

Afternoon Lesson. Luke 15. TEXT. PSALM 107 v 16 (23-7-1978)

The message to day is that the Lord has accomplished this to the joy and rejoicing of our souls in our own cases, and in many we have prayed for over the decades, and the divine message will produce in the souls of the Lord's living family a holy expectation. For when the word fell softly on my spirit late last evening, it produced a vista of hope and blessed expectation concerning many in this beloved flock who pray for those so dearly loved, with an authority given them to plead by receiving from the Lord promises and confirmations in their hearts. When I read before you the Text this morning and you looked at the beautiful symbolism, I am certain those well taught of the Spirit had a grasp of the interpretation of it by the power and grace of the Holy Ghost. I want to make plain as we resume the discourse, that we are speaking with a background and blessed vista of praise in the context. That is to say, as I see the word, "For he hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder." I see it against the background of everlasting love, the Covenant of Grace, and the accomplished work of atonement of the dear Redeemer, and the priestly work of our Mediator and Intercessor. These are things concerning which the Saviour intercedes with the Father, and the background is of holy praise, adoration, gratitude and thanksgiving to God.

Let us proceed with gates and bars to find the meaning by the Spirit, I will briefly take up the Biblical account of Adam and the fall of man. Precisely at that moment when their hearts became receptive of temptation, sin entered. This is a profound mystery. The sinning angels fell from Heaven because of the sin of pride, for once as you know from the doctrine divine, Satan and all the evil spirits were bright angelic spirits in Heaven, and because of the sin of pride they were cast out. The sinning angels fell, and woe was pronounced on the inhabitants of the earth and seas. "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer!" So pride was the first sin. It is an astonishing revelation how their hearts became receptive of the foul temptation: it was sombre. This will be an excellent starting point for me, because immediately there is reception the gates of the heart are wide open. So the gates of the hearts of our

first parents were wide open, and the cruel usurper and foe entered and the gates were shut and became iron and brass.

I will endeavour by the Lord's help, to show you concerning gates and bars. One thing is very precious, and there is nothing more precious. As in the case of Adam and Eve and poor sinners in the world, the gates of the heart are wide open, and Satan enters and the gates are closed. There is something that is wonderful to contemplate concerning the Lord's chosen people. What is it? When He takes away the stony heart and gives the heart of flesh, He dispossesses Satan by His almighty power and casts him out. What about the heart of flesh? If you believe, if we believe together that the Lord has removed the heart of stone and given a heart of flesh, the beauty of it is, that heart is open to receive Christ, and it is a grand, glorious mystery of the Kingdom of grace and glory that can never be fathomed by human sagacity, that Christ should dwell in your heart by faith. This is the ultimate for us. It would have been futile to have all the magnificence of Solomon's temple, with all provided for it according to the pattern given by God, apart from one thing: as the priests bearing the ark of the covenant brought it into the oracle, a cloud of glory filled the house, - the Lord was there. So there is the personal advent of Christ, the Holy Ghost preparing the chamber of your breast for His coming, when He enters your heart in all His glory and takes up His abode there, and remains in your soul. This is the holy ultimate to the language of the Text. Why should He do this? Why should He break the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder? So that all shall be effected by the sovereign, efficacious power of the Holy Ghost. How many believe that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost, and that Christ dwells in your hearts by faith? I have often referred to the secret of Christmas. You think about the manger in Bethlehem and the dear, precious Babe lying there. The secret of Christmas is to look down into your soul and find the Babe there; for Christ to dwell in our hearts by faith. This is the glory in the refrain, "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!"

It is in this context, the wonders God alone can do, miracles of grace, that I shall speak to gates of brass and bars of iron. What are

gates of brass? They may be referred to as being of tremendous, outstanding durability. In the case of poor sinners brass stands for stubborn, continued resentment and opposition to the Lord and His truth and His things: tremendous resistance to God, the Being of God, His Name and Names, His glorious truth, ways, holy ordinances, precepts, royal laws, His Day, and the preaching of the gospel; stubborn, sustained, determined, powerful resistance. This is brass. Come up against it, and you find how strong it is,- resistance. It is the fruit of infidelity, the bitter, poisonous root of infidelity; no belief in God, His Word, His things, the Person of Christ, His incarnation, atonement, resurrection, the Person of the Holy Ghost; no belief in any of these,- infidelity. What an awful state to be in! This is brass. Gates of brass are there. It is as if the heart will never relent; as if the gates will never be opened. You thought of it as you sang the last Hymn this morning. Well did Newton know, the infidel sailor who went to the furthest limits of sin; he knew brass in his beautiful Hymn, the gates of brass flying wide open and Jesus winning his heart. (1020) Brass.- stubbornness, rebellion, enmity, hatred. When you meet it you will realise how impossible it is with man for anything to be done. Mother and Father speak gracious words; nothing moves this sinner. Infidelity: no belief in anything divine, in eternity, the Day of Judgment and standing before God,- stubbornness, hatred, malice. No wonder the human race is in the state it is! When I think of the little island of the Lord's people in the vast sea of infidelity that surrounds us, and the influence on the young it alarms me. Nothing on earth, nothing mortal makes the slightest impression on brass, and the devil is reigning as if on a throne, in complete control. You look on the case and say it is hopeless: it is not. I hope you younger parents will be spared from the agony some know, or you will know what it is to be drawn almost into the pit yourself with them. Nothing catastrophic, nothing deeply emotional has any effect on brass. What a state! You might come to the conclusion that the heart is impregnable; that no assault on it can ever be successful. Remember the great Captain of our salvation, the almighty, invincible power of our King. You may say, "If ever there is a holy change wrought this will be a message of divine grace." and it will be. It is totally beyond the

reach of mortal power.

Bars of iron. One bar of iron is pride. I realise and I deeply sympathise with our younger friends. The time comes when they leave school, seeking employment. Immediately the majority have the information passed to them that you attend the House of God, read the Bible, desire to pray, and that your life is geared to Christianity, immediately a measure of reproach falls on you, and pride is a bar of iron. "I am not going to be looked down on and thought of as archaic and mental." That is the general inference. "Those people are simple,"- and we are willing to confess it in a certain sense. "Once you go on to higher education you will see that high criticism has exposed many things in the Bible and we do not believe in it." The effect may be devastating. Pride. And if in the road you see some of the Lord's dear people, and you are seen by your contemporaries at school or work you feel too ashamed for it to be known that you have any connection with those who fear God. It is pride. I deeply feel for our young friends: they may feel they have grown out of this sort of thing. Pride is a bar of iron. Stubbornness is: in one's temperament there may be a streak of stubbornness. You know you are wrong; that a thing is not right before God, but you are determined. The whole attitude of a person is. "Neither God nor man will alter my course." and they put up a bar of iron. What a case for God to deal with! and only He can. He may use a minister, or parents, friends, children, or immediately from Heaven. What a case for God's almighty power. This is why some coming into these sorrows and trials find this word precious, "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" It is like a challenge. "Prove me now herewith: bring your hardest cases. Bring your case to Me and see." Bars of iron, unbelief, self-will, prejudice. Iron stands for strength.

I will come to the better part. The Text speaks concerning what the Lord has done, and what He is able to do, and will do. "For he hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder." This is the invincible power of God in His grace. That is why the most beautiful hymn of Newton's celebrates the grace of God.

"Amazing grace! (how sweet the sound!)

That saved a wretch like me;

"I once was lost but now am found;

Was blind, but now I see." (198)

"For he hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder." Clearly this is a personal matter which those of you who fear God will seek confirmation that He has done it for you.

I will discourse from the Word of God on three cases where we see how the Lord by His grace and love fulfilled the word. "For he hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder." As I said, there are three cases in particular I have in mind. They are varied, yet the same before God in relation to gates of brass and bars of iron. We read in our Lesson one of the outstanding cases in the Book of God. It is in the terms of a parable. You have a young man: in his case the one objective was that he should experience an emancipation, get away from parental control and influence. He was anxious to be gone, and as he realised he had substance <sup>that</sup> would be due to him, he sought that it should be paid out to him, and his object was to gratify depraved nature. O the solemnity of the case! to know the flaming lusts and passions of the flesh, and seek to indulge and satisfy them by having his portion of the substance due to him. He lived in vice. What a life to live! in corruption, in the filth of all the depraved appetite of fallen nature. There the poor lad was. How solemn! It is a case of satiety: he carried everything to the extreme until he was bankrupt. Not every poor sinner in nature's death and darkness goes off like that. In his case it was vice, filth, all the sins named in the Scripture, licentiousness, and so on. He spent all his money and was absolutely debauched: he was a complete wreck of humanity, What did the Lord do? He came by His grace and broke the gates of brass and cut the bars of iron in sunder. He knew how by His divine power to open the gates of brass by conviction, regeneration, to cast out the foul, vile spirits that indwelt him, and brought him to repentance. I wonder in your diary whether you can refer to the year or the time when the Lord accomplished this among your relatives, or in your own family, or your own case? It may be you left a blank because it would be too base to name. The Lord knows. If any looked at the diaries they would term it a silent year. "Set out on some expedition, determined I would do this or that, and the Lord by His mercy prevented it. When I thought to indulge the flesh

the Lord overturned the project and delivered me from the evil." You can sing,

"Preserved in Jesus when  
My feet made haste to hell;  
And there should I have gone,  
But Thou dost all things well." (732)

Wonderful if the Lord did this for you! You were not allowed to fall into that sin. What did the Lord do for the prodigal? There was a taste of dying love in his poor heart because the gates of brass were open; he was filled with repentance and he had the kiss of forgiveness. "Let us eat and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." Wonderful, this; "he was dead, and is alive again."

Let us turn to another case, the dying malefactor. Here is a common criminal. Our prisons are stretched to capacity, and some are criminals from youth: nothing deters them. There was no injustice done to him in that he received capital punishment; he proclaimed it just. He was a criminal and a blasphemer, because at first he joined with the other malefactor. The Lord knew how to break the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder. So he was a poor criminal, and there are still a few cases. I do thank God that we have evidence that there are still criminals where the gates of brass and the bars of iron have been broken, and to day they fearlessly proclaim His love and truth before all men. So this man sued for mercy and asked the dear Lord to remember him. A penitent, broken-hearted sinner may ask the Lord to remember him. "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

The third case is well known,- that of our own apostle; a man exceedingly religious, saturated in tradition, a prominent Pharisee, dead to God, hating Christ, persecuting His dear people. One day, with all the determination of his nature, God knew how to break the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder. "Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard <sup>for thee to kick</sup> against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" See the poor sinner who described himself as the chief. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." And we see him saying he obtained mercy, who was before a blasphemer and a persecutor

and injurious. The Lord came and accomplished the word. "For he hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder." There is a song of praise for this, "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" Amen.