



<b>Series:</b> Nehemiah, Healthy Walls	<b>Reference:</b> Nehemiah 3 cont.	<b>Title:</b> Guard Your Gates!	<b>Date:</b> 5.21.17
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Website Writeup:</b></p> <p>The Gates in the wall of Jerusalem represent various truths for us. If the gates of our lives are in disrepair we are not fully operating as we should be. Let's explore what these Gates mean to us, and talk more about how we begin to repair them in order to live out our calling &amp; in abundance!</p>			

### Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

We are studying Nehemiah, however before we begin, let's pray for our unreached people group of the day...

#### **UPG Prayer of the Day...**

The Mawalud, a people group of 227,000 in south central India are often called Dhakkani because they migrated from the Deccan plateau. They're no known believers among them. Largely landless, the Dhakkani/Mawalud are engaged in various occupations. They intermarry with other Muslim communities & share water sources, burial grounds & religious shrines with them. They belong to the Sunni sect of Islam & follow the Hanafi school. *"All nations you have made will come & worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name."* Psalm 86:9

#### **Sermon...**

Last week we looked at Nehemiah 3, and how in rebuilding the walls & gates of the Temple, the people Served Each Other, Worked Together, Were Strategically Placed & Finished Their Task. We drew the conclusion that it's an image of the Body of Christ working well together, and that we're doing the same here in Eastern Main Line.

Today we want to look, not at *how* they worked, but at *what* they worked *on*; specifically the gates. They worked on 10 gates total; we could do a week on each gate, but we'll keep it simple.

For our purposes, these gates represent the rebuilding of our spiritual lives. They're an allegory of the means of access & egress in & out of our lives to God & others. We're careful when allegorizing Scripture, and I don't think we're taking too much liberty today. We read this tedious passage last week. I'll spare you a 2nd reading; but if you want to look at it while we speak, it's Nehemiah Chapter 3.

To summarize, Nehemiah had been called to rebuild the walls & gates, gotten permission, been confirmed in his call, and then made his way to Jerusalem to organize the effort. Almost everyone responded positively & worked together to do so.

As many of you know, I've been dealing more with my physical health over recent years. If my body's in disrepair, it affects all other things in life. Likewise, if the spiritual/emotional gates of our lives are in disrepair, we need to exert ourselves to be in top spiritual health as well - we need to repair the gates.



Today, it's my hope that the Holy Spirit leads each one of us to a certain gate, or number of gates in our lives, which need attention. So, my proposition to you today is; *Each one of us needs to rebuild a spiritual Gate(s) in our lives.* So, the question becomes; *Which Gate(s) in my life need attention?* Since we're in constant spiritual battle, and we need to have healthy gates, and guard them well.

Let's start with what, in Nehemiah's time, would have been called **The Sheep Gate** which stood in the northeast corner of the city. This gate was the one in which the sheep were to be brought in, and kept for sacrifice in the Temple courts. We know sheep are an image of sacrifice in Scripture. But more importantly, they were the image of Jesus as the great Sacrificial Lamb.

In Isaiah 53:7 it says, *"He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."*

Jesus in Philippians 2 is described as not grasping hold of his rights, but making himself a sacrifice even for those who killed him. He didn't come to win an argument, or fight for his rights in a worldly sense, but to sacrifice himself for the sins of the world. Again, in John 1:29, John the Baptist declares, *"Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"*

In 1 John 4 it says, *"9This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."*

He also says, *"7Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."*

That if we love, then we know God & God lives in us & his love is made complete in us. That God is love, and Jesus is the model of love in his sacrifice for us.

It continues in 1 Jhn to say, *"18There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. 19We love because he first loved us."* So, like it says in 1 Corinthians 13, in Christ there is no record of wrongs held over us. There is no burden in submission to a God who doesn't oppress, but rather shows his love in sacrifice. This is the image of the Sheep Gate.

It's fitting we start with the Sheep Gate realizing everything begins with Christ. The Sacrificial Lamb is the visual image to the people of God of his heart of love & forgiveness to us - 'Do I have Christ?' is the question the Sheep Gate presents. Do we operate out of that relationship with him, and with one another?



We love because he first loved us in Christ (1 Jhn 4:19). The Sheep Gate is the means of God's access into our lives & repairing/transforming us in Christ - it's also the means of egress as we go out to love others in Christ. This gate is the symbol of death of our natural selves, we must go beyond just 'accepting Jesus as Savior' and move towards 'making him Lord'. Constantly dying to self, so that the principle of the Cross grows larger in our lives.

Keep this gate of your life in constant repair, go back to Jesus; the power of his love, the model of his love, constantly dying to those things in your life which hold back the abundant life - the old has gone the new has come in Christ - let us throw off everything which hinders & the sin which so easily entangles & run the race of the cross in our lives to the very end.

The second gate is the **Fish Gate** which is the gate by which the fishermen from Galilee would bring in their catch. It's reminiscent of what Christ said to his disciples in Matt. 4:19, "*Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*" As we consider the lordship of Christ over us, we realize we've been bought with a price; our lives are no longer our own & never really were. We've moved from being slaves to sin, to slaves of righteousness - and if we've experienced the Sheep Gate, then we should be witnesses of that power to others. 'Am I a witness?' is the question this gate raises. Do we maintain relationships for years without ever caring they hear about Jesus? Are we afraid to lose a relationship because of this message? Are we willing to take relational risk in sharing Christ with others? We must be, if we are to keep this gate in repair. This is the gate of access & egress with other people in order to experience what you have already in the Sheep Gate with Jesus. Do we love Jesus so much because of what he has done for us that I'm bold in evangelism?

The third gate is the **Old Gate** (Jeshanah Gate). This gate represents, Truth doesn't change. Jeremiah 6:16 says, "*Ask for the ancient paths. Ask for the good way and walk in it.*" An old saying says, "*If something is new, it is not true; and if it is true, then it is not new.*" Truth remains constant & unchangeable. The question this gate asks us is, do we listen to the messages which bombard us from the world, or 'Do I listen to Jesus?' Do we listen to John Lennon, 'Love is all you need,' or do we listen to God, "Jesus is all you need." Do I interpret grace to let me do as I want, or do I embrace all the Scriptures tell me is true? Do I want love without the lordship of Christ? (elaborate) This gate is the means of access & egress to God & people when we can realize & rely on the ancient truths of Scripture; we're fallen, in need of Christ, etc.

The Fourth Gate is the **Valley Gate**. This gate represents what John Stott would say is the rarest & fairest of Christian virtues; Humility. Valley's in Scripture always represent humility & judgement of conceit in our lives. Peter says, "*God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*" 1Peter 5:5

This gate flies in the face of what we hear in the world. "You can do anything, you're master of your own destiny, fight your way to the top," is what we're told. Especially in our western individualistic World View. However, the mature Christian going out, and



allowing others into their lives, realizes they don't have it altogether, they can be wrong, need others, and need to rely on the Holy Spirit. This gate leaves us with the question, 'Am I prideful?' (My Pride Statue) Our lives would be much less restless if we kept this gate in repair, believing Jesus when he says in Matt 11:29, *"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your soul."* Our pride is the root of everything which plagues us. It's the sin of Adam, it says, "I am in control of my life, not God & certainly not others." This gate reminds us there are voices which have authority over my life; God, His Word, the Holy Spirit, and even other Christians. This gate doesn't afford us the luxury of saying I don't need others & I don't need God. This gate leaves us with the open heart for God & others to be allowed to speak into our lives even when it hurts.

CS Lewis wrote a great article on Pride & Humility. He says in that article: *"What you want to get clear is that Pride is essentially competitive - it's competitive by its very nature.... Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better-looking than others... It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest. Once the element of competition has gone, pride has gone. That is why I say that Pride is essentially competitive in a way the other vices are not.... Nearly all those evils in the world which people put down to greed or selfishness are really far more the result of Pride."*

The Fifth Gate is the **Dung Gate**. Nice name, and it's exactly what you expect it to be. It's the gate by which the refuse in our lives is thrown out. It's the gate which all the garbage was taken out of Jerusalem to the Hinnom Valley. In 2 Cor. 7:1 Paul says, *"Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God."*

This is a hard gate to keep in repair & use. Sometimes, cleansing ourselves of the filth feels like plucking out an eye, or taking off a limb. That's because those secret sins, faulty beliefs, pride, and idols which make us feel so fleetingly good are a crutch; they must be eliminated if we're to allow God fully in, and to be able to properly have access & egress for him & others into our lives. This is the gate which leaves us with the question, 'Am I seeking purity?' Because in Christ, your relationship can never be broken, but your means of experience with him & others can be deeply stifled if this gate remains in disrepair.

Stef sent me a nice article this week which deals with this gate describing how a family with small children developed the saying in their lives which was, "Guard your gates!" So, if the kids saw or heard something which was unhealthy for them, they'd scream, "Guard your Gates" and turn the TV off or whatever it was. That is a good practice in some instances, but the writer also pointed out that sometimes, as we grow older, we need to allow some hurtful things in too - like when we take on the burden & sufferings of others, listening to their pain, praying for them & encouraging them through it. As we

mature, the Holy Spirit will dictate what we allow through the Dung Gate, what is damaging we keep out, but what is necessary for ministry to others we allow in.

The Sixth Gate is the **Fountain Gate**, which follows directly on the heels of the Dung Gate for good reason. This was at the end of the Pool of Siloam. This reminds us of the words of Christ in John 7:38 - *“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.”* This is the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This gate leaves us with the question, “Am I being filled with the Spirit?” Since, this gate is the Spirit-filled life overflowing in you, and into the lives of others around you. Paul urges us to keep being filled with the Spirit in Ephesians 5:18 - so after the refuse is thrown out of the Dung Gate, the Fountain Gate washes us clean by the filling of his Spirit.

The Seventh Gate is the **Water Gate** which is located in the spring of Gihon. This is where Ezra reads the Law of God to the people in Chapter 8, and water in Scripture always represents the Word of God. In Matthew 4:4 it says, *“Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”* This gate is the means of God accessing our lives by his Word, and a means of our going out to others to minister to them by his Word. This gate leaves us with the question, “Do I spend time in the Word?” How do we do it? This gate interestingly enough did not need repair, which I think shows us that God’s word is constant & full, never lacking - the issue is do we take it in, struggle with it, and allow it to transform us?

Then in v28 we come to the **Horse Gate** reminding us of the battle we’re engaged in; horses in Scripture always represent battle. The Christian life should never be approached with the idea that it will be simple & easy; spiritual battle ensues. And when this gate is in disrepair we’re naive & unprepared for the assaults which come at us (Prayer Conference). Jesus said, the world will hate you on account of me. That the enemy prowls around looking for someone to devour. But this gate follows fast on the heels of the Water Gate - which is God’s Word which sustains us, and the Fountain Gate before us which is the Holy Spirit filling us - for instance 1 Cor. 10:13 where it says, *“<sup>13</sup>No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”* A verse which we can use to battle the sinful urges which come upon us. Not to mention Ephesians 6 where it tells us to put on the full armor of God by way of his Word & Spirit. This gate leaves us with the question, “Am I naive to spiritual battle?”

Then we come to the **East Gate**. This gate sat on the east side opposite the Temple area, facing the rising sun. It speaks of hope & expectation that the Messiah will return & reestablish his kingdom fully on earth once more. This gate tells us, all will not end in death & tragedy, there’s hope for all who believe. Luke 21:28 says, *“When you see all these things coming to pass, lift up your heads and rejoice, for your redemption is drawing near.”* However, many of us walk around with no hope. We assume nothing will work out, we look at life as half empty, not half full. But in Christ, even when all things are coming against us, there is hope of a god that comes to our rescue & final full



restoration! This gate begs the question, “Is my hope in Christ?” Or in me? Or in my girlfriend/boyfriend? Or my position or money? Where does my security lie?

And finally, we come to the **Inspection Gate**, which in Hebrew meant, ‘*the appointed place*’. In the book of Hebrews in v9:27 it says, “*It is appointed to man once to die, and after that the judgement*” - the inspection. We will give an account of how we handled the life given us - but in Christ there’s hope here - in 1 Cor. 3 it says everyone shall receive commendation. It’s the giving of rewards & acknowledgement of faithful service - it begs the question, “Do I have integrity in my walk?” Am I living in such a way as to hear ‘Well done, good & faithful servant’?”

And we end up back at the Sheep Gate again, and as we said, the Cross of Christ is the beginning, but also the end of our lives - He encompasses all these gates empowering us to live the abundant life, with power & hope. These gates represent the tools by which we exercise our spiritual muscles. In whatever we’re facing, we come back to the grace found in Christ who enables us to walk with Him in the abundant life.

In conclusion, each of us need rebuilding in our lives. Our church itself needs to pay attention to these gates. Whatever it is, I challenge you to start to rebuild your gates in order to follow Jesus, to live like Jesus did, to manifest Jesus. If we are to be like Nehemiah’s crowd & serve each other, work together, serve our community, and finish our tasks, we need each one of us in top spiritual health - To Guard Our Gates!

Let’s take a few moments to silently reflect on these gates in our lives & church. Where does Six:Eight need to focus? Where do you need to focus? Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you now about some practical steps you need to take to repair & guard your gates. Jot your ideas down if you can, and pray through this throughout the week. The Gates and the questions are on the screen.

The Sheep Gate; ‘Do I have Christ?’

The Fish Gate; ‘Do my life & words reveal Christ?’

The Old Gate; ‘Do I listen to Jesus?’

The Valley Gate; ‘Am I prideful?’

The Dung Gate; ‘Am I seeking purity?’

The Fountain Gate; “Am I being filled with the Spirit?”

The Water Gate; “Do I spend time in the Word?”

The Horse Gate; “Am I naive to spiritual battle?”

The East Gate; “Is my hope in Christ?”

The Inspection Gate; “Do I have integrity?”

**Community Group Leader Questions:**

1. Before your group meets print out & then read this article out loud together in group:  
<http://sarahbessey.com/guard-gates/>
  1. This specifically refers to the Dung Gate from our sermon - Am I seeking Purity?
  2. What are those things in life which you engage in but are not healthy? Things you would do better to cut out? It could be overeating, alcohol, Netflix, Facebook, sexually charged material, false teaching you read, the News, toxic people, etc.
  3. How do you cut these things out in an effort to find purity & allow God access to those places without becoming a *legalist*? Where is the Holy Spirit convicting you personally to make changes in life?
  4. What is the underlying need which drives you to find solace in these things? Since the outward sin is usually driven by an unmet inner need, or a falsehood we believe about ourselves, God & others. Have we tried to find answers in other things for these needs, and effectively crowded God out of being able to answer it for us? How do the Fountain, Water & Horse Gates play into this part of our Christian struggle?
2. Go through the other various gates...explore the questions they raise.