

The Strait Gate

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"Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." [Luke 13:24](#).

THE precepts of our Lord Jesus Christ are dictated by the soundest wisdom. He has given us Divine Prescriptions for the health of our souls and His Commandments, though clothed with Sovereign Authority, are spoken in such infinite kindness that we may regard them as the advice of a true and faithful Friend. This is not a legal, but a Gospel exhortation, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." He, Himself, is the only gate, or the door, by which we can find admission, and the way to enter in through Jesus Christ is not by working, but by believing! Then, as to the strife we are urged to carry on, it is an earnest endeavor to steer clear of all the rocks, shoals and quicksands of popular fallacies and deceitful traditions, and to sail in the deep waters with His Covenant for our chart, and His Word for our compass, in simple obedience to His statutes, trusting to Him as our Pilot, whose voice we always hear, though His face we cannot see. The storm signal may well awaken your fears, but the cry of peril had need excite your caution. The mere mention sounds like a menace. "Many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." Listen to that warning, lest you be among the, "many" that founder—perhaps you shall be among the few that escape. Listen to what Jesus tells you shall come to pass with the multitude, that it may never come to pass with you as individuals. Mark now—

I. A GATE WHICH IT IS MOST DESIRABLE TO ENTER.

Surely "many" would not seek to enter if they were not convinced of the desirableness of passing through it! The very fact that so many, although they fail, will at least seek to enter, proves that there is a desire, a reason and a motive why men and women should aim to enter.

This gate—that is, Christ—it is most desirable for us to pass through because it is the gate of the City of Refuge. Cities of refuge were appointed for men-slayers, who, when they were pursued by the avenger of blood, they might pass the gate and be secure within the sanctuary or city. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is intended as a refuge for those who have broken the Law of God, whom vengeance is pursuing, who will certainly be overtaken, to their eternal destruction, unless they fly to Christ and find shelter in Him. Outside of Christ the sword of fire pursues us swift and sharp. From God's wrath there is but one escape—and that is by a simple faith in Christ. Believe in Him and the sword is sheathed, and the energy and the love of God will become your everlasting portion! But refuse to believe in Jesus and

your innumerable sins, written in His book, shall be laid at your door in that day when the pillars of Heaven shall reel and the stars shall fall like withered fig leaves from the tree! Oh, who would not wish to escape from the wrath to come! Mr. Whitefield, when preaching, would often hold up his hands and cry, "Oh, the wrath to come! The wrath to come! The wrath to come!" There is more weight and meaning in these words than tongue can tell or heart conceive. The wrath to come! the wrath to come! When past that Gate, like Noah after he had passed into the ark, you are safe from the overwhelming deluge—you are sheltered from the devouring conflagration which shall consume the earth—you are rescued from the death and the doom that await the countless multitudes of the impenitent! Who would not wish to enter where there is salvation, the only place where salvation can be found?

It is desirable to enter this gate because it is the gate of a home. There is sweet music in that word, "home." Jesus is the home of His people's hearts. We are at rest when we get to Christ. We have all we need when we have Jesus. Happiness is the portion of the Christian in this life while he lives upon his Savior. I have seen outside in the night refugee crowds of persons waiting an hour beforehand, till the doors were opened. Poor souls! Shivering in the cold, but in expectation of being warmed and comforted in a little time for a little while, when they would be admitted. What do you think, Ohomeless men and women—were there a permanent home for you, a home from which you never could be banished, a home into which you could be introduced as dear children—would it not be worth your while to wait for a long time at the door, and to knock again and again right vehemently, could you but ultimately gain admission? Jesus is a home for the homeless, a rest for the weary, a comfort for the comfortless. Is your heart broken—Jesus can comfort you! Have you been banished from your family, or one by one have the dear ones been taken to their last resting place? Do you feel solitary, friendless, cheerless, accounting "the black flowing river" to be preferred before this troubled stream of life, and that pitiless society of men and women, all eager for gain and gaiety, reckoning nothing of your griefs or your groans? Oh, come to Jesus! Trust in Him and He will light up a star in the black midnight sky! He will kindle a fire in your hearts that shall make them glow with joy and comfort, even now! It were worthwhile to be a Christian, irrespective of the hereafter. Such present comfort as a belief in Jesus imparts is an inestimable compensation! This is the gate of refuge, and it is the gate of a home.

Moreover, it leads to a blessed feast. We read just now of the supper that was spread. Jesus does not feed our bodies, but He does what is better—He feeds our minds. A hungry stomach is terrible, but a hungry heart is far more dreadful, for a loaf of bread will fill the one, but what can satisfy the other? Oh, when the heart gets to craving, and pining, and yearning after something it cannot get, it is like the sea that cannot rest—it is like the grave that never can be filled—it is like the horseleech, whose daughters cry, "Give, give, give!" Happy the man who believes in Jesus, for he becomes at once a contented man. Not only does he find rest in Christ, but joy and gladness, peace and abiding satisfaction are the portion

of his lot. I tell you what I do know—and I would not lie, even for the Lord, Himself—I tell you that there is a mirth to be found in faith in Christ which cannot be matched! Speak of their buoyant spirits who make merry in the dance, or of the festive glee of those that are filled with wine? It is but the crackling of a handful of thorns under a pot— how soon it is gone! But the joy of the man who meditates on the love of Christ which embraces him, on the blood of Christ which cleanses him, on the arm of Christ which upholds him, on the hand of Christ which leads him, on the crown of Christ which is to be his portion—the joy of such a man is constant, deep, overflowing, beyond the power of expression! The poorest Christian in all the world—bedridden, living on parish allowance, full of pains and ready to die—when his heart is stayed upon Christ, would not change places with the youngest, brightest, richest, noblest spirit to be found outside the Church of God! No, kings and emperors, boast no more of your beggarly crowns—their glitter will soon fade! Your purple robes will soon be moth eaten! Your silver shall soon be cankered—of your palace, not a stone shall be left upon its fellow! Bitter shall be the dregs of your wine cups and all your music shall end in discord! I tell you that the poorest of all the company of the faithful in Christ Jesus excel you, and "would not change their blest estate for all that earth calls good or great." So abundantly worthwhile is it to come to Christ for the happiness, as well as the repose, which we find in Him.

Well likewise, dear Friends, may men desire to pass through the strait gate, knowing it is the gate which leads to Pa-radise. There was one gate of Paradise through which our father—Adam—and our mother—Eve—went weeping as they left the Garden all behind them to wander into the desert world. Can you picture them to yourselves, with the cherubim behind them and the flaming sword bidding them be gone, for Paradise was no place for rebels? Men have wandered up and down the world since then to find the gate of Paradise, that they might enter yet again. They have scaled the peaks of Sinai, but they have not found it there. They have traversed the tracks of the wilderness, weary and footsore, jaded and faint, but they have found no gate to Paradise anywhere in all their expeditions. The scholar has searched for it in the ancient books. The astronomer has hunted for it among the stars. Sages, as they were called, have sought to find it by studying their arts—and fools have tried to find it among their viols and their bowls. But there is only one gate! Look, there it is! It is in the form of a cross, and he that will find the gate of Heaven finds the Cross and the Man that did hang thereon! Happy he who can come up to it and pass through it, reposing all his confidence in the Atonement once made by the Man of Suffering on Calvary's tree. On earth he is saved, and in the article of death he shall pass through that gate of pearl unchallenged, walk the streets of gold unabashed and bow before the excellent Glory without a fear! He is free in Heaven. The Cross is a mark of a citizen of the skies! Having truly believed in Jesus, everlasting happiness is his beyond all doubt! Who, then, would not pass through the strait gate?

And who would not wish to pass through it when he considers what will be the lot of those outside the gate? How we tremble at the thought of that outer darkness where shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth! There are many enquiries, nowadays, about eternal punishment. Oh, Brothers and Sisters, do not rashly or carelessly challenge the bitter experience of such condemnation! Speculate as you will about the Doctrine, but I pray you do not trifle with the reality. To be lost forever, let that mean what it may, will be more than you can bear though your ribs were iron and your bones were brass. Tempt not the avenging angel! Beware that you forget not God, lest He tear you in pieces and there be no one to deliver you! By the living God, I pray you fear and tremble, lest you be found out of Christ in the day of His appearing. Rest not, be not patient, much less merry, till you are saved! To be in danger of the fire of Hell is a peril that no heart can adequately realize, no language fitly paint! Oh, I beseech you, halt not, give yourself no rest till you have got beyond that danger! Flee for your lives, for the fiery shower will soon descend! Escape! God, in His mercy, quicken your pace that you may escape soon, lest the hour of mercy cease and the Day of Judgment come! Surely these are reasons enough for wanting to pass in at the strait gate! Observe still further what our Lord tells us.

II. THERE IS A CROWD OF PEOPLE WHO WILL SEEK TO ENTER AND WILL NOT BE ABLE. Who are these? If you look closely at the crowd who this day seek to pass, I think you will see a considerable difference between seeking and striving. You are not merely advised to seek—you are urgently bid to strive. Striving is a more vehement exercise than seeking. Are you among those who coolly seek admission because, forsooth, they suppose it is the proper thing? Many there are who come up to the gate of mercy and seek to enter, not striving, not particularly anxious, certainly far enough from being agitated. And when they look at the gate, they object to the lintel because it is too low, nor will they deign to stoop. There is no believing in Jesus with a proud heart! He that trusts Christ must feel himself to be guilty, and acknowledge it. He never will savingly believe till he has been thoroughly convinced of sin. But many say, "I will never stoop to that. Unless I have something to do in the work, and share some of the merit, I cannot enter." No, Sirs, some of you are quite unable to believe in Christ because you believe in yourselves! As long as a man thinks himself a fine fellow, how can he think well of Jesus? You eclipse the sun! You hold up your own little hands before the sunlight—how can you expect to see? You are too good to go to Heaven, or, at least, too good in your own apprehension. Oh, Man, I pray God will prick that bubble, that blown-up bladder, and let out the gas so that you may discern what you really are, for you are nothing, after all, but a poor worm, contemptible, notwithstanding your conceit and pride, in spite of your poverty, an arrogant worm, that dares to lift up its head when it has nothing to glory in! Oh, bow yourself in lowly self-abhorrence, otherwise you may seek to enter, but shall not be able!

Some are unable to enter because the pride of life will not let them. They come to this gate in their carriage and pair, and expect to drive in, but they cannot get admission. There is no different way of salvation for a peer of the realm than for a pauper in the workhouse! The greatest prince that ever lived must trust Jesus just as the poorest peasant does. I recollect a minister once telling me that he attended the bedside of a very proud woman, of considerable wealth, and she said to him, "Do you think, Sir, that when I am in Heaven, such a person as Betty—my maid—will be in the same place as I am? I never could endure her company here. She is a good servant in her way, but I am sure I could not put up with her in Heaven." "No, Madam," he said, "I do not suppose you will ever be where Betty will be." He knew Betty to be one of the humblest and most consistent of Christian women anywhere—and he might have told her proud mistress that in the sight of God, meekness is preferable to majesty. The Lord Jesus, in the day of His coming, will wipe out all such distinctions as may very properly exist on earth, though they cannot be recognized beyond the skies. Oh, rich man, glory not in your richest! All your wealth, if you could take it with you, would not buy a single paving stone in the streets of Heaven! Do not trust in this poor stuff! Oh, lay it aside as a crown of glorying, and pass humbly through the gate with Lazarus!

Some are unable to enter because they carry contraband goods with them. When you land in France, there stands the gendarme who wants to see what you are carrying in that basket. If you attempt to push by, you will soon find yourself in custody. He must know what is there—contraband goods cannot be taken in. So at the gate of mercy which is Christ, no man can be saved if he desires to keep his sins. He must give up every false way. "Oh," says the drunk, "I'd like to get to Heaven, but I must smuggle in this bottle somehow." "I would like to be a Christian," says another. "I do not mind taking Dr. Watts' hymns with me, but I should like, sometimes, to sing a Bacchanalian song, or a light serenade." "Well," cries another, "I enjoy myself on Sunday with God's people, but you must not deny me the amusements of the world during the week—I cannot give them up." Well then you cannot enter, for Jesus Christ never saves us in our sins—He saves us from our sins. "Doctor," says the fool, "make me well, but I'd like to keep my fever." "No," says the doctor, "how can you be well while you keep the fever?" How can a man be saved from his sins while he clings to his sins? What is salvation but to be delivered from sin? Sin lovers may seek to be saved, but they shall not be able—while they hug their sins—they cannot have Christ! Some of you are in this grievous predicament. You have been attending this House of Prayer a good long time. I do not know what hinders you, but this I do know, there is a worm somewhere eating out the heart of that fair looking apple. Some private sin that you pamper is destroying your souls! Oh, that you had Grace to give it up and to come in by the strait gate, trusting in Jesus Christ!

Not a few are unable to enter in because they want to postpone the matter until tomorrow. Today, at any rate, you are engaged with other plans and projects. "A little longer let

me revel in some of the sensual enjoyments of life, and afterwards I will come in." Procrastinators are among the most hopeless of people! He that has "tomorrow" quivering on his lips is never likely to have Grace reigning in his heart.

Others, and these are in the worst plight of all, think that they are in and that they have entered. They mistake the outside of the gate for the inside! A strange mistake to fall into, but many do thus delude themselves. They rub their backs against the posts and then they tell us they are as near Heaven as anybody else. They have never passed the threshold—they have never found shelter in Christ—albeit they may have felt wonderfully excited at a revival meeting, and sung as loudly and lustily as any of the congregation—

"I do believe, I will believe."

There is a considerable show of reformation about them. Although they have not got a new garment, they have mended up the old one. They are not new creatures, but still, they are better behaved creatures than they were before! And they are, "all right." Be not deceived, my dear Friends! Beware of mistaking a work of nature for the operation of God's Grace. Do not be taken in by the devil's counterfeits. They are well made—they look genuine—when they are brand new they shine and glitter like fine gold, but they will not stand the test! Everyone of them will have a nail driven through them one day—they will never pass current with God. If you have a religion, let it be real and true, not feigned and hypocritical! Of all cheats, the man who cheats himself is certainly the least wise and, I think he is the least honest. Do not play the knave with your own soul! Suspect yourself too much rather than too little. Better journey to Heaven in terror of Hell than dream of the happy land while drifting in the other direction. "Ah, that deceit should steal such gentle shapes!" Be on your guard, everyone of you. Let not anyone deceive himself!

Thus it is that a crowd—I had almost said a countless crowd—of people nowadays seek to enter in, but for manifold reasons they are not able to do so. And yet there is a more appalling aspect to the same fact. "Many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." The dying are not able. Panic-stricken, the dying man sends for the minister whom he never went to hear when his health was good and hours hung heavy in his hands. The charm of Sundays lay in their dissipation—an excursion up the river, or a cheap trip to Brighton and back—anything, everything, sooner than hear the Gospel! He never read his Bible. He never prayed. Now the doctor shakes his head and the nurse suggests that they "fetch a clergyman." Poor soul! She means right, but what do you think he can do? What can we ministers do for you? What can any man do for his fellow creature? "None of us can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him." He begins to seek, when, alas, he cannot think, poor fellow, for he is in articulo mortis, with the throes of his last struggle! His head swims, pains grow at his vitals, a glassy film is over his eyes, rambling words fall from his lips. Could he think, he has got something else to think about than the dread future that awaits him! Look at his weeping wife. See those dear children, brought in

to get a last kiss from their father? Were his mind more vigorous, it were not likely to be taken up with spiritual thoughts—there is too much in the solemn farewell to occupy the moments left in preparation for the future. "Pray for me, Sir," he says, with fainting, failing breath. Yes, he is seeking to enter in! In 99 cases out of a 100 I fear the answer is, he shall not be able. Little hope have I for deathbed repentances. Never trust to them, I beseech you!

Such a vestibule as a deathbed you may never have. To die in the street may be your lot. Should you have a deathbed, you will have something else to think about besides religion. Oh, how often have I heard Christian men say, when they have been dying, "Ah, Sir, if I had a God to seek now, what a misery it would be! What a blessing it is that, with all the cares that now come upon me, I have a sure and certain hope in Christ, for I found Him years ago." Oh, dear Hearers, do not be among those who postpone and procrastinate, till, in a dying hour, after a fashion, you seek to enter and find you shall not be able!

Some years ago I was awakened about three o'clock in the morning by a sharp ring of the doorbell. I was urged without delay to visit a house not very far off London Bridge. I went and up two flights of stairs I was shown into a room, the occupants of which were a nurse and a dying man. There was nobody else. "Oh, Sir," she said, "Mr. So-and-So, about half an hour ago, begged me to send for you." "What does he want?" I asked. "He is dying, Sir," she replied. I said, "I see that. What sort of a man was he?" "He came home last night, Sir, from Brighton. He had been out all day. I looked for a Bible, Sir, but there is not one in the house. I hope you have got one with you." "Oh," I said, "a Bible would be of no use to him, now! If he could understand me, I could tell him the way of salvation in the very words of Holy Scripture." I spoke to him, but he gave me no answer. I spoke again—still there was no reply. All sense had fled. I stood a few minutes gazing at his face, till I perceived he was dead—his soul had departed. That man in his lifetime had been known to jeer at me. In strong language he had often denounced me as a hypocrite. Yet he was no sooner smitten with the darts of death than he sought my presence and my counsel, feeling in his heart, no doubt, that I was a servant of God, though he did not care to acknowledge it with his lips. There I stood, unable to help him. Promptly as I had responded to his call, what could I do but look at his corpse and go home again? He had, when too late, sighed for the ministry of reconciliation, sought to enter in, but he was not able. There was no space left him, then, for repentance—he had wasted the opportunity. Therefore, I pray and beseech you, my dear Hearers, by the near approach of death—it may be much nearer than you think—give earnest heed to these things! I look round in this building and note the pews and sittings from which hearers, whose faces were once familiar to us have gone—some to Glory, some I know not where. God knows. Oh, let not the next removal, if it is yours, vacate the seat of a scoffer, or of a neglecter, or of one who, having been touched in his conscience, silenced the secret monitor and would not turn! As the Lord lives, you must turn or burn! You must either repent or be ruined forever! May God give you wisdom to choose the better part!

It appears from Scripture that even after death there will be some who will seek to enter and shall not be able. I do not attempt to explain what I cannot understand, but I find the Master represents those on the left hand asking a question, "When saw we You hungry, and fed You not?" As if they had some glimmering hope that the sentence upon them might be reversed. And I read in another place of those who will come and knock at the door, and say, "Lord, Lord, open to us." But the Master of the house, having already risen up and shut the door, will answer, "Verily, I say unto you, I know you not." Is there, then, such a thing as prayer in Hell? When the soul has passed out of the body without hope, will it seek for hope hereafter? Perhaps so. Did not the rich man pray to Abraham to send Lazarus? It is but natural to expect that, as they doubted God's promises on earth, they may doubt God's threats in Hell, and may hope, perhaps, that there will be a way of escape. They will seek, they will seek, but they shall not be able, not able to enter Heaven! They said they were not able on earth—they shall find they are not able in Hell, either! *Non possumus* is the sinner's cry. "We are not able to leave our sins! We are not able to believe! We are not able to be serious! We are not able to be prayerful!" And then, how it will be thrown back into their teeth! Not able to enter Heaven, not able to escape from torment, not able to live, not able to die—not able because the gate of Heaven admits no sinner who has not been washed in the Redeemer's blood! Back with you, Sir! You would not come to the Fountain, you would not wash! Back with you! You are not able! Not able because Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people, and you never thought of preparation! Away with you, Sir! How can you enter when you are not prepared? Heaven is a place for which a fitness is needed. Men cannot enjoy that which would be contrary to their natures. Away with you, Sirs! You could not enjoy Heaven if you were admitted, for you are not changed in heart! Away with you!

What? Do you linger? Do you cry? Do you pray? Do you weep? Do you entreat? Away with you! No, the angels shall sweep you away, for is it not written—You yourselves shall be thrust out—unceremoniously driven and scourged away from the gate of Glory because you would not come to the gate of Grace? These are terrible things to utter. I well might shrink from speaking thus, were it not that fidelity to your souls makes such demands that I must ring the warning. If you die without faith in Christ, behold there is a gulf fixed between you and Heaven. I do not know what that means, but I know what idea it gives to me, and should give to you. Between Heaven and Hell there is no traffic! None ever passed from Hell to Heaven—

"There are no acts of pardon passed In the cold grave to which we hasten! But darkness, death, and long despair

Reign in eternal silence there!"

They would gladly pass the gulf—were it fire, they could be glad to pass it! Were it full of torments, many and manifold as a Spanish Inquisition could invent—they would be glad to bear them—could they but hope to cross the gulf. But no, the voice is heard—an angel's

voice—"He that is filthy, let him be filthy still; he that is unjust, let him be unjust still." The wax has cooled—you cannot alter the impression. The die is cast—you cannot remold it. The tree has fallen—there it lies.

I wish I could speak now in words that would burn their way right into your inmost hearts. Alas, I cannot. I must, however, just repeat the text again, and leave it with you. "Many shall seek in that dread day to enter, but shall not be able. Oh, enter then, enter! Enter now, while yet the gate stands wide open and mercy bids you come! Make haste to enter while yet the avenging angel lingers, and the angel of mercy stands with outstretched arms and cries, "Whoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely." May God, the ever-blessed Spirit, without whom no warning can be effectual, and no invitation can be attractive, sweetly compel you to trust Christ tonight! Here is the Gospel in a few words—Jesus suffered the wrath and torment we justly merited. He doubtless bore the penalty of your transgressions if you penitently believe in His Sacrifice. When you trust in Him for pardon, 'tis proof your sins were laid on Him for judgment! You are, therefore, a forgiven man! A pardoned woman! You are saved—saved forever! If you have a simple, child-like trust, you may go home singing for joy of heart, knowing that you have already entered the strait gate! And Grace on earth and glory in Heaven lie before you! May God bless you richly, and may you adore Him gratefully, for His dear name's sake. Amen.