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Sermon preached by Mr J Delves at Ebenezer Chapel Clapham
on Wednesday evening June 9th, 1943

"I know thy works; behold, I have set before, thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength and hast kept My Word, and hast not denied My name."

Revelation 3:8

Last Sabbath we took the preceding verse and spoke of a general survey of the particular church at Philadelphia. The two particular points noticed were the attributes and characteristics of the Person speaking and then the mediatorial and sovereign power of the Lord Jesus exercised by Himself in heaven; the authority of the great Head of the church dispensing in both providence and grace. 'He openeth and no man shutteth.' We spoke of the different ways in which the Lord opens and we know that when He opens none can shut however much men and devils may try. It is our mercy that all power is in His hand and many a child of God has been privileged to see the wonder-working hand of divine providence going before.

I would like now to attempt as few moments' application to the shutting more than the opening. When He shutteth no man openeth. I believe this can be considered profitably in two ways. Firstly, in a way that can be exceedingly confirming, comforting and strengthening to the Lord's people. For instance, if we take the case of Noah and his families. It is said they all went into the ark; male and female of all flesh went in unto Noah as God had commanded him, "And the Lord shut him in." There is something very sweet about that consideration because when the Lord shut him in, he was secure and safe from the approaching extermination of all flesh. Those and those only who were, safely secured and shut in the ark were preserved from the general destruction that came upon the earth, the mighty deluge. Here we may remember what the Lord had said to Noah, even that he would make His covenant with him. Why did the Lord shut Noah in the ark? Because He had promised that He would make His covenant with him, therefore he and his were mercifully preserved. O may not this set forth that covenant of God's grace with His people? Everyone who is sealed there by that divine decrees with the seal of divine fore-knowledge,, safely enclosed in that covenant in all things ordered well, is perfectly secure and safe, and will be from the awful judgement that will come upon the wicked of the earth. There is safety and there alone.

Again, we have the account of Daniel when the Lord closed the lions' mouths that they should not hurt him and he was enabled to be faithful to his God. That faithfulness appeared as though it might cost his life, yet he would not adhere to the laws of the Medes and Persians by ceasing to pray and make supplication unto his God as before. Daniel was cast into the den of lions but the Lord shut the lion's mouths so that they should not hurt him. You may have some enemies in your experience, in your life, that have threatened your undoing, perhaps for some particular reason connected with your profession or religion. Yea may have proved the enmity and wrath of the world or some evil-minded men, some enemies, and they have threatened you but you have seen the Lord shut their mouths so that they have not been permitted to hurt you. When the Lord stands for His people it matters not who may stand against them. "If the Lord be for us who can be against us?" He can shut the mouth of a persecutor; He can close the mouth of one who, if it were in his power, would bring

about your ruin. How wonderfully some have seen the Lord work for them, by overcoming and closing the mouths of their adversaries.

The particular privileges of the Church may be here defined, as recorded in the Canticles. "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; -a spring shut up, a fountain sealed." The Church of God is not common property; it is like a garden set apart by the Lord for him to come and walk in and commune with His people. They are separated from the world 'a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.'

One with Jesus, by eternal union one. (Gadsby'd 766)

There is something that may be very confirming, in this word 'and shutteth and no man openeth.' Secondly, there is another aspect, and it is very searching. When he shutteth none can open. We read of Job when vindicating his cause with his three supposed friends, speaking thus, "Behold, He breaketh down, and it cannot be built again: He shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening." There is something very solemn about this, and in some respects it may have application to the Lord's people in some of His dealings with them, particularly when they may be hard set upon something that is not according to the Lord's purposes. "Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths." (Hosea 6) We read of the foolish virgins who had no oil in their lamps, that they tried to obtain oil from, the wise virgins but it was too late and they, were not ready when the Bridegroom came; "And they that were ready went into the marriage: and the door was shut." Although the foolish virgins sought admittance later, they made their appeal too late -- the door was shut. The door of God's grace is open now, but the day will come when the day of grace will close and the door will be shut. What a mercy if our eyes and ears are opened to hear the Lord is gracious invitations and solemn warnings, and to seek mercy before it is too late. "For now is the day of salvation." 'And shutteth and no man openeth.' There is something very solemn about this in respect of the wilful and persistent rejection of the gospel by the wicked, as we read in Isaiah 6:10 "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed." It is a very solemn consideration because it brings before us the fact that the blindness and obstinacy of men's hearts in a wilful persistence thereof, is but a means of sealing their own condemnation. 'And shutteth and no man openeth.' Have we not very serious instances of this in the persistent unbelief of men, whom the Lord leaves to their own delusions? They are shut up in hardness of heart and in unbelief, and we know that nothing but almighty power can break down that inherent enmity that reigns in their hearts against the truth and the gospel, but that does not excuse their wilful, persistence in a rejection of the gospel.

'He shutteth.' is it not an experience with us at times? Some of the Lord's people are shut up so to speak, under the law. When the Holy Spirit deals with a convinced sinner in charging home the law upon the conscience, such a one is shut, up, bound, held fast in legal bondage. The law is like a prison it holds him, condemns him, closes him in, shuts him up; that is the Lord's work. In this convicting work of the Holy Spirit there is a bringing down, stripping wounding, killing; a shutting in of a person (so to speak) so that for the time, there can be no coming forth. Even the Psalmist uses language like this "I am shut up, and I cannot come forth." There is a bondage upon the spirit of such an one; he can see little else but his own condemnation., At that particular time to his own feelings the door of mercy is not open to him; Christ is not revealed, the comfort of the gospel is not

enjoyed, but there is a deep sense of condemnation felt is the conscience, darkness, bondage, guilt, fear, terror, death; he walks in darkness and cannot see his signs; the Lord shuts him up in the prison or the law and holds him there until He Himself opens. Those of you who have had that experience know very well that no man can upon, that is to say in and of himself, of his own power.

Friends may try to comfort, ministers may try to encourage, and quite rightly too, but until the Lord's time comes to bring that sinner forth from his darkness and bondage, no man can open. There is only One the can bring that sweet liberty to be known, felt and enjoyed in the soul, and that is Christ Himself; but this is His blessed province, even to open the blind eyes, to bring forth the prisoners out of the prison house. Sometimes a child of God may be shut up in recurring darkness of mind, even though he may have previously enjoyed sweet light and liberty. You may know what it is to have walked in the light of His countenance, to have enjoyed His presence, to have run in his ways with sweet delight, to have communed with Him, but O, now you say, I walk In darkness and have no light, I feel my heart (so to speak) hard as a millstone - I cannot produce anything spiritual, saving, or profitable, I seem to be just hardened mass of sin. 'He shutteth.' If the Lord withholds those communications of grace and mercy from us how soon we revert to a state of hardness, darkness and bondage. You may walk in darkness with respect to your own standing; your signs, your evidences, your tokens, are not clear to you; you are as a person shut up. This is also a fact with regard to speaking. At one time you could have enjoyed a little communion with the Lord's people, taken a delight in speaking a little of what the Lord had done for you, but now all is so different; you feel you cannot speak, you feel to be closed up, you feel you cannot pray even. There is a bondage, a painful bondage upon your spirit. 'And shutteth and no man openeth,' but mercifully the Lord does not leave His people there. They rise and, fall, and though they have seasons of painful bondage, darkness, temptation and trial, yet in His time he delivers them brings then; forth into a wealthy place, returns with the former tokens of His goodness and grace to them, and they prove Him to be the same God, just the same as before. 'He shutteth and no man openeth' but he opens again in his own good time. Sometimes dark providences the Lord's people have to pass through, peculiar trials and trying circumstances may also have to is effect. Certain painful things may be the means, for the time being, of closing your mouth. 'He shutteth.'

This may be true in aspect or the Lord closing a door. He opens doors, and according, to the teaching of the text here, 'he openeth and no man shutteth.' 'I have set before thee an open door.' But he has just the same power to close doors. We may possibly have been, in a measure, determined to go in this or that way, but the Lord has fought against us in it. O there has been an inward strife, but the Lord has withstood us mercifully and closed the door that we have tried to open, not just simply by lifting the latch, but have tried to force the door open. The Lord has withstood us and closed the door so that all our efforts have proved futile. When He shutteth none can open. We may try to force things and some of us have done, but it we go before the Lord we are trying to open a door ourselves, which is for the Lord to do. It is true there are times when the Lord's people have to move in things but I am thinking more particularly of that determination that may be in our natural will sometimes to persist in doing certain things which may be but a natural determination to own way. What a battle there is at such a time is there not? What a fight inwardly, what rebellion may rise up concerning this thing or that, but still we have to prove this, that when He shutteth no man can open. But amidst all this dark background we have this blessed truth brightly shining through the cloud.

'Behold I have set before thee an open door and no man can shut it.' This stands forth irrespective of certain closings, of the shutting up of some things and the opening of others. 'Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.' This door is Christ. This doctrine is so clearly affirmed by the Lord in St John's gospel – "I AM the door, by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved and go in and out and find pasture." O believer, here is great comfort for our souls. The door is ever open wide, no man can shut it; Christ is the open Way to heaven, His precious merit and atoning blood the way, the channel, the means, whereby sinners who need salvation, make their approaches unto the majesty of heaven. 'I have set before thee.'

This is an interesting and profitable point. The Lord does not say to the Church, 'Here is an open door but I will take care that you do not see it or ever enter into it.' It is set before us – 'I have set before thee an open door,' as though the Lord would take His people and draw them by His own invitation, irrespective of all opposing forces. We have here a way of escape from the wrath to come. "Come My people enter thou into thy chambers." Here is an open door. "Enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself for a little moment until the indignation be overpast." It is the Lord's kind word to a poor, tried, afflicted, tempest-tossed soul, 'Here is an open door, go in, come in.' The gospel invitation stands open to the poor and needy. If you have a case, sinner, a case for God then there is an open door set before you. Where is this door set before us? It is set before us in the gospel; the gospel is a glorious revelation of God's free mercy to poor, lost men, an opening up to a sinner of the way of escape from the wrath to come. Now this open door is set before to faith of a believer. Some of you know what I mean because you have felt the sweet privilege and liberty given to you of venturing upon the ground of Christ's atoning blood and righteousness to seek the mercy and salvation of God in your soul.

*Christ has blessings to impart,
Grace to save thee from thy fears.
O, the love that fills His heart,
Sinner, wipe away thy tears. (Gadsby's 956)*

'An open door.' You say 'My sins press me down, my bondage is fast, upon me, I am shut up as in a prison, I cannot come forth, what am I to do?' When the Lord's time comes He will bring you forth. The cry of many may be, "Bring my soul out of prison that I may praise Thy Name," but there is an open door, that is to say, He has set before us the blessed gospel of His grace - an open door which no man can shut. It is set before us in the Scriptures if we have eyes to see it. The blessed Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, His Priesthood, His covenant offices, all that a sinner needs, is by the Holy Spirit inscribed, recorded in the Scripture; this open door is sometimes seen by a believer's faith in the reading of the Scriptures. It attracts the mind, draws the affections, and is sometimes a means of bringing into your experience a measure of sweet liberty, and a measure of relief in your bondage. It is the Holy Spirit setting Christ before a sinner. What is it you want? Why, you say. I want mercy, grace, teaching, pardon, life, righteousness and many other things. The Holy Spirit says they are, all in Christ. He is the open door, and when He reveals Christ in some measure in His wondrous suitability to you a poor, needy sinner, it is as though He sets before you an open door, that is, He reveals to your faith the way of escape, and the remedy for sin; and you can enter in by that door. This is faith; faith responds to the invitation, you lay hold of the provision by faith, and enter this Door. This is receiving Christ into your heart, and having Him formed there the hope of glory.

Again, He is set before us in our experience as the Holy Spirit leads us into the truth; the mystery of the gospel is opened to our understanding and faith sees this open door. "No man can shut it." Our enemies have tried to rob us of the gospel, tried to deprive us of the scriptures, but all efforts have failed. They cannot take the scripture out of our hearts, if they take our Bibles from our hands, but they have not been permitted to do that for we still have the Word of God, a treasured possession; therefore when the Lord opens a door no man can shut it.

"I have set it before thee." This can come very sweetly into our experience sometimes in our difficulties, burdens, needs, conflicts and trials, when the Lord appears to us in different ways as I believe He does setting before us in experience a way, an open way, and it must always be here,

*A bleeding Jesus is the Way,
And blood tracks all the path. (Gadsby's 130)*

O What a mercy this is! No man or devil can shut this open door. It is open to sensible sinners; it is open to you. No man can shut it. It is set before us in all the sacrifices and oblations of the Levitical law; it is set before us in the ordinances of the gospel, in the Lord's Supper in the broken bread and poured out wine; the same truth is implied. Here is the Way to God, the way of escape from death and eternal punishment

The second point in this verse is Christ's testimony to their fidelity. It is a testimony too. 'For thou hast a little strength and hast kept My Word and hast not denied My Name.' That was a great thing to say of that Church – a great thing to say of any Church – 'Thou has kept My word and hast not denied My name.' Some professing Churches had done so - deceivers, false teachers and prophets had crept into the churches with pernicious errors and many had been led astray from the simplicity of the gospel; certain errors concerning Christ, that He was not truly God, that He was not a real man, that He was not the Son of God. Most errors have found their centre in respect of the Person of the Son of God. But it was given to this church to abide in the doctrine of Christ. 'Thou hast not denied My name.' They were enabled to cleave to pure doctrine and were not left to fall away into the errors that had permeated some Churches. 'Thou hast kept My Word.' 'Thou hast a little strength.' A little strength. As though He would say 'You have just as much strength as I give; you have none of your own; you live upon My strength but you will prove that sufficient. 'Thou hast a little strength.' It seems to show that the measure of grace the Church possessed was used in a right direction to hold them together in cleaving to the pure truth as it had been made known to them. 'Thou hast a little strength. Thou hast kept My Word.' A very fitting word. It may be so to some of you, more or less daily so. The Lord gives strength equal to the days not a lot to spare not any to play with, but just enough day by day. You may feel that often, in respect of your labours, in the daily calls upon your strength. You can say, I have been helped through this day and had just enough strength; a little strength; just been helped through. So it may have been day after day, which confirms the promise, "As thy day thy strength shall be." We receive just as much as the Lord gives; we have to live by that, and it is that little strength in our souls which enables us to at press on, otherwise we should have fainted long ere this. A little strength to pray. And yet such a little strength; it appears sometimes, just strength enough be feel our weakness, to make us feel how weak and dependent we are, and yet it is a mercy to have a little strength., that is, strength enough

to go on day by day humbly depending upon our God. He gives strength equal to the day. You may not always feel to have that great spirit of importunity and wrestling at a Throne or grace that Jacob had when he said, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me," yet there is a little inward, secret cleaving to Christ by faith. What little strength you have seems used up in and by the trials you have, but just enough to keep you going. Strength to sit still. And it needs a good deal for that. "Your strength is to sit still." How difficult that is; it is often much easier to be working. It is faith and a humble reliance upon the wisdom and grace of God that will enable us to sit still and to be still and know that He is God. But there can be something very sweet about this sometimes. You may in some things, feel on occasions such a calmness upon your spirit even in disturbing, distracting and oppressing things. It is the little strength that the Lord gives out of his fulness that helps you to be quiet, to rely on Him, not to be teased with tempest, shaken this and that way, or driven with every wind of doctrine but a little strength that enables you to cast yourself and your burden upon Him wherein you get quietness, relief, rest, and a composure of mind that will be a wonderful help.

'Thou hast a little strength.' It consists in the exercise of faith in God waiting upon Him day by day; not going forward and trying to meet things before they come, but in sweet reliance of the spirit upon Christ's wisdom to direct us and to help us through our difficulties. That is very sweet, is it not? 'A little strength.' Sometimes it may be in respect to resisting an enemy, an inward or outward adversary. "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life." Do you look at some things you have been brought through and say, 'I was just brought through, and only just.' This or that trial or affliction the Lord brought me through or I must have fallen. It is this little strength that enables you to depend on Him, to cast your burden upon Him; and in proportion that you are able to do that, you will be sure to find in your soul a sweet relief, a sacred quietness, calm amidst tempestuous motion. 'A little strength,' when a believer has to do with God about these things; strength enough, just enough to endure, to endure in much felt weakness, in fear and trembling, many fears often, yet held on by an unseen power. Something holds you, something keeps you from giving up, and otherwise you would have given up and cast aside all your religion long before now. There is something, within that sustains holds and keeps us; it is this little strength, just that strength which the Lord gives that keeps us cleaving to Him

I like this word, 'and have not denied My Name.' I was thinking this afternoon about the Word being put before the Name. In the Psalms we read, "Thou hast magnified Thy Word above all Thy Name." how can that be possible? How can the Lord magnify His Word above all His Name? I confess that it is difficult for me to define, but, it seems there, that the Psalmist compares the Lord's Word and the promise that He makes to His people in the communications of His Word to them, which in its living authority and power in their souls, is made more to them even than the attributes and Names of God. By His Word we understand His gospel. "Thou hast kept My Word," that is thou hast a knowledge of it, hast received it; hast held fast unto it; thou hast not denied it. May it be given unto us to keep it and may the Lord mercifully bestow upon us 'that little strength.' Strength enough. Strength equal to our day that we fall not but are enabled by it to keep His Word, to confess Him, to hold fast to the truth and to see Him go before us, opening and shutting; shutting and opening.

Amen.