you into a life of humility. We just read last Sunday night from 1 Peter 5:5-6, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.” In Col. 3:12 we read that one of the character qualities that we are to put on is “humbleness of mind.”

There’s a story of a certain Scottish preacher student who was attending class and seminary. One of the local churches invited him to preach. He was one of the top students, and he thought the church was rather privileged to have him as their preacher that day. He expected that he would be the next Charles Spurgeon. Even though he was prepared on paper, he was not prepared in spirit. He became frightened. He forgot everything he knew. He fumbled through the message and the message fell flat. He knew God was not in his message that day. After the service a lady came up to him and said, “If you had gone into the pulpit as you came out of the pulpit you, would have come out of the pulpit as you went into the pulpit.” He had too much pride in his heart to be used of God. [McGee, pp.513-514].

How do we obtain humility? Sometimes God will take us through the Valley gate into the valley of suffering, that we may be humbled before Him, and brought to the place we need to be before Him. The Valley Gate is one that many of us need to go through. Humility is also a fruit of the Spirit. Become empty of self, and full of the Holy Spirit, & you will have humility.

Well there’s another gate we need to go through in our Christian life and that is found in v.14:

V. THE REFUSE GATE

There we read, “Malchijah the son of Rechab, leader of the district of Beth Haccerem, repaired the Refuse Gate; he built it and hung its doors with its bolts and bars.” It is also called the Dung Gate. It was on the south side of Jerusalem leading to the Valley of Hinnom. That is where the garbage of Jerusalem was carried to be burned. Years later Jesus compared hell to Gehennnah, which was another term for the Valley of Hinnom. Garbage was constantly burning in

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2 King Manasseh had sacrificed children to idols in that valley (2 Chron. 33:6), and King Josiah had desecrated the place by turning it into a rubbish heap (2 Kings 23:10).
that valley. Jesus said that place is, “where ‘Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched’” (Mark 9:44). It was indeed a picture of hell.

What does the refuse gate remind us of? There is a lot of garbage in our lives that we need to get rid of. One of the first steps is to obey 1 John 1:9. We are to confess our sins to God. That literally means we are to agree with God that what we have done is sinful and wrong. When you see sand from God’s perspective and agree with him, then we will be much more likely to repent of that sin and turn from it. We will get rid of it from our lives. When we do that, God promises that our sins will be forgiven. But as long as you view your sin as something good and desirable, you will not give it up. You will hold on to the garbage that is defiling your life.

Do you know that there are some people who do not seem to get rid of the garbage from their house? If you were to visit their house you will find garbage and filth all over the place. And that’s the way many people are spiritually.

So let us come to the Refuse Gate and take the garbage of our lives through that gate into the valley of garbage and leave it there. In 2 Cor. 7:1 we read, “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” Notice that we need to cleanse ourselves not only of the filthiness of the flesh, but also of the spirit. We need to get rid of jealousy, hatred, lust, unforgiveness, and bitterness. Toward the end of the service we will observe the Lord Supper together. One thing you are to do is examine your life and see if there is any sin that remains unconfessed. As you realize that you have sin that is present in your life, you are to confess that to the Lord and turn from it.

Now let’s move on to v.15 where we read about:

VI. THE FOUNTAIN GATE

There we read, “Shallun the son of Col-Hozeh, leader of the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate; he built it, covered it, hung its doors with its bolts and bars, and repaired the wall of the Pool of Shelah by the King’s Garden, as far as the stairs that go down from the City of David.” This gate was at a very strategic location near the Pool of Siloam, the old City of David and the water tunnel built by King Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:20). The Gihon Spring that fed the water system was an important source of water in the city. Now we are on the east side of Jerusalem.

This reminds us of something else in the Christian life. In John 4 we read about Jesus speaking to the Samaritan woman. She had tried just about everything in life as she sought happiness and contentment. She had five different husbands, and I suppose none of them satisfied her. She was always thirsting for something else. So Jesus said to her in v.14, “but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.” Jesus is the One that can satisfy your soul. He can satisfy the deepest needs of your life. If you look at John 7:38 we see another reference of how God brings this to pass. Jesus said, “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” In the next verse John says that Jesus was referring to the Holy Spirit, who would become in us like a fountain or rivers of living water. A fountain of water never runs dry. That was one of the strengths of Jerusalem. It was built over several fountains of water. During a siege they always had water.

How do you have the kind of life that is filled with peace and contentment? You need to be filled with the Holy Spirit, who can give us an endless supply of love, joy, and peace. But remember, you have to repent of sin, and come to Jesus, the Lamb of God, in order to be saved and receive the Holy Spirit.
Now let’s continue our tour of Jerusalem and see what else we can learn from the Gates. v.26 we read about:

VII. THE WATERGATE

There we read, “Moreover the Nethinim who dwelt in Ophel made repairs as far as the place in front of the Water Gate toward the east, and on the projecting tower.” The Water Gate sounds familiar, doesn’t it? Was not the same Watergate that brought down Richard Nixon. This was evidently a gate that was near an important source of water for the city of Jerusalem. In fact, the Water Gate led from the old City of David to the Gihon Spring, located adjacent to the Kidron Valley (cf. 8:1, 3, 16; 12:37). It does not say that this gate was repaired. Perhaps it survived the destruction of Jerusalem under the Babylonians.

We will read later in chapter 8 that Ezra the Scribe taught the people from the Word of God. I think it is interesting that he did so at the Water Gate. You see, many times in the Word of God it is compared to water. The reason is the Word of God has a cleansing effect. Psa. 119:9 says, “How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.” In John 15:3 says, “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.” In John 17:17 Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” In Ephesians 5:26 we read that Jesus gave himself for the church, “that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.” So the Word of God is so important in the Christian life.

Have you come to the Water Gate in your Christian life? Do you regularly hear and read the word of God that you may be cleansed by it? The word of God has had such a cleansing effect on my life. Many others here today could testify to the same truth. Furthermore, we all need to be water boys, helping to bring the water to those who are thirsty for a word from God.

Now we continue our journey around Jerusalem and in v.28 we read about:

VIII. THE HORSE GATE

There we read, “Beyond the Horse Gate the priests made repairs, each in front of his own house.” The Horse Gate was near the temple. That is why the priests were involved. This gate is mentioned two other times in Scripture (2 Chr. 23:15; Jer. 31:40). Since it was also close to the King’s Palace, this is where the King’s horses came in and out of Jerusalem. Evidently there were some troops stationed near the king’s palace, and they would go to war through that gate.

The donkey is a symbol of peace. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, he rode upon a donkey. He came in peace. However, the horse is used in war. When Jesus comes again, the Bible says he will ride up on a white horse.

Here we see a picture of the fact that when you become a Christian, you must engage in spiritual warfare against the devil and those aligned with him. Ephesians 6:11-12 says, “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” In 2 Timothy 2:3 Paul told Timothy, “You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” If you are not engaging in spiritual warfare you are not taking a stand for Jesus and for righteousness. You must not be reaching souls for Christ. We’ve got to come to the Horse Gate of our Christian life, and be willing to engage in the spiritual battles of the Christian life.

3 McGee believes that since it did not need to be repaired, that also points to the Word of God, which is perfect & inerrant.
Now let’s continue up the east side of Jerusalem where we come in v.29 to:

IX. THE EAST GATE

There we read, “After them Zadok the son of Immer made repairs in front of his own house. After him Shemaiah the son of Shechaniah, the keeper of the East Gate, made repairs.” The East Gate was near the Temple facing the Mount of Olives. It was the first gate opened each morning. Tradition says that Jesus entered the temple on Palm Sunday through this gate.

What does the East gate remind us of? Notice this is the next to the last gate. It points us to the return of Jesus. If you were to go to Jerusalem today and look on the East side you will see the modern day East Gate. What is unusual about that gate is that it is sealed up. That’s because they believe that the Messiah is going to come through the East gate, & no one else is to use it. That is partly based on Zechariah 14:4, “And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, Which faces Jerusalem on the east….” They believe that He will then enter into Jerusalem through the East gate. Orthodox Jews are still looking for His first coming, but we know that He comes from the East at His second coming. Jesus said in Mt. 24:27, “For as the lightening comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.” Jesus is coming from the east according to that Scripture.

Some time ago Cheryl and I were visiting the church where the map this family attended many years ago. Some of her relatives still attend there. They have the cemetery next to the church, and I noticed that all the graves faced East. When the resurrection takes place those believers will not have to turn around to face Jesus as He returns!

Are you looking and longing for the return of Jesus Christ? Is that your heart’s desire? The apostle John said, “Even so, come Lord Jesus.” If you are not longing for Jesus to come there is something wrong. Have you truly come to Jesus, the Lamb of God? Have you truly repented of your sin, and removed the spiritual garbage from your life?

Now we come to the last gate of our tour. In v.31 we read about:

X. THE INSPECTION GATE

There we read, “After him Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs as far as the house of the Nethinim and of the merchants, in front of the Miphkad Gate, and as far as the upper room at the corner.” Miphkad is actually a transliteration of the Hebrew word found only here. However, the same word is found in a different form in Ezekiel 43:21, “Then you shall also take the bull of the sin offering, and burn it in the appointed place [miphqad] of the temple, outside the sanctuary.” This gate and the sheep gate where the two closest gates to the Temple.

Some believe Miphkad means “review” or “registry.” When a stranger came to Jerusalem, he had to stop at this gate and register. The Hebrew word has a military connotation and refers to the mustering of the troops for numbering and inspection. Tradition says that David met his returning troops at this gate and inspected them. The north side of Jerusalem was the most vulnerable to attack, so this was a logical place to locate the army. It may have also been a gathering place for the temple guards, as they were reviewed & prepared for service.

And so after the last battle of life when Jesus comes again, doesn’t the Scripture teach that He will inspect our lives? 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (see also 1 Cor. 3:10-15; Rom. 14:10-12). Someday

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4 However, it seems he would do so at the Horse Gate.
your life will come under review by the Lord Jesus. Are you ready for the greatest inspection of all?

Now notice v.32, “And between the upper room at the corner, as far as the Sheep Gate, the goldsmiths and the merchants made repairs.” We started at the Sheep Gate and we ended at the Sheep Gate. Doesn’t that tell us something? It seems to me the Sheep Gate was the most important gate of all. Even so, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, is the most important person of all. He is so important that He said in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” Whatever you miss in life, be sure you don’t miss Jesus. Also, Jesus is the “Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending” (Rev. 1:8).

Conclusion: There is the story of a Scottish preacher named Dr. McKay. After a great evangelistic service, a young man came to Dr. McKay and expressed that he did not understand. He explained the gospel yet again and yet the young man professed that he still did not understand. Dr. McKay said, “Young man, do you have a Bible?” He said he did not. So Dr. McKay gave him his Bible and said, “Turn to Isaiah 53:6 and read what it says. And when you get to the first ‘all’ I want you to bow down low, and when you get to the last ‘all’ I want you to stand up straight.” Meanwhile, Dr. McKay caught his train and left. The young man was left with his Bible and turned to that Scripture which says, “All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way…..” Reading that, he bowed down low. He knew that described him quite well. Then he read on, “And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” There we read that God took our sin and laid it on Jesus. Because of His death on the cross we can be forgiven! Believing that, the young man stood up straight, rejoicing that his sin had been forgiven. [McGee, p.517].

Have you come to the Sheep Gate? Have you come to believe in Jesus as your Savior? If not, call upon Jesus to be your Savior. He died for your sins. If you come for this morning I will be happy to lead you in our prayer to trust Christ as your Savior. Then you will be cleansed from sin and you will be ready for His return.


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