

A Gated Church?

By Raymond Elliott

No doubt, we all have heard of a ‘gated residential community,’ but have you heard of a ‘gated church’? Well, the church is not really ‘gated’ but the property is sometimes ‘gated’ to keep unwanted people off of the premises who might break into the building or to enter the grounds for immoral purposes. I have heard of some churches having fences around their parking lot in order to keep would-be thieves from breaking into the automobiles while the members were worshipping. For the first time to my knowledge there is a church of Christ in the city where I live that has installed a gate to keep cars and trucks from entering their property except during their worship assemblies. The famous city of Jerusalem, the center of the Jewish worship, was indeed a literal, ‘gated’ city as mentioned in the Bible.

In the New Testament we find several references to ‘gates’ being mentioned. The first one I desire to observe is the “narrow gate” that is found in the words of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 7:13-14. In most instances, you will have to be invited into a ‘gated community’ before receiving permission to enter the premises if you do not live there. The “narrow gate” that Jesus mentioned is open to all who will accept His invitation that He extended as found in Matthew 11:28-30. “Come unto Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (NKJV). A person cannot accidentally enter the “narrow gate”; rather, every effort will be required as is plainly taught in Luke 13:24: “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.” Those who enter the “narrow gate” and walk the “straitened” way will eventually enjoy eternal life with God. In contrast, there is the “broad gate.” There is much sadness in the Lord’s statement, “many are they that enter in thereby” (ASV). Those who enter the “broad way” simply fail to make proper preparation, or they rebel against the Lord and His Word. This is the easy way to travel, but the end leads to “destruction.”

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus made this precious promise before He died on the cross: “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” One understanding of the latter part of this verse is that though Jesus would die on Calvary’s cross and His soul would go to Hades (the unseen world of departed spirits), He would not remain there (See Acts 2:27). No power could prevent Him from coming forth from the grave and fulfilling His promise to establish His church. This He did on the first Pentecost Day following His resurrection when He sent the Holy Spirit upon His twelve apostles (Acts 2). It was then that the Gospel of Christ was preached and some 3,000 penitent believers responded and were immersed, and the Lord added them to the church

(Acts 2:36-38, 41, 47). The church of Jesus Christ has an 'open door' policy. No one is to be excluded or prevented from entering the church, which is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22, 23). The church is where both Jew and Gentile can be reconciled to God and be "fellow heirs, of the same body" (Ephesians 2:11-18; 3:3-6).

There is a 'gate' found in Hebrews 13:12 that is of great importance, especially to all who have had their sins forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:7; Revelation 1:5): "Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate." In his commentary on the Book of Hebrews, Martel Pace makes this observation regarding verses 12 and 13.

The idea of the animals being incinerated outside the camp on the Day of Atonement is introduced. The bull offered for sin was carried outside the camp (see Lev. 16:27). The idea of Jesus being crucified **outside the gate** (see Jn.19:20) fulfilled that symbol. By accepting the stigma of guilt (a probable meaning of "outside the gate"), Jesus could bear our sins. Leaving the camp (v.13) suggests a total break from the synagogue and the temple. (v.12, emphasis added)

In contrast to the church, heaven is a 'gated community'! Jesus has gone to prepare a place for all who prepare to go there when this life on earth is finished (John 14:1-3). Jesus Himself is "the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). It is only when we give our lives to God that we will be permitted to enter into "the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:10-11). In Revelation chapters 21 and 22, the gates in heaven are mentioned six times. They are described as follows: "Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west" (21:12, 13). "The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl" (21:21). "Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there)" (21:25). Now, please note who will be able to enter the eternal city of God: "But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life" (21:27). "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city" (22:14).

This is the final invitation our Lord will extend to the redeemed: "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'" (Matthew 25:34). Individuals who will not be permitted to enter the gates of heaven are described as follows: "But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers, and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie" (Revelation 22:15). "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers,

idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (21:8).

Gates can be used to keep someone in or out. Often gates function in both directions for people to enter and/or leave. In heaven, the gates open only one way, and that is to permit saved people to enter for eternity. “Dad,” said Charles H. Gabriel, Jr., from the embrace of his father, “if I never see you again here, I’ll meet you where the gates never swing outward.” His father, the beloved song writer, had gone to New York to bid his son God-speed as he departed for France during the First World War. It was while clasped in that last good-bye, his eyes turned toward the gates through which he must pass to go on shipboard. Those gates of entrance to war and death swung both ways; it gave him apt figure of speech to phrase his parting from his father. “I’ll meet you where the gates never swing outward!”

The words sketched a picture in the mind of his father, who, while the train journeyed westward toward his Chicago home, held in his heart his son’s heart-warming goodbye of love and... affection. From his meditation came this tender song: “Where the Gates Swing Outward Never!” (from *Forty Gospel Hymn Stories* by George W. Sanville, 1943, cp. 80)

Where the Gates Swing Outward Never by Charles H. Gabriel

Just a few more days to be filled with Joy a-waits me in the morning]
praise,
And to tell the Old, old story:
Then, when twilight falls,
and my Savior calls,
I shall go to Him in glory.

Just a few more years with their toil
and tears,
And the journey Will be ended;
Then I’ll be with Him,
where the tide of time
With eternity is blended.

[Tho’ the hills be steep and the valleys
deep,
With no flow’rs my way adorning;
Tho’ the night be lone
and my rest a stone,

What a joy t'will be
when I wake to see Him
for whom my Heart is burning!
Nevermore to sigh,
never more to die –
For that day my heart is yearning.

Chorus:

I'll exchange my cross for a starry
crown,
Where the gates swing outward never;
At His feet I'll lay every burden down,
And with Jesus reign for ever.